



# sanitation

Edward Grayson Commissioner

## Testimony of Edward Grayson, Commissioner New York City Department of Sanitation

### Hearing on Street and Sidewalk Cleanliness & Intro. 471

#### New York City Council Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management

Monday, October 4, 2021  
10:00 A.M.

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Good morning Chair Reynoso and members of the City Council Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management. I am Edward Grayson, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Sanitation, and I am joined by Stephen Harbin, Chief of Cleaning Operations, and Ricky Cyrus, Assistant Chief of the Enforcement Division. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Department's efforts to keep our City clean and to provide comments on behalf of the Administration on Intro. 471.

Our Department's mission is to keep New York City healthy, safe and clean. We celebrated our 140<sup>th</sup> birthday earlier this year and, despite the change from the Department of Street Cleaning to the Department of Sanitation, our commitment to cleaning our City has not wavered over those 140 years. I have been a proud member of this Department for nearly 23 years now, and my parents were as well for decades before me.

Just about one year ago, I testified in front of this committee in my first hearing as Sanitation Commissioner on this very topic. Then, the City was on the cusp of the second wave of COVID infections, without approved vaccinations, dealing with tremendous budget cuts and facing the prospect of widespread layoffs. Today, we still face many of the same challenges we did a year ago, but the outlook is brighter. Our City is on the path to recovery; our schools, restaurants, theaters, and workplaces are open.

Then, service cuts and manpower shortfalls, combined with pandemic-related increases in the use of our streets and public spaces, had led to more litter on our streets, overflowing corner baskets, and an overall sense that the City was dirtier than it had been in years.

Today, we still face several of those challenges, particularly regarding changes in New Yorkers' attitudes and behavior, but we have seen dramatic improvements as well. As I will describe, several budget cuts have been restored, and we have put new programs in place. New Yorkers have joined us in record numbers to help clean up their blocks and their neighborhoods. And we have honed our approach to persistent challenges regarding illegal dumping to work toward a cleaner city.

## **FY 2022 Budget Highlights**

This year's Recovery Budget, released by Mayor de Blasio in April, included several new and restored cleaning initiatives aimed at supporting our City's recovery.

In the Executive Budget, the Administration restored baseline funding for the Department's litter basket collection services. In partnership with the City Council, the Administration added an additional \$8.6 million in funding for supplemental litter basket collection, making a total of more than \$17 million in new or restored funding for litter basket collections this fiscal year. Today, DSNY is funded to run 588 litter basket trucks each week, a 116 percent increase from 272 trucks per week in July 2020. This additional service has contributed to cleaner streets and improved quality of life in our communities.

The Department of Sanitation has also created the Precision Cleaning Initiative (PCI), with teams to conduct targeted cleanings of litter conditions, illegal dumping, and overflowing litter baskets. These conditions are eyesores that affect New Yorkers' quality of life and threaten NYC's recovery. Teams are dispatched based on DSNY field observations, 311 complaints and referrals from other City agencies and community groups. To date, PCI crews have collected more than 10,052 eyesore conditions and emptied a total of 25,388 additional litter baskets citywide.

We have also restored our dedicated syringe litter staff within our Environmental Police Unit to conduct proactive patrols in areas with highest concentrations of syringe litter. These six dedicated officers are specially trained to properly handle syringes and other potentially hazardous waste. Since the restoration in March, our dedicated team of EPU officers has collected a total of 27,485 syringes from New York City streets.

This Fiscal Year, we have also received more than \$4 million in funds from City Council members through the NYC Clean Up initiative, our highest total since the program began seven years ago. I thank all of the members for their commitment to our mission and for their partnership as we work to keep New York City clean.

## **Community Cleanups and Partnerships**

All 8.8 million New Yorkers, as well as the millions of visitors and commuters, have a role to play in keeping our City clean. Litter and trash does not just magically appear on City streets – each piece, bag or pile has a person associated with it—someone who tossed it on the ground, dumped it on the corner, or threw it out a car window. As we recover and move along toward a post-COVID New York City, I ask all New Yorkers to do the right thing: Don't litter. Use our corner litter baskets properly. Clean up after your pet. Move your car for alternate side parking. Sweep the sidewalk in front of your home or business. And if you see a litter condition that needs DSNY attention, please let us know by calling 311.

