



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

Testimony

Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams

Tuesday, June 11, 2019

I want to thank Chair Rafael Salamanca, Jr. and the Committee on Land Use for giving me the opportunity to provide comments at this public hearing. Additionally, I would like to thank Council Member Espinal for introducing this legislation on my behalf as well as his Council colleagues for co-sponsoring this important legislation.

The impetus of this legislation stems not only from the historic challenges of unsecured land tenure for community gardens throughout neighborhoods across New York City, but also from meeting time and again with urban agriculture companies during my visits to neighborhoods throughout Brooklyn. I was, and continue to be, inspired by the entrepreneurial spirit that produces fruits and vegetables in Brooklyn using new forms of tech-focused agriculture such as aeroponics and closed loop aquaponics. Unfortunately, I hear over and over again about the difficulty of receiving City agency approval for these companies, which were often being set up on rooftops and in warehouses. This frustration prompted the most logical next step, which was to bring City agencies to the table to speak with advocates and industry leaders on the issue of permits and regulations.

Two years ago, I hosted a roundtable in partnership with Council Member Espinal at Brooklyn Borough Hall with 10 City agencies and more than 20 urban agriculture companies and non-profit organizations. The takeaway was clear: Agriculture is only mentioned a handful of times in the zoning resolution, and City agencies were placing responsibility on one another to regulate this emerging industry, but no one was taking any clear regulatory responsibility. This resulted in more questions than answers for urban agriculture companies and no clear path for fresh food and job creation. While we have seen successful companies like Brooklyn Grange and Gotham Greens take root, many more companies have labored trying to get their business off the ground. Meanwhile, cities such as Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, and Newark are plowing forward with an urban agriculture revolution. Intro 1058 asks the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP) to take the first step in playing catch up with so many other cities by developing a comprehensive urban agriculture plan that addresses land use and other regulatory issues. The website created in response to our last attempt at getting a comprehensive plan passed is a nice resource, but it does not fully address the challenges facing this growing industry. We need a real plan and I support the creation of a taskforce to create and implement this plan.

Since being on my own journey with Type 2 diabetes, I have noticed how deadly our food system has become. Fast, processed foods dominate our lives. From our school lunches to our grocery stores to restaurants throughout the borough, we are killing ourselves with the foods we eat. The data amplifies the problem. According to a 2007-2010 Center for Disease Control and Prevention survey, 87 percent of adults failed to meet their daily recommended vegetable intake. That is no surprise to me considering bodegas represent 80 percent of the food source in neighborhoods in central and northern Brooklyn according to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH)'s analysis of their Healthy Bodegas Initiative from 2008. On average, only 10 percent of bodegas carry leafy green vegetables according to a 2006 DOHMH study. These are food deserts filled with processed foods, plain and simple. We must have equity of access for fresh, healthy food and stop flooding our neighborhoods that have the greatest need with the least healthy alternatives.

As Brooklyn's borough president, it is my job to advocate for the health and well-being of my constituents. That is why I am calling for the passage of this legislation. If we can clear the way for urban and vertical agriculture, then we can begin to sow the seeds for a food revolution that provides healthy food access to communities from Bensonhurst to Brownsville.

Through the support and expansion of community gardens and urban farming, we can reduce transportation costs, negative environmental effects, and other externalities associated with shipping logistics, while opening up job opportunities to the next generation of entrepreneurs. That is why I contributed \$1 million in capital funding to the Brooklyn Navy Yard for the establishment of an urban agriculture tech incubator so we can foster startups to crack the high energy cost and real estate code.

Looking to the future, I initiated "Growing Brooklyn's Future," committing more than \$7 million in capital funding for projects across Brooklyn. These include hydroponic classrooms in schools across the borough in partnership with NY Sun Works; a greenhouse at the Urban Assembly Unison school in partnership with Council Member Laurie Cumbo and Teens for Food Justice, as well as green roofs and rooftop gardens at other schools. This investment recognizes the need to prepare for the workforce of the future that is coming: an urban, fresh food revolution. As our young people are preparing for this future, the question remains: Will the city be prepared for them?

This legislation and the capital contribution are a win-win for Brooklyn and the City of New York. I hope this committee and the City Council pass this legislation, and send it to the Mayor for his signature, so we can begin the fresh and healthy food revolution.

Thank you.