



sanitation

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**Testimony of
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**Hearing before the New York City Council
Committees on Sanitation & Solid Waste Management and Finance
Monday, May 20, 2024, 9:30 A.M.**

New York City Department of Sanitation's FY2025 Executive Budget

Good morning, Chair Brannan, Chair Abreu, and members of the Committees on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management and Finance. I am Jessica Tisch, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Sanitation, and I am joined today by First Deputy Commissioner Javier Lojan and by Joseph Antonelli, Deputy Commissioner, Management and Budget.

It is a terrible time to be a piece of trash in New York City.

The 10,000 public servants at the Department of Sanitation are deep into multiple rounds of offensives in the Trash Revolution, enacting a broad variety of changes to the management, collection, sorting, and processing of 44 million pounds of waste produced across the City every single day.

Each of the strategic initiatives on which I will update you today could have been era-defining on its own.

And yet, we are not allowing one major project to distract from any other. Just as we collect the trash in every part of the City, we are *changing* the way trash is managed in every part of the City.

This complete overhaul of our essential service is *working*, with historic decreases in rat sightings reported concurrently with this effort. While the Trash Revolution has many components, I will provide updates on four key fronts.

Containerization

First, containerization.

We are moving forward with a once-in-a-generation change to the way the trash is set out, making tremendous strides in the long-discussed but long-delayed process of getting every single piece of trash off our streets and sidewalks and into secure bins and containers.

In October 2022, the Adams administration kicked off this Trash Revolution by changing set-out times for both residential and commercial waste from 4:00 PM — one of the earliest set-out times in the country — to 8:00 PM, effective April 2023, while also allowing earlier set-out if the material is in a container. This incentive of containerization was paired with major changes to DSNY operations, picking up more of the trash far earlier, including ending a practice by which up to *one fifth* of trash had been left out for a full day.

Later that month, we published our "Future of Trash" report, the first meaningful attempt to study containerization models in New York City, and the playbook to get it done.

Last August, containerization requirements went into effect for all food-related businesses in New York City. These businesses — restaurants, delis, bodegas, bars, grocery stores, caterers, etc. — produce an outsized amount of the type of trash that attracts rats.

That same month, installation of the initial 10-block, 16-school Manhattan Community Board 9 pilot containers began.

Last September, commercial containerization requirements extended to chain businesses of any type with five or more locations in New York City. These chain businesses tend to produce a large total volume of trash.

Starting March 1, 2024, container requirements went into effect for all businesses — of every type — in New York City to get their trash off the streets and into a secure bin. There is now a new 311 service request whereby residents can report a business not using bins. Between resident complaints and the observations of our DSNY enforcement staff, we have written over 2,500 summonses to businesses for failing to containerize their trash since the warning period ended April 1.

Later this fall, when container requirements go into effect for lower-density buildings — those with one to nine residential units — approximately 70 percent of all trash in the city will be containerized.

In the spring of 2025, installation of stationary on-street containers will begin in Manhattan Community Board 9 for the first full-district containerization pilot, serviced by new automated side-loading trucks. The responses to our RFP to select a specific on-street container were due just three days ago, and the review began today.

In addition to commercial and residential waste, we have also taken steps to rethink the way we contain public-space trash in litter baskets, placing over 1,600 of the new BetterBins across the City, with the significant help of Council Members who have wisely chosen to use discretionary funds to speed the spread of these new icons that stand at the vanguard of the Trash Revolution. Whereas the old mesh baskets forced New Yorkers to look at the trash all day, the new baskets allow us to look to the future.

Composting

As containerization spreads across the City, so too does the second key front in the Trash Revolution, the largest and easiest curbside composting program ever. This program is on track to reach every single residence in all five boroughs starting the week of October 6th.

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. When Mayor Adams took office, he committed to developing a universal program that *works* for New Yorkers, and the team at DSNY set to work developing a model built for long-term sustainability; no more stops and starts, no more complicated rules, no more drama.

The resulting program, currently running in Brooklyn and Queens and coming to the other three boroughs this fall, will be the first 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 on their recycling day.

That simplicity is the most important part of the program. There's no need for sign-ups, special dates to remember, or specific locations to visit within limited hours. Simply place your material out on recycling day, your Sanitation Workers will collect it from your home, and we'll ensure it's put to good use. This is a composting program for all New Yorkers.

Make the separation of compostable material easy, and people will do it. And we have numbers to back this up: in fiscal year 2023, DSNY diverted a record 211 million pounds of compostable material from landfills, an incredible increase from just over 150 million pounds the year before. This is a testament to the value of simple, universal programs, especially given that it includes only a part of our ongoing Citywide roll-out.

The ease-of-use principle holds true for our network of nearly 400 Smart Composting Bins across the five boroughs, where residents can drop off their compostable material 24/7 through an easy-to-use smartphone app. These bins are serviced six days per week and have proven to be very popular.

