



sanitation

Jessica S. Tisch Commissioner

**Testimony of
Jessica Tisch, Commissioner
New York City Department of Sanitation**

**Hearing before the New York City Council
Committee on Sanitation & Solid Waste Management**

**Wednesday, March 15, 2023
10:30 A.M.**

**New York City Department of Sanitation's FY2024 Preliminary Budget and
Preliminary FY2024 Mayor's Management Report**

Good morning Chair Nurse and members of the City Council Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management. I am Jessica Tisch, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Sanitation (DSNY). I am joined today by First Deputy Commissioner Javier Lojan, Joseph Antonelli, Deputy Commissioner for Management and Budget, and Gregory Anderson, Deputy Commissioner for Policy and Strategic Initiatives. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on DSNY's Fiscal Year 2024 Preliminary Budget.

When Mayor Adams took office last year, New York City was filthy. The previous Administration gutted core cleanliness functions at DSNY during the pandemic, slashing funding for basic services like litter basket collection and street cleaning. Combined with staffing shortages related to the ongoing pandemic, these cuts had created service levels among the lowest in decades – missed collections increased, cleanliness complaints increased, basic enforcement decreased, and the City was viscerally and visibly dirtier.

In the first year of the Adams Administration, that narrative has begun to change. Mayor Adams has made unprecedented new investments in restoring cleaning programs – and much more.

Today, we have more than 8,000 uniformed Sanitation Workers and officers, the highest uniformed headcount in two decades.

Before I address the specifics of our FY2024 budget, I'll discuss a few highlights of our new programs and priorities as we work to Get Stuff Clean.

Setout Time Rules

First, DSNY is implementing one of the most important changes to waste management in decades next month – changing the rules around waste setout to eliminate the five o'clock shadow of black bags on the curb. Currently, trash and recycling may be placed on the curb after

4:00 p.m. the night before collection – the earliest of any major American city – meaning that in many neighborhoods these items can sit out for more than 14 hours, including during the evening pedestrian rush hour.

The new rules, which take effect on April 1, give two options for residential and commercial properties. Residential properties will be able to set out waste in bags at the curb starting at 8:00 p.m. or in containers 55 gallons or less with a lid starting at 6:00 p.m. Commercial properties and establishments will be able to set waste in bags at the curb starting at 8:00 p.m. or in containers with a lid starting one hour before closing.

In addition to these new proposed rules, DSNY is doing more of its collection on the midnight shift than pre-pandemic, further reducing the amount of time trash sits on the street.

This month, DSNY has rolled out an aggressive marketing and communications campaign to educate the public about the new rules, including mailers to every home and business, ads on social media, digital, and print platforms, and dozens of meetings with business groups, community organizations and other stakeholders.

Cleaning – Restore and More

We have taken aim at something that every New Yorker was aware of – the way in which the City became meaningfully dirtier over the course of the pandemic, following deep cuts to the budget for the Department’s cleanliness function that took effect in March 2020. To that end, Mayor Adams has restored several cleaning services as part of his plan to Get Stuff Clean. But he hasn’t *just* restored them – he’s gone beyond, giving us the highest level of service for these basic cleanliness functions in history.

Together, these initiatives represent a total investment of \$53.2 million in the current fiscal year, the largest investment in new cleanliness programs in decades, and they total nearly 250 additional uniformed personnel for the agency.

Last July, in partnership with the City Council, we added \$22 million in supplemental service for the more than 23,000 corner litter baskets across New York City. This represents a 74 percent increase in service above the baseline funding level and has led to a decrease in 311 complaints for overflowing litter baskets by more than 50 percent compared to last fiscal year. Baskets are emptied 50,000 times more often citywide each week, and we’ve seen the largest year-over-year decrease in complaints ever.

In November, we added \$4.8 million to provide supplemental service for litter baskets on DOT bridges and around parks, some of the most highly-trafficked tourist areas in the city. Together, these investments fund 889 weekly litter basket crews, up from a pre-pandemic high of 736 weekly crews and the highest level of litter basket service on record at DSNY. Regular cleaning for some of our most visible areas, which is so essential to our recovery.

Last July, DSNY fully restored street cleaning operations after more than two years of cuts to sweeping frequency. Mechanical brooms are the city’s most effective tools for street cleaning —

sweeping litter from along the curb on thousands of miles of New York City streets – and they'd been handcuffed, effectively assigned to desk duty. This restoration of a critical cleaning operation, alongside new management and analytical tools to track performance, has contributed to noticeably cleaner streets. However, our street sweepers are only as good as New Yorkers' compliance with parking regulations, and we need New Yorkers to move their cars for ASP so our street sweepers can do their jobs. They should know, if they don't, they WILL receive a ticket, and their street WILL look dirtier for it.