In the past year, the Department has greatly expanded our Community Clean Up program, working with volunteers and community partners across the five boroughs. DSNY provides tools and operational support for neighborhood cleanups. We have also introduced a Community Clean-Up Van to raise awareness and support these events. The Department lends tools, trash bags, masks, brooms and dustpans to volunteers and can now deliver these tools directly to the volunteers through the new community clean-up van. The Department has partnered with an estimated 7,200 New Yorkers on 278 volunteer cleanups during Fiscal Year 2021, which ended

June 30, 2021. The cleanups represent a 546 percent increase from Fiscal Year 2020 and a 186 percent increase from pre-pandemic Fiscal Year 2019. We encourage all New Yorkers to chip in and help us keep New York City clean.

### **City Cleanup Corps**

The City Cleanup Corps (Corps) is Mayor de Blasio's New Deal-inspired program. The Corps is intended to foster the city's economic recovery by employing 10,000 New Yorkers to refresh and revitalize our city to make it welcoming to residents, workers, and tourists alike. Since its launch six months ago, the Corps has contributed significantly to cleaning the city's streets and sidewalks in neighborhoods across the five boroughs. To date it has helped remove more than 600,000 bags of trash and cleaned over 25,000 rain gardens of trash and debris.

Additionally, the Corps has been actively helping our neighbors impacted by Hurricane Ida. Since Ida hit, Corps members have helped remove 72,000 bags of debris and cleared rain gardens and storm drains of trash and debris to help mitigate the possibility of flooding all over the city.

### **Illegal Dumping**

Illegal dumping is a particularly pervasive problem in New York City today. There are any number of reasons that drive this – unpermitted contractors renovating homes and storefronts, businesses trying to save money and not hiring a private carter, unscrupulous operators dumping in the dark of night.

Illegal dumping occurs when someone removes trash from a vehicle and leaves it in a public or private space. It is a major problem in many parts of the city, leading to unsightly and unsafe conditions for residents, particularly in areas with vacant lots, dead ends, overpasses, railroad lines, and industrial zones. To combat illegal dumping, DSNY employs a team of Sanitation Police Officers who stakeout known dumping locations, investigate 311 complaints, and impound vehicles that are involved in illegal dumping activity. Fines for illegal dumping start at \$4,000 and can be as high as \$18,000 for repeat violators.

DSNY also conducts enforcement of improper disposal, a lesser violation that generally involves a smaller quantity of material and does not use a vehicle. The number of 311 requests for enforcement of improper disposal increased to 5,094 in FY21, up from 3,837 in FY19.

This summer, we recently launched a pilot program of increased, concentrated enforcement. Between late July and early August, we concentrated our efforts in Brooklyn Community Board 5 and issued 24 summonses for illegal dumping, 15 summonses for littering from a motor vehicle, nine summonses for improper disposal, additional summonses for related violations -- and some higher level enforcement actions, including 16 vehicle impounds and even one arrest. We removed litter and debris from several public sites, leading to cleaner and safer streets for residents of these neighborhoods.

A similar enforcement surge in the Hunts Point section of the Bronx also yielded very positive results. To date this year, we have issued 143 violations related to illegal dumping and impounded 83 vehicles. We hope that this increase in enforcement – and potentially other

efforts in the five boroughs in the coming weeks – will prompt all residents and businesses to follow the rules and keep our City clean.

### **Intro. 471**

Intro. 471, sponsored by Council Member Dromm, would prohibit obstructions or nuisances in or upon sidewalks, flagging or curbstones, streets and medians of streets and establishing a rebuttable presumption regarding responsibility for the placement of signs constituting such obstructions or nuisances. This legislation is aimed at holding the party identified on an “A”-frame sign, also known as a “sandwich board” sign, responsible for creating the sidewalk obstruction rather than the building abutting the sidewalk where the sign has been improperly placed. This bill would also expand the public areas for unlawful placement of A-frame signs to include traffic medians. The bill contains a rebuttable presumption that the individual or business named on the A-frame sign is responsible for unlawfully placing the sign on the public sidewalk or traffic median.

The Department receives many complaints about the improper placement of signs by businesses in front of other businesses, in the street or on traffic medians. This practice is also readily used by real estate businesses to promote open houses. The Department looks forward to working with the City Council to move forward on this important piece of legislation.

### **Conclusion**

On behalf of our 9,700 employees, I want to thank the City Council for your support in our effort to clean our streets, sidewalks and public spaces. Our frontline workers are the true heroes of this effort, working day after day in all manner of conditions, doing the tireless work of picking up litter, emptying corner baskets, and collecting our trash and recycling. For 140 years, our employees have worked to make New York City neighborhoods cleaner and to improve quality of life for our residents and visitors.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and we are now happy to answer your questions.