



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

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Brooklyn Borough President

Testimony on the NY State Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA)

May 3, 2022

Good afternoon, I am Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso, and I want to thank the Climate Action Council for hosting this important hearing in Brooklyn today. As you all know, climate change is the existential threat of our time, and I am very excited about the potential of the CLCPA to kickstart a just transition and build the green economy, both of which are imperatives for our city's future. This is even more important now, as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have set us back from our goals, with more people using cars for commuting, relying on trucks for deliveries, and consuming more energy working from home.

I very much appreciate the fact that the draft plan centers our environmental justice communities. Communities of color have been on the front lines of climate change, experiencing associated health and economic impacts, and bearing the brunt of natural disasters. We must address their needs first and use new initiatives to provide justice, including but of course not limited to cleaner air, flood resiliency, and green jobs.

The CLCPA is bold and ambitious, so I want to focus my testimony on the impacts this plan will have here in Brooklyn, specifically on infrastructure, transportation, buildings, waste, and land use.

Brooklyn Infrastructure

Brooklyn is well-positioned to lead the city in building the green economy. I am particularly excited about the offshore wind hub that is coming to the South Brooklyn Marine Terminal in Sunset Park, an example of a project that will create hundreds of green jobs in an environmental justice community while helping to usher in our clean energy future.

We can and should go further to support Sunset Park and Red Hook, communities of color that have experienced more than their fair share of health and quality-of-life impacts associated with industrial pollution. I support advocates' efforts to convert the peaker plants in these communities from fossil fuels to renewables, and to address the concentration of last-mile delivery facilities, which lead to increased truck traffic and associated health and safety concerns.

In North Brooklyn, I support the community's efforts to stop National Grid's North Brooklyn Pipeline. National Grid's expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure, including its proposed fracked gas vaporizers,



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undermines the CLCPA's goals and adds more pollution and greenhouse gas emissions to Brooklyn communities of color. The Public Service Commission should be supporting renewable energy sources, not more fossil fuels.

Transportation

The CLCPA proposes investments in sustainable transportation options, which is critical to address climate change. However, I am concerned that the plan focuses too heavily on electrification of single-occupancy vehicles, and not enough on getting New Yorkers out of cars and onto public transportation. The most important thing that New York State can do to make New York City more sustainable is to fix the MTA. Especially now that more people are driving due to COVID, we need to implement congestion pricing as soon as possible, and find additional sources of funding to upgrade our trains and buses to make them clean, efficient, reliable, accessible, and affordable. We need more real Select Bus Service, and new and innovative public transit options like the Interborough Express. Additionally, we need to make it safer and more efficient to ride a bicycle and walk in our city. We need more protected bike lanes and expanded micromobility options such as CitiBike. We need to address dangerous intersections across the borough, to provide safe routes to transit and reliable transit options for seniors and people with disabilities, and to ensure our streets are designed for people, not cars.

Buildings

The CLCPA calls for a dramatic increase in the use of heat pumps to make residential buildings more energy efficient. However, scaling up this technology is not without its challenges. My office provides grant-based support for Brooklyn property owners to switch to heat pumps through the Heat/Cool Smart Brooklyn Program. The organizations we support to carry out this work have found that small and mid-sized multi-family properties often lack access to qualified building professionals and available incentives. Building owners and managers are often unfamiliar with emerging technologies, and many lack the resources to explore new solutions.

Additionally, existing programs and incentives offered by utilities discourage large-scale implementation. The ConEd Clean Heat Program's application, for example, is cumbersome and demands specific system requirements. Many customers feel that even with existing incentives, heat pumps do not provide significant return on investment, especially against New York City's high electricity costs. Multi-family



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buildings such as co-ops and condos may struggle to achieve buy-in. And the difficulty of finding experienced sales personnel and technicians means that many contractors lack adequate capacity to educate their customers. Most crucially, many building owners are cost-sensitive and make decisions only when systems fail, replacing fossil fuel systems with new fossil fuel systems due to familiarity with existing technology and pressing need for repairs.

Full buy-in of heat pump technology on the scale the CLCPA calls for will require a major investment in outreach and education, as well as more targeted and easy-to-access incentive programs. My office and our partner organizations hope to continue working with NYSERDA on this effort.

Waste

This issue is very personal for me, having been the Chair of the City Council's Sanitation Committee for the two previous terms. The waste sector has a huge impact on climate change and environmental justice, especially in Brooklyn, where we have the largest concentration of waste facilities in the city. New York City is unfortunately very far from the previous administration's goal of sending zero waste to landfills by 2030. The State can support the City in these efforts by providing funding to implement:

- **Universal curbside organics collection:** 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. 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. New York City needs a citywide, mandatory, curbside collection program paired with robust outreach and education to maximize participation.
- **Commercial waste collection zones:** I was proud to champion this local legislation, which will transform the commercial waste industry. Implementing CWZ will dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the private carting industry and deliver on environmental justice commitments, improve our city's diversion rates for recycling and organics, make our streets safer, and improve conditions for workers in the industry. After passing this bill in 2019, I have been disappointed that DSNY delayed its implementation for two years. Now it appears to be back on track with final RFP submissions due in July, but the State can assist DSNY by ensuring that the agency is fully funded to implement the program quickly and efficiently.



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- **Save-as-you-throw:** The Department of Sanitation has studied this model, an incentive-based program that encourages recycling and source-separation of organics, but has not yet taken steps toward implementation.
- **Electronic waste recycling:** The City's curbside, by-appointment e-waste pickup program is limited in scope, and larger buildings must opt-in. With only one drop-off site per borough, complying with e-waste recycling regulations can be difficult.
- **Limiting single-use plastics:** Proposed policies at the City and State level would help curb the use of these products, especially those that come from restaurants.

Land Use

I was heartened to see that the CLCPA includes funding for municipalities to undertake comprehensive planning efforts. Advocates have long argued that NYC needs a more comprehensive approach to planning than our current system allows. Setting district-specific benchmarks for everything from affordable housing to green infrastructure to transportation improvements could help end what I call the "NIMBY-YIMBY doom loop" and help us take a more proactive, community-oriented approach to ending climate change. I hope that the State will consider supporting this approach in New York City in addition to in other smaller municipalities.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony and for taking the time to come to Brooklyn to hear directly from my constituents. I want to be a partner in all efforts to make our beautiful borough more sustainable, to support innovation to end climate change, build the green economy, and provide relief and support to our EJ communities. I look forward to opportunities to collaborate with my partners in the State on these efforts.