

COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND SOLID WASTE
MANAGEMENT JOINTLY WITH THE COMMITTEE
ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND SOLID WASTE
MANAGEMENT JOINTLY WITH THE COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND
RECREATION

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December 18, 2020
Start: 11:08 a.m.
Recess: 4:20 p.m.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING (VIRTUAL ROOM 1)

B E F O R E: Antonio Reynoso,
Chairperson for Committee on
Sanitation and Solid Waste
Management

Peter Koo,
Chairperson for Committee on Parks
and Recreation

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Justin L. Brannan
Fernando Cabrera
Margaret S. Chin
Andrew Cohen
Costa G. Constantinides
Chaim M. Deutsch
Joseph Borelli
Mark Gjonaj
Robert Holden
Stephen T. Levin
Mark Levine

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COUNCIL MEMBERS: (CONT.)

Francisco Moya
Keith Powers
Carlina Rivera
Jimmy Van Bramer

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A P P E A R A N C E S

Bridget Anderson
Deputy Commissioner for Recycling and
Sustainability at the New York City's Department
of Sanitation

Gregory Anderson
Assistant Commissioner for Policy and External
Affairs and colleagues from the Department of
Parks and Recreation

Sam Biederman
Assistant Commissioner for Community Outreach and
Partnership Development at NYC Parks

Matt Drury
Director of Government Relations for the Parks
Department

Fariha Haider
Representing the Brooklyn Latin Schools Eco Club

Rebecca Shabnam
A New York City DOE High Schooler

Gale Brewer
Manhattan Borough President

Justin Green
Executive Director of Big Reuse

Christine Datz-Romero
Executive Director of the Lower East Side Ecology
Center

Domingo Morales
Founder of Compost Power

Marisa DeDominicis
Co-Founder of the Earth Matter New York

Melissa Iachan
Senior Staff Attorney in the Environmental
Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the
Public Interest

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A P P E A R A N C E S

1
2
3 Lisa Bloodgood
4 Director of Advocacy and Education with Newtown
5 Creek Alliance

6
7 David Hurd
8 Director of Zero Waste programs at GrowNYC

9
10 Dr. Tok Michelle Oyewole
11 New York City Environmental Justice Alliance

12
13 Eric Goldstein
14 Senior Attorney with the Natural Resources Defense
15 Council

16
17 Carina Storrs

18
19 Carlos Castell Croke
20 Associate for New York City Programs at the New
21 York League of Conservation Voters

22
23 Emily Bachman
24 Compost Program Manager at GrowNYC

25
26 Clare Mifflin
27 Center of Zero Waste Design

28
29 Frank Franciosi
30 Executive Director of the United States Composting
31 Council

32
33 Elizabeth Aceituno
34 Resident of Long Island City Queens

35
36 Brys Peralta-Grant
37 Bike Composter at BK ROT

38
39 Brittany Cattaruzza
40 Resident of Astoria Queens and volunteers weekly
41 with Astoria Pug

42
43 Charlie Reynoso
44 New York Restoration Project

45
46 Jane Selden
47 Speaking on behalf of 350 NYC

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A P P E A R A N C E S

Rosamond Gianutsos
Resident of Sunnyside Queens

Elizabeth Royzman
Secretary of the Brooklyn Solid Waste Advisory
Board

Brendon Hannon
Member of Smiling Hogshead Ranch at Community
Garden in Western Queens

Gil Lopez

Danika Lam
Founding Member of Haki Compost Collective on
Roosevelt Island

Clay Burch
Creator and Organizer of Brooklyn Scrap Shuttle

Gregory Todd
Gardner at Imani Green Thumb Garden in Crown
Heights Brooklyn

Alice Dugan
Brooklyn resident, Manager for a film production
company based in Brooklyn, also called Public
Record

Mary Ann Bennett
Resident in Flatbush Brooklyn

Mellison Arguson
Lives in East Harlem and composting with GrowNYC

Julie Won
Resident of Sunnyside New York

Kim Howell
Resident of Lefferts Gardens in Brooklyn

Dr. Sara Perl Egendorf
Speaking on behalf of a number of Research
Collaborators from Cornell University

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- 1
- 2 Edward Streeter
- 3 Leah Retherford
Queens Resident
- 4
- 5 Sandye Renz
Scared, Frustrated but yet Hopeful Citizen
- 6 Barbara Hertel
Long Time Composter
- 7
- 8 Wendy Brawer
Long Time Lower East Side Resident and
Sustainability Professional
- 9
- 10 Mary Ellen Sullivan
- 11 Valerie Zandoli
Natural Resources Defense Council, NRDC
- 12 Aleft Tadesse[SP?]
Resident of Long Island City
- 13
- 14 Anna Von Muehlen
Sustainability Coordinator and Teacher at Compass
Charter School
- 15
- 16 Daniel Wendell
- 17
- 18 Emily Kitchler
- 19 Dana Affleck
Brooklyn Resident
- 20
- 21 Billy Freeland
candidate for City Council in District 5
- 22
- 23 Kristen Misak
- 24
- 25 Laura Picalo
Resident of Astoria
- Alexa Jakob
Community Composter
- Laura A. Hechtlinger
- Marya Friedman

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Carolina Diaz Chan
Resident of Canarsie Brooklyn

Renee Pappous
Community Composter, Volunteer for the Micro-
Hauler Astoria Pug and a Concerned Citizen of the
City of New York

Debby Lee
Executive Director and Founder of Cafeteria
Culture

Anna Sacks
Save our Compost Coalition

Greg Genco
Lifelong New Yorker Living in Vinegar Hill

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1
2 SERGEANT BIONDO: Sergeants, can you start your
3 recordings. PC recording has started.

4 SERGEANT HOPE: Cloud recording started.

5 SERGEANT BIONDO: Thank you. Thank you. Good
6 morning and welcome to today's Remote New York City
7 Council joint hearing on the Committee's of
8 Sanitation jointly with the Committee on Parks and
9 Recreation.

10 At this time, would all panelists please turn on
11 their video for verification. Once again, all
12 panelists please turn on your video's for
13 verification.

14 To minimize disruption, when you are unmuted
15 please place all electronic devices on vibrate or
16 silent mode. If you wish to submit testimony, you
17 may do so at testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that
18 is testimony@council.nyc.gov.

19 Thank you for your cooperation. Chairs we are
20 ready to begin. You are good to go sir.

21 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: I am sorry. Sorry and I
22 apologize for the noise in the background, my son is
23 in the living room. So, please bear with us.

24 Thank you for joining our virtual hearing today
25 before the Council's Committee's on Sanitation and

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1 Solid Waste Management and Parks and Recreation. I
2 would like to thank my fellow Chair Council Member
3 Peter Koo and acknowledge my fellow City Council
4 Members who are present. I will do that in short
5 order but I want to allow for Council Member Koo to
6 read his opening statement first. Council Member
7 Koo.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Oh, you want me to start.

10 Thank you, thank you Chair Reynoso.

11 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Good morning. I am Peter Koo,
13 Chair of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. I
14 would like to thank my fellow Co-Chair Council Member
15 Reynoso for agreeing to hold this joint hearing.

16 Today's hearing will examine the issues facing
17 the City's various compositing programs. It is no
18 secret to anyone that compositing programs are vital
19 to the City's recycling and sustainability goals.
20 The City has long supported and increased in the
21 widespread use of community compositing as one of the
22 major steps that can be taken to lessen the harmful
23 effects of climate change on our city.

24 A major example of this was in 2013 when the
25 Council passed Local Law 77, which required the

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1 Sanitation Commissioner to establish a residential
2 organic waste and school organic waste collection
3 pilot programs.
4

5 Through this effort, the Sanitation Department
6 collected various types of organic waste from city
7 residents, which was turned into compost or renewable
8 energy.

9 For residents with low access to curbside
10 collection services, they were encouraged to create
11 drop off locations within their communities.

12 However, with the recent budget cuts earlier this
13 year, resulting from the economic effects of COVID-
14 19, the residential part of the collection program
15 was temporarily halted on May 4, 2020. With no plans
16 to completely resume service until 2022.

17 Though some of these programs were recently
18 reinstated, it seems that composting programs, a law
19 as secure as we would hope. The Parks Department
20 historically step in as well when it comes to
21 composting. They have partnered with numerous park
22 conservancies, other park groups, community gardens
23 and community organizations to allow them to conduct
24 their own community composting programs, which has
25 successfully operated for years.

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1
2 Parks, due to their welcoming and recreational
3 nature, are perfect places to site community
4 composting programs. Which is why I want to make
5 sure that the long-standing policy of supporting
6 these programs is not at risk.

7 However, the status of two composting facilities
8 located on property maybe at risk. One program, the
9 lower east side Ecology Center in East River Park has
10 been told by Parks that they can no longer operate
11 their site in the Parks due to the construction that
12 will occur in the East Side Coastal Resilience
13 Project.

14 As a result, they may be forced to operate at a
15 location in upper Manhattan with no rock solid
16 assurance from the Parks Department that they can
17 return to operate in East River Park when ESEL is
18 complete. This will deprive community residents on
19 the lower east side from their composting program for
20 years, if no suitable alternative locations can be
21 found.

22 Another site is operated by the Big Reuse. Under
23 the Queensborough Bridge adjacent to Queens Bridge
24 Park. Their license to operate in that location
25 expires at the end of this month and parks has

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1
2 previously indicated that they will not renew the
3 agreement. Forcing the Big Reuse to find an
4 alternative location. Although there are indications
5 now there are compromises hopefully in the works.

6 Parks has said that they intend to use the site
7 to station, maintenance vehicles and equipment.
8 Instead of being stationed within the park in order
9 to allow for improvements to be made there. It
10 seems that this situation is sending mixed signals
11 regarding what the city's compositing policy actually
12 is.

13 Do we want more community compositing or less? I
14 think the answer is yes. Do we want improvements
15 made to our parks? I think the answer is also yes.
16 If we all agree, I think that we can surely find a
17 common ground to ensure the community compositing and
18 properly resourced parks coexists. We need clear
19 explanations here from the Administration. If we
20 need to move sites or offer temporary alternatives
21 and the Sanitation and the Parks Department need to
22 work together and come up with solutions so that the
23 community groups who administer these important
24 programs can plan their futures. And the communities

25

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1 who rely on them are not deprived of composting
2 resources.
3

4 Thank you again and I look forward to exploring
5 these issues at this hearing today. I will now turn
6 over to our Co-Chair Council Member Reynoso. Thank
7 you.

8 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Thank you Council Member
9 Koo. I appreciate your Co-Chairmanship. After I
10 make my statement, I just want to allow for two
11 Council Members in the impacted districts to be able
12 to add quick statements as well.

13 Good morning, I am Council Member Antonio
14 Reynoso, Chair of the Committee on Sanitation and
15 Solid Waste Management, thank you for joining today's
16 hearing on Community Composting in New York City that
17 we are holding jointly with the Committee on Parks
18 and Recreation Chaired by myself and Council Member
19 Peter Koo.

20 We are also hearing a Resolution calling on New
21 York City Department of Sanitation and Department of
22 Parks and Recreation to continue to engage and can
23 elaborate with local communities to encourage and
24 allow community composting to be carried out on park
25 land that is safe for residents. The proper disposal

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1 and processing of organic waste reduces the amount of
2 refuse sent to landfill and cuts down on greenhouse
3 gas emissions.
4

5 The City has stated an ambitious and important
6 goal to send zero waste to landfill by 2030. This
7 year has been incredibly difficult with the Mayor
8 making severe austerity cuts to programs that
9 provided New Yorkers access to recycling to help
10 reach our zero by 30 goal. Residential organics
11 collection has been suspended at least until 2022.
12 School organics collection has been eliminated and
13 the majority of food scrap drop off sites have been
14 closed.

15 We are nearing a point where New Yorkers will
16 have no opportunity to recycle organic waste. And in
17 the midst of all this, the City is not supporting the
18 community composting operations that are the only
19 ones still doing the important work of processing
20 organic waste locally. The Council in partnership
21 with environmental advocates, secured the restoration
22 of funds specifically to support the work of these
23 groups in this year's budget and now it appears that
24 the Mayor is taking the backdoor route to undermine
25

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1 this important work by literally snatching the land
2 from under them.
3

4 The Lower East Side Ecology Center and the Big
5 Reuse are community composts. They process organic
6 waste. Both of these operations are currently on
7 city park land. The Lower East Side Ecology Center
8 is being moved to an entirely different community
9 while the area is being renovated. Parks is not
10 renewing Big Reuse's license to operate in the Queens
11 Bridge Park. As far as I know, the City is still
12 publicly committed to sending zero waste to landfill
13 but the City is also eliminating every opportunity to
14 recycle organic waste.

15 Why are the actions of the Parks Department
16 misaligned with the stated goals of the City? Why is
17 the City saying that recycling organic waste is
18 essential but then not supporting the work of
19 community composters? So much of my work in this
20 Committee over the past seven years has been focused
21 on holding the Mayor accountable to his own
22 commitments. It seems that every time we take a step
23 forward, we take two steps back and I struggle to
24 understand the Parks Department, an agency that
25

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1 should be laser focused on environmental initiatives
2 has seen fit to prioritize parking over composting.

3 I am looking forward to understanding from DSNY
4 and the Department of Parks and Recreation about
5 their interagency coordination and their plans to
6 work towards the City's goal of zero waste. I want
7 to learn about the long-term plan to support
8 community composting and allow these operations to
9 continue processing organic waste. I want to hear why
10 Big Reuse is being told to leave their site.

11 I would like to just acknowledge that we have
12 been joined by Council Members Borelli, Council
13 Member Brannan, Council Member Cabrera, Cohen,
14 Constantinides, Deutsch, Gjonaj, Holden, Levine,
15 Moya, Rivera and Van Bramer. I want to give an
16 opportunity for Council Member Van Bramer to make a
17 quick statement related to this park land in his
18 district. Thank you. Council Member Van Bramer.

19 Does somebody need to unmute Council Member Van
20 Bramer? And I also want to acknowledge we have been
21 joined by Council Member Powers.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Oh, there he is, okay.
24
25

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: They did need to
3 unmute me and they did.

4 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: It was me just behind the
5 curtain just holding you back.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: First of all, I just
7 want to thank Chair Reynoso and his adorable son for
8 joining us on the Zoom today and also Chair Koo.

9 My name is Jimmy Van Bramer and I am very proud
10 to represent Big Reuse and I am an enormous fan of
11 Justin Green and his entire team. Community
12 composting is everything that's right about this city
13 right now and a sustainable future and it is
14 incomprehensible that Big Reuse would be evicted and
15 particularly reprehensible if in fact that site,
16 which is now a site of community compositing and
17 source of education would be turned into a parking
18 lot for vehicles.

19 I know that Parks is going to speak in a few
20 moments. We spoke this morning and they may have a
21 temporary potential deal for Big Reuse but I want to
22 say a few things about that. One, we are only here
23 because of Chair Reynoso, Chair Koo and the movement.
24 All of the people who are on this call who have
25 fought to organize, who have submitted testimony,

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1 have rallied, have had press conferences to get parks
2 and the City of New York to the place where they are
3 going to offer a temporary solution here today. But
4 I also want to say, I spoke to Justin and Big Reuse
5 this morning as well and what we need from the
6 Administration is a promise not to evict Big Reuse
7 until they have a new site. A simple extension with
8 a promise to potentially find them new home is not
9 good enough. There isn't the time. They would still
10 probably wind up getting evicted.

12 So, we are here because people fought and have
13 pushed and supported and that is a good thing.
14 People power is real but we have to keep pushing for
15 a permanent home and a permanent solutions for Big
16 Reuse and obviously my colleague Rivera will be
17 talking about the location in her district. But I
18 want to talk about Big Reuse and the imperative that
19 it be saved and that a permanent location will be
20 found. An extension without the guarantee that they
21 will remain is not the solution that we are looking
22 for. It's a step in the right direction but it is
23 not everything we want and need and I also want to
24 say that the restoration of Baby Park for the Queens
25 Bridge community is absolutely imperative as well.

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1
2 Long, long fought for and sought for and we are
3 thrilled that \$11 million is going to be going to
4 restore that stretch of park for the Queens Bridge
5 houses but we shouldn't pit the one against the
6 other. We can and must be able to restore Baby Park
7 and also, maintain community composting in western
8 Queens and have a permanent home for Big Reuse.

9 So, I want to thank Chairs Reynoso and Koo for
10 the time but most of all thank all of the activists
11 for rallying around Lower East Side Ecology Center
12 and Big Reuse and community composting. You have
13 made Parks bend a little bit but we need them to bend
14 even more and create permanent homes for community
15 composting and the City has to recommit to composting
16 overall. Thank you very much.

17 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Okay, thank you very much.
18 Now I want to allow for the Parks Department and the
19 Department of Sanitation for their opening statements
20 and we will go from there.

21 So, I believe Sam, I think you are going to take
22 it away.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member, this is Kris
24 Sartori, Counsel to Parks, I believe Council Member

25

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2 Rivera would like to make a statement regarding the
3 District.

4 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Okay, I apologize, I
5 thought she wanted to ask questions first. Okay, no
6 problem, Council Member Rivera.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Chair Reynoso, Chair Koo,
8 thank you. That is true, I would rather use my time
9 for questions. I just want to thank you for having
10 this hearing. I think we all know why we are here.
11 To put it very briefly, Big Use and LES Ecology
12 Center jointly process more than 2 million pounds of
13 food waste each year that would otherwise chucked to
14 landfills where they would release harmful methane
15 gas. And I would just want to add and again, this is
16 for my questions. It doesn't make sense that we are
17 putting this much energy into moving these sites or
18 as to whatever confusion there is as to their future
19 locations.

20 In terms of the city's 2030 climate goals,
21 citywide composting cuts 4 billion pounds of CO2 per
22 year. That's equal to taking 350,000 cars off of New
23 York City streets.

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1
2 So, thank you for having this hearing and I am
3 looking forward to asking questions after the
4 testimony.

5 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Thank you Council Member
6 Rivera and I believe we want to swear folks in.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes Council Member, I will
8 just go over some procedural items and we can begin
9 with testimony after.

10 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: And I apologize because of
11 my situation at home, I don't have the script in
12 front of me, so moving forward, please Counsel
13 interrupt whenever possible.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sure, will do. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chairs Reynoso and
17 Koo. I am Kris Sartori, Senior Counsel to the
18 Committee on Parks and Recreation and I will be
19 Moderating this hearing.

20 Before we begin, I would like to remind everyone
21 that you will be on mute until you are called to
22 testify, at which point, you will be unmuted by the
23 host. During the hearing, I will be calling on
24 various panelists to testify, so please listen for
25

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1
2 your name to be called, as I will periodically be
3 announcing who the next panelist will be.

4 We will first be hearing testimony from the
5 Administration followed by testimony from members of
6 the public. During the hearing, if Council Members
7 would like to ask a question of the Administration or
8 of a specific panelist, please use the Zoom raise
9 hand function and I will call on you in order.

10 We will be limiting Council Member questions to
11 five minutes which includes the time it takes to
12 answer those questions. Also, please note that
13 panelists aside from those from the Administration
14 will be limited to a two minute time limit, so that
15 we may more easily accommodate the large number of
16 people who have come today to testify. The exception
17 will be for a few panelists who have a direct
18 connection to the sites in question. Those people
19 will testify soon after the Administration. I will
20 just let them know who they are. Justin Green,
21 Christine Datz-Romero and Domingo Morales as well as
22 Borough President Gale Brewer. They will have five
23 minutes to make their statement.

24 We will now call on members of the Administration
25 to testify. We will be hearing testimony from Sam

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2 Biederman, Assistant Commissioner for Community
3 Outreach and Partnership Development for Department
4 of Parks and Recreation and Bridget Anderson, Deputy
5 Commissioner for Recycling and Sustainability for the
6 Department of Sanitation. Gregory Anderson,
7 Assistant Commissioner for Policy and External
8 Affairs for the Department of Sanitation and Matt
9 Drury, Director of Government Relations for the Parks
10 Department will also be present to answer any
11 questions that may come from Council Members.

12 At this time, I will administer the affirmation
13 to each member of the Administration and I will call
14 on you individually for a response, so please all
15 raise your right hands.

16 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth
17 and nothing but the truth before these committee's
18 and to respond honestly to Council Member questions?
19 Commissioner Biederman?

20 SAM BIEDERMAN: I do.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Commissioner Bridget
22 Anderson?

23 BRIDGET ANDERSON: I do.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Commissioner Gregory
25 Anderson?

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GREGORY ANDERSON: I do.

3

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Mr. Drury?

4

MATT DRURY: I do.

5

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. And at this time,

6

I will — this is the Commissioner's Biederman and

7

Anderson to present their testimony. Thank you.

8

BRIDGET ANDERSON: Great and we pulled straws, I

9

will go first.

10

Good afternoon Chairs Reynoso and Koo, and

11

members of the City Council Committees on Sanitation

12

and Solid Waste Management and Parks and Recreation.

13

I am Bridget Anderson, Deputy Commissioner for

14

Recycling and Sustainability at the New York City

15

Department of Sanitation. I am joined today by

16

Gregory Anderson, Assistant Commissioner for Policy

17

and External Affairs and colleagues from the

18

Department of Parks and Recreation. Thank you for

19

the opportunity to testify today. Community

20

composting is critical for the city's push to fight

21

climate change and to build more resilient

22

neighborhoods.

23

Over the last three decades, our community

24

compost partners have trained generations of New

25

Yorkers of all ages in sustainability, education and

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1
2 composting operations. It is thanks to these
3 passionate community composters that we were able to
4 build the momentum that helped us launch and expand
5 the curbside composting program over the last several
6 years. Despite difficult budget cuts this year, we
7 remain committed to composting as a key component of
8 our zero waste goals and the city's push to fight
9 climate change. Community-scale composting, in
10 particular, allows people to learn about the
11 composting process hands on. It also demonstrates
12 the value that compost brings to our neighborhoods,
13 improving and rebuilding the soils of our gardens,
14 our parks and street trees. Now more than ever, we
15 need individuals and communities to help our City be
16 clean, healthy, safe and resilient.

17 As the neighborhood testified in June, and as is
18 still true through this winter, the COVID-19 pandemic
19 has put immense financial strain on our city and our
20 communities. The Administration continues to make
21 difficult budgetary decisions and those cuts will
22 deepen unless we get the support we need from the
23 federal government. As was released in the November
24 Plan, the suspension of the curbside composting
25 program will be extended by a second year through

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1
2 June 2022 as the difficult but necessary step for our
3 city to take due to our current budget reality.

4 I want to thank Speaker Johnson, Chair Reynoso,
5 Chair Koo and many others here today for your strong
6 advocacy to restore \$2.88 million in funding to
7 continue community-scale composting. Currently, our
8 Fiscal Year 22 budget has \$3.5 million allocated for
9 community composting, which we hope will allow us to
10 re-instate some of the educational programming that
11 was suspended during the pandemic.

12 Founded in 1993 by Department of Sanitation, the
13 NYC Compost Project works to rebuild New York City's
14 soils by providing New Yorkers with the knowledge,
15 skills and opportunities they need to produce and use
16 compost locally. It is held up as a national model
17 for compost education, having cultivated
18 relationships with more than 225 community compost
19 sites and more than 800 community groups,
20 organizations and institutions to build public
21 knowledge about and support for local composting in
22 all five boroughs.

23 The Department currently funds seven affiliates
24 at cultural institutions and non-profit organizations
25 to advance the Project's mission leveraging thousands

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1 of volunteers each year. Innovation, creativity and
2 relationships underpin our partners' work. In
3 addition to training and technical assistance to
4 learn how to compost organic material locally, the
5 Compost Project affiliates distribute finished
6 compost for free to community gardens, parks, urban
7 farms, street tree stewards and other public greening
8 initiatives. These partners have developed programs
9 familiar to many and I will just name a few. A
10 nationally recognized Master Composter training
11 course. A demonstration farm at Queens Botanical
12 Garden that educates about the links between
13 composting and our food system. Zero waste island,
14 an effort by Earth Matter to close the resource loop
15 on Governor's Island by composting horticultural
16 trimmings and food scraps on the island. Support for
17 garden and greening projects on NYCHA campuses, such
18 as Big Reuse's work at Ravenswood and Queensbridge
19 Houses and the original food scrap drop-off site at
20 Union Square Greenmarket, a truly visionary act by
21 the Lower East Side Ecology Center in the 1990's.

22 The impact of the NYC Compost Project activities
23 over three decades have changed lives and transformed
24 neighborhoods. This is a program we look forward to
25

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1
2 fully restoring and expanding when we are able. The
3 most recent addition of activities to receive funding
4 by the NYC Compost Project over the last decade, have
5 been local food scrap drop off and high-performing
6 community composting operations. But community scale
7 food scrap composting has been a grassroots activity
8 long before it was funded by the Project. An outcome
9 of the Master Composter Course was a growing number
10 of trained people who not only composted at home or
11 in their communities but who organized local efforts
12 to capture food scraps for composting.

13 DSNY, through the NYC Compost Project affiliates
14 and GrowNYC, has experimented with different models
15 to increase access to food scrap drop off
16 opportunities. At its peak [LOST AUDIO 14:07]

17 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Did we lose someone?

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We are going to check on
19 that, if everyone could just hold on for a second
20 while we make sure what happened, thanks.

21

22

23 GREGORY ANDERSON: If you want, I can continue
24 delivering the Sanitation testimony on Bridget's
25 behalf and we can try to get her back on while
Commissioner Biederman is testifying?

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2 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Thank you Gregory. Yeah,
3 let's do that. I think that's appropriate.

4 GREGORY ANDERSON: Okay.

5 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: From one thing to the next,
6 I am sorry.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, go ahead please thank
8 you.

9 GREGORY ANDERSON: She says her apartment just
10 lost power, so she is going to try to rejoin but I
11 will finish the testimony.

12 At its peak in early spring 2020, there were 175
13 food scrap drop off sites ranging from Greenmarkets,
14 commuter hubs, libraries and other community-hosted
15 sites. At present, there are 99 food scrap drop off
16 sites made possible with this year's Council funding.
17 And our partners are actively looking for community
18 hosts to add more.

19 DSNY has funded operations at six high-performing
20 mid-scale community compost sites. While DSNY funds
21 the programming at these sites, the organizations
22 independently hold the relationships and agreements
23 with the owners of those sites. Community composting
24 is by its nature, an inherently physical activity.
25 To do their work, these organizations require space

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2 to operate and we are committed to working with our
3 partners to find space for them to continue to
4 perform their important role.

5 Our work to advance zero waste and to fight
6 climate change through improved waste management is
7 far from done, and we are eager to advance programs
8 that will maximize the recovery and beneficial use of
9 food scraps, leaves, woody material. As we look
10 beyond the COVID-19 crisis, I want to reassure the
11 members of these Committee's and all New Yorkers,
12 that we continue to be a strong proponent of robust
13 community composting programs and an ambitious
14 citywide organics recovery plan.

15 While the budget realities have caused
16 unfortunate setbacks, they also offer us an
17 opportunity to plan and as we recover, to develop an
18 even better long-term composting infrastructure. We
19 continue to welcome the support and leadership of
20 Council on this mutually shared environmental goal
21 and remain committed to working to promote and
22 incorporate sustainable green practices in all
23 communities across the City.

24

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1
2 I will now turn this over to my colleagues at the
3 Department of Parks and Recreation, after which I am
4 happy to answer any questions.

5 SAM BIEDERMAN: Thank you Greg and thank you
6 Bridget and the absentia temporarily. So, good
7 afternoon, Chair Koo, Chair Reynoso and members of
8 the Parks and Sanitation Committees. I hope you and
9 your loved ones are doing well in these difficult
10 times.

11 My name is Sam Biederman, I am Assistant
12 Commissioner for Community Outreach and Partnership
13 Development at NYC Parks and I am joined by members
14 of our Government Relations team. We are very
15 pleased to be here today to join our colleagues at
16 the Department of Sanitation to discuss the City's
17 support for sustainable management practices and
18 community composting.