Last fall, we also restored supplemental sweeping of highway on-ramps and off-ramps, often one of the first places that visitors and commuters see when they come to New York and an area that contributed to New York's reputation as Trash City. With \$470,000 in new funds this year and \$1.1 million in baseline funding thereafter, we're cleaning more than 150 miles of ramps an average of once a month.

But what about our neighborhoods? For far too long, "No Man's Land" areas – the walkways, medians, step streets, overpasses, and other areas - around the City harbored dirty, litter-filled conditions. These areas fell between the bureaucratic jurisdictional cracks, and no agency had the resources or the mandate to keep them clean. In November, DSNY created a new Targeted Neighborhood Taskforce unit to regularly clean these areas for the first time ever. We're addressing over 1500 of them, in every community in the City.

This unit, funded for \$7.1 million in FY2023, will grow to 141 dedicated Sanitation Workers this year. Already, it's having an impact on overlooked spaces across the five boroughs, and nearly every location originally identified for cleaning has been cleaned at least twice, with additional new locations being added every week.

Strategic Enforcement

We are doing our part to clean up New York City. But every New Yorker has a role to play in maintaining the cleanliness of our neighborhoods – in a city this size, it can't just be the 10,000 members of the Sanitation Department doing this work.

We have a new focus on enforcing basic cleanliness rules – cleaning the sidewalk in front of a chain store, putting trash out when you're supposed to and in an orderly manner, the kinds of things that keep our streets clean. These are the most basic cleanliness rules, not enforcement for enforcement's sake.

For things like filthy sidewalks, loose trash, uncovered receptacles that attract rats – the sorts of basic cleanliness requirements that make for good neighbors and good neighborhoods – we are looking at an 80 percent increase in summons issuance year to date as compared to the same period in 2022. On one of the most crucial regulations, the requirement that property owners keep their sidewalks clean, we have written nearly 12,000 summonses this year, up 79 percent compared to last year.

But enforcement only goes so far when the penalty for inaction is too low. Right now, fines for basic sanitation rules are set by local law at just \$50, an amount that is far too low. This was

reduced from \$100 by City Council in 2021, sending the message that cleanliness is not a top priority in our city. I am calling on this Council to reverse course and create stiffer penalties. I am eager to work with you to make this happen.

I'd also like to provide an update on our illegal dumping enforcement – one of this Administration's most successful operations at the intersection of safety and cleanliness, where for too long the only strategy was just to clean it up and let it happen all over again.

Illegal dumping is a theft of public space where someone – usually a crooked contractor or an out of townner – comes to what they think is a neighborhood no one will care about; a place they can just leave their trash on our streets. This doesn't affect every neighborhood, but the ones it does affect feel it profoundly – and that should matter to every New Yorker.

Dumpers are wrong about two things. They're wrong to think no one cares about Hunts Point, or East New York, or Glendale, or any of the other neighborhoods where this has been a problem for too long. And they're wrong to think they will get away with it.

For the first time in New York City, they won't.

That's because of our new citywide illegal dumping enforcement camera network that will grow each week to more than 250 cameras this summer. And it's because of the work of our dedicated Sanitation Police Officers, who use that camera network in their investigations to catch dumpers and hold them accountable.

Based on this new strategy, both vehicle impounds and the \$4,000 summons for illegal dumping are up **450% year to date** versus the same period 2022.

Our message to dumpers is clear: your days of dumping on our neighborhoods are long past over.

Universal Curbside Composting

Last month, I joined Mayor Adams to announce roadmap to implement the nation's largest composting program, which will provide universal composting service to every New Yorker for the first time ever over the next 19 months.

While curbside composting programs have existed in New York City for the last decade, none have ever served more than approximately 40 percent of the city. This will be the first-ever specific plan and commitment to reach 100 percent coverage citywide, providing residents with simple, universal weekly collection of leaf and yard waste, food scraps, and food-soiled paper products. It is also the first program designed as a service for “mass market” use by all New Yorkers.

This announcement came on the heels of the cost-effective first phase in Queens last fall, which collected nearly 13 million pounds of yard and food waste, more than three times the material per district than the legacy opt-in program.