And, weeks ago, we made good on a promise to bring curbside compost collection to every Department of Education school, giving the next generation of composters familiarity with the ease and importance of this program. When the Adams administration began, only about half of schools received this service, and only about half of the next generation of composters were learning about proper separation of waste for beneficial reuse. Now, they all are, and they're showing their parents and guardians the way.

Material collected through each of these initiatives – curbside residential collection, Smart Bins, and schools – is put to beneficial use, either through composting or through anaerobic digestion. The Department produces tens of millions of pounds of finished compost every year at the Staten Island Compost Facility, where in January Mayor Adams and I cut the ribbon on a major expansion. That 33-acre site is now permitted to accept over 62 million pounds of food waste per year, up from just three million pounds prior to the expansion, in addition to another 60 million

pounds of leaf and yard waste. The new technology on site can turn waste into compost in half the time it used to take – weeks rather than months. We are producing tens of millions of pounds of beautiful NYC compost every year, and giving it back to New Yorkers for free, with a list of events available at nyc.gov/getcompost.

While the City has sufficient permitted and contracted capacity to process compostable material from a Citywide program, we are currently engaged in a procurement to distribute that capacity more evenly across the region. Though City procurement rules limit the extent to which we can talk about future status of processing infrastructure for putrescible waste, beneficial use and waste equity are both key to our long-term planning.

DSNY would also like to raise the issue of commercial organics separation. Local Law 146 of 2013 requires certain commercial establishments to separate their compostable material, but this law is now substantially out of step with the City's commitment to diversion of compostable waste. The Commercial Waste Zone system will improve commercial diversion, in that DSNY is requiring carters to charge businesses less to collect recyclables and compostable material than to collect trash, but we also urge the Council to consider an update that would allow DSNY to require source separation at all commercial establishments, in line with the progress made in residential diversion.

Taken together, reform of commercial organics and the Citywide wraparound residential services will make our streets *and* our air cleaner.

Commercial Waste Zones

DSNY is also moving full-speed ahead with a third era-defining overhaul of how the trash is managed in New York City, our implementation of the Commercial Waste Zone program described in Local Law 199 of 2019.

This law was designed to reform the commercial waste hauling system by establishing new safety standards for workers in the commercial carting industry, improving service for businesses, increasing diversion rates, and reducing vehicle miles traveled as well as harmful emissions from waste hauling vehicles.

In January, we announced the entire suite of contract awards for this program, available at nyc.gov/cwz, and the first of New York City's 20 non-exclusive Commercial Waste Zones will come online in the second half of this year in Corona, Elmhurst, and Jackson Heights. Businesses will be able to register new carting contracts beginning in early September and must do so by January 2nd, 2025. DSNY has a substantial outreach and education program planned for before and during that period.

This program will add legal safeguards to the commercial carting industry that will protect workers, business owners, and our environment. We are talking about 12 million miles fewer traveled by commercial carting vehicles. And, making good on a promise from when this program was created, businesses will pay less for the collection of recyclables and compostable material than they do for trash – a Citywide average of 32% less for recycling and 18% less for

compostable material. That means businesses will have a meaningful financial incentive to separate their waste properly.

Enforcement

Containerization, composting, and the implementation of Commercial Waste Zones are major changes in the way the Department performs our work, but they also necessitate changes in the ways New Yorkers conduct *their* work around waste, and in addition to education and outreach, there must be a robust enforcement component to each of these programs.

The Department of Sanitation will never enforce for enforcement's sake, but as part of the Trash Revolution, we are not afraid to hold property owners accountable to the very basic requirements around cleanliness – the legal requirements to maintain a clean sidewalk, to remove litter and debris from the first 18 inches into the street, and to set out waste at the proper time and in the proper receptacles. In 2023, our enforcement of these critical rules around cleanliness was up over 60% compared to the year prior, and we target ongoing enforcement in the highest-density parts of the City, doubling down on this Council's designation around Rat Mitigation Zones.

In addition to enforcing the basic rules of cleanliness outside every property in the City, we have implemented new strategies to combat two specific quality of life offenses.

The first is our camera enforcement approach to the scourge of illegal dumping, a crime wherein dumpers use cars, vans, or trucks to dispose of everything from construction debris to entire suites of office equipment to regular bags of trash. This occurs in areas that dumpers consider to be “out of the way,” like dead-end streets, underpasses, and, perhaps most distressingly, alongside cemeteries.

For many years, the Department of Sanitation did not have a meaningful enforcement strategy against the crime of illegal dumping. We just cleaned and cleaned over and over again, and the behavior continued to afflict neighborhoods like East New York, Glendale, and Hunts Point.

We have *significantly* stepped up illegal dumping surveillance in the last two years. Last year, we issued more than 300 summonses for illegal dumping, an increase of about 70% over 2022. Each of those summonses starts at \$4,000, with the cost of cleaning up the mess also passed along to the dumper. And we impound the vehicles involved.