19 To provide a quick overview, NYC Parks is the
20 steward of city parkland, in accordance with the
21 mandate established by the New York City Charter.
22 Throughout the tenure of this administration, we have
23 focused on addressing issues of inequity in public
24 access to parks for their recreational and open space
25 needs. This includes formal programs like the

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2 Community Parks Initiative and Anchor Parks but we
3 also are constantly identifying park spaces that can
4 be made more accessible to the public, through
5 initiatives like Parks Without Borders. This
6 commitment to equity also encompasses our efforts to
7 make our city cleaner, greener and more resilient,
8 including support for community composting.

9 Parks participates in the City's efforts to
10 encourage composting as part of our everyday
11 sustainable management practices. The agency and
12 partners like the Central Park Conservancy and
13 Prospect Park Alliance maintain compost yards in the
14 operational areas of several of our parks. These
15 yards take in leaves and yard waste exclusively from
16 the park to convert into soil for park horticultural
17 use, this is a closed loop system that contributes to
18 the betterment of our parks system while also
19 minimizing our impact on our global ecosystem and
20 overburdened landfills.

21 Additionally, community gardens across the city
22 serve as hyper-local sites for the processing of
23 compost, including many of the GreenThumb community
24 gardens that are under Parks' jurisdiction on City
25 property. Generally speaking, these efforts usually

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1
2 involve composting of internal garden debris and food
3 scraps brought in by the member gardeners, though
4 some of our GreenThumb community gardens are able to
5 accept food scraps from neighbors.

6 Many of our gardens also host educational
7 programs about the importance of composting, to
8 encourage more New Yorkers to do their part in
9 helping keep our city green. Also, as our colleagues
10 at DSNY noted, there are collection sites for food
11 waste and other organic materials located around the
12 city, including many farmers' markets or other
13 locations where community partners help to collect
14 food scraps and other waste. The frequency of these
15 collections varies from year-round to once a week but
16 New Yorkers have hundreds of locations to choose
17 from, including many in parks, so they can
18 conveniently drop off food scrap waste which can then
19 be brought to regional community-scale processing
20 sites where the household waste is converted into
21 soil.

22 Now, as this time of year, I would be remiss if I
23 didn't mention Mulchfest, an annual tradition where
24 New Yorkers can bring Christmas trees to park
25 locations around the City after the holidays. These

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1
2 discarded trees are converted into wood chips that
3 nourish our tree canopy and make NYC even greener.
4 This great program in partnership with DSNY helped us
5 recycle over 50,000 holiday trees last year, so just
6 as an additional note, please do help us spread the
7 word that you can drop off your tree at any Mulchfest
8 location between December 26 and January 9.

9 Lastly, in coordination with DSNY, we have
10 provided space within a few parks for compost
11 processing operations. As you are likely aware, due
12 to recent operational needs and legal concerns, two
13 of these community-scale compost processing sites,
14 which are regulated by the New York State Department
15 of Environmental Conservation as waste facilities,
16 are slated to have their park site operations
17 disrupted in the near future.

18 Now, the Lower East Side Ecology Center is a
19 community-based organization dedicated to urban
20 sustainability whose offices are currently located in
21 the Fire Boat House in East River Park in Manhattan.
22 In addition to offering environmental programming to
23 the public, the Center is under contract with DSNY to
24 accept and process residential food and yard waste
25 and provide compost education and had a license

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1
2 agreement with NYC Parks for a one-acre site within
3 the park, where household waste from across Manhattan
4 is stored and converted into compost.

5 Thanks to \$1.45 billion in federal & City
6 funding, East River Park is being rebuilt and
7 fortified as part of the East Side Coastal Resiliency
8 Project, that ESCR, ESCR will protect thousands of
9 New Yorkers from the effects of climate change and –
10 sorry, I lost my place here. Will protect thousands
11 of New Yorkers against storm surge, sea level rise
12 and the impacts of climate change. Due to safety
13 concerns, the Center will not be able to continue its
14 programming or compost operations at this location
15 during ESCR construction, which will begin in East
16 River Park in early 2021.

17 The agency has already prepared alternate
18 programming space for the Center at nearby Seward
19 Park, it is free of charge, and the Mayor's Office is
20 currently leading an effort to locate and prepare a
21 new site for the Center's composting use. At the
22 Center's recommendation, the City will wetproof the
23 Fire Boat House as part of ESCR and the City has
24 committed to good faith negotiations with the Center

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1
2 regarding their future in East River Park after ESCR
3 is completed.

4 Big Reuse is an environmental non-profit engaged
5 in a wide variety of efforts dedicated to
6 environmental advocacy and action, including a
7 contract agreement with DSNY to collect residential
8 food and yard waste. One of the sites they manage
9 has been located at Baby Queensbridge Park in Queens,
10 under the Ed Koch Queensborough Bridge, where
11 significant household waste from across the City,
12 along with park yard waste, is stored and converted
13 into compost.

14 Big Reuse had informally operated within the park
15 for several years but Big Reuse and Parks formally
16 entered into a temporary license agreement to allow
17 their presence at the site, taking effect in May 2018
18 and slated to expire at the end of this year. Baby
19 Queensbridge Park is a long-neglected 5½ acre site
20 park, located next to the largest public housing
21 complex in North America with almost 7,000 residents.

22 Over the years, Baby Queensbridge had become a
23 forgotten space, full of trash and abandoned
24 vehicles. In the context of our commitment to park
25 equity, Parks has been hard at work making targeted

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2 improvements at Baby Queensbridge but this community
3 deserves a fully reimagined and reinvigorated park.
4 That's why we were thrilled when \$11 million in
5 capital funding in Mayoral capital funding was
6 provided in 2018 for the transformation of Baby
7 Queensbridge Park. And we look forward to beginning
8 design on the project next month with a public input
9 session, so that the neighboring NYCHA residents can
10 have access to the recreational and open space they
11 need and deserve.

12 In order to make that a reality, our agency will
13 require the use of the portion of the park currently
14 used for compost processing for our park system's
15 operational needs, including support for park repairs
16 and maintenance. This is supply storage, office
17 trailers, so that we can convert the open air section
18 next to Vernon Boulevard that is currently used for
19 operations into a proper park space.

20 We believe that the regional operations,
21 currently sited on the adjacent portion next to the
22 site can be better utilized as recreational space for
23 the public. Once Big Reuse vacates the area under
24 the bridge, Parks will move our operations into that
25 space, so the rest of the park can be redesigned and

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2 rebuilt to provide recreational amenities for the
3 community.

4 While design work is about to begin, I am pleased
5 to report that we are be able to temporarily extend
6 Big Reuse's ability to stay in the park for six
7 months, so that they can continue operations while
8 the City works with them to find a more appropriate
9 location. Whether it's conserving and restoring
10 natural areas, reducing our carbon footprint via our
11 electric vehicles and green roofs, or reducing the
12 impact of climate change through smarter, more
13 resilient park design, we are proud to be a green
14 agency.

15 Just as importantly, our agency has a City
16 Charter mandate to, and I quote, "maintain the
17 beauty and utility of all parks and other
18 recreational properties," as well as a legal
19 responsibility to preserve parkland and open space
20 for appropriate park uses. If we have learned
21 anything during this past year and all of the
22 difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's that New
23 Yorkers are more reliant than ever on our city's
24 parks and open spaces and all of the physical, mental
25 and emotional benefits that they provide.

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2 Within this framework, we are dedicated to giving
3 New Yorkers every opportunity to enjoy the best
4 possible parks system we can offer them.

5 Thank you, Chairs, for the opportunity to testify
6 today. We would be happy to answer any questions you
7 may have.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I will now turn
9 it over to questions from Chairs Reynoso and Koo. At
10 this point, I would ask all Administration panelists
11 if possible, to stay unmuted during the question and
12 answer session. Chair Reynoso, please begin when
13 ready.

14 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Thank you.

15 GREGORY ANDERSON: And just a quick note, Deputy
16 Commissioner Anderson was able to dial back in, so
17 she is available for Q&A also.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Okay, thank you. Look, I
20 want to be perfectly honest, I don't even know where
21 to begin because it just doesn't make any sense. To
22 have the Department of Sanitation and Department of
23 Parks say how committed they are to composting and
24 understanding the environmental significance of it,
25

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2 and then in another breath just say hey, but we still
3 got to kick them out just doesn't add up.

4 But first, I want to ask some basic questions.

5 Because all of a sudden there is a legal concern
6 here, how was the Department of Parks and Recreation
7 able to go into - enter into a lease in 2018 with Big
8 Reuse for this site if legally they were obligated to
9 go against that?

10 I guess the legality of allowing them to be on
11 the site for two years and now stating that legally
12 they are not allowed to be on these sites unless they
13 are doing work specifically for Department of Parks.
14 Can someone clear that up a little?

15 SAM BIEDERMAN: Yes, Council Member with the
16 caveat that of course, I am not a lawyer. My
17 understanding of the situation is that the temporary
18 nature of the agreement is what made it permissible.

19 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Okay, so arguably, another
20 temporary lease for two years would be permissible on
21 New York City Parks land?

22 SAM BIEDERMAN: Well, I also want to underscore,
23 as I said in my testimony that Parks does have a
24 responsibility here to make sure that park land is

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2 made as accessible and open as possible as recreation
3 space.

4 So, we have \$11 million in funding to develop
5 Baby Queensbridge Park as a site for recreational use
6 and we have a responsibility to move forward with
7 that project.

8 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Yeah, so that's like basic
9 colonialist theory to pit one poor community against
10 another or one group against another. There is space
11 underneath the Queensborough Bridge. I don't know
12 what else it could possibly be named. Is there not
13 other space owned by Parks Department that is
14 available underneath the bridge?

15 SAM BIEDERMAN: Well, we have a need for all the
16 space under the bridge although, certain sections of
17 the bridge that I think you may be referring to are
18 not appropriate for the operational uses that we have
19 and the operational use that we have on that area.

20 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: What are the operational
21 needs that you have that these other locations are
22 not suitable for?

23 SAM BIEDERMAN: So, the operational needs are
24 storage, repair — areas for repair. And again,
25 different types of storage. Now there are details

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2 within this area under the bridge or issues regarding
3 access to for instance man holes that have to kept
4 accessible.

5 The way we need to use the space doesn't match up
6 with how the space is arranged by man. It is also
7 the grading I believe of the area it doesn't work.

8 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: I understand, so back to
9 it. Your main goal as the Parks Department, your
10 mission statement is to provide access to these sites
11 to the general public. The use that you are speaking
12 to has nothing to do with public access to the
13 general public. Correct me if I am wrong.

14 SAM BIEDERMAN: Well, Park operations is a really
15 important crucial indispensable part of what it takes
16 to keep spaces open to recreational use right. And
17 we currently have the space that we are occupying
18 with our operations that is appropriate to an open
19 recreational space. That is why we have \$11 million
20 in capital funding to develop it.

21 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: The current site that Big
22 Reuse is in, who did the development of allowing for
23 that site to become operational? Who invested the
24 capital to make that area I guess more suitable for
25 the work that you need to do? Did Parks Department

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2 initially invest in that site to make it a more ideal
3 site for like, for compost work specifically?

4 SAM BIEDERMAN: Forgive me, I don't know the
5 details of who invested, how much to prepare the
6 site.

7 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Right because like the
8 point that I am trying to make here, is that there
9 was investment made by someone in cleaning up that
10 space and making it operational or useful, so that
11 they can do the compost work. And in doing so, have
12 worked against themselves in making it a more
13 appropriate site to be used for maintenance and
14 parking by the Parks Department.

15 In the \$11 million that was given for the
16 development for this park, is there no line items
17 specifically geared towards building out space or
18 having space to have a storage space or maintain or
19 have parking space available? Or is it \$11 million
20 almost exclusively just for the development of the
21 park?

22 SAM BIEDERMAN: It's my understanding that the
23 \$11 million is for the development of the Baby Queens
24 Bridge Park site on which we have our operational
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plot now, but I am going to fact check it. So, I just want to be sure.

CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Okay, because I would just like to say the Queensborough Bridge Park doesn't exist or you didn't have access to that. Why could parks not be able to build out this site for Queens Bridge?

SAM BIEDERMAN: Forgive me Council Member, I am afraid I don't quite understand the question. Could you repeat it?

CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: You keep mentioning this Baby Bridge Park, I want to call it.

SAM BIEDERMAN: Yeah, Baby Queensbridge Park, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Right, Baby Queensbridge Park. You are mentioning that as a reason why this needs to happen.

SAM BIEDERMAN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: I just want to ask, is if there was no access to any of the space underneath the bridge, would the Parks Department not be able to build out this Park because of the lack of operational space and storage or parking?

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2 SAM BIEDERMAN: Forgive my misunderstanding of
3 the question and thank you for clarifying. I can't
4 really conjecture about that because we deal with the
5 funding and the land that we have in the way that we
6 have, right. And the funding was given to develop,
7 as you know, Council Member, funding is given to
8 specific areas based on those areas needs.

9 What I do know is that the borough and the
10 regional management of the borough does require the
11 use of this space for its operational needs. You
12 know, operations are a huge part of running this park
13 system and keeping it open. It is absolutely
14 necessary that we have the space that our park
15 workers need in order to do their jobs.

16 I mean, look you know, we just came off of about
17 a foot of snow or maybe a little more. You see the
18 amount of work that that the City Park workers have
19 been tirelessly putting themselves out to do over the
20 past few months and especially during the snow storm.

21 It makes their jobs possible. It makes it
22 possible to do their jobs by creating space for our
23 operations with backup house concerns.

24 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: I want to allow for the
25 Council Members who are most affected by the issue

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1
2 and Council Member Van Bramer and Rivera to ask
3 question. So, I want to limit my questions and allow
4 for Council Member Peter Koo or Co-Chair to speak,
5 but I do want to say, I know for certain that the New
6 York City Parks Department has used park space for
7 the parking of vehicles for other agencies, like the
8 Department of Transportation. And its countless
9 other uses for a lot of park space that exists in the
10 City of New York and it seems like someone woke up
11 someday and decided that they wanted to use legal
12 ease and basic legal language to figure out a way to
13 get these folks out.

14 You have committed to something, you stubbornness
15 won't allow you to move and it really is unfortunate
16 for a Parks Department to be using, again, a
17 technicality and again, you have space in other
18 places that we can absolutely outfit to be able to
19 handle these operations but again, to move out the
20 function an environmental justice function of
21 composting and the economic benefits that it has to
22 the city. To just have to wake up one day and figure
23 that they have to move or force them to have to move
24 just doesn't seem to speak to like what should be the

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2 true mission statement of the New York City Parks
3 Department, which is environmental justice.

4 So, I want to allow for Council Member Peter Koo,
5 our Co-Chair to ask a few questions before we go to
6 Council Member Van Bramer and Rivera. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you Chair Reynoso, yeah.
8 So, Commissioner Biederman and Commissioner Anderson,
9 my question is that, since Big Reuse is being given a
10 six month extension on their agreement, what efforts
11 will Parks Department and DSNY engage to help Big
12 Reuse find new sites? Have you identified any
13 potential new sites they can explore?

14 BRIDGET ANDERSON: I can start on this. I am
15 happy to start this and again, apologies for my brief
16 technical glitch. This is why we have two people on
17 the line to follow through.

18 We are actively engaging with multiple agencies
19 actually to identify alternative sites and so, our
20 first step, Department of Sanitation, you know we
21 have the contracts with these organizations and we
22 you know, understand the needs of these types of
23 community composting facilities in terms of the space
24 and suitability of space.

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2 So, we are working on an initial past at sites
3 that have been identified with the help of DCAS and
4 with the help of Parks and Sanitation and once we
5 have identified potentially suitable sites, then we
6 will engage with Big Reuse to visit those sites and
7 to understand you know, in the detail of what we need
8 to do to prep an appropriate site.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Commissioner Biederman?

10 SAM BIEDERMAN: Yes.

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Have you identified any sites or
12 is it true that the Parks Department cannot allow
13 them to use Park land for composting?

14 SAM BIEDERMAN: So, I want to be clear here as
15 reiterate this, that Parks Department composts quite
16 a bit. We are absolutely committed to sustainable
17 park management. We have roughly 30 large compost
18 sites. You know, we work with our Green Thumb
19 partners to compost and we host compost drop off
20 sites across the city.

21 The particular type of composting practice by Big
22 Reuse, we don't believe is the appropriate park use
23 right now.

24 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, is it illegal to use Park
25 land for outside composting?

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2 SAM BIEDERMAN: So, again with the caveat here
3 that I am not a lawyer, there are some legal concerns
4 about certain types of composts being practiced on
5 Park land. With that said, our concerns with Big
6 Reuse and much more immediate. They are about the
7 use of the Park space for our operational needs and
8 the development of the space next door for like
9 proper recreation space.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, even if we identify a place
11 for them to move, when you are moving you incur a lot
12 of expenses. Is Sanitation or other city agencies
13 able to help them with their moving expense,
14 Commissioner Anderson?

15 BRIDGET ANDERSON: Yeah, we are, yes, so what we
16 will do is identify potentially suitable space. We
17 will look at that space with Big Reuse. We have done
18 with this as LESEC as well. Identify what are the
19 needs to actually prepare a space to be suitable for
20 the operations and educational activities that they
21 incur and determine within the city, how can we
22 prepare the space for them, for their continued
23 operation.

24 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, your help for the expense?

25 BRIDGET ANDERSON: Yes.

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CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay.

GREGORY ANDERSON: Yeah and I will add there Council Member, we also, not just the expense, I think we are very invested in the ongoing operation and in fact we have funded most of the equipment that they have on site. So, we would actually offer operational assistance as well. One of the things that we do well at Sanitation is moving things from one place to another, so we would be happy to help out.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, yeah. So, my next question is for the Parks Department. Commissioner Biederman, can you provide us with more details regarding what your plans are upgrade Queens Bridge Park? This is the reason Reuse agreements not being renewed. So, can you give us more details about your specific plan for the park?

SAM BIEDERMAN: Yes, of course. So, the \$11 million that we have for Queens Bridge Park, for this area of Queens Bridge Park is part of a broader vision for the park itself.

So, if I could, I would like to walk you through some of the work we have already done and what it leads to. In 2016, Parks worked with DCAS and NYCHA

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2 to remove NYCHA's abandoned fleet of vehicles that
3 were occupying a set of park land here. And DCAS was
4 actually able to auction off 26 of these vehicles.

5 In 2017, the Department of Transportation
6 restriped and resigned the bikeway on behalf of Parks
7 and again, in addition, we have been able to initiate
8 capital projects to improve the park.

9 In May 2019, with funding thank you Councilman
10 Van Bramer, we started design of the handball area of
11 the park. The project is currently in procurement
12 and the space was redesigned with community input
13 including a new basketball court and reconstructed
14 handball courts.

15 In 2018, and this is where the \$11 million comes
16 from. The Administration announced the Long Island
17 City Investment Strategy. Parks worked to secure \$11
18 million for Baby Queens Bridge Park is part of that
19 plan.

20 We were supposed to start design of the park in
21 spring of this year but for obvious reasons, we had
22 to delay that a little bit but we will start late
23 next week on the community scoping session. So,
24 parks recently received the approval to restart
25

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1 design and proper design process, sorry, we will
2 begin Spring of 2020.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, yeah, so can you give me
5 some conservancy organizations that offer community
6 composting?

7 SAM BEIDERMAN: Yes, some parks partner
8 organizations do offer different types of composting,
9 that is correct.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, can you give me some names,
11 Central Park or other parks?

12 SAM BEIDERMAN: Just to clear up -

13 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Of the conservancies.

14 SAM BEIDERMAN: Misapprehension. Central Parks
15 composting operations actually, what we refer to as a
16 closed loop operation. So, it takes waste generated
17 within the park, yard waste, leaves, branches, that
18 sort of thing, processes it in the park and then
19 turns the soil that is created back out into the park
20 itself. So, it's a closed loop that deals only with
21 waste generated in the park.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, what is the Parks
23 Department or what are the rules or guidance that you
24 give to organizations that may conduct composting

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2 programs? You can only do internal composting or are
3 they allowed to take a neighborhood of organic waste?

4 SAM BEIDERMAN: So, every case is -

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Are there rules that you tell
6 them?

7 SAM BEIDERMAN: So, it depends on the operation I
8 think is the short answer. You know, for big
9 operations like our conservancy partners like,
10 Central Park Conservancy and Prospect Park Alliance,
11 as I said, they use compost as the Parks Department
12 does, as part of regular sustainable every day
13 management. Then our Green Thumb programs, some of
14 which are on park land and some of which aren't but
15 are all under Parks jurisdiction process - you can
16 sort of think of them as micro-waste sites, right.

17 So, they take the guidelines under which they
18 operate is they take waste generated within the
19 garden and a certain very small amount of household
20 waste usually just from garden members, these
21 volunteer garden members and a few sites from outside
22 the gardens to process waste that way. So, that on
23 Green Thumb sites. And then we do host, as is said,
24 some pick up sites across our network.

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2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you yeah. You know to
3 save time I will turn over to other Council Members
4 for questions, yeah.

5 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Yeah, thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Koo. At this
7 point, I will invite other Council Members to ask
8 questions in the order they have used the Zoom raised
9 hand function.

10 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: I am sorry, can we allow
11 for Council Member Van Bramer followed by Council
12 Member Rivera first and then go through allowing for
13 other Council Members to go on depending on when they
14 raise their hands?

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes Council Member, that was
16 the order we were -

17 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Okay, I apologize, thank
18 you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No problem. I am just going
20 to go over just a quick procedural process. So,
21 Council Members, if you would like to ask a question,
22 please use the Zoom hand raise function and raise it
23 now if you would like to and we are going to ask
24 members if possible to please keep their questions to
25 five minutes. The Sergeant at Arms will give you the

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2 queue when it is your time to begin. So, at this
3 point, we are going to hear questions from Council
4 Member Van Bramer followed by Council Member Rivera.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much.
7 So, I am as the Council Member who has represented
8 Queens Bridge and Big Reuse for the last 11 years
9 flabbergasted by this pitting of one community
10 against the other. As a premise for evicting Big
11 Reuse.

12 I want to say a few things, first, Commissioner
13 Biederman said and this is at the heart of what's
14 happening here, that community composting is not an
15 appropriate use of New York City public park land.
16 Which to me is what's at the heart of this matter
17 right, which is that the Parks Department and the
18 City is walking away from community composting and
19 that is just fundamentally wrong.

20 Second, in your testimony, you mentioned that
21 Baby Park in Queens Bridge was long neglected. But
22 that's because city agencies stole that land from the
23 people of Queens Bridge parking their vehicles there
24 for decades and leaving it that way and only put the
25 money in two years ago to do some part of the park

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2 because Queens Bridge residents rose up and we joined
3 them in fighting to reclaim this land for the
4 community. But it is the agencies themselves who
5 parked their vehicles all over what was once a park
6 for Queens Bridge residents and children. That's
7 disgraceful and that's the legacy of what happened
8 here.

9 The other thing I wanted to say is, if you can
10 find additional space or other space for Big Reuse,
11 surely you can find other space to park your vehicles
12 during the planning and construction phase of this
13 operation. You also said that there is a scoping
14 meeting next week and planning starting next month.
15 Our office is unaware of all of that and has not been
16 invited to a scoping meeting next week, I don't
17 believe, but I want to ask you this. First of all,
18 \$11 million, as we all know in Parks projects doesn't
19 actually get you very far and if you are starting a
20 scoping process in the next month or two, you are
21 probably two or three years away from construction.

22 So, why do you need to evict Big Reuse and why
23 can't you include Big Reuse in the reconstruction of
24 this Park? You already have a great use with great
25 benefit to the local community and Justin Green and

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2 Big Reuse includes in their efforts the public
3 housing residents across the street.

4 So, I don't understand why you are now using this
5 \$11 million project an excuse to throw Big Reuse out
6 when there is so much land right now there and if you
7 walked right now, the grounds of Baby Park or what
8 was Baby Park, before city agencies stole that land,
9 so they could park their vehicles and put trailers
10 there and house equipment, you would see so many
11 vehicles parked there, right.

12 That could be moved. That should be moved and
13 you all should keep Big Reuse and then you should
14 reimagine the park with input from the Queens Bridge
15 community. But it is absolutely outrageous that you
16 are pitting one community against another and I am
17 just so outraged by what you are coming to us with.

18 So, maybe Sam, you could take shot and I realize
19 I have limited time but -

20 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Jimmy, we are going to
21 extend your time if need be. We are going to allow
22 for you and Council Member Rivera to ask in fact, as
23 many questions as possible. I really want to get to
24 the bottom of this and you guys are the local experts

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1 and I want to make sure you can ask the questions
2 Jimmy.

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4 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank you Chair
5 Reynoso because I am just outraged because we have
6 been working on this for 11 years and the Queens
7 Bridge community has been working on this for
8 decades, decades and it's because the agencies
9 themselves have neglected this park, stolen this park
10 land from the community and Big Reuse was the first
11 actual reuse of the land for member of the community
12 and now they are being evicted so that more
13 operational uses for parks can be utilized there.

14 Which to me screams vehicles and trailers and look, I
15 want Queens Bridge Baby Park to be rebuilt and
16 restored for community use but that's on you, right.
17 You created that and I am not saying you Sam and you
18 Matt personally. Decades ago that decision was made
19 my city agencies but you have all kept to it. And
20 some work has been done, some vehicles have been
21 moved but there is still so much more to be done.

22 So, can you talk to me Sam about this scoping
23 meeting and what is the construction time like? When
24 are you actually supposed to begin construction on
25 this and \$11 million, we built a bran new park house

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2 as you know, in the park which I am really proud of
3 which includes office space and some storage space
4 for parks. I realize that's not enough for all of
5 your needs but there has been significant investment.
6 There are other spaces. So, talk to me about the
7 construction timeline and why you can't give Big
8 Reuse a, a long extension and b, why you can't
9 incorporate them into this planning and this
10 expansion of the park?

11 SAM BIEDERMAN: So, firstly, we are very grateful
12 for the funding in progress that we have already made
13 at Baby Queen's Bridge of which you and Queens Bridge
14 community have been a part of. So, thank you for
15 that. I know it has been a long road to get to even
16 where we are. So, it's good to see progress.

17 Secondly, I want to apologize for I misstated
18 when the scoping meeting is, it is next month and we
19 will absolutely commit to looping your office into
20 that. Forgive me, I apologize for that.

21 So, you know, the Big Reuse license is a finite
22 license. It doesn't have an option to renew which is
23 not entirely common in a parks license. That this
24 has been the plan for three years to develop this
25 space under the park as operational space. So, we

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1 could develop the operational law into open park as I
2 said.
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4 When we initially discussed this license with Big
5 Reuse, there was some back and forth about whether
6 there would be an option to renew and there is not an
7 option to renew.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: You could change that
9 right?

10 SAM BIEDERMAN: Well, we have a need for this
11 space, right. We have a need for this space and I am
12 very happy that we have been able to extend their
13 period of tenancy under the Bridge for six months
14 beyond their license. Which is really not something
15 we always do.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: But by definition
17 means you could extend it further.

18 SAM BIEDERMAN: Well you know, I can't conjecture
19 anything past the six month that we agreed to today.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: You don't have to
21 conjecture Commissioner, but if the agency is
22 announcing today a six month extension for Big Reuse,
23 it could also today announce a one year, a two year,
24 a three year extension. That's just logical. You
25 did it. You just said you are extending their time

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1 there by six months. Therefore, you could extend it
2 by any amount of time that you wanted.
3

4 SAM BIEDERMAN: Councilman, it is my hope and my
5 expectation that in the six month period, that's not
6 something that we will have to worry about. That
7 there will be - we will identify a more stable
8 location or DSNY and our partners across the City
9 will identify a more stable location for Big Reuse
10 during this period.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: But there is no
12 guarantee and that's the problem with these
13 unenforceable promises by city agencies. That we are
14 going to give you six months and we are going to do
15 our best to try and find you an alternative location.
16 But if we don't find a suitable alternative location
17 in six months, right, you are shit out of luck.

18 SAM BIEDERMAN: Well, our agreement with Big
19 Reuse was that during their period, the period of the
20 licensure, they would seek a more stable space that
21 was not on park land.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: This could be stable
23 space. This is stable space if you just allowed them
24 to stay, right. If you actually gave them a
25 permanent home, where they currently are doing

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2 amazing work and Justin and the team at Big Reuse
3 [LOST AUDIO 36:42].