The new program is built on a number of efficiencies that drive costs down, including the use of dual-bin trucks and a right-sizing of the workforce to reduce overtime. The leaf-and-yard-waste-first approach was designed based on an analysis of successful programs in other cities. Unlike past composting programs, there will be no sign-up required for this new program. Residents will simply set out anything from their kitchen or their garden in a separate bin on their recycling day and DSNY will pick up those materials to turn them into usable compost or clean, renewable energy.

DSNY is working with OMB to refine the costs associated with this program, which we expect to be funded in the Executive Budget.

This universal curbside program is part of a comprehensive approach to organic waste diversion. Earlier this year, we completed the installation of 250 Smart Compost Bins across all five boroughs. These bins are accessible 24 hours per day via a new app for iOS and Android called NYC Compost.

New Smart Compost Bin service covers a number of traditionally underserved communities, including Bushwick, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Castle Hill, Harlem, Highbridge, the North Shore of Staten Island, Parkchester, the area around Queensbridge Houses, and Washington Heights. Across these communities, the bins have been greeted by enthusiastic usage and have diverted pristine compostable material from landfill, and where feasible we are servicing these bins using existing school organics trucks. As Manhattan will receive curbside service last, DSNY is also adding an additional 150 Smart Compost Bins boroughwide beginning in June, for a total of 400 citywide.

We also announced a major milestone last week in efforts to expand composting at City public schools – completing the rollout of curbside composting service at every school in the Bronx. Over the next year, we will expand service to the remaining 533 schools, largely in Brooklyn and Queens, delivering on our commitment to provide composting to every public school by 2024.

Containerization

Cities in Europe, Asia and South America have introduced new innovations in waste collection over the past two decades; New York City, however, is stuck in the past. In October, we launched a study of containerization practices and feasibility in New York City. This study is largely complete, and we expect to release a public report in the coming weeks.

A few highlights: implementing shared containers in New York City involves significant complexity, including new trucks and containers that have never before been used in North America at scale. It also requires substantial curb space, taking away space used for parking, open restaurants, and other uses. And it requires significant increases to service frequency – some cities in Europe provide collection service as often as once or twice *per day*.

In parallel, DSNY has conducted a small pilot of containerization through our Clean Curbs program. Since the first installation was announced last April, we have installed more than 40

total Clean Curbs containers in all five boroughs. We have provided grants totaling \$375,000 to 19 business improvement districts and community organizations for Clean Curbs installations in all five boroughs.

In November, we launched the Clean Curbs residential pilot on 45th Street between Ninth and Tenth Avenues in Manhattan. This pilot has taught us a lot, most importantly that behavior change will be key to any adoption of containerization at scale. This block has been advocating for waste containerization for years, and despite consistent education and outreach efforts, there is regularly waste placed outside of the containers every day of the week. This is an incredibly resource-intensive pilot, and this approach is not scalable beyond its current scope.

FY2024 Preliminary Budget

The Preliminary Budget includes \$1.93 billion in expense funds in Fiscal Year 2023 and \$1.82 billion in Fiscal Year 2024, reflecting increases of \$55.9 million and \$4.5 million, respectively, from the budget adopted last June.

The Fiscal Year 2024 expense budget includes \$1.06 billion for personal services to support a total budgeted headcount of 9,551 full-time positions, including 7,649 uniformed positions and 1,902 civilian positions, and \$760 million for other than personal services.

DSNY's Fiscal Year 2024 Preliminary Budget includes \$4.17 billion in capital funding in the 10-year plan, including \$1.48 billion for garages and facilities, \$2.48 billion for equipment, \$72.6 million for IT, and \$135.3 million for solid waste management infrastructure.

The Capital Budget includes new funding of \$100 million to purchase 244 additional new trucks, allowing us to dramatically increase the pace of purchases of rear loader and dual-bin collection trucks. We are aggressively moving to bring in these new vehicles, which will bring down the average age of our fleet and improve out-of-service rates.

The Capital Budget also includes funding for several major facilities projects, including:

- \$170 million in additional funding for the construction of a new garage for Bronx Districts 9, 10, and 11, with construction of temporary space scheduled to begin in 2024; and
- \$140 million in additional funding for the construction of a new garage for Queens District 1, with construction of the new garage scheduled to begin in 2027.

Together, these investments will begin to address critical infrastructure needs at our Sanitation garages, many of which are in desperate need of repair.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and my staff and I look forward to answer your questions.