The dumpers are on notice that they won't get away with it any longer.

The same is true for people who use our streets as free storage for abandoned or derelict vehicles. Under state law, DSNY has jurisdiction for the removal of vehicles identified as derelict, meaning without license plates and with a value of under \$1,250, with authority for removal of vehicles outside this category residing with the NYPD. But for the public, this distinction is meaningless. Who knows the value of a car that has taken up space outside their home, sometimes for years without moving? Who needs to know which agency to call?

That's why in 2023, DSNY and NYPD launched an interagency Abandoned Vehicle Task Force to cut through the red tape. A team of five NYPD officers were assigned to DSNY to partner with our derelict vehicle operations team so that when we encounter vehicles on the streets that do not meet the derelict criteria but qualify as abandoned, we can action them then and there. Thanks to these efforts, in 2023, we increased our derelict vehicle removal by 43%, and removed nearly 8,000 vehicles that calendar year. In 2024, we're on pace to dwarf that number.

All of you celebrate this work and most of you ask for *more* of this work. You speak often about the concerns of your constituents related to the cleanliness of commercial corridors and other dirty conditions in your districts.

But there are gaps in our enforcement authority – areas where the Department of Sanitation does not have the tools we need to do our job.

We want to get the job done, and there are three bills awaiting action by this Council that would give us the tools we need.

Intro 97, sponsored by Council Member Ung, will provide a meaningful escalator in fines for the small number of commercial property owners who repeatedly allow filth to congregate on our streets and sidewalks. Intro 11, sponsored by Council Member Bottcher, will expand the hours of the day that DSNY may enforce commercial cleanliness rules, and Intro 57, sponsored by Council Member Osse, will codify and clarify the penalties for failure to containerize commercial waste, one of the most successful cleanliness programs underway in the City.

In 2023, over 1,600 locations received four or more summonses for Dirty Area, and nearly 500 were issued 10 or more. Three dozen were issued FIFTY or more!

Take this commercial location, which has received 37 summonses year to date. And despite that, when Sanitation officers checked the site on Tuesday, THIS is what they found – filth littering OUR public space. And here you can see a business that has been summonsed for flouting set-out requirements 34 times and STILL hasn't gotten the message. Clearly, the escalating fine structure is not currently steep enough to act as a disincentive to repeat offenders.

Enforcement is not about generating revenue; it is about compliance, but under the law today, bad actors can simply look at DSNY enforcement as the cost of doing business. That has to change.

Cleanliness is a shared responsibility. We urge the Council to pass Intro 97 and implore the Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management to vote Intros 11 and 57 out of committee.

We are also asking for your support with a home rule message for state legislative bill A08902B/S08756. This would allow the Department of Sanitation to engage in automated enforcement against Alternate Side Parking violators, letting the mechanical brooms do their important job. Automated enforcement has worked well for the MTA in the bus lanes, and it can

do the same for clean streets. These bills are moving, with the support of a very broad coalition of state legislative leaders – and we need your support.

FY2025 Executive Budget

But even as we pursue a wide variety of innovative programs - and even with a challenging fiscal climate - we are not slowing down on our core cleanliness work...and neither are the people who create the need for that work.

This area of abandoned railway along Staten Island's North Shore has been allowed to become the definition of a "No Man's Land" over a period of decades, with dumpers easily climbing the fence you see in the rear of the photo - and Staten Islanders had been left with little choice but to conclude that no one cares.

That must end. The DSNY Targeted Neighborhood Taskforce began a major operation at this site last week, and will not stop until it's done.

I will now discuss the Executive Budget, which includes \$1.985 billion in expense funds in Fiscal Year 2024 and \$1.89 billion in Fiscal Year 2025, reflecting increases of \$83.7 million and \$26.0 million, respectively, from the budget adopted last June.

The Fiscal Year 2025 budget includes \$1.13 billion for personal services to support a total budgeted headcount of 9,476 full-time positions, including 7,844 uniformed positions and 1,632 civilian positions, and \$756.7 million for other than personal services, or OTPS.

DSNY's Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Budget includes \$3.36 billion in capital funding in the 10-year plan, \$1.18 billion of which is for garages and facilities, \$2.06 billion for equipment, \$64.9 million for IT, and \$59.8 million for solid waste management infrastructure.

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

- \$487 million in funding for the construction of a new garage for Bronx Districts 9, 10, and 11, with demolition;
- \$283 million in additional funding for the construction of a new garage for Queens District 1, with design slated to begin next year;
- Upgrades to the facility that serves as the home for the Bronx District 12 Garage, which has an overall budget of \$55.5 million and will begin construction next year;
- And the \$20 million finishing touches of the \$213 million build-out for the brand-new home for Staten Island District 3, which is slated to be completed next Spring.

We look forward to taking your questions about the end of the era of the black bags in the City of New York and the FY2025 Executive Budget. Thank you.