4 SAM BIEDERMAN: Forgive me -

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: His team can talk
6 about this. Yes, I was getting a phone call but I
7 obviously didn't take it. So, Justin and the folks
8 will talk more about this but this is a space that is
9 current being utilized. You can and you already have
10 expanded the time that they are allowed to stay
11 there. You can and should expand it further, right.
12 You can and should rebuild Baby Park for the
13 community while also recommitting to community
14 composting and recommitting to Big Reuse. They are
15 not mutually exclusive goals, which you have
16 presented here today, that in order to accomplish the
17 reconstruction of Baby Park, we must take the land
18 and evict Big Reuse. That is a false narrative.

19 You do not have to do that. That is what you are
20 coming here saying today. And you know again, if we
21 walked along that bike and pedestrian path that you
22 talked about DOT building a couple of years ago,
23 right, we would see and you know that because you
24 have been there to, as I have, right. Dozens of
25 vehicles, dozens of trailers, incredible amounts of

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2 space that the community once utilized that was taken
3 from them by city agencies.

4 You cannot tell me that we can't leave Big Reuse
5 to do the good work that they are doing and better
6 utilize the other space as you - what you should do
7 is pull out of that and give all of that land back to
8 the community, which had it taken from them years
9 ago.

10 As you mentioned, we have done amazing work at
11 Queens Bridge Park. When I became a Council Member,
12 the seawall had literally crumbled into the river.
13 Right, the City allowed that to happen. It wouldn't
14 allow that to happen in many other communities but
15 the park was crumbling into the river. We fixed
16 that, right, \$100 million plan.

17 The park house had been allowed to lay vacant and
18 dormant for decades, right. I funded it, we rebuilt
19 it. So, many good things have happened but this is
20 not what we want. We want Baby Park to be restored
21 but we want Big Reuse to stay and those can both
22 happen. If only parks didn't take the position that
23 you just stated, which is that community composting
24 is inconsistent, right and inappropriate for park
25 land. That's at the heart of this.

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2 You are walking away from what is an incredibly
3 value program.

4 SAM BIEDERMAN: We certainly agree that Big Reuse
5 is a great organization and that they do wonderful
6 work. I would say that their value is not intrinsic
7 to the space that they occupy at Baby Queens Bridge
8 and I look forward to you know working with our
9 agency partners and of course partnering with DSNY to
10 identify again, the more stable space.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Parking for agency
12 vehicles and trailers for agencies is also not
13 providing an intrinsic value to the people of Queens
14 Bridge. It is absolutely inconsistent with what
15 people want to see under that Bride.

16 So, I just want to say again, that this pitting
17 of one community against the other is absolutely
18 outrageous and the city parks and sanitation can and
19 should recommit to doing this in a way that not only
20 brings environmental justice to this community but
21 racial justice as well. And for you all to be taking
22 the position that you are is inconsistent with both,
23 in my opinion. Do you have any response to that?

24 SAM BIEDERMAN: I understand your concern Council
25 Member and I appreciate it. You know, we do share of

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2 course a principled commitment to taking care and
3 developing as much open space and recreational space
4 as we possibly can. That is what the Parks
5 Department is about.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So, just one last
7 question because \$11 million right. \$11 million in a
8 New York City Parks project doesn't get you very
9 much. We all know that, right. So, is this project
10 fully funded or are you going to come back and need
11 additional funding which will take additional years
12 in terms of the process to build out this park. The
13 park house as you know, was built across the street
14 in the 5-7 million dollar range and \$11 million isn't
15 going to get you very far.

16 We need a real number and a real commitment for
17 Baby Park because if you are talking about the need
18 to do Baby Park, \$11 million doesn't get you very
19 far.

20 SAM BIEDERMAN: \$11 million is beyond - I think
21 it's about double what we intended to spend on
22 community parks initiative sites. And this is
23 similarly sized give or take. I am confident, you
24 know, I am not a capital guy but I am confident
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2 giving my experience with the capital process that
3 this funding is sufficient.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: For Vernon Boulevard
5 all the way to 21st Street, in all of that land
6 underneath the Bridge, which now is occupied by city
7 agencies vehicles and trailers and equipment, are you
8 saying this \$11 million covers returning all of that
9 land to the people of Queens Bridge?

10 SAM BIEDERMAN: It's not— Matt, I may defer to
11 you on the details here but it's not my understanding
12 that it covers the entirety of the stretch of Baby
13 Queens Bridge. Do I have that right?

14 MATT DRURY: Yeah, hi, this is Matt. You know,
15 so obviously the details of this are going to be
16 flushed out like through the design of the process.
17 But as you are aware, what you might say is that
18 there is sort of a green way, right and there is
19 significant operational space in the middle, that is
20 true. But there is additional operational space that
21 is required that will be relocated.

22 So, right now, there is the Vernon corner which
23 is operational and then there is sort of a space in
24 the mid-section if you will that's operational.

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2 So, the vision here is to essentially move the
3 operational space at Vernon under the Bridge, so that
4 that can be freed up and become a more traditional
5 park like open air amenity. So, for that space to be
6 and then improvements also along the greenway and
7 then I believe on the other end, sort of the two ends
8 of the dumbbell if you will is the rough vision but
9 again, this is all going to be flushed out after
10 community listening. After that informs the design.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Right, so just to
12 close and throw it back to the Chairs, right. What
13 you are talking about is the restoration and
14 renovation of a small portion of Baby Park and the
15 land under the Bridge. That city vehicles and city
16 agencies will still commandeer a significant amount
17 of public land, that was once available to the people
18 of Queens Bridge. And that while you are moving some
19 operational spaces, you are also increasing your use
20 of land for operational uses at the expense of Big
21 Reuse.

22 And I will just end here by saying once again,
23 shameful that the city is walking away from community
24 composting. Even more shameful that in the case of
25 Big Reuse, the long neglected by city agency land

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2 that was stolen from the people of Queens Bridge,
3 that being used as an excuse to evict Big Reuse is
4 disgraceful. And once again, you haven't been able
5 to answer the question about, if you can move Big
6 Reuse and find a new space, you certainly should and
7 can and must be able to find another space for the
8 operational needs that we need.

9 You also haven't been able to talk about the
10 timeline for the construction of this project, nor
11 have you been able to talk about the fact that even
12 though you are extending the lease and allowing them
13 to stay for six months, there is no answer about why
14 you couldn't extend it for a year or two years or at
15 the bare minimum, make the commitment that you will
16 not evict Big Reuse until there is a permanent
17 substitute functional place for Big Reuse to continue
18 their operations. At the bare minimum, you should
19 make that commitment here today because you have
20 already given them a six month extension. You should
21 give them the extension until a new site is located.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Thank you Chair.
23 Thank you Council Member Reynoso, yeah.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I think we will
3 move onto questions from Council Member Rivera
4 followed by questions from Council Member Powers.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Thank you so much for
7 being here. Thank you for your testimony. Thank you
8 for mentioning the funding provided by the Council to
9 keep this programming whole, these services that I
10 think are so critical to our city's future.

11 I want to thank my colleagues, of course the
12 Chairs. Especially Council Member Reynoso who really
13 championed the composting initiative during budget
14 negotiations and I just want to thank my own team who
15 I know is watching. We have organized composting
16 workshops throughout our district. We did this a lot
17 last summer. Parks and Sanitation tried to be
18 collaborative.

19 I remember you gave us the cutting boards that
20 say, don't toss your scraps and that's all very nice.
21 But I just want to talk big picture right now and how
22 important this program and these sites are to our
23 communities and our city in terms of a fight against
24 climate change.

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So, let's talk about the Lower East Side Ecology Center for a few minutes. I will try to be as brief as possible. We all know that the Lower East Side Ecology Center has been in the East River Park for over 30 years and they have a close working relationship with the Parks Department and the local community bringing in volunteers to help clean and beautify the park, as well as process compost and host educational field trips for local residents.

This organization is unquestionably a vital part of the community and composting is the cornerstone of its mission. So, we have heard that you don't believe composting is an appropriate parks use. But over the past 30 years, Lower East Side Ecology Center has proven that parks are an ideal location for composting as it enhances the circular economy while creating more deep community engagement with the park.

Can you explain why you think community organizations like Lower East Side Ecology Center should not be in parks?

SAM BIEDERMAN: Thank you, thank you Council Member. So, I do want to clarify that parks does believe that composting is the appropriate park use.

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2 We compost quite frequently as I said, we compost 30
3 sites. We do parks composting at 30 sites. We do it
4 at Green Thumb Gardens and we have pick up sites
5 across our system. So, we are a green agency, we
6 like composting, we are committed to that.

7 So, what's going on as you know, with the Lower
8 East Side Ecology Center is that they currently have
9 their offices in East River Park and operate a
10 regional compost operation there. Due to
11 construction logistics and safety, the center cannot,
12 as you know probably better than anybody in the City
13 of New York cannot continue its programming or
14 compost operations at this location during ESCR.
15 Prep work for which will begin early next year.

16 As you also know and you know, we have talked to
17 your staff about this, we are proud that Parks
18 Department is very proud that we have prepared an
19 alternative programming site for the Center at Seward
20 Park free of charge to the center and the city is
21 currently leading an effort to locate an interim site
22 for their composting. So, we are at work finding an
23 interim site where they can practice compost during
24 construction.

25

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2 Now, in addition to that as I stated before, we
3 have put \$8 million into wet proofing Fire Boat House
4 as part of the ESCR.

5 Now, your question, I don't want to get ahead of
6 myself though. So, your question was about
7 composting in general or compositing with a -

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: In parks.

9 SAM BIEDERMAN: In parks.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: In perpetuity.

11 SAM BIEDERMAN: Compositing parks in perpetuity.

12 Well, I mean, the short answer is that we are
13 absolutely committed to composting in parks in
14 perpetuity.

15 The types of composting that I enumerated are -
16 we are quite confident that those are parks
17 appropriate uses.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: So, as for, you also
19 mentioned the return. You mentioned Lower East Side
20 Ecology Center and kind of wet proofing the Fire Boat
21 House. Christine Datz-Romero who is here worked with
22 us, all of us during the East Side Coastal Resiliency
23 negotiation to decide the future of the Boat House
24 and we went through many options and we finally came
25 to a solution as a community.

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2 We did that so that she can return to the Fire
3 Boat House of which she was a part of that
4 conversation, so she could essentially enjoy the
5 fruits of her labor. That was a very intense
6 negotiation process.

7 Will you make a temporary space available to
8 Lower East Side Ecology Center during the renovation
9 of East River Park and specifically the Fire Boat
10 House?

11 SAM BIEDERMAN: Well, as I said, for the Fire
12 Boat, for what is done at the Fire Boat House, which
13 I understand it is office space and programming
14 right. I am confident that we have taken care of
15 that for the programming site. I don't want to take
16 credit for the office side, the Lower East Side
17 Ecology Center took care about themselves and I
18 believe that they have sufficient office space but we
19 are - we do have an interim site ready, locked and
20 ready to go in Seward Park, the Park House, it is
21 beautiful. I would recommend coming and seeing it.
22 I am actually quite proud of the job that Parks
23 Department did.

24 So, our next step here is to get the Lower East
25 Side Ecology Center set up there and paper as it

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1 were, properly licensed to occupy that space for the
2 duration construction. Once that happens, the next
3 step – so once we get the Lower East Side Ecology
4 Center set up in Seward Park and we get it on paper,
5 the next step is to and we have committed to this
6 before, enter into good faith negotiations with Lower
7 East Side Ecology Center to envision their future
8 role in East River Park one construction certificate.

9
10 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: But what about their
11 composting? The programming is one thing. I
12 mentioned the educational workshops and that's very
13 important and that is what the Seward Park location
14 is for. What about the actual composting site in
15 that alternative location? And if you do not, I just
16 wanted to clarify, if you do not have the site ready,
17 which is the kind of run around that we are getting
18 from the Mayor's Office, Parks says it is Sanitation,
19 Sanitation says it is someone else. I am asking for
20 the composting site; we are going to temporarily
21 relocate them. Do you have a site in mind? Do you
22 commit that if you don't have a site in mind, you are
23 going to leave Lower East Side Ecology Center in East
24 River Park until that location is found and
25 essentially you hand the keys over to Christine and

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2 you say, here is your temporary composting site while
3 we renew the Fire Boat House and while we renew your
4 space to continue providing your services going
5 forward. Can you confirm that that is indeed the
6 plan?

7 SAM BIEDERMAN: So, the plan is to and I don't
8 want to again, you rightly pointed that you know, we
9 say we will talk to Sanitation. Counterparts of
10 Sanitation are leading the effort to find an interim
11 space. So, I will defer to them on that progress but
12 regarding what's going to happen as we move towards
13 construction, you know, it is my hope and expectation
14 that we are going to get that and we are going to
15 find an interim space.

16 And the Lower East Side Ecology Center, will be
17 able to practice compost at East River Park for as
18 long as feasible for construction.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Well, we can ask
20 Sanitation right, they are here.

21 BRIDGET ANDERSON: So, what I can speak to is our
22 efforts to find alternative space and -

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: I just wanted to thank
24 you for being here. A special thank you to you
25 Bridget Anderson and Debbie Shine Talk[SP?], they

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1 worked directly with my office on this project. As
2 well as adding drop-off locations, not just any drop-
3 off locations, public drop-off locations so that
4 everyone can access them in my district and I know
5 how difficult its been to find locations for the
6 alternate site during construction. But you know,
7 even earlier this week, the Mayor said he is
8 committed to finding a solution to this situation.

9
10 Is there any indication on what the solution is
11 and since you're both here, have you found other
12 agencies to be collaborative or even cooperative
13 partners as you identify possible alternative
14 locations? And which agencies are those agencies
15 that you are working with? Clearly Parks is here,
16 have they offered other locations and with the
17 difficulty of identifying alternate locations in your
18 opinion, if you could just answer that.

19 BRIDGET ANDERSON: Sure, I think a good example
20 just for how this works and the efforts we've had is
21 over a year ago, so October of 2019, we had gone
22 through a list of sites. We actually had worked with
23 Christine and her team to see if they had candidate
24 sites that they were interested or willing to
25 consider. Parks Department worked with DCAS to

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2 generate a short list of city owned sites within
3 Manhattan that potentially could be candidate sites
4 and over the course of vetting and reviewing
5 feasibility for these sites, one site in particular,
6 under the Triborough Bridge ramp was identified. And
7 so, we really focused our efforts at that point to
8 try to negotiate with multiple agencies that are
9 located there with the Triborough Bridge authority to
10 make sure that we could set them up.

11 And we actually worked with LESEC to design what
12 the site would look like. So, the area is at
13 [INAUDIBLE 47:43] 1ST Avenue. Unfortunately, well, I
14 will speak a little bit. So, we had, Parks
15 Department had storage there. Police Department has
16 parking there. Sanitation adjacent to this area has
17 a salt lot and DOT obviously would be involved in any
18 curb cuts or anything like that.

19 So, we had multiple agencies working on this and
20 City Hall really did the brokering with multiple
21 agencies how do we adjust the space to allow for a
22 community composting site that was sufficiently large
23 that was sufficiently safe to set up for LESEC. We
24 were in the process of reviewing, creating, drafting
25 MOU's. We were actually Sanitation, our own

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2 contracts for fencing, electrical, water. We were
3 working through all of the steps to prepare that site
4 and then for better or worse, we end up in late March
5 and COVID hit and there was a delay in our ability to
6 actually advance the actual work and the actual move.

7 When we came back to it over the summer,
8 conditions had changed and the Triborough Bridge
9 authority determined that it was no longer a suitable
10 site. So, we were kind of back to square one and so
11 that's where we renewed in earnest our conversations
12 with DCAS about what are other city sites. Do you we
13 look just at city sites? Should we start looking at
14 private sites? We have been very proactive to try to
15 identify candidate sites but the first step of that
16 obviously is once we identify lots, are they big
17 enough? Are they paved? What are the conditions of
18 those sites and how suitable are they?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: I know it's been
20 challenging but we've known that this has to happen.
21 We have known this for quite some time, so where are
22 we at? I mean, where is Lower East Side Ecology
23 Center going to go? And if you have no location, you
24 are committing today on the record and I realize this
25 has all been challenging and stressful for all of us

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1 but she is going to get a location. She is not going
2 to get a location. It's not fair. We just want some
3 honesty and transparency. We were sold this lot kind
4 of under the bridge and now it is not going to work.
5

6 If all those agencies were contacted, if we know
7 that we have to deal with the Tunnels and Bridges
8 authority and now it is not going to work, I am
9 having a hard time understanding, when are we going
10 to get like a full update? When can we trust a full
11 update? I just want to know where she is going to
12 go. Do you know, yes or no?

13 BRIDGET ANDERSON: We do not yet have an answer.
14 We do not yet have a site but we are very much
15 actively trying to solve this problem and we, from
16 Sanitations perspective, we are 100 percent committed
17 to these community organizations to continue to
18 operate and to have stable homes.

19 So, but the reality is we do not have an answer.
20 We are committed to transparency in the process and
21 to making sure that all parties are kept up to date.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Okay, I know how much
23 work - thank you, I know how much work the agency put
24 into building out the citywide composting program
25 doing outreach and promotion to encourage more people

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2 to use composting but with the elimination of that
3 program and the truncated funding for community
4 composting, the city is relying more and more on
5 organizations like Big Reuse and Lower East Side
6 Ecology Center to process compost.

7 So, if one or both of these sites are shut down
8 for any reason, how is the city going to make up for
9 the need to process the compost that is being
10 collected. And do you think composting should be
11 done at an industrial scale, a community scale or a
12 combination of both? It seems like the community
13 sites are working. I would like to see us
14 incorporating micro hauling and our bicycle
15 infrastructure to kind of help that but what are your
16 thoughts and again, how will the city make up for the
17 need to process compost that is being collected when
18 you clearly rely on these organizations?

19 BRIDGET ANDERSON: Absolutely. We actually, when
20 we were working to figure out how to be most
21 productive with the funding that was restored, due to
22 all of the advocacy work, we wanted to have a
23 contingency plan in place because we knew with the
24 suspension of curbside, that we might have a good
25

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2 problem, which is that participation would grow at
3 the food scrape drop off sites.

4 So, we do have - we are set up to receive loads
5 of material from the community organizations at our
6 Statin Island compost facility when the local sites
7 are unable to handle the volume that is coming in
8 through the drop off sites.

9 So, we have a contingency plan operationally and
10 what I would say is, citywide, if we are talking
11 about our large scale organics management plan, we
12 have to look at the macro and the micro and in our
13 opening they are both critical. The micro scale
14 efforts help to build an understanding of why we are
15 doing this and helped us show the benefits of doing
16 this and it also, I always talk about it being the
17 best antidepressant is, separating my food scraps and
18 putting them in a bin or bringing them to a drop off
19 site. Because we feel like you are actually taking a
20 step everyday to help be a part of the solution.

21 And so, the micro scale is important but volume
22 and overall citywide, the volume of organics is too
23 high to rely and overpressure the community scales.
24 We need both, we need both.

25

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: And that's fair. I just
3 want to - I am going to wrap up now. I really want
4 to hear you commit to Lower East Side Ecology Center
5 staying in the park until you have an alternative
6 space. I know this is kind of a Parks question.

7 It is so important. We went through all of this
8 to ensure that Lower East Side Ecology has a future.
9 We do not have a location right now as an
10 alternative. Can you please commit to Lower East
11 Side Ecology Center staying in the park until we have
12 an alternative space. I heard the construction. No
13 one has heard more about construction of this park
14 more than me believe me but you can't displace an
15 organization after you committed to support them
16 throughout the process.

17 SAM BIEDERMAN: So, what we can do is commit to
18 allowing the compost yard to stay for as long as it
19 is feasible and working with you know every city
20 agency that we can to realize an interim space.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Until it is feasible. It
22 is one of those relative words that the city like to
23 use that is 100 percent discretionary. I believe, I
24 think you owe Christine Datz-Romero an apology. I
25 want to say that once we save these sites and I think

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2 my colleagues and I have every intention of doing so,
3 that we also need to dramatically expand access to
4 composting. We can't do that without saving these
5 sites and so, we need community organizations at the
6 table playing a critical role and just you know,
7 Seattle compost 20 percent of its food waste. New
8 York, less than one percent. It is time for New York
9 to be a compost leader and it is time for us to
10 respect the pioneers that put us on the path to doing
11 that. And those are the organizations that are in
12 question today and I hope that you will find the
13 organization, the collaboration and the cooperation
14 to make it a reality today.

15 Thank you Mr. Chairs, both of you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member
17 Rivera. We will now move on to Council Member Powers
18 and following him we will move back to the Chairs for
19 additional questions. Thank you.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Thank you. Thank you to
22 both Chairs for having this hearing and certainly to
23 Council Member Van Bramer and Council Member Rivera.
24 I am in solidarity with you to try to keep these
25 sites here. I know how important it is to your

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2 communities and to folks around the city and for the
3 Lower East Side Ecology Center. They have been a
4 great partner to me in my district. We set up a
5 composting center in Stuyvesant town and to help fill
6 in, I paid for myself to fill in the gap here and
7 they are the ones helping us. So, I really want to
8 thank them for their work here.

9 I wanted to do broader picture of community
10 composting here in the city because we are going to
11 enter budget discussions again. Last year we were
12 really fighting to maintain some version of
13 composting as the curbside was getting picked up.
14 So, I just want to start with just budget numbers
15 here. Can you give us the total budget for
16 composting in the city right now between curbside,
17 which I believe is zero. Community composting and I
18 think GrowNYC doing compost as like a third number
19 and anything else I might have missed; can you give
20 us the total budget broken down by category?

21 BRIDGET ANDERSON: So, I have \$2.88 million is
22 the amount of money that we are using with our seven
23 compost project affiliates and that \$2.88 million is
24 also funding GrowNYC. And I will say that again, due
25 to the scrappy nature of these organizations, there

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2 has been a lot of efforts to seek additional
3 supplementary private sector funding. It is not city
4 budget and you are case and point enabling us. You
5 know Stuy Town is such a large and supportive
6 community for drop offs. That was very helpful as
7 well, so I don't have the discretionary Council
8 Member, numbers in front of me but I am happy to
9 share that.

10 We have, as was mentioned earlier, you know, we
11 are supporting Mulchfest, so if we are talking about
12 non-food scrapes for supporting Mulchfest, we are
13 supporting processing of leaves within Parks
14 operations. But Sanitation does a lot of work to
15 partner with and maximize the ability to compost
16 leaves within parks and we are also working to do
17 some very limited collections at some of the larger
18 NYCHA facilities with lot of trees. But it is very,
19 very limited at this point.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Okay and for those site
21 in mind - right outside my door, I can walk outside
22 and drop it off in 30 seconds in Stuyvesant Town. It
23 is, that is a drop off location for folks that's
24 getting transported to Lower East Side Ecology
25 Center. So, the \$2.88 million is funding those sites

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1 really, right. Those community composting sites
2 where the materials are ending up. Like, the
3 discretionary I have is really paying for staff, I
4 think to be there to help on the site.
5

6 BRIDGET ANDERSON: Yeah absolutely and I believe
7 Grow is doing the staffing and LESEC is doing the
8 processing.

9 So, the \$2.88 million is actually funding support
10 for community hosted sites that choose to open up a
11 drop off to the public and compost on site. Some of
12 those are Green Thumb gardens, some of those are
13 independent community compost sites. We also have a
14 category of sites that host a drop off themselves and
15 we support them with technical assistance with
16 equipment and supplies and signage and things like
17 that and then, those materials get hauled by these
18 nonprofits to these midscale high performing sites.

19 We then have some sites, largely the green market
20 sites where we fund GrowNYC to staff – actually staff
21 the sites. At green markets as you can imagine, the
22 social distancing, staffing is a critical component
23 of making those sites effective.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Yeah, okay and for the
25 private sector folks or foundations or whoever has

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2 money and wants to help fill in the gaps here, that
3 the feel you know, sort of compelled to help these
4 sites out. How do they go about doing that? Is
5 there a citywide mechanism for that or are they like,
6 the fund for New York or is through those individual
7 organizations?

8 BRIDGET ANDERSON: At this point its been through
9 the individual organizations and you know, when
10 needed we obviously will supply support and letter of
11 recommendation that these are incredibly effective
12 tools but it is directly between a private sector
13 funder and the organization itself.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Okay and do you have a
15 breakdown of the different sites in terms of the
16 \$2.88 million and just where that's going?

17 BRIDGET ANDERSON: Yeah, you know and it is very
18 dynamic so we are constantly adding sites. We are at
19 99, our goal is to get to 100 by the end of the
20 calendar year. A few of those are seasonal but we
21 have a nyc.govdropfoodscraps is the map where you can
22 see all the sites where they are located. We are not
23 in all community boards and so, our goal this year is
24 to get to all community boards and make sure that
25 there is a presence citywide. We are on all five

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2 boroughs but not yet in all community boards and I am
3 happy to share those details.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Council Member Rivera -
5 Council Member Reynoso rather and I have a piece of
6 legislation that would mandate that we called the
7 Core Act. Two bills that would mandate sites here in
8 every community board multiple sites. We would love
9 to work and get that bill passed so that beyond this
10 Administration, beyond all of us, we uphold our
11 commitment to this. Which is such a great investment
12 I think for the amount of money we are putting in.

13 How much money do you and I am just going to ask
14 you a few more questions and I am sorry to the Chair,
15 I just want to get - how much money do you think is
16 necessary? We had, you know, as we are fighting over
17 dollars and we are going into our next round of
18 budget, there were minor cuts but I and others really
19 fought hard to maintain the community composting as
20 part of the budget.

21 How much money do you think is needed if you want
22 to talk to the needs right now, to make sure that we
23 can do community composting? Even is curbside is not
24 available for a number of reasons.

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2 BRIDGET ANDERSON: Yeah and I just wanted to very
3 quickly say nyc.gov/hostadropoff is where anyone can
4 go if they have an idea. We leverage ideas through
5 the local communities of who might be willing to host
6 a drop off and then we can connect the organizations.
7 So, please leverage that.

8 In Fiscal Year '19, we spent about \$4.7 million
9 to operate the food scrap drop off and local process
10 composting program. So, that included the New York
11 City Compost project affiliates and the funding to
12 GrowNYC to do food scrap drop off management. We had
13 an increase to that budget to just over \$5 million
14 for 2020, we didn't obviously end up spending it, all
15 because of COVID but I would say you know, we want to
16 at a minimum, maintain, stabilize what we have and
17 then work to grow.

18 But just to give you from a reference fully
19 loaded the community scale program is about \$4.7
20 million in Fiscal '19.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Okay, \$4.7 might be a
22 guiding post here.

23 BRIDGET ANDERSON: Yeah.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Okay, got it and my last
25 questions here, do you have any unstaffed sites right

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now? I mean, are there any sites that you – I think that you guys had talked about at some point looking at unstaffed sites for drop off. Are those operating and how are they working?

BRIDGET ANDERSON: So, we have well, we say unstaffed but managed sites. A lot of community hosts will have a bin. There is not somebody standing at the bin all the time but the bin is there and that community is you know, sort of committed to sort of having adopted that bin and making sure that it is managed appropriately and like I said, we provide technical assistance, supplies, signage, etc.

So, that we do have a number of those and they are working fairly well. The material continues to be pristine for this program. Obviously we have people who are volunteering to do this and so they are doing it right.

There was an effort with the downtown Alliance of New York lower Manhattan to experiment with a high tech bin system whereby you would have on your smart phone the ability to unlock a bin and food in your food scraps. It would be managed. That project was put on hold. We are looking forward to and hopeful

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2 that maybe we would be able to revisit that at some
3 point.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Okay, got it. I have
5 more questions but I want to be respectful of
6 everybody's time. So, thank you and I think this is
7 such an important program. It is a really small
8 investment to make sure that we can do our job here.
9 I want to talk with you guys about ways we can
10 increase our levels of composting in the city across
11 the board. Make it easier and educate folks but I
12 will let -- I know so many folks here to testify, so I
13 want to give them an opportunity to hear their
14 voices. Thank you and happy holidays everyone.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member. At
16 this point, we will return to Chairperson Koo who has
17 some additional questions.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, yeah. So, after
19 hearing so much about composting, I want to go back a
20 little bit. Can you guys provide us some backgrounds
21 on how the composting contracts works? Who is
22 responsible for awarding the contracts and who is
23 responsible for providing space? So, is Sanitation
24 the main agency that provides the funding and all
25 these nonprofit companies if they are interested in

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2 doing composting, they apply through who? Sanitation
3 first?

