



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

ANTONIO REYNOSO

Brooklyn Borough President

**Testimony to the New York City Council
Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management
Preliminary Budget Hearing, March 23, 2022**

Good afternoon and thank you to Chair Sandy Nurse and the Sanitation Committee for the opportunity to speak today. I am very excited to see Council Member Nurse stepping into my former role as Chair of this committee. She has been a strong ally in efforts to make the City's waste management more sustainable and more equitable, and I know she will continue to lead on these issues.

I am here today to express a number of concerns about this budget. Unfortunately, it represents a rollback of many of the gains we made over last eight years. While we already had a long way to go toward sending zero waste to landfill by 2030, this budget gets us even further from that goal instead of moving us toward it. I want to focus on a few specific areas of concern, including organics, commercial waste, trash on our streets, and the District 13/15 sanitation garage.

Organics: About one third of New York City's waste stream is organic waste – food, soiled paper, and yard waste. If we are serious about diverting waste from landfill – and we should be, because when this material goes to landfill, it produces harmful greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change – we must have a functioning organics collection program. The Mayor has called the existing program “symbolic” because of low participation. It's true that if the program only exists on a small scale, it is not cost efficient. However, the answer is not to scrap the program. Last year, a study by the Independent Budget Office found that increasing participation in the curbside program would reduce per-ton collection costs significantly, and that any increase in emissions from additional trucks would be more than offset by diverting the organics from landfill. The answer is a citywide, mandatory, curbside collection program paired with robust outreach and education to maximize participation.

Until we get there, it is critical that we support our community-based compost dropoff sites. Making cuts to these programs is an equity issue. When the budgets are cut, the City tends to support the dropoff sites with the highest utilization rates, which often leaves low-income communities of color, who also don't have the option to participate in the curbside program, with no options for keeping their food scraps out of landfill. Even the existing program leaves out much of Central, East, and South Brooklyn. In the Council, I advocated for a more equitable approach requiring at least one community-based dropoff site per community district, and I will continue to do so until we have a universal curbside program.



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Commercial Waste Zoning: I was recently disappointed to learn that implementation of a zoned collection system for commercial waste has been delayed three more months, after a two-year delay due to the pandemic. This plan will be transformative for our city in so many ways: it will further environmental justice, make our streets safer, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and increase worker safety. I know that Chair Nurse intends to hold a hearing just on this next month, so I won't go into too many details here, but I do want to say that it is critical that DSNY and the Business Integrity Commission have all the staff they need to ensure that this program is implemented as soon as possible.

Trash Collection and Quality of Life: We are all experiencing the issues caused by our inefficient approach to trash storage on our streets and sidewalks. Our city can and must do better than the ugly piles of trash and rats that we all have to dodge everyday. I was very dismayed to see cuts proposed to DSNY's waste containerization pilot before it has even had a chance to start. Other countries and cities have no problem using rat-proof containerized waste systems on their streets and sidewalks. It's time to admit that we have limited space in this city, and prioritizing waste storage over parking would make our streets and sidewalks significantly cleaner. (Separating organics in rat-proof containers for a curbside program would also help.)

Brooklyn District 13/15 garage: While I thank DSNY for including upgrades to Brooklyn District 3 and 17/18 facilities in the Preliminary Capital Commitment Plan, I am disappointed to see that a new garage for Brooklyn Districts 13 and 15 remains unfunded. DSNY has told me that these garages are currently operating from among the worst physical plants in their inventory, with BK 13 located in a dilapidated building and parking its trucks on an HPD-owned site slated for affordable housing development, and BK 15 using trailers in an area plagued by flooding. New York's Strongest already have some of the toughest jobs out there, and they shouldn't be forced to work in these conditions. A new garage was proposed at Coney Island Creek decades ago, and City Council approved site selection in 2006, but implementation has been delayed so long that now the lot is on the market and may be sold to a private developer. I want to ask the administration to please reconsider, to negotiate with National Grid to acquire the site before it's too late, and to move forward with this garage as soon as possible.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today. I am looking forward to working very closely with Chair Nurse and the City Council to ensure that DSNY is adequately supported to keep our city clean and to consistently update our approach to waste management to further equity and combat climate change.