4 BRIDGET ANDERSON: So, right, so we have
5 longstanding partnerships with Botanical Gardens and
6 also the nonprofit organizations. So, we have Earth
7 Matter, Lower East Side Ecology Center, Big Reuse as
8 nonprofits and then we have Botanical Gardens
9 institutions. And our relationship historically with
10 the Botanical Gardens has been through the Department
11 of Cultural Affairs actually in partnership, which
12 has been fantastic. With the nonprofits, we
13 currently have contracts with these three nonprofit
14 organizations. They are five year contacts. We fund
15 the programming. We are not responsible for
16 providing the site.

17 The idea is that these organizations that do more
18 than just support New York City Compost projects, so
19 they have independent programming that they also
20 operate and so, it made more sense and they already
21 had existing relationships with the sites where they
22 operate.

23 I will tell you that we do host one of these
24 midscale processing sites on a sanitation lot in
25 Brooklyn at the Gowanus Salt Lot and that was also a

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2 Grassroots effort originally. An informal corner was
3 carved out for some community composters for master
4 composters and then through participatory budgeting
5 efforts, including addition sanitation funding, we
6 were able to build out a site for one of these sites.
7 But generally we are not responsible in the contracts
8 to be the site license agreement holder.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, you are responsible for
10 awarding the contract in terms of funding?

11 BRIDGET ANDERSON: Correct, we fund – for the New
12 York City Compost Project activities, we fund, the
13 Department of Sanitation funds those activities.
14 These organizations do have independent programming
15 that they also have other sources of funding for.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, how does Parks come along –
17 I mean, how come the Parks is the only one to provide
18 the space. I would say that maybe Department of
19 Transportation have a lot of space underneath all the
20 bleachers you know.

21 So, in terms of providing space, who do you
22 assign? I mean, does Sanitation assign or you talk
23 to other agencies to provide them the space to do
24 composting?

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2 BRIDGET ANDERSON: Right, what we are doing is
3 working on identifying city owned lots and ideally
4 they are lots that are currently underutilized or
5 unutilized to determine feasibility of those sites
6 for this type of operation.

7 Obviously, there are many agencies, we are all
8 dying for space. Space as we all know is very, very
9 tight. Especially in Manhattan and so, inevitably it
10 involves conversations with our agencies about the
11 ways that those sites are being utilized and if there
12 is a feasible way to have these organizations operate
13 on space.

14 And so, it's many, many organizations that we are
15 speaking with, agencies.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, parks is not the only
17 agency that provides space?

18 BRIDGET ANDERSON: It doesn't have to be.

19 GREGORY ANDERSON: And I would add, Sanitation
20 actually hosts a community compost site at our salt
21 lot in Brooklyn Community Board 6. So, we do, at one
22 of our locations and it is actually operated by
23 Justin at Big Reuse. So, you know, where we can, we
24 would love to host these sites. But I think as many
25 Council Members know, we are unbelievably space

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1
2 constrained ourselves. Particularly in Manhattan
3 where we have you know, trucks parking on the street
4 in many locations. So, you know, I think while we
5 all definitely support community composting, it is
6 also very difficult to find unused space in Manhattan
7 or in any of the other boroughs.

8 BRIDGET ANDERSON: It doesn't mean it is not
9 possible and we are very committed to ensuring that
10 this program advances and continues. This is our
11 work and we are committed to it.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair.

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: I am done, yeah. Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Koo. Seeing
16 no other members with questions, we will now move on
17 to testimony from the public. We are going to hear
18 testimony first from two high school students that
19 the Chairs would like to give time to since they are
20 on a pressing schedule and I will just go over the
21 quick logistical issues.

22 Unlike our typical Council hearings, we will be
23 calling individuals one by one to testify and each
24 panelist will be given two minutes to speak. Council
25 Members who have questions for a particular panelist

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1 should use the Zoom raise hand function and I will
2 call on you after each panelist has completed their
3 testimony.
4

5 For panelists, once your name is called, a member
6 of our staff will unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms
7 will give you the queue to begin upon setting the
8 timer. So, please wait for the Sergeant to announce
9 that you may begin before delivering your testimony.
10 Once you start your testimony, please state your name
11 and the organization you represent.

12 So, we will hear first from a high school student
13 Fariha Haider, if she is ready to begin.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

15 FARIHA HAIDER: Good afternoon. My name is
16 Fariha Haider and I am here representing the Brooklyn
17 Latin Schools Eco Club, which I Co-lead with Rebecca.
18 Our Eco Club strongly urges the City Council to
19 continue to fund composting programs specifically for
20 Lower East Side Ecology Center and Big Reuse.

21 Big Reuse is especially dear to us because we
22 ourselves have volunteered with them. Just last
23 year, members of our Eco Club including myself
24 attended a leaf raking event in support of DSNY's
25 make compost not trash campaign at Grover Cleveland

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2 Park. And were able to divert 53 lawn and leaf bags
3 from landfills to be composted at Queens Botanical
4 Garden. They continue to reach out to us for our
5 thoughts on how to make their curbside composting
6 program a success.

7 We learned how our personal actions also help our
8 communities. Composting reduces pollution in
9 environmental justice communities, reduce methane
10 emissions, as well as food and yard waste.
11 Composting strives to save resources.

12 New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio hopes to send
13 zero waste to landfills by 2030. A goal that we are
14 in support of but how will that be feasible if
15 numerous environmental programs are being cut back?
16 It is for these reasons that I ask City Council to
17 please reconsider the proposal to cut funding for
18 Lower East Side Ecology Center and Big Reuse. As it
19 will be a major step back for all of us. Thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. We will
21 now hear testimony from Rebecca Shabnam.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

23 REBECCA SHABNAM: Hi, my name is Rebecca Shabnam,
24 I just finished a class on Zoom. I am a Lower East
25 side resident, a New York City DOE high schooler,

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1 Youth Advocate for Cafeteria Culture and fingers
2 crossed, hopefully a New York City government
3 official in the future. And I am here to strongly
4 urge City Council to continue funding composting for
5 New York City.
6

7 I am testifying because evicting composting is
8 not only a step back in the wrong direction but also
9 evicting composting needs, denying frontline
10 communities the environmental justice they deserve.
11 So, essential composting sites run by my neighborhood
12 practically in my own back yard are no on the verge
13 of being shut down and I refuse to see that happen.

14 So, evicting composting means increased
15 greenhouse gas and pollution from all compostable
16 waste, foods and scraps and organics that make up
17 one-third of our trash that are just being dumped
18 into landfills and who is going to be effected by
19 that the most? It is going to be low income, Black
20 and Brown communities. In the middle of a pandemic
21 where people are already vulnerable to health issues,
22 evicting composting is a dangerous thing to do. It
23 is not only a waste of just public fund invested to
24 make these sites and DSNY services designed to reduce
25 sending waste to these landfills. It tells these

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1
2 frontline communities that the City does not care
3 about them. If a City wants to protect Black and
4 Brown and low-income communities, if the City cares
5 about its youth, they must continue funding
6 composting and resume it in all schools citywide and
7 also especially in public housing and Black
8 indigenous people of color communities that were
9 previously excluded.

10 So now is your chance to show us that you are on
11 our side. Thank you for giving the time to testify.

12 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Great job, thank you so
13 much. It is good to have our youth and our young
14 people front and center on a lot of these issues and
15 I really appreciate your time.

16 I hope that the City can stay on while people are
17 testifying and give them that curtesy, so they can
18 hear the issues that folks on the frontlines have
19 related to this issue. Thank you so much for your
20 testimony.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you and thank you
22 Chair. We will now move on to our next group and I
23 stated earlier, the next group of four individuals
24 will have five minutes to testify due to their
25 connections to the effected sites. Our first speaker

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1 will be Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
2 followed by Justin Green followed by Christine Datz-
3 Romero followed by Domingo Morales. And Borough
4 President Brewer, you may begin when ready. Thank
5 you.
6

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 GALE BREWER: Thank you very much. I am Gale
9 Brewer Manhattan Borough President. I want to thank
10 the two Chairs and the Committee members and I and
11 always in support of Resolution 1510, that would
12 encourage the Parks Department and the Sanitation
13 Department to allow community posting operations on
14 park land. And I have listened to the wonderful back
15 and forth and I have to say, I don't understand why
16 this is an issue.

17 I am a strong supporter of composting. Chair
18 Reynoso is aware of the partnership along with
19 Council Member Keith Powers on Intro. 1942 and Intro.
20 1943. That's the Core Act and that would have
21 established recycling and organics drop off in every
22 community district. It was because of the budget cut
23 that we brought this up. I did oppose the FY21
24 budget cuts that suspended the Sanitation
25 Department's residential organics collection program

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1 through 2021 and I want to say that the Manhattan
2 SWAB and I think the other SWABS are trying to figure
3 out how we can make sure that picking up ones
4 composting organics, it becomes composting in every
5 neighborhood like my block. How it can make sense
6 because it does make sense.
7

8 While curbside organics collection is on hiatus,
9 community composting serves as the only alternatives
10 for us New Yorkers who want to compost our food
11 waste. And these sites are located on park land and
12 in community gardens and certainly the one that you
13 have heard so much about today, East River Park
14 operated by the beloved Lower East Side Ecology
15 Center and 3,500 or more household rely on this
16 program.

17 On a policy level, community composting as you
18 heard from everyone is integral to the New York City
19 achieving zero waste by 2030. Food waste comprises
20 one-third of the overall waste generated by New
21 Yorkers and this ends up in the landfill as we know
22 and it costs a fortune.

23 The City should support the expansion, not the
24 elimination of community composting sites and I know
25 that Sanitation and Parks they are supporters, but

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1 you are not supporters if you don't support it at its
2 completeness.

3
4 We know and the Committee, the Committee members
5 know that for over a year Council Member Carlina
6 Rivera and she spoke articulately about her support.
7 We convened stakeholders, we engaged local residents
8 including NYCHA tenants. We had a community advisory
9 group, we even got an independent expert to come from
10 Holland to ensure a wide range of local voices would
11 be incorporated into ESCR, as you heard it, it is the
12 East River Coastal Resiliency Process.

13 And the community input into these plans was
14 especially important because there was so much city
15 emphasis on disregarding all the community planning.
16 So, we ended up with a preferred alternative. But at
17 every level, no matter what one believed about the
18 process and about ESCR, the same response, protect
19 the compost. Protect, support the compost.

20 I support the goal of ESCR and I believe it is
21 important to move forward to move forward with the
22 federal money before they expire for New Yorkers
23 because we need to make sure there is flood
24 protection. Yet, the City should also provide
25 greater support to the Lower East Side's compost yard

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1 and ensure its existence during and after ESCR
2 construction.

3
4 Coastal resiliency and zero waste strategies are
5 not usually exclusive. They need both. I also want
6 to point out all of the Big Reuse discussion, I am
7 supportive of in keeping it. Roosevelt Island, it is
8 in Manhattan for those of you who don't know and
9 guess what? The garden club members at Roosevelt
10 Island and Roosevelt Island residents support
11 composting in their community. They would love to
12 have it on park land and they are advocating for more
13 funding for those programs but they are also hugely
14 supportive of Big Reuse, hugely supportive.

15 Composting does belong in parks and park land.
16 It just seems to be it is normal and legal. Eric
17 Goldstein thinks it is legal. Parks Department, Law
18 Department may not but I would go with Eric Goldstein
19 NRDC.

20 Resolution 1510 proposed by Chair Reynoso calls
21 on the agencies to continue to engage and collaborate
22 with local communities to encourage and allow
23 community composting be carried out on park land that
24 is safe for residents. This is certainly the call of
25 everyone who has been testifying so far and I support

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1
2 it. I look forward to working with members of the
3 committee's to protect and preserve the City's
4 community composting sites, all of them. Thank you
5 very much.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Borough President.
7 We will now hear testimony from Justin Green followed
8 by Christine Datz-Romero.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

10 JUSTIN GREEN: Hi, my name is Justin Green, I am
11 the Executive Director of Big Reuse. I want to thank
12 the thousands of community activists in Astoria and
13 throughout the City who are fighting to save
14 community composting sites and compost with us.

15 I want to thank the Save our Compost Coalition,
16 the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance and
17 NRDC and New York Lawyers in public interest for all
18 of your work that has gotten us to this point.

19 Thank you to Council Member Reynoso, Asher
20 Freeman, Council Member Van Bramer, amazing
21 questioning and you have been an amazing advocate for
22 the community and you know, bringing parks to improve
23 Queens Bridge has been a long fight for you and I
24 really am thankful you have been here to make that
25 effort.

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2 Thank you to Council Member Koo for your
3 testimony and all the elected officials who have
4 funded and fought for community composting and called
5 for oversight hearings to save our sites.

6 I want to thank the Department of Sanitation
7 Bridget and Greg and every one there. We have worked
8 with nearly a decade to make composting happen in New
9 York City and all the nonprofit partners we work with
10 to expand those community opportunities.

11 We really want to get to every community district
12 and this is a distraction and you know, I think a
13 waste of time for everyone here, all the thousands of
14 residents on something so clearly that community
15 composting should happen on parks. Because we are
16 composting their leaves and woodchips and giving back
17 the compost to Parks, to Green Thumb, to street tree
18 care and community gardens to use. It is within
19 Parks mission.

20 And I want to thank local Queens Park staff who
21 we worked with for decades to rake leaves and clean
22 up parks and green parks. Local Queens Park staff
23 understand the importance of composting and
24 understand the importance of working with us. Like,
25 we see that and they appreciate us.

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1 I do want to thank the Park leadership for
2 finally reaching out to us this morning to offer the
3 extension. We appreciate the chance to start talking
4 about our site and how to move forward and we are
5 glad our efforts have encouraged Parks to begin work
6 on a long delayed Baby Queens Bridge Park
7 improvements. Glad to see that movement happen as
8 well.
9

10 You know community composting belongs in parks,
11 plain and simple. It just makes sense. I think
12 everyone, there have been so much activism around it
13 because people are like, well you are composting
14 leaves and woodchips. You are giving compost back to
15 parks, what can the objection be? No one
16 understands. We were talking to a New York Times
17 reporter yesterday, they were like, why would Parks
18 want to kick you out. I can't come up with a good
19 solution.

20 It is not - you know, we all have a
21 responsibility to fight for climate change and if
22 Parks said, we all need to do our part to green parks
23 and right now they are not doing it. You know Parks
24 generates millions of pounds of leaf and yard waste
25 every year that they currently landfill or

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1 incinerate, which contribute to climate change. Our
2 community composting site provides parks with that
3 solution to act sustainably and to compost that waste
4 with community benefit. For almost a decade we have
5 done this.
6

7 Close to 1.5 million pounds under the Queens
8 Borough Bridge on Parks managed land. You know we
9 worked with thousands of volunteers with Department
10 of Sanitation and over two years to clean a lot that
11 we now occupy. It was filled – a Parks managed lot
12 was filled with garbage, had been basically squatted
13 by a private contractor for a decade. We cleared off
14 30, 50 yard containers of garbage. We grated; we
15 paved the site. Our site is open to the public. It
16 is a public resource and recreation. We have 1,000
17 volunteers that came through in 2019. So, it's open
18 to the public, it's part of the community and we make
19 every effort to improve the community. We fixed the
20 site that had been left abandoned. Now that we have
21 fixed it and paved it and grated it, Parks wants it
22 back and that was not clear in any of the
23 negotiations. There is no written thing in the
24 negotiations that says the site was temporary.
25

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1
2 You know, we don't have a renewal that's true,
3 but as Council Member Van Bramer stated, Parks can
4 renew. We are there every day, so we understand the
5 local operations needs. There are six trailers in
6 Queens Bridge that could easily fit in the staff
7 parking lot underneath Queens Borough Bridge. There
8 is five blocks of land that Parks controls. Some for
9 Green Thumb, some for energy and some for a 20,000
10 square foot staff parking lot. Which is currently,
11 typically a quarter full you know that could easily
12 fit 20 trailers, not just the six trailers that need
13 to moved and could fit the four trailers that are for
14 District one, two and three operations.

15 So, there is really no reason logistically,
16 ethically or legally to evict our site and we are
17 happy to keep working with local parks and local
18 community, which we have done for a decade and we are
19 hear to help green the city and fight climate change
20 and we want to be given that opportunity to remain
21 and do that. Thank you, please renew our license.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you and Council Member
23 Van Bramer does have a question.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Well, first of all
25 thank you Justin for talking so powerfully about the

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1 great work that you have done. About the abandoned
2 lot, those city owned that you found and restored to
3 public use. And thank you also for – because you are
4 on the ground as I am, talking about just how much
5 parking space there is available. How much of it is
6 currently being used and I just have to say when you
7 said that it reminded me of the beautiful bike lane
8 that was recently rebuilt that joins this and as a
9 City, we should be encouraging everyone to bike and
10 to use mass transit and not be driving and not be
11 parking their vehicles in Queens Bridge. Which is a
12 community has long been abused and long been
13 susceptible to asthma and other illnesses because the
14 environmental racism that has been witnessed upon
15 that community.

17 So, we have this giant parking lot for staff and
18 yet, the seven and other trains are a couple of
19 blocks away and we have a beautifully repaved
20 protected bike lane right, right adjoining site.

21 So, Justin, I just want to say, once again, thank
22 you for everything that you have done, everything you
23 continue to do and the fact that you also don't
24 accept this extension of six months you know, as a
25 victory, right for a permanent home which could very

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1 easily be right where you are. And also continue to
2 fight as you mentioned for justice for Queens Bridge
3 Park and therefore the people of Queens Bridge in
4 Raven's Wood just to the north which is incredibly
5 important to me and to you.
6

7 So, thank you for laying it out in the way you
8 did in terms of how all of that space is being used
9 under the bridge right across the street from the
10 Queens Bridge Houses and how easy a fix this is if
11 Parks would just recommit to community composting and
12 say that this is consistent with their values and how
13 they are actually going to achieve what they say they
14 want to achieve and that is saving this planet.

15 JUSTIN GREEN: Thank you Jimmy. I think that's -
16 I mean, you've have really well spoken and you know,
17 I think that is clear that local parks operations
18 agrees with us you know and works with us and they
19 feel that connection to the soil and they understand
20 the benefit that compost brings to their parks and
21 their communities. And the issue I think really is
22 just not being in the community is just not being in
23 the community.

24 Like, when folks are making decisions that are
25 not in the community for the community and that's -

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1
2 you know, we have been there for a decade and what's
3 happening now is just more of that.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Absolutely, well you
5 know, I will continue to stand with you in solidarity
6 and fight with this incredible community in
7 solidarity every step of the way. Thank you.

8 JUSTIN GREEN: Thank you. Thanks for your work.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member Van
10 Bramer. I believe Chair Koo does have a question as
11 well.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Hi, I have a question. Thank
13 you Justin for your contributions in composting. So,
14 you said you have been there for ten years but you
15 only signed a current license agreement with Parks in
16 2018. How come you took so long to sign the
17 agreement with the Parks Department.

18 JUSTIN GREEN: Well, it took a very long time to
19 negotiate that agreement. It took us, I mean, we
20 were originally moved onto the site or found unused
21 space under the bridge and we worked with Dotty
22 Lewandowski, who was the Queens Parks Commissioner at
23 the time under an MOU to operate there starting in
24 2011.

25

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2 We operated successfully on the site that then
3 Green Thumb wanted to move to. So, we took on the
4 massive project of cleaning up this garbage site on
5 Vernon and it was like I said, full of 50, 30 yard
6 containers of garbage. We worked with Department of
7 Sanitation who did a lot of the lot clearing and we
8 worked with engineers and contractors to build out
9 this site to pave this site. Con Ed has massive
10 utilities running through the site, so we had to work
11 around their repairs. They did – we are doing a
12 year's worth of repairs, so it took us two years of
13 work to actually prepare the site to move into.

14 So, that took a long time and lots of volunteer
15 work and lots of staff work to get to that point.
16 So, that's why we have been under the bridge for so
17 long is because we have been working to repair and
18 improve the sites under the bridge for that long.

19 And so, when it finally had been fully repaired
20 in 2018, is when we signed the license agreement to
21 start operations.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: But then how come you signed
23 the agreement for only two years? If I spent so much
24 time and energy improvement of a place, I wouldn't
25 sign an agreement for two years only.

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JUSTIN GREEN: You know, I mean, absolutely, that's a good point. I mean, we had been there so long prior to that and without any issues and we assumed since we were taking over a lot that it had been filled with garbage, that Parks really didn't need that space. So, we sort of assumed we - our case is such a common sense case for sustainability and our integration with Parks operation was so clear, we had assumed we would just continue the way we continue for you know, seven years prior.

So, that was I guess naive on our part to agree to that.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, what were your expectations? When you signed the agreement, did you have a lawyer to advise you or what?

JUSTIN GREEN: Yeah, we did. I mean, you know, it is true that when we went into negotiations it was - we were given three years you know. And there wasn't an extension in there but we assumed we would get to that point.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Were you under the impression that you will get an extension when you signed it?

JUSTIN GREEN: Well, at the Department when we signed it, that was not on the table. It wasn't on

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1 the table at that point. So, I mean, we assumed that
2 that would happen but it wasn't specifically named in
3 the license agreement. I mean, it is up to parks and
4 the City to decide what to do with the space.
5

6 Our agreement as it stands, Parks could kick off
7 almost anyone as part of any license agreement. The
8 City can almost kick up anyone at any time. So, you
9 know that license agreement are really solely based
10 on the good will of the City and the public sentiment
11 around that space.

12 So, as you know from looking at it, you have
13 probably seen license agreements. The City has that
14 legal ability. We don't own the property you know;
15 the City owns it. The City can kick off anyone at
16 any time if they need to. And so it is up for the
17 City to decide even in license agreements with
18 extensions like Lower East Side has a license
19 agreement that extends into perpetuity. That's not
20 saving their site, right. So, the same thing is
21 happening with us is, it is up to the City to decide
22 whether there is a renewal in there or not.

23 You know, whether the City decides whether it
24 makes sense sustainably, ethically and whether the
25

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1 decision makes sense for the community and it makes
2 that decision with every site.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, what is your status of your
5 agreement with Sanitation Department now? Do they
6 have a timeline there of how many years you can do
7 composting.

8 JUSTIN GREEN: Yeah, we have four years left in
9 our five year license agreement. I mean not license
10 agreement; we have a contract with the City for
11 community composting.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, so with Sanitation you
13 have four more years?

14 JUSTIN GREEN: Yeah.

15 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, did Parks ever offer you
16 any a renewal if you change your practice? Did they
17 say, hey you have to do this in order for us to renew
18 your license. Did they ever offer you anything?

19 JUSTIN GREEN: No.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, Parks never identified any
21 place for you to move?

22 JUSTIN GREEN: No. And you know, we talked with
23 like I said local Parks officials -

24 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

25 JUSTIN GREEN: Go ahead.

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CHAIRPERSON KOO: Quite yeah.

JUSTIN GREEN: You know, local Parks operations folks have even offered some of their sites. Why don't you move to our park, we would love to have you. But Parks has decided that community composting doesn't belong in Parks.

So, that's why, that's really what it comes down to is that's the rationale. So, it's not, you know, I think we have seen so many different reasons given why we have to move but I think as Council Member Van Bramer pointed out, it's really you know a stance at Parks what you know, what - if they believe in community composting or not.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, thank you Justin.

CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Justin, I just wanted to just ask a couple of - not even ask questions just make a statement. It is very unfortunate; it's just composting makes so much sense with the Parks Department and it is unfortunate that they are taking the stand that there is not a good marriage between the two and we obviously know that it makes a lot of sense.

I am sorry that you are having to go through this. You know and just to be clear, the Parks

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1 Department have no problem putting in trailers and
2 parking vehicles on park land for decades in Queens
3 Bridge but it is so favorably against keeping
4 composting on one of its sites. It is remarkable how
5 strong they are willing to take a stand on this and
6 how quickly they are to overlook the long term
7 parking and alienation of space in Queens Bridge.
8

9 So, again, I am sorry you are having to go
10 through this. Just know we are going to be fighting
11 this unfortunate decision during this time. So,
12 thank you so much for all the work that you do at Big
13 Reuse.

14 JUSTIN GREEN: Thank you Council Member.

15 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

17 JUSTIN GREEN: Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We will now hear
19 from Christine Datz-Romero followed by Domingo
20 Morales.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 CHRISTINE DATZ-ROMERO: Thank you for this
23 opportunity to testify and I would like to thank
24 Chair Reynoso and Chair Koo for holding this meeting
25 and also would like to thank everybody who is tuning

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1 in and for our local Council people to advocate for
2 us together with the Borough Presidents office.

3 My name is Christine Datz-Romero and I am the
4 Executive Director of the Lower East Side Ecology
5 Center. Being an organization that started community
6 composting 30 years ago in the Lower East Side on
7 some City owned vacant lot that we cleaned up and
8 returned up and returned in to a vibrant green space.

9 By 1998 we entered into a long term partnership
10 with Parks and moved to East River Park and in
11 exchange for this space in the Park to grow our
12 programs, we agreed to handle leaf and yard waste
13 generated by Parks and to donate finished compost
14 back to Parks, Community Gardens and community groups
15 taking care of street trees.

16 This is a win, win situation. Parks has provided
17 the sustainability services that comes at no cost to
18 them while gaining programs faced that engages
19 community residents, delivers hand on educational
20 opportunities to local schools, providers job
21 training and creates green jobs.

22 And I want to just also mention that this long
23 term relationship that we really entered into the
24 Parks Department was memorialized in a license
25

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1 agreement that we had with Parks and that's a five
2 year license agreement that we signed in 2010 and one
3 of the paragraphs of this license agreement says that
4 this agreement should be viewed as an agreement or
5 partnership that should run in perpetuity.
6

7 And the other thing I want to mention is that
8 when we entered or when we came to East River Park in
9 1998, we didn't even have a relationship with the
10 Department of Sanitation. We are deep pioneer of
11 community based composting in New York City. We are
12 committed to it. It is our core program that I think
13 community sets us apart and we really have seen - we
14 are very proud of where the City came to in terms of
15 really creating a community and a lot of advocates
16 for composting here in the City, otherwise we
17 wouldn't have an organics curbside program that's
18 unfortunately suspended now.

19 So, we wouldn't have made all of this progress
20 without really having this amazing community that
21 really supports composting and sees a lot of benefit
22 in it and so when we entered this park, we you know,
23 we ended it without having even a relationship with
24 Sanitation but I think the Parks Department at least
25 at that point in the late 90's and through 2000's

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1
2 really saw that benefit of partnering with a partner
3 who really brought sustainability, who brought a
4 program who fights climate change every day of the
5 year and they really wanted to partner with us and I
6 really don't understand what happened in the meantime
7 with this relationship because we did everything
8 right by the Parks Department.

9 We worked really hard in this park. We did
10 stewardship. We used the compost that we created to
11 really revitalize this park after ESCR. We planted
12 native plants, you name but composting is the
13 cornerstone of the programs that we did here and it
14 makes a lot of sense.

15 We also work to educate other entities that are
16 interested and just like Justin spoke about it, in
17 Parks, Riverside Park, the whole horticulture staff
18 came down here to do workshops with us. There are so
19 many people in Parks that believe that composting
20 belongs in the Park system and want to see a more
21 sustainable and close loop systems in their
22 neighborhoods and we were really there to educate and
23 give technical assistance and we are still very much
24 interested in doing that.

25

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1 Just look at Hudson River Park, it's a statement
2 park but however they have a composting program and
3 they handle the yard waste and now they have ten drop
4 off locations sprinkled throughout the parks. They
5 use their resources and their staff to service these
6 drop off locations for food scraps because they know
7 food scraps and yard waste makes magic and that's
8 compost.
9

10 In an urban space that's what we should be doing.
11 It is hyperlocal, it makes a lot of sense and again,
12 we can probably advocate and talked that to death but
13 I just want to bring the point home again, it makes
14 absolutely no sense from a policy standpoint for
15 parks to deny that and to evict such [INAUDIBLE
16 1:18:01] of community based organizations.

17 The other thing I also want to point out is that
18 the ESCR construction, which is starting sometime
19 next year is really supposed to build a resilient
20 park and at the same time it seems to be dooming a
21 climate frankly composting program.

22 We all know that the escalating climate crisis is
23 the root cause of why we will have to build that
24 protection but the answer can't be to build of a
25 higher walls to keep the water out. To tackle our

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1
2 climate crisis, we need to change our habits and
3 lifestyles and composting again, is one step into
4 that direction.

5 So, for Parks Department to say we are building a
6 world class resilient park and at the same time
7 throwing the composting program to the way side, into
8 the garbage pile, is just unconscionable and we say
9 to create a resilient East River Park, the compost
10 yard needs to return to this park.

11 It has been absolutely frustrating to be involved
12 with an agency who has had such a commitment to our
13 program to now just stonewall us forever and not
14 really engage with us in finding solutions. We don't
15 want to slow down the ESCR program. We all know we
16 need to protect ourselves, however, the last time
17 there was construction scheduled here in East River
18 Park which was from 2001 to 2012 when there was a
19 major rebuild of the promenade, the Ecology Center
20 was in this park already and we moved out of the way
21 of construction. We stayed here as long as feasible
22 and then we were relocated into another park in
23 Coleman Park down in Lower Manhattan. And at that
24 point, parks didn't even question that they needed to
25 provide an alternative space to us. When we started

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1 to look for space to move to because of ESCR, Parks
2 has never proactively offered us any space and that
3 is an again very disappointing and just not right.

4 Again, preserving community based composting is
5 essential for New York City and we need to just
6 really fight and I would like to thank everybody for
7 their tremendous support and I am hoping that we will
8 get the Parks Department to acknowledge that they
9 have to be an agency that just like everybody else is
10 coming together to really fight climate change and
11 it's a day to day thing that we need to engage in and
12 community composting needs to remain on public land.
13 Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. I
15 believe Chair Koo does have a question.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you Christine for your
17 passion and your delegation in composting and helping
18 your City.

19 So, my question to you is, has the Administration
20 or the Parks Department told you what time to move
21 out? Have they given you a timeline.

22 CHRISTINE DATZ-ROMERO: They have not given us a
23 timeline. The last I heard was when Sam came,
24 Biederman, who is here today, came to a CB3 Community
25

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1 Board meeting and said that there is no drop deadline
2 for us. However, he has also said today that we
3 could stay there as long as feasible. So, these are
4 all sort of statements that are very you know, it
5 doesn't feel like that's an answer that we can build,
6 that we confidently say, oh, yeah, we want to stay
7 here. So, they have not given us a timeline. Parks
8 Department has tried to eliminate the compost yard as
9 a part of an early package for ESCR. So, we were
10 supposed to move out this September however, that
11 just never happened obviously.

12
13 And I just really want to hear from the Parks
14 Department that they are committed to finding us a
15 space so we can move to during the construction if
16 that is needed and also really want to hear from the
17 Parks Department that we are coming back to East
18 River Park. Saying that they will make a good faith
19 effort, is basically telling us that there is a
20 problem with us returning to this park and there
21 shouldn't be a problem.

22 Throughout the ESCR, you know, I have attended so
23 many meetings. I have spent years of my time you
24 know, following this process and everybody in our
25 community has always just come out and supported our

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1 organization and for us to be in this park. The only
2 agency who is hesitant in that support is the Parks
3 Department.
4

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, are there any sites in the
6 community where you can do composting temporary?
7 Have you identified some places and if you identified
8 those, has Parks Department helped you to relocate?

9 CHRISTINE DATZ-ROMERO: Well, as I said Parks
10 Department has not been proactive in helping us
11 identifying new sites and I would argue that the
12 Parks Department come to us and say here are some
13 sites that you could move to. There are certain
14 specifications that have to be met. We cannot just
15 you know move into any site. Smaller sites are
16 really not appropriate for us to move to but Parks
17 Department has so far not afford us any sites to
18 relocate to.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, I thought Parks Department
20 already offered East River Park for your educational
21 and administration right?

22 CHRISTINE DATZ-ROMERO: So, our organization has
23 really made East River Park its home for two decades.
24 We offer educational programs and that aspect of our
25 organization will be able to serve our community by

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1 being relocated to Seward Park. However our compost
2 yard, which is a one acre site in East River Park,
3 which is a 58 acre waterfront park, that aspect of
4 our organization and our programs has not been
5 offered any space to move to.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: But in the meantime Parks
8 Department said they are trying their best right to
9 help you to relocate because right now they don't
10 have a confession time. So, they don't know when you
11 guys are moving out yet.

12 CHRISTINE DATZ-ROMERO: Well, as I said, Parks
13 Department has very proactively always tried to
14 really make sure that we leave East River Park as
15 soon as possible. Just to give you an example,
16 during ESCR, they announced a whole bunch of
17 mitigation sites that they wanted to develop and they
18 said to us very casually in one of our meetings that
19 they are thinking about turning the compost yard into
20 a passive recreational lawn as a mitigation for the
21 ESCR construction which will close down at least 40
22 percent of this park at a time to the community and
23 we right away raised really concerns about it and
24 Parks Department never came - made this mitigation
25 public until it was a done deal, until they had the

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1 okay from the Public Design Commission to go forward
2 with that construction. That's when they announced
3 it at Community Board meetings.
4

5 So, for the last couple of years, what we have
6 really seen is a department that is doing anything it
7 can to really make sure that we are leaving this park
8 at an escalated timetable. At that point, the ESCR
9 construction wasn't even supposed to start but they
10 made sure to come up with some scheme to have us out
11 before even the construction started.

12 So, I would say they have not engaged in any good
13 faith effort to really treat us as the partner as
14 they should treat us as because we have been here for
15 20 years and quite frankly, we worked very hard to
16 make this park the success it is.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Excuse me, is Mr. Biederman
18 still there. Commissioner Biederman, are you still
19 there?

20 SAM BIEDERMAN: Yes, I am present.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah, so can you like tell us
22 whether you can give assurance to Christine that
23 Lower East Side can return to Lower East Side Park
24 once the construction is done?

25 SAM BIEDERMAN: So, as I stated earlier -

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2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: That's the second question.
3 The first question, can you help them to find a
4 temporary place during construction?

5 SAM BIEDERMAN: Alright, so thank you Council
6 Member. As I stated earlier, The Parks Department
7 has taken great efforts to make sure that the Lower
8 East Side Ecology Center has an interim location to
9 do their programming in Seward Park. This comes free
10 of charge. We renovated a new space for them and
11 worked with them very closely to renovate this space.

12 So, we, and in response to your question Council
13 Member, the effort to find a temporary location for
14 the Lower East Side Ecology Center is actually being
15 led - it is a citywide effort right, so it is not
16 being led by the Parks Department. It is being led
17 in partnership with many city agencies but DSNY and
18 DCAS are leading this effort along with partners from
19 the Mayor's Office.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. I finished my questions,
21 yeah, thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Okay, I think Council
23 Member Rivera has some questions.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, Council Member Rivera is
25 next. Please go ahead.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Christine, I really just wanted to come out here to thank you for kind of reiterating and reinforcing everything that we have mentioned as to your contribution to the entire movement. I just want to recognize that. Can you just tell – and forgive me if I have missed this in your testimony, a little bit about what your programs provide really to the LES in terms of resources and education but how that directly correlates to the type of alternative facility or lot that you will need in order to be your most successful during that temporary relocation.

CHRISTINE DATZ-ROMERO: Sure, yeah, so of course here in East River Park, you know, there is really three things that come together. It's educational, it is stewardship of the park and it is doing composting and for us they all are intertwined. I want to also really say that at one point Commissioner Biederman talked about Parks really having this mandate to offer open space for recreational use. And I would say that during COVID, the minute it was safe for us to offer volunteer opportunities again, which is a form of recreational

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1 use of park land, we had no problems filling slots
2 from people who really wanted to help and be engaged
3 in our composting yard.
4

5 So, we have had hundreds of volunteers come to
6 the compost yard since about May, June to help us
7 with that. So, you know, we really also engaged the
8 community in this process of being part of this
9 program that we know benefits the city so greatly.

10 Space that we really need to temporarily
11 relocate, of course we would like to stay as close to
12 our community as we can. All of our programs run
13 within 2.5 mile radius, so our drop off locations and
14 where the turn scraps into finished compost are very
15 tight. We also have 50 community gardens in our
16 neighborhood as you know and we deliver a lot of
17 finished compost to these community gardens.

18 So, you know, we have really over the three
19 decades of offering this program, built a lot of
20 relationships that you know, if we uprooted, you
21 know, we are not going to expect to have the same
22 kind of opportunities and relationships in a new
23 neighborhood. But having a space where we can
24 operate out of reliably will at least allow us to
25 pass this time during construction of escrow so we

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2 can really return and be still a strong organization
3 once we are able to return to East River Park.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Thank you so much for
5 that. I know that this is exactly the type of
6 location that we are fighting for to make sure that
7 we could accommodate all of these important
8 components of your program which I think we all know
9 is for the wellbeing of our city. The wellbeing of
10 our families.

11 So, I just want to ask, I mean, I know the Parks
12 Department is still here. I want to thank you for
13 listening to people. I guess I am asking Christine
14 this question but it really is also a question for
15 the Parks Department, which is, you don't think we
16 can find a suitable location that could accommodate
17 the components of Lower East Side Ecology Centers
18 programs and services in a park like Central Park or
19 Riverside Park or even Battery Park or any other
20 large parks in the area?

21 I guess Christine if you want to address whether
22 you think that's a good idea. I am happy to hear
23 your honest critic. I am just trying to figure out
24 you know, why we were relying so heavily on this one
25 site that suddenly is no longer an option.

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2 So, I don't know if that's something that [LOST
3 AUDIO 1:26:47-1:26:58].

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member, you are on
5 mute. Let's try to unmute Council Member.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: So, I want to go,
7 Christine, I wanted to ask and the Parks Department
8 is still here. Did you all hear that part?

9 SAM BIEDERMAN: Well, I didn't hear, I am afraid
10 that when you cut out, I don't think I heard the end
11 of the question but I think I got the jest.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Okay, it was like Battery
13 Park, Central Park, Riverside Park, these are large
14 parks that I think could potentially be a solution.
15 And I guess I am asking Christine, considering all
16 the components of the program, whether honestly
17 that's a good idea and whether that has been explored
18 by the Parks Department considering the size and the
19 fact that it could potentially accommodate the
20 programs, the services that Christine described?

21 CHRISTINE DATZ-ROMERO: Yeah, I would definitely
22 say we very much -

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.
24
25

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2 CHRISTINE DATZ-ROMERO: For the Parks Department
3 to work with us to identify space in a public park to
4 move to temporarily. We are all for that.

5 SAM BIEDERMAN: And so, Council Member, I
6 certainly appreciate the sentiment and you know, it
7 is not something that we have really talked about in
8 depth but I will say that our concern remains making
9 sure that you know, we are getting the most public
10 recreational space out of our parks, especially you
11 know, as we have all seen during this past ten months
12 keeping as much park land on line as possible is
13 really the name of the game here for the mental,
14 emotional and physical health of New Yorkers. And as
15 we work with your office too and other members of the
16 Council meet other commitments around ESCR
17 construction right. So, we have already done quite a
18 game of dominos just shifting things into place to
19 make sure that recreational amenities are available
20 as the Park in stages goes offline and online.

21 So, that's about all I can say on it. That its
22 finding another location within parks. I mean, our
23 focus right now, I think the City's focus right now
24 is finding another location that is not on park land
25 and that is really where the focus lays.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: I know what you are
3 saying. I heard the dominos thing but I think the
4 entire community has been reorganizing, making all
5 sorts of sacrifices to allow the flood protection to
6 come in.

7 So, I would say that if you can let Big Reuse
8 move back in, then you can certainly find another
9 spot for the Lower East Side Ecology Center and I
10 just want to thank the Chairs for their time.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member.
12 Our next speaker is Domingo Morales.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

14 DOMINGO MORALES: Hello, thank you for allowing
15 me to speak today. My name is Domingo Morales and I
16 am here today to talk about the partnership with
17 Parks and Department of Sanitation and Compost
18 Project.

19 I have been hearing during this call all day
20 today that the reason why these two sites are being
21 removed is because they have to do construction and
22 they need this space and they want to improve access
23 but the site that I represent, the Red Hook compost
24 site, which was the largest compost site in the
25 United States that didn't use fossil fuels has been

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1 shut down by Parks because they just don't want
2 composting on that site.

3
4 So, just getting that out of the way, a little
5 bit of background, my name is Domingo Morales, the
6 Founder of Compost Power, Alum of Green City Force
7 and a former Site Manager at the Red Hook compost
8 site.

9 My mission at Compost Power is to build
10 grassroots compost sites throughout New York City
11 providing all residents with access to waste equity,
12 sustainable education and job training. I am here to
13 advocate for the right of compost site, which is
14 already shutdown and also, more broadly for diversity
15 and inclusion in the citywide composting program.

16 I managed the Red Hook Compost site before it was
17 funded which is the largest compost site in the US
18 that didn't use any machines. We engaged with over
19 2,000 a year, trained hundreds of underserved youth,
20 empowering them to get life skills that would ensure
21 their success in any career they chose.

22 We build the infrastructure and culture around
23 inclusiveness, where children, which are Brown
24 people, people of color and all other New Yorkers
25 feel comfortable in our space. The compost site was

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1 human powered and it served over 100 community
2 spaces, gardens, farms all over New York City.

3
4 I took over the site two years ago after the site
5 founder, David Buckman passed. It was one of the
6 only city funded sites in New York City that provided
7 consistent training all year around for marginalized
8 residents and all other New Yorkers alike.

9 The program was halted because we don't have
10 permission from parks to process any new food scraps
11 on site. So, any funding that was meant for the Red
12 Hook compost site has been diverted elsewhere and not
13 used to collect or process organic waste.

14 This is a devastating regression and an enormous
15 waste after so much was invested in building the
16 infrastructure and culture in Red Hook over the last
17 12 years. When I started working at the Red Hook
18 compost site there weren't a lot of people like me
19 working in the compost field. Fast forward to 2020,
20 there were several people of color, just like myself
21 that were managing compost sites in New York City and
22 then the budget cuts happened.

23 I had a feeling that my job wouldn't be coming
24 back during financial hardships, people of color are
25 usually affected the most because it is easier for

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1 organizations to hire people within their own
2 circles, rather than making the extra effort to reach
3 out to people outside to increase diversity or invest
4 in communities that these organizations reside in.

5 The compost project went from having several
6 color people – several people of color running
7 compost sites in New York City to most of being gone.
8 Red Hood compost site on the other hand was unique
9 because staff, volunteers, visitors were diverse and
10 because staff, volunteers, visitors were diverse and
11 inclusive by design. Instead of being machine
12 operated or run by a homogeneous crew.

13 Our goal should be to build a sustainable and
14 equitable city. In order to do that, any city funded
15 composting efforts have to be more diverse and
16 inclusive to all residents of New York City. We need
17 to ensure that organizations that are receiving
18 funding commit to two things.

19 One, diversify their staff to represent the
20 communities they reside in. The only way to tackle
21 these issues and provide waste equity across New York
22 City is to have a diverse representation of teachers,
23 trainers, employees and volunteers. We need everyone
24 in on this.
25

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2 Two, provide education and outreach which will
3 help increase, support and participation from these
4 communities to the Parks Department. For the past
5 three decades, we have worked together to beautify
6 New York City Parks with the rich compost that we
7 made. We co-hosted volunteer events together. We
8 have cultivated shared spaces for the community.

9 Red Hook composting site was a safe green space
10 where people could walk through freely just like any
11 other New York City Park. We need more sites like
12 Red Hook compost site, not less.

13 I ask that the City Council encourage the Parks
14 Department to allow us to continue this work at Red
15 Hook and all other compost project sites. This is
16 the time to invest otherwise the \$2.8 million is only
17 serving the most privileged New York City residents
18 and keeping thousands of citizens in the dark. Thank
19 you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. We will
21 now move on to our next panelists. And from here on
22 out there are many people left to testify, so we will
23 be moving to a two minute timeframe. We will be hear
24 first from Marisa DeDominicis followed by Melissa
25 Iachan.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

MARISA DEDOMINICIS: Good day. Thank you Council Member Koo for calling this critical New York City Parks oversight hearing. My name is Marisa DeDominicis and I am the Co-Founder of the Earth Matter New York. We are a nonprofit dedicated to the art and science of composting and we are located on Governors Island.

I am here today to shout out Earth Matters support for our sister organizations. The Lower East Side Ecology Center and the Big Reuse to be able to continue their crucial work of composting, neighbor food scraps located on New York City park land and we would shout out that they need a permanent status and they need it now.

Elected officials, will you act on the voice of your constituents? The voice of the thousands of people who have chosen to change their behaviors by composting their food scraps. This is the one basic way that people can directly contribute to sustaining New York City. Will you listen to the cry of our Mother Earth who is in need of healing?

New York City Landfill and incinerate 99 percent of New York City organic resources in someone else's

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1
2 backyards. Composting is the answer to many of the
3 environmental problems every one in this room Mr.
4 Biederman is tasked to solve.

5 City Council Members, Mayor Bill and political
6 candidates who seek to lead our city, are you willing
7 to advocate for compost legislation on New York City
8 park land? Will you support expanding compost on
9 other New York City lands as well, which I haven't
10 heard. As a key way back from the environmental
11 degradation practices that have caused this sickness
12 of our public lands. Composting is a step in the
13 right direction for managing our resources and a way
14 to nurture and heal our land.

15 Thank you for this opportunity to speak. Humbly
16 yours, Mother Earths compost handmaiden. Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. We will
18 now hear from Melissa Iachan and she will be followed
19 by Lisa Bloodgood.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 MELISSA IACHAN: Good afternoon. My name is
22 Melissa Iachan and I am Senior Staff Attorney in the
23 Environmental Justice Program at New York Lawyers for
24 the Public Interest.

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Unlike many of the people we have heard today who were referring to some legal opinions, I am in fact a lawyer and that is what has brought me here today. I have extensive written testimony, which I have submitted and please, I urge the members of the Committee, as well as the members of the Administration to please read over my testimony as well as the testimony of my partner in legal crime, Eric Goldstein.

But I am just going to take this quick moment today to just say, one, I am so grateful that we have this hearing today. I have been working alongside the amazing efforts of Christine and Justin for months now trying to advocate to save these incredibly important compost processing sites. Community Gems and we have been very frustrated. We have been begging for some sort of oversight and accountability on the varied answers and excuses that we were getting from the varied agencies for months now.

So, I am so grateful to Chairman Koo, Chairman Reynoso, to all of the Council Members who worked together with us in our advocacy and it culminated in today's hearing. Why did we want this hearing? We

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1 had been getting the run around. Just during this
2 hearing, we have heard how many different excuses
3 given to how many different people as to why these
4 valuable community organizations are being evicted
5 off their sites and as we just heard, one has already
6 been shuttered by the Parks Department.
7

8 Among all of these excuses, we keep hearing,
9 well, I am not a lawyer but. There are legal issues,
10 which I will get to in a moment. The reason we
11 really wanted this hearing was to get some
12 accountability and some direct answers on the record
13 under oath, which this hearing presumably has done.

14 However, we still don't have any straight answers
15 and as many of the Council Members have said, this is
16 the most idiotic reason to be sitting here and -

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 MELISSA IACHAN: And take all this time. That
19 was two minutes? Okay, well, please read my written
20 testimony because I address all of the presumable
21 legal issues, not of which are applicable and there
22 is no actual valid legal reason why either of these
23 organizations need to be moved. And I am happy to
24 answer any questions about that if Council Members
25 should have them.

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2 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Alright, and I do have a
3 question. Melissa, can you clarify one point that is
4 being made, is that by law a composting site doesn't
5 serve a parks purpose so that it must - so, it in
6 turn speaks to like some alienation of land. And I
7 want to ask as well, I believe Parks Department also
8 has like golf courses that exists and I can't just
9 walk into a golf course. You know, so I just want to
10 ask, what is the difference? Is a golf course an
11 appropriate and a private I am guessing, a private
12 golf course a reasonable use of park space as opposed
13 to let's say a compost site?

14 So, I just wanted to ask those questions. Is it
15 alienation? Is it an unfit or by law a use that
16 can't be used and just a golf course, I don't know if
17 you have done any research on it. If you can answer
18 those two questions.

19 MELISSA IACHAN: Yeah, I would be happy to.
20 Thank you Chair Reynoso for the opportunity to
21 clarify. So, there is no actual law that says park
22 land can and cannot be used for certain specific
23 uses. There is a doctrine of law, known as the
24 Public Trust Doctrine and under the Public Trust
25 Doctrine, park land cannot be alienated for any

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2 purpose that is inconsistent with the public use and
3 enjoyment of that park land, okay.

4 So, that is the doctrine that has been applied
5 and the assumption that has been going on is that the
6 Parks Department is referring to one specific case,
7 which is the only case that has ever really been used
8 to evaluate this sort of dilemma here in New York
9 City. And that is the Spring Creek case from 2013 or
10 2014 and in that situation there was a 20-acre
11 industrial facility that had a contract to process
12 sludge from sewage treatment plants as well as food
13 waste and it was a huge nuisance.

14 It had high fences and again it took 20- acres of
15 parks land. And based on that case, which found that
16 that use of those 20- acres of parks land was an
17 alienation and a violation of the Public Trust
18 Doctrine and therefore could not continue to be used
19 in that way. Based on that one case, that is what
20 these non-lawyers keep saying, well, my lawyers are
21 telling me that this is you know, certain compost
22 uses are inconsistent.

23 Sure, a 20- acre sewage sludge processing
24 facility that is owned and run by a private for
25 profit company probably is inconsistent with park

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1 land. But a community based organization that uses
2 one acre or less, that provides education, that
3 provides rehabilitation to the land, beautification
4 that processes parks own waste is absolutely not
5 inconsistent. I can't think of many more consistent
6 uses for parks land.
7

8 So, that's the first piece. In terms of the golf
9 course example, because golf is recreational, I think
10 it is probably like the Trump Ice Rink in Central
11 Park for example. Or some of the private restaurants
12 that operate in parks. Sure, parks does give private
13 entities, licenses and concessions to operate private
14 commercial enterprises on parks land that it has the
15 discretion to deem are consistent with recreation and
16 enjoyment of parks land.

17 Are they open to all the public? Does it jive
18 with this claim of equity which Assistant
19 Commissioner Biederman was throwing around despite
20 the fact that this very hearing was being called
21 because of the complete offense to environmental
22 justice that their decision making is? No. Do I
23 think private golf courses and private restaurants
24 and private ice skating rinks? No.
25

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2 If it is the Parks Department that are operating
3 it and they are charging a nominal fee to be able to
4 pay their staffers to operate it, that's a separate
5 question. But in terms of the legality of it,
6 because it is a recreation use, I actually think the
7 judge would uphold that but I have 100 percent faith
8 and no doubts in saying that the use for composting
9 of the way that the Lower East Side Ecology Center
10 has done for three decades on parks lands with no
11 legal challenges, no complaints from communities is
12 an absolute consistent use of park land and there is
13 no concern under the alienation of park land or the
14 violation of public trust.

15 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Thank you for that
16 clarification Melissa.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. We will
18 now hear from Lisa Bloodgood and she will be followed
19 by David Hurd.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 LISA BLOODGOOD: Good morning and thank you for
22 the opportunity to share testimony in support of
23 community composting in New York City. My name is
24 Lisa Bloodgood and I am the Director of Advocacy and
25 Education with Newtown Creek Alliance.

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1
2 We are a community based nonprofit founded in
3 2002 whose mission is to restore, reveal and
4 revitalize Newtown Creek. One of the most polluted
5 waterways in the country in the geographic boarder
6 between North Brooklyn and Western Queens.

7 For nearly a century it was common practice for
8 both the city of New York and the industries that
9 operated in around the waterway to dump waste
10 products into the water, land and air polluting our
11 valuable natural resources. Our neighborhoods are
12 still struggling to overcome these disastrous
13 practices.

14 Sadly, our communities are well known to be over
15 rot by environmental injustices that have left human
16 and ecological health fighting to recover. We have
17 long been overburdened by the legacy of an
18 unregulated industrial past and the continuous
19 marginalization of these areas brought on by the
20 siting of much of the city's waste infrastructure.

21 For many decades now, the communities surrounding
22 Newtown Creek have been home to the largest number of
23 waste transfer stations in the City. The largest
24 waste water treatment facility. We have a [INAUDIBLE
25 1:36:32] brown fields, contaminated land and is home

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1 to one of the city's three federally designated super
2 fun sites. Many other states super fun sites ensure
3 the soil that our communities surrounding the creek
4 are built upon is often considered too polluted to
5 come into contact with.
6

7 And this brings me to compost and the value and
8 promise this resource holds for our community.
9 Collecting food scraps, processing them locally into
10 compost that can be used as a soil amendment or
11 cover, using the locally generated resources and
12 mitigation tool to assist our neighborhoods and
13 protecting themselves and their families against
14 coming into contact with some of the aforementioned
15 contamination.

16 It was well documented that the addition of
17 compost to contaminated soil, as well as the act of
18 composting itself, can assist in the reduction or
19 immobilization of soil based pollutants.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

21 LISA BLOODGOOD: Well, I will just skip to say,
22 that it is for these reasons that our organizations
23 have sought to bring small scale community composting
24 to sites that could best serve these communities and
25 I will just point out that there are two sites that

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1 are on the banks of the Newtown Creek. One is at
2 Greenpoint Transfer Station operated by DSNY and then
3 there is a state owned, sorry, state DOT managed
4 property under the Kosciuszko Bridge in Long Island
5 City.
6

7 Both of these locations would facilitate
8 community composting now and our organization is here
9 and available to work with whomever to make those
10 things a reality. And I will share the rest of my
11 written testimony with you all, so thank you very
12 much.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is David
14 Hurd followed by Tok Michelle Oyewole.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

16 DAVID HURD: Good afternoon Chairman Koo and
17 Chairman Reynoso and members of the Committees and
18 thank you for the opportunity to testify in support
19 of community composting today, and to encourage the
20 City Council to maintain processing capacity for the
21 Lower East Side Ecology Center and Big Reuse at the
22 East River Park in Queens Bridge locations.

23 My name is David Hurd and I am the Director of
24 Zero Waste programs at GrowNYC since 2006. GrowNYC
25 has played a pivotal role in helping improve the

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1 environmental quality of life in New York City for 50
2 years and we have been an active player in community
3 composting since 2011.
4

5 We have also been proud to have DSNY and the
6 Parks Department as our partners throughout this
7 time. Simply stated, community composting works.
8 City Council fought hard in June to restore funding
9 for community composting and we cannot thank them
10 enough. They fought for this because their
11 constituents rely on this vital service, so they can
12 do their part to help combat climate change.

13 This is more important now than ever with the
14 suspension of curbside composting. Now the system
15 that the City Council helped restore is in jeopardy
16 with the potential loss of these two sites. The
17 Lower East Side Ecology Center has been the
18 pioneering community composting for three decades.
19 It is there work that helped institutionalize
20 composting with the introduction of curbside organics
21 collection.

22 They represent the history of composting in New
23 York City. Together with Big Reuse, Earth Matter and
24 the other members of the New York City compost
25 project, they represent the cornerstones of community

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1 composting processing in New York City. But these
2 facilities are not just processing centers. They
3 also serve a vital role in educating New York City
4 residents on the importance of composting and its
5 compatibility in the public landscape.

6
7 GrowNYC was fortunate to be the recipient of some
8 of the restored funds and has been able to
9 reestablish 15 of its 76 former food scrap drop off
10 sites. We depend on this two composting sites to
11 deliver the material we collect from the public.

12 I stated earlier that community composting works.
13 Let me put that into perspective. In November of
14 2020, with just 18 percent of our sites open compared
15 to November of 2019, we still collected 43 percent of
16 the tonnage we did in November 2019 which was the
17 second highest month of diversion in the programs
18 nine year history.

19 For the three months the restore sites have been
20 open, we have already collected a quarter of a
21 million pounds of food scraps -

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 DAVID HURD: And over 31,000 participants. The
24 loss of the processing sites for the Lower East Side
25 Ecology Center and Big Reuse represents a potential

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2 loss of approximately two million pounds of capacity
3 a year. Given the way the program is performing, we
4 need that capacity to fulfill the goals of the City
5 Council restoration of funds.

6 While the loss of these sites may not result in a
7 screeching halt to our activities, we will add cost
8 to the program to deliver to alternative facilities
9 and may limit our ability to keep all these sites
10 operating.

11 In closing, I respectfully encourage the City
12 Council to work with the Mayor's Office, the Parks
13 Department and our elected officials to temporarily
14 extend the operating permits for these two
15 organizations that their current locations, as we all
16 work together to find permanent sites for them to
17 continue to play their pivotal role in community
18 composting. They are models for the rest of the
19 nation and represent a legacy of environmental
20 improvements for New York City.

21 The loss of these two sites would be nothing less
22 than tragic. Thank you for your time and allowing me
23 to speak today.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is Tok
25 Michelle Oyewole followed by Eric Goldstein.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

TOK MICHELLE OYEWOLE: Thank you to the Committee
Chairs and members and all who worked in earnest
toward increasing organics processing this year. My
name is Dr. Tok Michelle Oyewole and I am testifying
on behalf of the New York City Environmental Justice
Alliance.

For decades our organization has led efforts to
address the disproportionate burden of New York's
solid waste system on a handful of environmental
justice communities. Today, we are testifying as co-
organizers of the Save our Compost Coalition in
support of preserving the sites of Big Reuse and the
Lower East Side Ecology Center.

Local diversion of organic materials is important
for numerous reasons, including the fact that the
impacts of our solid waste system are already
greatest in a few low-income communities and
communities of color in New York City. Causing
higher rates of health consequences such as asthma
and various cancers. Closing these sites would
worsen health disparities within the City and outside
of it. Would result in higher emissions of air
pollutants that are exacerbating impacts of COVID-19

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1 and higher greenhouse gas emissions from
2 transportation, incineration and landfilling.
3

4 These sites are the backbone of the city's food
5 scrap drop off program which was just partially
6 restored to the amount of \$2.88 million as a result
7 of the advocacy of thousands this year. This small
8 one will be wasted if the Administration and New York
9 City Parks who manage this 14 percent of our city's
10 land do not provide the space to compost the
11 materials. Closing these two successful sites when
12 city composting is nearly at capacity does not make
13 sense while the city is professing its commitment to
14 waste equity, zero waste, climate justice and other
15 environmental goals.

16 There are other locations where Parks numerous
17 and complexly stated needs for a parking lot,
18 storage, construction etc., could take place if
19 actually needed. Some of the cuts to organics
20 diversion initiatives this year have been described
21 as austerity measures related to COVID but these
22 failures were apparent before the pandemic and are a
23 result of the Administration consistently choosing
24 not to commit funding and support for these vital
25 programs.

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1 Today, we are asking for more than talk about the
2 City's goals. The public and these organizations
3 have stated loudly and clearly that these lands
4 should be maintained for composting sites and Parks
5 evicting them because of various "needs for the
6 space" is an unacceptable diversion and abuse of
7 decision making power.
8

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 TOK MICHELLE OYEWOLE: This just really quickly,
11 the City Administration eliminated school composting,
12 partial residential organics. Its lag behind city's
13 like Seattle and implementing universal organic
14 collection hasn't provided sufficient space. Has
15 supported needless pollution with heavy duty truck
16 driving and ultimately this fight we are in today is
17 a distraction from broader waste equity goals the
18 city needs to accomplish.

19 So, lastly, the Lower East Side Ecology Center
20 site should be preserved and incorporated into the
21 East Side Coastal Resiliency Project. Move to
22 temporary space that they agree to in the interim.
23 Big Reuse should be allowed to continue composting.

24 Today, we learned about a possible six month
25 license extension which is not long enough and if

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1 they are to be forced out of a site where they have
2 support and existing infrastructure to complete their
3 work, this extension should last at least until the
4 City has worked with them to find another site. But
5 the preference is that they are allowed to stay.
6 This is the exact type of climate and environmental
7 justice solution we should be supporting and the idea
8 that we would close them now is frankly ridiculous.

9
10 Thank you for your time.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Eric
12 Goldstein followed by Carina Storrs.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

14 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Good afternoon, I am Eric
15 Goldstein, Senior Attorney at the Natural Resources
16 Defense Council. Thanks to Council Member Reynoso,
17 Van Bramer and Rivera for their sensible and forceful
18 advocacy on behalf of these community composting
19 organizations.

20 I have been fortunate enough to work under New
21 York City environmental issues for 40 years and I can
22 say that this Parks Department decision with respect
23 to these two nonprofit community based organizations
24 is among the most illogical and unreasonable city
25 agency actions in memory.

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2 It is inconsistent with the City Council's
3 recently enacted landmark climate legislation and the
4 Mayor's 2015 OneNYC sustainability plan, which set
5 ambitious targets for reducing the city's global
6 warming emissions,

7 It is inconsistent with Mayor's often stated
8 sustainability goal of sending zero waste to
9 landfills by 2030. And it is inconsistent with the
10 Parks Department's very own 2011 sustainability plan,
11 which committed the Department to "increase the
12 efficiency of its leaf composting program" and
13 "increase capacity for small-scale composting."

14 What the Parks Department is really saying is
15 that, for Big Reuse, the Parks just has other
16 priorities including parking and storage. And for
17 the Lower East Side Ecology Center, we just doesn't
18 want to commit to welcome you back after the
19 resiliency work is completed at East River Park.

20 The underlying message from Parks is that
21 community composting is not compatible with Park use
22 and should not be a Department priority. That
23 conclusion is wrong. Community composting brings
24 people into parks. Community composting teaches
25 people about nature including kids. Community

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2 composting can help the Parks Department more
3 comprehensively address their own yard and food waste
4 that they produce across the system.

5 For months, the Parks Department officials have
6 pointed to an eight-year old lower court ruling to
7 use as a legal defense as to why they had to evict
8 these two organizations from their parks.

9 But the differences between the facts in the
10 Spring Creek case and the current situation is the
11 difference between day and night.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

13 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: The Spring Creek operation was
14 more than 20 times larger than either the Lower East
15 Side Ecology Center or Big Reuse, both of which are
16 one acre or less. And the court in the Spring Creek
17 case found that the operation there was an unsightly
18 industrial operation and that generated noise and
19 odors in the surrounding community.

20 In contrast, the size, scope and operation of
21 Spring Creek created a nuisance and closed off the
22 park from its community. And the facts here are
23 precisely the opposite. These two neighborhood-sized
24 operations, Lower East Side Ecology and Big Reuse are
25

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1 consistent with park purposes and indeed enhance
2 public use and enjoyment of parkland.
3

4 Finally, the Parks Department's last-minute offer
5 for a six month extension or to provide you know,
6 good faith negotiations is not the answer. We don't
7 need a temporary paper overing of this crisis. What
8 we need is for the city and the Mayor to provide iron
9 clad assurances that these two sites will remain
10 where they belong until suitable replacement sites
11 are found in their neighborhoods. And a continuing
12 commitment to expand community composting in City
13 Parks. People around the city who love our parks and
14 who want the Parks Department to help address our
15 climate crisis and to enhance community composting
16 are not going to rest until they complete a permanent
17 resolution of this crisis is achieved. Thank you for
18 listening.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. The next is
20 Carina Storrs followed by Carlos Castell Croke.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

22 CARINA STORRS: Hi, my name is Carina Storrs,
23 thanks for giving me the opportunity to speak. I am
24 actually not here representing an organization. I am
25 a private citizen. I am a freelance science

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2 journalist and writer but this is not related to a
3 story. I am a citizen and I live on the upper West
4 Side and that's how I got involved. I am pretty far
5 from the Lower East Side Ecology Center but my
6 building and my block have come to really appreciate
7 the work that the center does because they operate a
8 compost pickup site on the upper West Side.

9 Our building, as I wrote when I signed the
10 petition, I really got hooked on composting when we
11 got compost curbside pickup. Department of
12 Sanitation DSNY started the program which of course
13 got suspended during the pandemic. But most of the
14 building really liked composting and I personally and
15 others got informed. We educated ourselves about the
16 benefit of composting both of course globally and for
17 the local environment and economically for New York
18 City.

19 So, we didn't want to just go back to tossing our
20 scraps. It just seemed going backwards, so we have
21 been bringing our compost to the Upper West Side
22 pickup site every week and it has kind of created a
23 community up here on West 108th Street. People are
24 coming by more and more each week and learning about
25 the Lower East Side Ecology Center and learning about

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1 the value of composting, so it is kind of nice that
2 we are kind of this like this oh shoot up here. I
3 feel like our community is growing and hopefully it
4 saves this site, it gets protected and I appreciate
5 the work everyone here has been doing.

6 Thank you for that and I hope I can visit the
7 Ecology Center when the pandemic is over. Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is Carlos
9 Castell Croke followed by Emily Bachman.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

11 CARLOS CASTELL CROKE: Good afternoon, my name is
12 Carlos Castell Croke and I am the Associate for New
13 York City Programs at the New York League of
14 Conservation Voters.

15 NYLCV represents over 30,000 members in New York
16 City and we are committed to advancing a
17 sustainability agenda that will make our people, our
18 neighborhoods and our economy healthier and more
19 resilient. I would like to thank Chairs Koo and
20 Reynoso and Council Members River and Van Bramer for
21 holding this important hearing and for the
22 opportunity to testify today.

23 The unprecedented recession caused by the COVID-
24 19 pandemic has forced drastic cuts to many
25

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1 environmental initiatives and city agencies that are
2 essential to effectively combating climate change,
3 including the Parks and Sanitation Departments. We
4 are staunch advocates for the mission of these
5 agencies, as they provide critical environmental
6 services that keep New Yorkers and the environment
7 healthy. The organic waste recycling program faced
8 particularly devastating cuts in the Fiscal Year 2021
9 budget, with curbside collection suspended entirely
10 and many drop-off sites eliminated.

12 These cuts mean that New York City has fallen
13 even further behind our peer cities in sustainably
14 handling our solid waste. Reducing waste is a
15 crucial aspect of combating climate change that
16 cannot wait for opportunity or convenience. I am
17 here today to voice NYLCV's support for the community
18 compost sites that we all care so much about at this
19 hearing.

20 These sites provide a critical service to New
21 York City residents at some of the remaining organic
22 waste drop off sites. We must find a permanent
23 solution for these sites. We urge the Mayor to
24 direct agencies to work with the Lower East Side
25 Ecology Center, Big Reuse and other composting

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1
2 organizations and climate and community advocates to
3 find permanent sites that effectively suit the needs
4 of these projects.

5 The city must be a partner in the fight to solve
6 climate change. I implore the Council to help us
7 protect composting in our city so that we can uphold
8 our commitments to the environment and waste
9 reduction. Thank you for the opportunity to testify
10 today.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. Next up
12 is Emily Bachman followed by Clare Mifflin.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

14 EMILY BACHMAN: Thank you for this opportunity to
15 testify in support of community composting in Parks.
16 My name is Emily Bachman and I am the Compost Program
17 Manager at GrowNYC. Where we have been running food
18 scrap drop off sites like the one behind me since
19 2011. Our work is made possible through partnerships
20 with local processing sites like Lower East Side
21 Ecology Center and Big Reuse, which make compost by
22 mixing the food scraps we collect with leaf and yard
23 waste from the Parks Department and return the
24 finished compost back to parks.

25

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1
2 These successful, long standing public private
3 and interagency partnerships benefit all parties at a
4 time when budgets are tight and collaboration is key.
5 While the majority of funding for composting in New
6 York City was cut from this year's budget, the City
7 Council was able to save a small amount for community
8 composting.

9 At GrowNYC we have been able to reopen 15 of the
10 city's largest food scrap drop off sites and on
11 average collections at those sites are 25 percent
12 higher today than they were before COVID. In
13 November, we diverted 149,000 pounds of food scraps
14 from industrial landfills to community composting.
15 The emissions equivalent of conserving 7,000 gallons
16 of gasoline. 43 percent of the food scraps we
17 collected in November, were composted at the Big
18 Reuse Queens Bridge composting site alone.

19 We can't collect food scraps unless we have a
20 place to bring them and the closer the drop off site
21 is to the processing site, the more efficient we are
22 and the more we can do. What's at stake right now
23 with the potential loss of two major composting sites
24 is over half of our current processing capacity.
25 Meanwhile participation at our food scrap drop off

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1 sites continues to grow by 20 percent in the South
2 Bronx, 30 percent in Bed Stuy, 50 percent in the
3 Upper West Side, 70 percent in Fort Greene, and 155
4 percent in Carroll Gardens. This growth means that
5 we need more processing capacity, not less.
6

7 We are so thankful to the City Council, the
8 Mayor, the Parks Department, and the Department of
9 Sanitation. With your support, the nation's largest
10 network of food scrap drop-off sites.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

12 EMILY BACHMAN: We are eager to continue
13 expanding this work but we cannot do so without our
14 compost processing partners and we hope that
15 immediate, long-term homes for the Lower East Side
16 Ecology Center and Big Reuse composting facilities
17 can be secured. Thank you so much.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is Clare
19 Mifflin followed by Frank Franciosi.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 CLARE MIFFLIN: Hi, I am Clare Mifflin from the
22 Center of Zero Waste Design. I led the development
23 of the Zero Waste Design guidelines which show how
24 design of the city is crucial to achieving zero
25 waste. This was a collaborative process and many

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1 city agencies were involved but unfortunately not
2 Parks. Yet Parks is the most important agency for
3 making sure composting is designed into the city's
4 open realm.
5

6 Other Parks, not city owned like Governors
7 Island, Battery Park City, Hudson River Park and
8 Dominick Park know that composting food waste and
9 yard waste makes sense and they have designed
10 facilities into their parks.

11 Previously, I was project architect for Bushwick
12 Park facility, which houses Parks North Brooklyn
13 maintenance operations. So, I understand space
14 constraints and how these projects work. Their parks
15 vehicles are in a garage with a park sloping up over
16 the top. Good design solves problems.

17 Before Parks Department can say they need the Big
18 Reuse site, they need to do some sort of conceptual
19 plan laying out their space requirements. Where is
20 that plan? I also know the architects of East River
21 Park were given a design brief by Parks which either
22 included a compost yard or saying that the City is
23 committed to negotiating return to the park doesn't
24 answer the question. Is there a compost yard in the
25 new design or not?

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1
2 If it isn't their return will waste a lot of
3 money in retrofitting a brand new park to accommodate
4 it. Collecting and composting of New York City's
5 organic waste has to be designed into the open realm.
6 That will make it affordable and ensure the benefits
7 contribute to a green and just recovery for the city.
8 Thank you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is Frank
10 Franciosi followed by Elizabeth Aceituno.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

12 FRANK FRANCIOSI: Thank you for the opportunity
13 to speak. My name is Frank Franciosi, I am the
14 Executive Director of the United States Composting
15 Council.

16 U.S. Composting Council was established in 1990,
17 we are a 501C6 Trade organization. I echo the
18 comments and recommendations of Council Member Rivera
19 and also Bridget Anderson of DSNY. I am not going to
20 go into all of the benefits of compost. I think we
21 all know that it's tremendous impact both from an
22 environmental standpoint but also from a community
23 standpoint and we are changing and paradigm here. We
24 are making a paradigm shift and it is really
25 important that we maintain community composting and

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1
2 composting really at all levels from the micro-
3 haulers to the community composters to the large
4 industrial compost sites. That's a big impact. It
5 is making New York City more resilient and our Parks
6 should be part of that. The Parks of New York City
7 are important. Let's look at green infrastructure
8 and resiliency, storm water management, having the
9 ability for infiltration. Compost can be used on
10 those parks to increase infiltration and take care of
11 that storm water event that you have.

12 So, I also wanted to take this time to let
13 everyone know that this year Big Reuse has been
14 awarded the small compost manufactory year award from
15 the U.S. Composting Council for their efforts. And I
16 also want to also mention that in the past, Jodie
17 Colon has won - was awarded the H. Clark Gregory
18 Award for grassroots work by the U.S. Composting
19 Council.

20 So, I hope that you can all come to an agreement
21 that composting is important for the City. The whole
22 world is watching, the U.S. is watching. What you do
23 in New York City is important to us on a national
24 level.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

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1
2 FRANK FRANCIOSI: So, if we can do that and
3 continue to increase the funding because your return
4 on investment will be worth it in the end. Thank
5 you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. Next up
7 is Elizabeth Aceituno followed by Brys Peralta-Grant.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

9 ELIZABETH ACEITUNO: Thank you. My name is
10 Elizabeth Aceituno, I am a resident of Long Island
11 City Queens and I thank you very much for the
12 opportunity that's given to members of the community
13 to be heard on this important matter.

14 As a New Yorker and in fact as a human being, I
15 am acutely aware of the time of crisis we are all
16 facing and I am also aware that there is very little
17 individuals like me can do without a systemic change.

18 Composting organic waste is one of those few
19 things that we can all do and it actually helps
20 reducing greenhouse gas emissions. With good
21 infrastructure, composting in New York has been
22 scaled and can have an even bigger impact. Faced
23 with the need to make budget cuts due to the economic
24 crisis brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, New York
25 City greatly reduced funding for composting

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1 operations are due this year. All the work that has
2 been done in educating and convincing New Yorkers
3 that their individual count will soon be undone as
4 people go back to old convenient habit. But many New
5 Yorkers have also refused to stop composting and have
6 relied on nonprofits and a number of smaller
7 neighborhood community gardens have stepped up to the
8 plate.
9

10 Now, as we have heard one of these nonprofit
11 organizations Big Reuse is facing evictions from its
12 site under the Queens Borough Bridge, which to me,
13 seems like a final blow to the possibility of
14 [INAUDIBLE 1:50:00] continue to do the right thing
15 and contribute to the fight against climate change.

16 In addition, these organizations provide jobs
17 which are sorely needed at this time. I sincerely
18 hope that through this hearing our public officials,
19 especially the New York City Parks Commissioner will
20 agree that maintaining the lifeline of an activity
21 that is helping fight climate change, create jobs and
22 keep our communities together is more important than
23 finding a convenient parking spot for some trucks.

24 Thank you.

25

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1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Brys
3 Peralta-Grant followed by Brittany Cattaruzza.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

5 BRY S PERALTA-GRANT: Good afternoon. My name is
6 Brys Peralta-Grant and I am a Biker Composter at BK
7 ROT and also a New York City high school student. I
8 collect food scraps across the Bed Stuy area by bike
9 and compost it at one of our partner gardens as part
10 of BK ROT. And today, I am testifying on our behalf
11 in support of our New York City compost ecosystem and
12 urge Parks to continue supporting composting in New
13 York City.

14 Local large scale composting sites on parks land
15 like Big Reuse and the Lower East Side Ecology Center
16 are critical in our New York City composting
17 ecosystem. They support local community gardens
18 compost projects and organizations like ours that get
19 overwhelmed by our neighbors who seek composting
20 options yet face a shortage of city support.

21 In 2020, our public food scrap drop off rates
22 doubled and if it weren't for Big Reuse processing,
23 some of our scraps at their Queens Bridge site, we
24 would not have been able to honor all of our drop off
25 hours or meet our neighbors composting demands.

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1
2 Composting and Parks go hand and hand and what
3 better way to honor Parks mission than by integrating
4 resiliency and sustainability through housing
5 composting sites that compost parks organic waste and
6 create recreational opportunities for New Yorkers.

7 From firsthand experience, I know composting can
8 be used as a recreational activity as it creates
9 meaningful jobs as well as healthy outdoor and land
10 connecting opportunities for volunteers. As one of
11 the largest land stewards in New York City, Parks
12 must listen to the growing public interest and calls
13 for climate action and support and expand local
14 composting operations.

15 We urge the Parks Department to consider all New
16 Yorkers and the global crisis that we are in and hope
17 they will join us in finding ways to continue to
18 support and expand the resilience of our New York
19 City composting ecosystem including renewing Big
20 Reuse's license and including the Lower East Side
21 Ecology Center's composting site in the new site
22 plan. Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Brittany
24 Cattaruzza followed by Charlie Reynoso.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

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1
2 BRITTANY CATTARUZZA: Hi, my name is Brittany
3 Cattaruzza and I am a resident of Astoria Queens. I
4 volunteer weekly with Astoria Pug.

5 I began the weekly tour of bringing my food
6 scraps to a local drop off point about four years ago
7 and haven't looked back. Ironically, that chore
8 quickly became a high point of my week and an
9 important staple in my ever evolving habits to lead a
10 more sustainable life for myself, our community and
11 the planet as a whole.

12 I spent three and a half of those years passably
13 dumping my food scraps at various drop off points
14 around the City, not truly appreciating the efforts
15 and immense importance of facilities like Big Reuse
16 and the Lower East Side Ecology Center.

17 Facilities that have worked hard to pick up this
18 slack as the City continues to roll back their
19 composting efforts effectively ignoring the promises
20 leaders like you have made to send zero waste to
21 landfill by 2030.

22 When the pandemic hit and our regular food scrap
23 drop off point closed, my husband and I squirreled
24 away as many food scraps as we could in our small
25 apartment. In August, we found out about Astoria Pug

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1 and all that they were doing to support
2 sustainability efforts in our community. I was so
3 impressed with just how many people were involved and
4 how efficiently they worked to help their neighbors
5 divert food waste from landfill.
6

7 In the five months since I began volunteering
8 with them, they have grown from operating out of a U-
9 Haul and before that a small red sedan to collecting
10 over 3,000 food scraps every week, all of which are
11 processed at Big Reuse. An incredibly efficient
12 facility that I was lucky enough to visit. At that
13 time the narrative Parks was pushing was that they
14 needed the space as a parking lot but walking home, I
15 passed multiple parks designated lots that were half
16 full and severely underutilized.

17 Composting locally is too important to give up
18 over poor planning and inefficient vehicle
19 organization. If composting locally wasn't important
20 to New Yorkers, you wouldn't see micro-haulers in
21 small neighborhoods collecting three to four
22 thousands pounds of food scraps a week.

23 If composting wasn't important, you wouldn't see
24 families coming out with their young children rain or
25 shine during a pandemic just to divert their food

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1
2 scraps. If composting wasn't important, you wouldn't
3 see other big cities like San Francisco, Portland
4 Oregon, Boulder Colorado and Seattle prioritizing
5 composting in their waste infrastructure.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

7 BRITTANY CATTARUZZA: If composting wasn't
8 important, Parks themselves wouldn't need to utilize
9 it to dump a massive amount of yard waste.

10 I moved to New York City ten years ago, expecting
11 it to be a leader but if we allow these composting
12 facilities to fall by the wayside, we will quickly
13 fall behind and not only will it be a disappointment
14 to the country but more importantly the residents of
15 this beautiful city.

16 Please City Council, save our compost. Thank
17 you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you and next up is
19 Charlie Reynoso followed Jane Selden.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 CHARLIE REYNOSO: Good afternoon Chairman Reynoso,
22 Committee on Sanitation members, Chairman Koo and
23 Committee on Parks and Recreation members.

24 My name is Charlie Reynoso, I am here today on
25 behalf of the New York Restoration Project. Thank

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1 you for your leadership in advancing New York City
2 and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

3
4 NYRP operates 52 community gardens and stewards
5 80-acres of city park land throughout the five
6 boroughs. In this extraordinary time since COVID-19
7 took hold, looming emergencies like climate
8 mitigation and bolstering community resilience have
9 become more critical. For years, NYRP like so many
10 of our partners, has been composting gardens and
11 offering composting sites to neighbors. We know the
12 greatest burden of our waste system is shouldered by
13 our lower income and Black and Brown communities.

14 Gardeners and composters citywide are helping to
15 alleviate some of the concentrated burden by
16 collecting millions of pounds of organic waste each
17 year. It is unfortunate that the City composting
18 services were cut when New Yorkers are most concerned
19 with the strength and adaptability of our community.

20 We applaud the City Council's efforts to advocate
21 for a future of New York City that includes
22 composting. It is crucial that we restore the levels
23 of service which existed pre-pandemic and work to
24 expand and connect more New Yorkers to the programs –
25 the programs excuse me, that has capacity to address

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1
2 some of our dirtiest environmental and social equity
3 issues. While DSNY slowly reintroduces sites, we
4 should be encouraging community based programs, small
5 ones like community gardens and our more prolific
6 partners keeping millions of pounds of trash from our
7 polluting waste system. We all know investment in
8 community composting mitigates a process that
9 produces unnecessary levels of greenhouse gas
10 emissions and further produces a product that helps
11 carbon and enrich our local soil.

12 Closer to home, it just makes sense to protect
13 and expand local organic processing that improves the
14 quality of life in neighborhoods that host a high
15 concentration of transfer facilities, especially now
16 in the wake of COVID-19.

17 Thank you Chairman Reynoso, Chairman Koo and
18 members -

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

20 CHARLIE REYNOSO: Of City Council who have
21 supported our community composting partners in their
22 urgent work and fighting to maintain and expand
23 citywide services. Thanks.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is Jane
25 Selden followed by Rosamond Gianutsos.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Jane Selden, are you there?
It appears that you may not be. Okay, we will move
onto -

JANE SELDEN: I am here, I am sorry, I am here.
I was just looking. Should I start again or?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, if Sergeant - just wait
for the Sergeant to give you the queue please and
then you can start. Thank you.

JANE SELDEN: Thank you.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

JANE SELDEN: My name is Jane Selden and I am
speaking on behalf of 350 NYC. A grassroots climate
activist group that advocates for a radical reduction
of greenhouse gas emissions and a just transition to
a renewable economy.

I am here today to express 350 NYC's opposition
to the Parks Departments plan to evict Big Reuse and
the Lower East Side Ecology Center from City park
land.

Organics recycling plays a vital role in
combating the climate crisis. One third of the
City's waste stream is composed of organic material.
If composted, it has the environmental benefit of

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1 sequestrant carbon. If not, most will end up in
2 landfill where it produces methane, a greenhouse gas
3 30 times more potent than CO₂. Since curbside
4 recycling was suspended in May, Big Reuse and LES
5 Ecology Center has assumed an even greater role. Not
6 only in diverting waste from landfill but also from
7 waste transfer stations concentrated in low income
8 communities of color in South East Queens, North
9 Brooklyn and the South Bronx.

11 Shutting down these two composting sites, it will
12 mean even more waste will be trucked through these
13 communities that already suffer from high aspirates
14 and higher death rates from COVID.

15 The Parks Commissioners decision is especially
16 baffling because Big Reuse and LES Ecology Center
17 have enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with
18 the Parks Department for many years.

19 In exchange for using small parcels of land,
20 these organizations combine leaves and yard waste
21 from the parks with food scraps to create soil
22 enriching compost which is then given to the parks
23 for free.

24 At Tuesday's Press Conference Council Member
25 Constantinides rightly called community composters,

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1 "the unsung hero's of the City Council's
2 sustainability environmental justice agenda."

3
4 We should be thanking them not fording them and
5 instead of trying to shut down their facilities, the
6 Mayor and the Parks Department should be advocating
7 for replicating their success by expanding small
8 scale community composting sites to other park land.

9 Thank you for giving me this opportunity to
10 speak.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. Next is
12 Rosamond Gianutsos followed by Elizabeth Royzman.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

14 ROSAMOND GIANUTSOS: Hello, are you hearing me
15 now or am I muted, right?

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes, we can hear you.

17 ROSAMOND GIANUTSOS: Okay, thank you very much.
18 I won't repeat all of the compelling arguments that
19 have been presented here except to endorse the idea
20 that the composting is a totally legitimate activity
21 to occur on New York City park land and it is
22 frustrating to see all of the legalities that stand
23 in the way of people who need to use the park land
24 and should use the park land. Of course I very much

25

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1 support Big Reuse and the Lower East Side Ecology
2 Center and their efforts.
3

4 I am a resident of Sunnyside Queens. We have a
5 group called the Woodside Sunnyside Composters who
6 have been attempting to use a vacant park land at
7 50th Street and 39th Avenue here in Queens. This land
8 just had - they just had a scoping here and they told
9 us it will be basically two years for any you know;
10 shovels go down and any actual work is done in this
11 park.

12 Meanwhile, it stands fenced off and it is - the
13 composters could very much use this land and they
14 want to and attempted to create a place regarding
15 there. We have lines going around the block.

16 [INAUDIBLE 1:56:59 -1:57:01] restaurants and the open
17 street program [INAUDIBLE 1:57:02-

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is
20 Elizabeth Royzman followed by Brendan Hannan.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

22 ELIZABETH ROYZMAN: Hello, my name is Elizabeth
23 Royzman and I am Secretary of the Brooklyn Solid
24 Waste Advisory Board.
25

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1
2 This comment is presented on behalf of the
3 Brooklyn and Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Boards
4 and the Queens Solid Waste Advisory Board Organizing
5 Committee. We are grateful for the opportunity to
6 present testimony for this oversight hearing.

7 The SWABS commend the City for the partial
8 restoration of funding for community composting in
9 FY21 that occurred in the months since the initial
10 budget cuts in the spring. This has enabled the
11 reopening of food waste drop off sites and the
12 continuation of the New York City Compost Project.
13 Providing a vital avenue for New York residents to
14 divert their organic waste from landfill and
15 incineration.

16 A failure to renew the leases of Big Reuse and
17 Lower East Side Ecology Center, would represent a
18 major setback in this process. Collectively, the two
19 organizations divert approximately 2.5 million pounds
20 of organic waste from landfill and incineration
21 annually. Given the absence of curbside collection,
22 community composting is the only avenue for citizens
23 to recycle their food and yard scraps. Hence, it
24 plays an even more important role than it did prior
25 to COVID-19.

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1 The pandemic has been notable for hitting
2
3 disadvantages communities the hardest. Reducing the
4 local processing capacity for organic waste will
5 exacerbate existing environmental injustices. More
6 organic waste will be sent to landfill and
7 incineration via truck corridors and two facilities
8 that predominantly impact low-income neighborhoods
9 and communities of color.

10 In addition to the fact that composting has been
11 shown to generate significantly more jobs than
12 disposal of waste to the general waste stream, the
13 two organizations strong track record of providing
14 volunteering and training opportunities, suspension
15 of their operations will be a significant step
16 backward.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 ELIZABETH ROYZMAN: These two organizations
19 shared the Parks Department vision of creating and
20 sustaining thriving Parks. They process leaves for
21 City Parks, give finished compost back and educate
22 New Yorkers about ecology and how they can play a
23 role in helping the environment.

24 The SWABS, therefore, urge the Parks Department
25 to work with Big Reuse, Lower East Side Ecology

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1
2 Center and Department of Sanitation to find a
3 solution that will enable them to continue their fine
4 work serving New York City. Thank you for your
5 consideration.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is
7 Brendon Hannon followed by Gil.

8 SEREANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

9 BRENDON HANNON: Thank you to the Council for
10 providing this avenue for this testimony. I am a
11 Member of Smiling Hogshead Ranch at Community Garden
12 in Eastern Queens, excuse me Western Queens.

13 Today, our members are processing hundreds of
14 pounds of food scraps a week. What we saw was that
15 when the City shutdown the organics collection during
16 the COVID crisis, the demand for our services of
17 community composting skyrocketed. But before we were
18 processing approximately 200 pounds a week. We are
19 now seeing that volume every two to three days.

20 Limiting organics collection and the resources to
21 take care of those organics does not stop the freight
22 train that is the city's organics production. It
23 simply redirects it and the methane emissions and the
24 tip fees that the City is charged remain.

25

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1
2 And we have talked about that we are in a climate
3 emergency and that diverting food scraps from the
4 landfills avoids methane and we know well the
5 benefits that are provided from composts.

6 The City should be striving towards 100 percent
7 collection of all its organics and there are adequate
8 facilities through the City using the DEP
9 infrastructure but that is a long term plan and in
10 the short term, we need these small scale ability to
11 process organics locally. We do not want trucks
12 moving back and forth throughout our neighborhoods or
13 moving organics and the ability to have these sites
14 that exist is critical to the City's composting
15 efforts.

16 One lesson that I would close with is that we are
17 a community garden and what we know is that you do
18 not throw out good equipment. You do not get rid of
19 the infrastructure you have that you use. Since
20 COVID started, we accepted an aerated static pile
21 from the Queens Botanical Garden that we have been
22 using to increase our own capacity. Getting rid of
23 these facilities that the City relies on is
24 mismanagement and we ask that the City not displace
25 existing sites but expand new composting facilities.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is Gil followed by Danika Lam.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

GIL: Hi, my name is Gil Lopez, I live, work and play in Long Island City Queens, which is the traditional territory of the [INAUDIBLE 2:00:02] peoples. I call upon the spirit of these people and the land defenders including my own ancestors. Be with me now.

It is not okay that our community has spent our holiday season stressed out and fighting for our basic right to do the responsible thing with our organics. I have been a community composter in Western Queens for over a decade now and I have watched my friends build the Western Queens Compost Initiative, which turned into big compost, which was then incorporated into Department of Sanitations New York City Compost Project hosted by Big Reuse.

We thought that the City taking stewardship of our project would ensure its inclusion in our community for the long term. But here we are defending the presence in its place. Master composters know the work that we do is important yet

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1
2 over the years the City has used our work as a
3 political football to greenwash its various policies
4 and goals. While not walking or talking shameful
5 unto oneself. In this case, it is a crime against
6 humanity. After witnessing so many actions that work
7 directly against your words, I am now convinced that
8 a systematic dismantling of our compost
9 infrastructure is taking place. Creating more space
10 inside of one of the largest parks in Long Island
11 City is not a mandate and should not be priority
12 right now.

13 What are you thinking? What is happening here is
14 called eco-gentrification. This is when improved
15 green spaces like the recent multimillion dollar
16 renovation of the Queens Bridge fieldhouse or the
17 proposed EQX is shoved down the throats of the
18 community in order to redevelop and bring others into
19 the neighborhood.

20 Intentionally withholding information then
21 releasing a press release after advocates have
22 already prepared testimony is a common tactic of
23 developers and it is shameful that Parks is now
24 deploying these techniques against its own
25 constituents. What is that all about? This tactic

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1
2 is clearly meant to confuse, demoralize and gaslight
3 us. Parks attempt to weaponize open space against
4 community composting is a clear attempt to divide us
5 but my community will not be divided. We will stand
6 against your insidious plan.

7 We may even expose whatever nefarious ulterior
8 motives you may have in the meantime.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 GIL LOPEZ: So, in closing, I just want to say
11 the answer is simple, mandate compost now. Mandate
12 compost for Parks. Do not displace community
13 organizations from neighborhoods we are rooted in.
14 If you can afford to move us, you can afford to start
15 a new composting site. I am happy to help teach
16 those folks and that new community how to reach those
17 goals. If Parks cannot steward their land
18 responsibly then they need to have their lands taken
19 away from them. These lands need to be put in the
20 hands of an agency that will do the good work that
21 will ensure the future of our generations. I see you
22 Silver, I see you Biederman and I see you Docket.
23 Mayor de Blasio, this will not go unanswered.

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1
2 Me and my gorilla team of gardeners in Western
3 Queens will not let this go unchecked. You have my
4 rage.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next we have
6 Danika Lam followed by Clay Burch.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

8 DANIKA LAM: Thanks Gil, I think we are all very
9 thankful for your rage. Good afternoon everyone, my
10 name is Danika Lam and I am a Founding Member of Haki
11 Compost Collective on Roosevelt Island. I am also a
12 former compost coordinator with GrowNYC for whom I
13 manage the Roosevelt Island food scrap drop off site
14 until all sites were shut down at the end of March.

15 In the devastation of the coronavirus pandemic
16 and the City's earlier decision to slash the budget
17 for City funded compost programs, Haki Compost
18 Collective was born of a group of humble Roosevelt
19 Island residents determined to bring back what we
20 knew to be an essential service to our community.

21 It is only thanks to our partnership with Big
22 Reuse that we have been able since September to
23 resume food scrap collection on Roosevelt Island at
24 scale. Though now our operations are entirely
25 different. Our site is wholly volunteer run and

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1
2 recognizing the unifying potential of composting is
3 now paired with community building programming. At
4 our renewed food scrap drop off site, we have not
5 only diverted more than 10,000 pounds of food scraps
6 in just the past two months but also registered new
7 voters leading up to this years pivotal presidential
8 election. And hosted an indigenous peoples day
9 community reflection to assess our responsibility to
10 the people for whom this land was stolen.

11 That is the power of community composting and
12 this is exactly the kind of program a City government
13 should build up rather than tear down. What kind of
14 government is this? To whom are you accountable if
15 you cannot support programs by and for your
16 constituents? The city now has a choice. It can
17 partner with the community and make good on its
18 commitments to send zero waste to landfill by 2030
19 and reduce greenhouse gas emission by 80 percent by
20 2050. Or it can follow in the footsteps of the
21 current administration repealing environmental
22 protection laws and disgracefully forcing a pipeline
23 through Native land.

24

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1
2 I think I need not specify upon which side of the
3 line evicting community composting sites would fall.

4 Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sorry, next is Clay Burch
6 followed by Gregory Todd.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

8 CLAY BURCH: Hi, thank you for having me. I am
9 grateful for the opportunity to share my perspective.
10 My name is Clay Burch, I live in East Williamsburg
11 and I am the Creator and Organizer of Brooklyn Scrap
12 Shuttle.

13 I am here speaking on behalf of my organization
14 as well as the other North Brooklyn community compost
15 organizations that were created in response to this
16 year's budget cuts. Brooklyn Scrap Shuttle started
17 with one guy with his bicycle, a mini-cargo trailer a
18 27-gallon bin collecting approximately 200 pounds of
19 food scraps per week from my neighbors in Cooper
20 Park. It has since grown into an organization with
21 dozens of volunteers collecting 700 plus pounds of
22 organic waste every week.

23 Today, we have diverted over 10,000 pounds of
24 waste for landfills. The North Brooklyn Compost
25 Project, an initiative of North Brooklyn Mutual Aid

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1
2 launched on June 6th and primarily operates out of
3 McGolrick Park. On average, the North Brooklyn
4 Compost collects approximately 2,800 pounds of food
5 scraps and yard waste per week.

6 The initiative has diverted 55,000 pounds of
7 organic waste from landfills since June and relies
8 exclusively on the work of the Big Reuse. After
9 closing in late March due to City budget cuts, the
10 GrowNYC food scrap collection at the McCarren Park
11 Green Market reopened on October 3rd. On average,
12 more than 400 neighbors drop off 3,000 pounds of food
13 scraps per week. Since then, the site has diverted
14 more than 27,000 pounds of organic waste from
15 landfills. All of these scraps are processed locally
16 by the Big Reuse at the Queens Bridge location.

17 To date, these organizations have diverted over
18 100,000 pounds of waste. The compost work taking
19 place in North Brooklyn is being done in large part
20 by volunteers. The infrastructure that has been
21 created by passionate residents over the last six to
22 seven months is a testament to the power and
23 potential of conscious community collaboration when
24 unbridled by the limits of bureaucracy.

25

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1
2 As we move into an uncertain future, we must
3 remain focused on creating systems that benefit all
4 New York City residents, not just government
5 agencies. Through conscious collaboration, without
6 competition, we can and we will create -

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 CLAY BURCH: And sustainable city. On behalf of
9 all of the community compost organizations in North
10 Brooklyn and the taxpayers of New York City, I urge
11 you to reconsider your eviction of the Big Reuse and
12 the Lower East Side Ecology Center. Thank you for
13 your time.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Gregory
15 Todd followed by Alice Dugan.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Gregory Todd, are you
18 present? Okay, we will move onto Alice Dugan
19 followed by Mary Ann Bennett.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 GREGORY TODD: Hello, I am trying to unmute. Did
22 someone unmute me?

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Go ahead Gregory.

24 GREGORY TODD: Alright, thank you. Thank you, I
25 was trying to speak while you were unmuting me.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Just hold on for one second.

3

The Sergeant will restart the timer and when he gives

4

you the queue you can begin.

5

GREGORY TODD: Alright.

6

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alice, you can go after him.

7

Thank you.

8

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

9

GREGORY TODD: Good afternoon, my name is Greg

10

Todd, I am a Gardner at Imani Green Thumb Garden in

11

Crown Heights Brooklyn. Thank you Chair Reynoso and

12

Chair Koo for hosting this important hearing.

13

In June 2019, the City Council passed Resolution

14

864 stating the City Council declares a climate

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emergency and calls for an immediate emergency

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mobilization to restore a safe climate. Simpler and

17

more clear words have rarely been written but what

18

has the City done to back them up?

19

By canceling curbside pickup organics and now

20

allowing parks to unilaterally not renew licenses for

21

composting sites under the Queens Borough Bridge and

22

on East River, the current Administration has made a

23

mockery of this noble resolution by the City Council.

24

Despite the Paris climate accord and urgent

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alliance by climate scientists around the world about

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1 the catastrophic effects of climate, on the climate
2 global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise.

3
4 As a City surrounded by bodies of water, sea
5 level rise caused by climate change will have
6 devastating effects on our population. Despite all
7 these bold declarations of clear science, the current
8 Administration continues on with business as usual.
9 Nothing shows this pattern more clearly than the
10 recent decision by Parks Department and its
11 Commissioner Mitchel Silver to evict composting
12 operation from parks sites.

13 Citywide composting cuts 4 billion pounds of CO2
14 per year, the equivalent of taking 385,000 cars off
15 the road. Yet despite this fact, Parks chooses to
16 reduce composting opportunities not expand them.

17 The core - the Community Organics Recycling
18 Empowerment Act Corp introduced by the City Council
19 last year by Powers and Reynoso demands that
20 composting sites be created in every community board
21 in the city.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 GREGORY TODD: By making compost accessible. It
24 is beyond time for Mayor de Blasio to get involved in
25 this struggle and overrule the imprudent and

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1
2 detrimental environmental stewardship Parks
3 Department as it is Administered by its current
4 Commissioner Mitchell Silver. Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Alice
6 Dugan followed by Mary Ann Bennett.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

8 ALICE DUGAN: Good afternoon Chairs Antonio
9 Reynoso and Peter Koo, Council Members, Members of
10 the Committee's on Parks and Recreation and
11 Sanitation. Ladies and gentleman, my name is Alice
12 Dugan, I am a Brooklyn resident and I am a Manager
13 for a film production company based in Brooklyn, also
14 called Public Record.

15 As part of our companies efforts to reduce our
16 carbon footprint, we began composting our organic
17 waste about three years ago by dropping it off at Big
18 Reuse which had its drop site a few blocks from our
19 office.

20 We are a small business with only four to five
21 people in the office. So, we did not generate enough
22 organic waste to warrant paying our carting company
23 to take the waste for us, rather myself or an intern
24 would drop it off every other week.

25

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1 We felt that not only did this divert our waste -
2 we felt that not only did this waste diversion lower
3 our carbon footprint, it also connected us to the
4 neighborhood and the city as a whole because the
5 compost it produced would be distributed to community
6 gardens, parks and residents in the summer.

7
8 Big Reuse is no longer accepting food scraps in
9 their Gowanus facility, so it hasn't been easy for
10 our company to divert our organic waste. Currently,
11 operational drop off sites in our area are not
12 amenable to our office hours. We have a typical
13 Monday to Friday 9-5 schedule and while the Salt lot
14 in Gowanus does accept drop offs for a few midday
15 hours on Monday's, those hours are just about the
16 highest peak operation times for our business.

17 So, we are hopeful that Big Reuse would accept
18 drop offs again, so our company could continue
19 practicing composting with ease. But now that Big
20 Reuse is jeopardy of losing their current location in
21 Queens, we are concerned about the prospect of no
22 longer being able to be part of the City's
23 sustainability goals. We would prefer not to throw
24 our organic waste in with organic waste because that
25 reverts us back to contributing to greenhouse gases.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

ALICE DUGAN: Furthermore, politicians in the City have time and again stressed the importance of becoming more sustainable and can move towards being carbon mutual. So, to lose the important facility would be disappointing, especially for the sake of operational uses that add the carbon in our environment.

I thank you for your time today and we hope that the Committee's on Parks and Recreation and Sanitation work to retain the composting sites of Big Reuse and Lower East Side Ecology Center or at least guarantee their new location so that small businesses like ours can still continue to compost. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Mary Ann Bennett followed by Mellison Arguson.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

MARY ANN BENNETT: Hi everyone. My name is Mary Ann and I am a resident in Flatbush Brooklyn. I volunteer with Nurture BK Compost, which organizes a weekly food scrap drop off in my neighborhood. Composting is important to me because climate change is real and it effects all of our communities.

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1
2 I made a commitment to live a more sustainable
3 life and reducing waste is an important part of that.
4 A lot can be done to reduce waste but composting has
5 been the easiest sustainable life style change I have
6 made in New York.

7 Taking action against climate change means not
8 only reducing waste but also reversing our affect.
9 Compost offers an opportunity to give back to the
10 environment. Big Reuse, which is where my food
11 scraps go to, gives their compost to Community
12 Gardens and Parks across the city. Every week at
13 Nurture BK we have seen our community grow as more
14 people make the decision to start composting. Or
15 restart after they realize they have a place where
16 their scraps can go again.

17 This gives me hope that we are expanding a
18 community and building future generations committed
19 to reducing and reversing climate change. Taking
20 away community composting sites like Big Reuse is a
21 step backwards. It prevents other organizations like
22 ours from being able to start up or intake more
23 scraps.

24

25

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1
2 Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak
3 with you today about an organization and process that
4 is important to my community.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Mellison
6 Arguson followed by Julie Won.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

8 MELLISON ARGUSON: Hi everyone, thank you for
9 allowing me to speak today to defend community
10 composting. My name is Mellison Arguson, I currently
11 live in East Harlem and I have been composting with
12 GrowNYC for two years now.

13 Since many compost sites including the one that's
14 closest to my apartment have shut down due to the
15 pandemic, composting has not been convenient for me
16 whatsoever. I wake up every Friday morning at 7 a.m.
17 to walk across Central Park to the West Side to drop
18 off my compost pile at the 97th Street Green Market,
19 so that I can be back at my apartment where I have to
20 be online for my work at 9 a.m.

21 I now have to take a whole trip just to compost
22 but one of the ongoing benefits of composting is that
23 it motivated me to adopt a vegetarian diet. Since
24 GrowNYC primarily accepts vegetable and food scraps,
25 no meat or fish, I decided to drastically cut down on

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1
2 meat so that I can divert as much food waste as
3 possible. My current diet is the healthiest it has
4 ever been.

5 Now, that's only one example of how composting
6 has improved my personal life but I want to drive
7 home ways that composting helps our communities and
8 our planet. When we compost, our food scraps just
9 turn right back into nutrient rich soil that can help
10 grow more healthy food. Otherwise, if we toss our
11 food right into the trash, it will be sent straight
12 to the landfill where it will turn into methane gas
13 which harms the planet. It is pretty clear that
14 composting is the more sustainable and useful option.

15 My second point is that NYC's composting programs
16 help preserve city green jobs that focus on
17 collection, outreach and education. During the
18 COVID-19 pandemic when so many people have lost their
19 jobs, composting jobs matter more than ever.

20 And lastly, the United Nations set out 17
21 sustainable development goals that we must achieve by
22 2030 to ensure a healthy, just and livable planet and
23 one of the goals is to take climate action and we can
24 help do this by achieving zero waste within the next
25 decade.

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1
2 But because of the pandemic, I fear that we are
3 falling behind on reaching this goal and so we must
4 continue our composting efforts in New York City -

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

6 MELLISON ARGUSON: And saving LES Ecology Center
7 and Big Reuse because they are critical to keeping
8 not only the city but the whole world on track to
9 achieving zero waste. Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Julie Won
11 followed by Kim Howell.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

13 JULIE WON: Hi everybody, my name is Julie Won
14 and I currently live in Sunnyside New York. I also
15 used to live in Long Island City and I also serve on
16 the Community Board 2 as well as on the Board of 696
17 Build Queens Bridge.

18 As you have heard from so many other public
19 hearing testifiers as well as Council Members, this
20 is a huge part of our community especially here in
21 Western Queens. A lot of our community composting
22 sites are the lifeblood, literally feeding us. The
23 food insecurity that we have seen in the last few
24 months due to COVID-19 has been alleviated by
25 allowing us to not only compost our own food waste

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1
2 but also using that fresh compost to grow more fresh
3 produce for a sustainable way for us to make sure
4 that we are meeting food insecurity needs for our
5 mutual aid as well.

6 So, I really hope that you will reconsider and
7 when we talk about making sure that we have equity in
8 parks access for Queen Bridge, I currently work at
9 696 Build Queens Bridge and we take walks all the
10 time. There is plenty of storage space and there is
11 plenty of parking under the bridge, not only to
12 mention right along the bike path, there is always
13 illegal parking on the park path as well. Where I
14 see the people who work for City agencies like Waste
15 Management and Parks are always parking on the parts
16 of greenery that should be used for the community.

17 So, I think it is very hypocritical and I really
18 hope that you will reconsider not just extending
19 Queens Bridges Reuse site but also making sure that
20 you make this permanent because composting is a
21 sustainable and environmentally just way of living as
22 well as you are stealing away from the actual
23 community that is starting their community gardens
24 using that very compost in Queens Bridge.

25

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1
2 These people in Ravens Wood and Queens Bridge are
3 active composters and they really care about this
4 community as well and I really hope that you will
5 reconsider because it also comes to accessibility.
6 The same way that people are testifying even just
7 now, how she has to travel for composting. It is
8 supposed to be accessible and if you are not going to
9 come pick it up, the way that the city used to -

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 JULIE WON: Then you need to allow us to have
12 community access. Thank you. Especially for low-
13 income communities.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is Kim
15 Howell followed by Leslie Gersing.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

17 KIM HOWELL: Hi, my name is Kim Howell and I am a
18 resident of Lefferts Gardens in Brooklyn and I am
19 calling because as many on this call, I am very, very
20 dedicated to getting this City that I love in
21 sustainable shape for hopefully many centuries to
22 come and composting is essential to that. I started
23 several years ago and deeply feel that it is one of
24 the best ways that I can take one of those actions

25

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1 that I can take to keep myself and my City
2 sustainable and Big Reuses work in that is essential.

3 I really, I am kind of devastated to see that the
4 Parks Department and sustainability are now pitted
5 against each other because these are two of the
6 things that I love the most about my City and they
7 don't have to be against each other. I appreciate
8 that running the Park is an extremely complicated
9 endeavor that takes a lot of maintenance, it take
10 vehicles, it takes lots of work but we cannot have
11 this happen at the cost of our long term
12 sustainability. That's just not a trade off that we
13 should ever be making at this point.

14 One of the speakers pointed out that we could
15 declare a climate emergency that needs a top
16 priority. So, we need to be creative and find other
17 tradeoffs that don't come at the cost of methane
18 gases. From a program that is not just hypothetical
19 but existing, functioning, it has been shown to work.
20 This is working, we cannot dismantle it even more
21 than we already have.

22 And then I also wanted to point out, a couple
23 people have alluded to this but I am an avid gardener
24 and I had the soil next to my building tested for
25

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1
2 lead and it was off the charts as is most of New York
3 due to decades and decades of leaded gas cars and
4 lead paint. One of the best ways to remediate this
5 is to stop this from going into the bloodstreams of
6 children and other residents of New York City is to
7 put compost into the soil to grow plants -

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

9 KIM HOWELL: In the soil to find those terrible
10 compounds. And so, we can't afford to cut off the
11 program that is running. It is working. It protects
12 our people and our environment. Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Leslie
14 Gersing followed by Dana Lobel.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

16 LESLIE GERSING: Hi, my name is Leslie Gersing.
17 I have lived on the Upper West Side for more than 38
18 years and I oppose the Parks Department's plan to
19 evict Big Reuse and the Lower East Side Ecology
20 Center Composting operations.

21 For many years, anyone in my building who wanted
22 to recycle had to walk 8-10 blocks to our weekend
23 green markets. Starting in April 2018, a fellow
24 tenant and I urged our 80 unit building to sign up
25 for DSNY's curbside collection. After nearly a year

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1
2 of pressure, my neighbors eagerly became converts and
3 diverted food scraps from the way stream just by
4 dropping it off in our carts.

5 Under the pandemic budget cuts, DSNY shut down
6 that program, the city shuttered most of the drop off
7 sites. Some reopened in the fall and despite
8 obstacles, GrowNYC just testified that Upper West
9 Side donations are up 50 percent from pre-COVID
10 levels. Some of my waste goes to the Lower East Side
11 Ecology Center. The Parks Department says that site
12 is needed to build the East Side Coastal Resiliency
13 Project ironically to battle to the flood risk we
14 have created by refusing to tackle man made global
15 warming.

16 Big Reuse says it processes nearly 1.4 million
17 pounds of food scraps and yard waste a year. With
18 apologies to Joni Mitchell, the Parks Department is
19 planning to pay the half acre site dedicated to
20 saving our paradise to put up a parking lot.

21 This Fiscal Year, New York City expects to pay
22 more than \$420 million to export its garbage to
23 landfills and incinerators as far away as South
24 Carolina. Most of it ends up in low income
25 neighborhoods and communities of color where toxic

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1
2 ash, leachate and greenhouse gas sicken people who
3 have little power to protect themselves.

4 A middle school teacher told me the climate
5 crisis is her students number one concern. What
6 lesson are they learning? That there is nothing we
7 can do to stop the destruction of their future. That
8 other peoples health is an unavoidable casualty of
9 selfish garbage policies. We need to emulate smart
10 governments elsewhere.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

12 LESLIE GERSING: Composting of organics and
13 sustain the organizations that do it well here now.
14 Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is Dana
16 Lobel followed by Dr. Sara Perl Egendorf.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Is Dana Lobel here? Okay,
19 she apparently has logged off, we will move onto Dr.
20 Sara Perl Egendorf followed by Leah Retherford.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

22 Dr. SARA PERL EGENDORF: Good afternoon. Thank
23 you so much Chairman Reynoso, Chairman Koo, all of
24 the dedicated incredible community composters for all
25 of the vital work you do.

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1
2 My name is Dr. Sara Perl Egendorf and I am here
3 speaking on behalf of a number of research
4 collaborators from Cornell University where I am
5 currently employed as a post doctor or researcher and
6 the City University of New York where I received a
7 PhD studying urban soil.

8 We are all extremely concerned with regard to the
9 budget cuts that have already cut so much of this
10 incredible community composting program, as well as
11 its potential removal without secured relocation of
12 the New York City Compost Project hosted by the Lower
13 East Side Ecology Center and Big Reuse.

14 We can assure you that community composting is
15 absolutely essential, as everyone here has said
16 today, for a just and sustainable future. We must
17 invest even more in these green jobs that reduce
18 waste, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and turn this
19 so called waste into a vital resource for building
20 new soils.

21 Supporting New York City's community composting
22 efforts is one of the most important and effective
23 ways to promote local environmental justice, food
24 justice and climate change mitigation. And the Parks
25 Department, you have an opportunity to change your

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1 position and provide permanent support for these
2 sites.

3
4 The majority of my research is focused on
5 limiting exposure to lead in soil. People of color
6 and people from low income communities are most
7 frequently exposed to environmental toxicants
8 including lead and soil, making this an urgent and
9 widespread environmental justice issue.

10 I have worked closely with researchers from
11 Cornell University and the State Department of Health
12 who conducted research on New York City's soils for
13 over ten years. And on their widely used, What
14 Gardeners Can Do, Ten Best Practices for Healthy
15 Gardening, the number one recommendation for limiting
16 exposure to contaminants is to use clean soil and
17 compost.

18 So, all of the community composting efforts that
19 the Parks Department claims they are in support of,
20 they need to support -

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

22 DR. SARA PERL EGENDORF: I encourage you to read
23 my testimony. There is many different citations and
24 discussion of various programs and I want to say to
25 echo all of the sentiments today that the research

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communities that I am speaking on behalf of, highly support these efforts. It is absolutely essential. We need to guarantee space and more and more funding for these efforts. Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is Leah Retherford followed by Edward Streeter.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Leah Retherford, are you available? Okay, she may have logged off, we will move on or check back. Next up is Edward Streeter followed by Mary Palkovich[SP?].

LEAH RETHERFORD: Hello.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Please hold on. Leah Retherford, you are up next. Please start when the Sergeant gives you the queue to begin. Thank you.

LEAH RETHERFORD: Thank you.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

LEAH RETHERFORD: My name is Leah Retherford and I am a Queens Resident. I want to thank Parks staff for their service in taking care of our parks. I spent many hours in Forest Park this summer and can attest to Parks being lifelines in this difficult year.

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2 I was formerly the Project Manager for the New
3 York City Compost Project hosted by Big Reuse. I
4 spent a lot of my time there along with the team I
5 led bringing the new Queens Bridge site in the
6 beginning. It was very challenging and it was also a
7 significant investment of time and money for a third
8 of an acre site and it is also something I am very
9 proud of.

10 Our team gave countless tours of the site to New
11 Yorkers, people from across the United States along
12 with visitors from Japan, Nigeria and Brazil. I also
13 presented on this project at two national
14 conferences. People are blown away by the
15 partnership and project. The question people ask is
16 how did this happen? How did two sprawling city
17 agencies with very different mandates come together
18 to work with small idealistic nonprofits to make
19 midscale community composting a reality.

20 The longer I worked at Big Reuse, the more I
21 appreciated what a feat this was and how unique it is
22 to New York City. It is a testament to the people
23 who worked at Big Reuse and the Lower East Side
24 Ecology Center who built relationships and asked what
25 was possible of their city agencies. As well as the

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1 staff and leaders at Parks and Sanitation who were
2 willing to say yes to community composting.
3

4 Community composting has a ripple effect through
5 our city. Doing this one thing has ramifications for
6 soil and plant health, waste management, climate
7 change, environmental justice, education and more.
8 We need to be replicating these projects, not moving
9 or evicting them. Just like Gil said previously.

10 I am asking Parks and the City to please recommit
11 to these community composting sites in their current
12 locations. Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. Next up
14 is Mary Palkovich.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, she appears to be
17 logged off. I did skip over Mr. Edward Streeter, so
18 please begin Sir.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

20 EDWARD STREETER: Thank you for giving me this
21 opportunity. I was going to say some words in
22 support of absolutely everything that Christine Datz-
23 Romero and Justin Green have said before.

24 So, instead of doing that, I am going to focus my
25 testimony on one thing that Christine said. And that

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1 was, the point that she made that volunteer programs
2 for members of the community, that the Lower East
3 Side Ecology Center and Big Reuse provide is a vital
4 form of recreation and therefore a part and parcel of
5 the City Parks Department's mission. And I think in
6 terms of recreation, I think that aspect of the
7 mission is quite a bit more vital than the recreation
8 provided by golf for instance.
9

10 And although I love golf as much as the next
11 person, but the point is, the Parks Department is
12 claiming something about the lack of the recreational
13 aspect of the volunteer aspect of composting programs
14 as being some sort of an excuse and I just would like
15 to point out that what Christine said needs to be
16 paid close attention to.

17 And I got a little bit more time, so I just want
18 to mention that I am a long time resident of the
19 Lower East Side and on a more personal basis, my
20 daughter went to school at the Shuang Wen School and
21 took advantage of the community outreach program for
22 elementary school kids that the Lower East Side
23 Ecology Center provided.

24 So, thank you very much.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is Sandye
3 Renz followed by Barbara Hertel.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

5 SANDYE RENZ: Hi, my name is Sandye Renz, I am
6 going to turn on my light and I am a scared,
7 frustrated but yet hopeful citizen. Composting is
8 critical for a sustainable planet. When I am asked
9 what I do, I frequently say, I compost. I am lucky
10 to have a backyard where I can compost but I can't
11 compost all of my food and garden waste, so when the
12 City suspended curbside pickup, I was heartbroken.

13 Most people don't understand that food and garden
14 waste does not turn into compost when it is put in
15 landfills or incinerators. Food and garden waste is
16 a huge polluter when put in landfills or incinerators
17 but it is a valuable resource when it is properly
18 composted.

19 Community composting sites are perfect places to
20 educate the public about this environmental issue. I
21 eventually found a place where I could drop off food
22 and garden waste that was somewhat nearby. It was
23 hard to carry all my waste to this site but this
24 heroic weekly collection was very helpful.

25

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1
2 Since some of the food and garden waste drop off
3 sites have reopened, I haven't been volunteering at
4 Big Reuse. I have seen the quality of the work that
5 Big Reuse does is outstanding. The interest and
6 dedication of the community is incredible. People
7 walk and ride bikes in the pouring rain, as well as
8 bring cars full of blocks worth of contributions to
9 drop off at these sites once a week.

10 This support is evidence that the need for the
11 services of Big Reuse and the Lower East Side Ecology
12 Center are vital. New York City should be serious
13 about their zero waste goal. All existing compost
14 should continue however that needs to be arranged
15 with no breaks in service and all the programs need
16 to be restored and expanded. Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Barbara
18 Hertel followed by Wendy Brawer.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

20 BARBARA HERTEL: Hi, my name is Barbara Hertel, I
21 am a long time composter. I live in North Brooklyn
22 and I am a member of a lot of different committee's
23 about you know the environment.

24 Anyways, but really the composting is a great
25 asset to Parks. I believe it provides jobs for young

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1
2 people, it teaches people where your food goes, what
3 happens to your food and I think in terms of the
4 parks, I think it's the perfect place to have
5 composting and I think it is just awful that they
6 want to get rid of the Queens Borough Lower East Side
7 Composting sites. It is just stupid and dumb and I
8 just can't believe that Parks is saying that it is
9 not really a parks activity when it is and I think
10 they are just kind of bowing a little bit to
11 developers and to the people who don't compost that
12 come to the parks.

13 I realize that I go to - when they didn't have
14 composting, I went to Hogshead which was just a
15 lifeblood for me. I dropped off my composting there.
16 I am part of their increase of composting stuff. And
17 then when the Parks Department started up again, I
18 was really grateful that I could bring that even
19 though I had to throw away my meat and other things
20 like that.

21 So, the other part of this is that the composting
22 in the parks, it brings people to the parks and I
23 feel like I enjoyed going to different parks to drop
24 off my stuff. I would go to McGolrick Park which
25 uses the Queens Borough site to drop off their

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1
2 composting and now they are afraid that they won't be
3 able to do composting in McGolrick Park, which is
4 another park in North Brooklyn. It is farther away
5 from McCarren Park where you can go on Saturdays and
6 now what are the people going to do there? They
7 collect a lot of food and you know, with the city not
8 doing anything, I think that the Parks Department
9 should allow these places to stay until they can find
10 a new place.

11 So, that's my testimony. Thank you for having
12 this hearing.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is Wendy
14 Brawer followed by Mary Ellen Sullivan.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

16 WENDY BRAWER: I am Wendy Brawer, Long Time Lower
17 East Side Resident and Sustainability Professional.
18 Last December, I was shocked when it was suddenly
19 revealed that the Mayor and Parks Commissioner were
20 planning to destroy the Lower East Side Compost
21 Center's compost yard and replace it with a passive
22 lawn.

23 Not having composting when you are fighting
24 climate change is like not wearing a mask in a
25 pandemic. I could not understand who would approve

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1
2 this knowing Parks mission is to plan resilient and
3 sustainable parks. I asked Commissioner Silver about
4 eco-gentrification and who it benefits and it
5 alienates me that he did not deign to show up today.
6 I met with our Congresswoman and Carolyn Maloney
7 urged me to file a foil for answers. I filed on
8 January 3, 2020 with DDC.

9 Despite requests on my behalf in the
10 Congresswoman and Assembly Member Epstein's office,
11 this foil is still being withheld. Who would destroy
12 their top soil making machine when dozens of acres of
13 park land will need it very soon?

14 Unfortunately ESCR prioritizes the 84 daily ferry
15 riders over the 500 a day who drop off their food
16 scraps. Note that these two spots are just a few
17 feet apart. The new Park will have three parking
18 lots and a massively expanded tennis center yet no
19 room for composting.

20 Composting needs to be visible and a public
21 place. Moreover, this is a form of recreation, as it
22 was just said, especially if you pitch in to help
23 make the compost or use it on gardens, parks or in
24 street trees. Lower East Side Ecology Center as well
25 as Big Reuse and other community compost problems

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1
2 have engaged thousands of residents citywide in these
3 healthy stewardship activities.

4 Eviction is no way to say thank you. With NYC's
5 ever growing garbage crisis, please cancel this
6 illogical climate filing. Otherwise -

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 WENDY BRAWER: My building is looking into
9 getting a pig to keep in the basement just like in
10 the olden days to manage our ever growing pile of
11 food scraps and organic waste.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is Mary
13 Ellen Sullivan followed by Valerie Zandoli.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

15 MARY ELLEN SULLIVAN: Hi, my name is Mary Ellen
16 Sullivan and I am a concerned citizen from Brooklyn
17 and also a client of Big Reuse and Lower East Side
18 Ecology.

19 With the onset of the pandemic, I was very
20 disturbed to find out about the cancelation of the
21 composting program as well as the cancelation of
22 funding from the city for Lower East Side Ecologies e
23 waste site in the Gowanus. I am upset that the
24 environment is not a priority. I think that people
25 and I have been very inspired by the City Council

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1
2 Members that have spoken about Lower East Side
3 Ecology and Big Reuse and I would urge the Parks to
4 not evict these people. I would ask them to restate
5 Red Hook composting and to also rebut the comment
6 that I can go and recycle my food scraps at my
7 farmers market. By Borough Hall, Farmers Market no
8 longer accepts food scraps. So, that is not an
9 option that I have.

10 I would have to go to organizations such as the
11 one's that have spoken or work with Ground Cycle,
12 which is an extremely innovative start up that takes
13 the food scraps and then sells them to farmers in
14 upstate New York. I would urge the City to explore
15 innovative approaches such as these, so we can combat
16 the terrible waste problem that we have in the City,
17 where we have 1.2 million tons of waste per year.
18 The cost of about \$80 per ton and I would urge the
19 City to become a leader in this much like San
20 Francisco, Seattle, Austin, that are taking climate
21 seriously and are rapidly exploring how to put
22 forward the circular economy within their city.
23 Thank you very much.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Valerie
25 Zandoli followed by Aleft Tadesse[SP?].

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

VALERIE ZANDOLI: Hi, I, sorry about that. Hi,
oh, no. Good afternoon, I am Valerie Zandoli of
Tottenville, Staten Island resident with remarkably
little access to any composting despite being highly
motivated to do it.

I came to testify today on the behalf of Natural
Resources Defense Council, NRDC and equally on my own
behalf as multigenerational lifetime resident of New
York City. As the Parks Department presented to me
today, the Parks Department's argument does not
justify evicting community composting.

Composting explicitly community composting and
its adjunct public education are fundamental
undeniable positive works in helping the city's
people to act meaningfully against climate change and
to the benefit of all of us.

Unmitigated disruption of community composting
and of its constructive impact is foolhardy,
misguided and maximally unwise. Especially as a
majority of motivated citizens now suffer greater
obstacles to and fewer sites that was to drop
compostable material of any type. I plead with all
the individuals who involve themselves in these

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2 incipient evictions to do their best to reconsider
3 their actions and decisions.

4 I speak for many of my community members. We
5 stand forcibly and in full solidarity with everyone
6 including NRDC who opposes any interruption to the
7 work of the two exemplary composters and educators,
8 Big Reuse and LESEC and any other such organization
9 now or later. If the Parks Department can only site
10 Spring Creek as precedent, then I find their argument
11 even more woefully weak. As almost none of the facts
12 are comparable.

13 The two different reasons that Parks Department
14 sites for interrupting -

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16 VALERIE ZANDOLI: Thanks.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Aleft
18 Tadesse, I am sorry, Anna Von Muehlen and pardon me.
19 Aleft Tadesse please.

20 ALEFT TADASI: Hi, my name is Aleft Tadesse. I
21 have been a resident of Long Island City for the past
22 three and a half years. Once I found a composting
23 site in my community, I started composting my food
24 very regularly, almost every other week now. What
25 usually would fill up half of my garbage, I now put

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2 in my freezer to store then fill up a container and
3 then walk about 25 minutes with my heavy bag to the
4 nearest composting bin.

5 The process is difficult but I am willing to do
6 my part as a community member because I understand
7 how important composting is for our environment, our
8 health and our economy. I am asking that the Parks
9 Department to do their part as well. So, I am here
10 testifying that we need to strengthen and expand
11 composting sites and services, not push them out of
12 our community which would make composting impractical
13 to incorporate at least I know for me into my life.

14 And with recent cuts to curbside compost
15 collection and community composting drop off services
16 in the city's budget, composting has already become
17 an even more limited resource and the LIC in the
18 Astoria community. So, I urge you to keep the
19 existing composting services run by Big Reuse and
20 Lower East Side Ecology Center. Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Anna Von
22 Muehlen followed by Daniel Wendell[SP?].

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

24 ANNA VON MUEHLEN: Hi, I am Anna Von Muehlen and
25 I am the Sustainability Coordinator and Teacher at

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1
2 Compass Charter School in Fort Green and Brooklyn and
3 I am here to represent the kids all over the city who
4 know that composting is important. They understand
5 the value of composting and they are devastated to
6 think that grown ups in positions of power don't
7 understand this.

8 I am going to read some of their comments to you.
9 One of my first graders this week said, I wonder why
10 the Parks Department and the Mayor think it is more
11 important to park trucks than to compost?

12 A group of fist graders talked about the earth.
13 If we compost, the earth is healthy, said one of
14 them. Compost is important because it helps the
15 earth and if there is garbage everywhere, we can't
16 live on the earth said another.

17 The understand there is no such place as away and
18 when we truck things to landfills, it is an active
19 environmental racism as this away is actually someone
20 else's back yard and usually people of color.

21 One of them said, this is not right Mayor.
22 Throwing things in the garbage is not okay with me.
23 It is very important to compost and we should make
24 compost. You can throw them away but if put the food
25

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2 scraps and leaves in the compost, it can make soil
3 and it can help people, said another.

4 When we have food left on the ground in a
5 landfill, it isn't helpful to the earth. You cannot
6 do that. That's not helpful and you are not taking
7 care of our city.

8 They understand the amount of methane gases
9 released by landfills and how composting does the
10 opposite. Composting means less trash, said Clara.
11 If we don't compost, the bad air will come. It is
12 bad for humans and bad for the earth. We want the
13 earth not to become dirty. We want it to be clean.

14 They see the financial flaws. Since compost is
15 very good for the environment and the trucks are
16 probably getting 10 miles to the gallon, that's
17 really bad for the environment. Why turn something
18 good into something bad?

19 Now, this is my words. I think as we know,
20 children know what's right and they know that there
21 are grownup who get to make the decisions and
22 decisions can be hard but we know that this isn't
23 actually a hard decision. Big Reuse and the Lower
24 East Side Ecology Center, the Sanitation Department
25 and the Parks -

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

ANNA VON MUEHLEN: Who work for them, know what they are doing. They take pride in their work and they are role models to my students. Just let them do their jobs. All you get from making this decision is rewards in the form of less pollution, less trucking, continuing to reach towards the goals that you actually set and a whole bunch of kids who will ever be grateful. So, leave the compost, it's better for the planet. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is Daniel Wendell followed by Emily Kitchler.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

DANIEL WENDELL: Good afternoon Council. I would like begin by summoning the spirit and legacy of David Buckle who is a lawyer and fierce advocate for civil rights. Who is also a master composter, a prolific compost educator and a relentless advocate for community composting. I was a student of his. David took his own life in the spring of 2018, using resources that are destroying this earth to destroy himself. His last action was an environmental protest against indifference and the apathy against denying neglect and alienation. So, I

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1
2 summon the spirit of David Buckle in act of
3 remembrance.

4 Compost exists at a complex crossroads in the
5 effort to achieve environmental and social justice
6 amidst a climate crisis. Reduce, reuse, recycle is
7 what we have been taught. Yet, composting embodies
8 all three simultaneously. By composting, we
9 substantially reduce what lands and landfills, we
10 reuse organic matter that has been scraped or
11 discarded. We recycle organic matter into a nutrient
12 dense substance that is particularly beneficial to
13 soils, plants and people. Compost is not waste; it
14 is a resource.

15 Historically, it has been a wasted resource.
16 Organics are not currently handled by any single
17 agency rather a hodgepodge where no agency or
18 organization is left holding the proverbial bag.

19 My testimony today urges the Council that the
20 Mayor will not take leadership role to mandate
21 compost now citywide. Composting whether residential
22 collection or community efforts should never be on
23 the chopping block again. Never more should
24 composting be towed away because the Parks Department
25 needs ironically more parking.

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1 Council, what mandating compost now looks like, a
2 revision to the City's Charter making compost a
3 critical resource and requiring increasing Department
4 of Compost or Composting Council to legislation
5 requiring all city agencies, commercial entities,
6 organizations, businesses, residences, to participate
7 in a citywide compost program.
8

9 Three, further legislation permitting organics
10 micro-haulers -

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

12 DANIEL WENDELL: Equal access to the carting
13 industry and for tipping at decentralized processing
14 centers. And four, the adoption and expansion of the
15 CORE Act of 2020 and the Commercial Waste Zones Plan
16 of 2018. Currently private carting is a 20th century
17 backwater public and environmental menus.

18 Thank you to the Council and everyone working to
19 save our compost. Rest in power David Buckle.
20 Mandate compost now.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Emily
22 Kitchler followed by Dana Affleck.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

24 EMILY KITCHLER: Hi, thank you Chair people and
25 Council Members for this opportunity to speak today.

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2 My name is Emily, during the pandemic I was fortunate
3 to be able to compost with an NYRP community garden
4 and experienced numerous ways that NYC has composted
5 over the years living in different boroughs.

6 Big Reuse processes food scraps from numerous
7 micro-haulers which could shut down without the help
8 of Big Reuse. My biggest concern is that by
9 disrupting the stability of such major sites as Big
10 Reuse or Lower East Side Ecology Center and Red Hook,
11 the organics collection program will not be able to
12 abide by commercial waste zoning laws. Which were
13 put in place to prevent waste from being transferred
14 inequitably and unsustainably.

15 This waste transfer has caused years of pollution
16 in the South Bronx and it has caused regular 10-20
17 hour work days for hauler that could otherwise go a
18 shorter distance and omit less transfer waste within
19 their own boroughs. Without sites like Big Reuse,
20 Lower East Side Ecology Center and Red Hook, NYC will
21 run into the same problems with composting given that
22 composting is a priority at all and bigger composting
23 sites are being focused on in the long term.

24 I also appreciate the Parks Department's
25 acknowledgement of their composting support through

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2 sites like Green Thumb and I also want to acknowledge
3 that micro-operations like this are entirely
4 voluntary. And while all of community composting
5 currently relies on volunteers, the sites that really
6 create and process significant compost, have staff
7 and support green jobs and I would like to see the
8 financial support of composting education and
9 operations at this scale in order to stick with the
10 words of commitment -

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

12 EMILY KITCHLER: For this level of community
13 composting. Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Dana
15 Affleck followed by Billy Freeland.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

17 DANA AFFLECK: Hi everybody. My name is Dana
18 Affleck and I speak today as a Brooklyn Resident.

19 Before the pandemic hit, I was composting at a
20 local New York City, a growing New York City drop off
21 location every Saturday. This was my weekend ritual
22 because composting is very important to me for many
23 reasons. Composting food waste reduces the amount of
24 general waste I am personally responsible for sending
25 to landfills and incinerators.

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This is not just about cutting greenhouse gas emissions generated by food waste as it rots and decomposes in landfills. This is an environmental justice issue too. Food waste is often sent to incinerators located primarily in low-income communities and communities of color and burn with trash and fossil fuels. This releases particulates and toxic chemicals into local communities and can cause serious health issues and worsen air pollution in the area. Something that is particularly dangerous during the COVID pandemic.

But since the pandemic shutdown the City and changed our day to day lives, I haven't been able to compost in my local Brooklyn community. New York City Council budget cuts have met curbside compost collection programs in community drop off sites have been drastically reduced. Local community gardens close to me don't have the resources to run a composting service to the general public during a pandemic either.

Composting programs like those run by Lower East Side Ecology Center and Big Reuse are critical for New York City residents like me who still want to sustainably dispose of food waste. Allowing the

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1
2 Parks Department to evict them and thereby shutter
3 their composting services will not only take away
4 some of the last composting programs left in the City
5 but would result in an increase in New York City's
6 greenhouse gas emissions and cause local communities
7 to suffer the health impacts of air pollution
8 associated with increasing incineration of our city's
9 trash.

10 Please ensure the Lower East Side Ecology Center
11 and Big Reuse can continue to operate on Parks land
12 and provide critical composting services to the city.
13 Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Billy
15 Freeland followed by Kristen Misak.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

17 BILLY FREELAND: Thank you Chair Koo, Chair
18 Reynoso and members of the Committee's. My name is
19 Billy Freeland, I a candidate for City Council in
20 District 5. I am a member of Community Board 8 in
21 Manhattan and I am speaking in my personal capacity
22 today.

23 I want to first thank Sira Panu[SP?] and Justin
24 Greenburg, two high schoolers in my community who
25 helped me prepare for my testimony today. Roosevelt

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2 Island is in my District. It is in my community and
3 it is home to the Haki Compost Collective. You have
4 already heard from Danika Lam about that.

5 At Haki residents drop off food scraps, which are
6 then picked up by Big Reuse and processed at their
7 Queens Bridge composting site. If Big Reuse is
8 evicted, finding a new partner will pose significant
9 challenges in light of July's budget cuts to
10 composting. Evicting Big Reuse would be devastating
11 for the entire composting community on Roosevelt
12 Island and threatens to force Haki to halt its food
13 scrap collection.

14 We must also consider and this is really
15 important for the Parks Department and the Committee
16 to weigh. That Roosevelt Island is relatively
17 isolated from Manhattan and from Queens. It has a
18 large population of elderly and disabled people for
19 when traveling over a bridge or across the east river
20 to a far off composting site is simply not feasible.

21 And hauling the scraps a greater distance may
22 offset an even reverse and outweigh the emissions
23 safe in composting. So, that's the local impacts. I
24 want to briefly talk about the climate and food
25 insecurity issues that I think we are all pretty

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1 familiar with. You don't need me to tell you we are
2 in a climate emergency. Did you know that municipal
3 solid waste is the third largest source of methane
4 emissions in the United States. 15 percent of those
5 emissions in 2018 alone factored into global warming.
6 Organic waste make up 25-50 percent of what people
7 throw away.
8

9 In New York City, we produce more than 14 million
10 tons of trash every year and our recycling rate is
11 only 18 percent. Consider Seattle, which is at 57
12 percent recycling rate. We must do better.

13 And then finally, composting impacts food
14 insecurity. Nearly 1.1 million New Yorkers are food
15 insecure and research show the positive correlation
16 between composting and food security.

17 Let's do the right thing. This is a local issue,
18 a climate issue, food security issue, our planet is
19 at stake. Thank you all very much.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Kristen
21 Misak followed by Laura Picalo.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

23 KRISTEN MISAK: Thank you very much. I want to
24 thank everyone that worked so hard to put this
25 hearing together. I know that it has run long but I

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1
2 think that goes to show how important this issue is
3 to us. I know that it is very long but I hope that
4 our representative from Parks and Sanitation are
5 still listening, although their cameras are off, it
6 does send a bit of a message that they are not, so I
7 hope that they are still listening.

8 I think that our struggle is really embodied by
9 actions such as Commissioner Biederman not paying
10 attention while our high school students were
11 testifying about how this issue impacts their future.
12 We are here because we are not worried about us right
13 now but we are worried about future generations. And
14 we had high school students who took time out of
15 their school day to be here to testify and I think
16 paying attention to them is the least that we can do.

17 I am a volunteer with a community based
18 composting organization called Astoria Pug and we
19 work with the Big Reuse to process the food scraps
20 and organic waste that we collect. Crippling the -
21 the budget cuts that crippled our ability to compost
22 in Queens led to the formation of Astoria Pug and
23 removing Big Reuse from the space that they have
24 right now under the Queens Borough Bridge would only
25 further serve to negatively impact organizations like

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1
2 Astoria Pug that are working really hard to keep
3 composting alive in our community.

4 We have seen the Mayor and other city officials
5 use composting and language such as mandatory
6 composting by 2030 to be politically advantageous to
7 them in their campaigns but we actually don't really
8 see that in action.

9 So, we are asking for the City to show the same
10 commitment back to these local organizations that are
11 doing the work and the same amount of commitment that
12 they are showing to their communities by doing it.

13 So, I hope that this has -

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

15 KRISTEN MISAK: Really shown how important this
16 is to our community and how much we need that
17 commitment from the City and I hope that the Big
18 Reuse can get extended for more than six months on
19 that space because I do live in long Island City and
20 I know that there is more space for those vehicles to
21 go. That Parks does not need to evict the Big Reuse
22 and that hopefully they can get a longer contract.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Laura
24 Picalo followed by Alexa Jakob.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

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LAURA PICALO: Good afternoon City Council Members, the Parks Department and Committee members and as Kristen said before me, I really do hope the Parks Department are still with us on this meeting. Even though they did kind of fall off a little bit earlier.

My name is Laura Picalo and I am a Resident of Astoria. I am also a composter and I am testifying today regarding the potential eviction of Big Reuse under the Queens Borough Bridge.

So, community composting is an essential program and it is being threatened by the Parks Department. I would truly appreciate if we could work with the Parks Department to find an alternative space for the proposed parking lot, not for the Big Reuse location. Why create extra work and incur extra cost when there is no need. I can guarantee you; you would be hard pressed to find passionate individuals rallying in support of a parking lot. Yet so many people in Queens and other boroughs are rallying here today to save this composting space.

We not only see the good it produces but we have experienced it as well as residents of North West Queens. During the pandemic, when composting was

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1
2 virtually paused throughout the entire city, local
3 community members took it upon themselves to keep it
4 going. I volunteered with the local Astoria group,
5 Astoria Pug to ensure the communities needs continue
6 to be met and our city's commitment to zero waste
7 remained a possibility.

8 Several compost sites were created throughout
9 Astoria to collect food scraps and Big Reuse has
10 supported these efforts by taking the food scraps we
11 have collected. Meeting people in the community,
12 speaking with our neighbors and working in the field,
13 the magnitude of local composting's importance and
14 having a composting site was truly realized. Local,
15 easy access composting sites that create jobs for the
16 community are of infinite more value and parking lots
17 are storage facilities.

18 According to the Department of Sanitations
19 website, there is no way when we throw garbage into a
20 can or liter basket, a majority of our waste can be
21 composted or recycled. New Yorkers can fight climate
22 change, support green jobs and reduce our
23 environmental footprint by sending zero waste -

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.
25

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2 LAURA PICALO: We have a near ten years from now
3 in order to have this happen. The decisions that we
4 make today can have decade long repercussions on
5 achieving this goal. Let's align our actions and
6 have all New York City agencies work towards a common
7 goal of a more sustainable city. Together we can
8 make that happen. I encourage you all to please have
9 the same vision. Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Alexa
11 Jakob followed by Laura Hechtlinger.

12 SERGEAT AT ARMS: Starting time.

13 ALEXA JAKOB: My name is Alexa Jakob and I use
14 community compost programs particularly the one run
15 by Astoria Pug where I live.

16 I have composted for nearly three years now and
17 even when I lived in my tiny East Village apartment,
18 I always saved my food scraps drop off at the
19 community garden down the way. I multiplied my
20 impact by convincing about five people to compost
21 along with me and having lived in both the
22 neighborhoods where Built it Green, Reuses Queens
23 Bridge site and the Lower East Side Ecology Center
24 site have been, let me say they are both excellent
25 neighbors and we love having them in the community.

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To end their lease to create parking lots would be a wasted investment in both money and in community ties. I compost because this is a small and easy thing that I can do to reduce my carbon footprint and getting to occasionally hang out with Rocky Depug[SP?] is definitely a plus but the most important thing to contribute is to reducing New York City's waste. As a member of the Sunrise Movements New York City Hub, we are pushing for a new green deal that will stop climate change and adapt our society to our new climate change reality by creating green union jobs.

I am concerned about the city's response to climate change. Although I am not here today representing Sunrise, I know that our members value the investment of the City Council and sustainability programs and we will be watching the City Council's actions on this in the coming months.

New York City has a zero waste goal for 2030 and we are already not on track but cutting the composting program makes it even more difficult to reach that goal. And as you have probably heard from the Lower East Side Ecology Center and BIG reuse, composting creates local green jobs, gives back to

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1
2 the community and providing compost to our community
3 gardens and reduces our collective carbon footprint.

4 Community led operations are filling the gap the
5 city left when it defunded the composting program in
6 July but unpaid advocates across the five boroughs
7 can't do it alone. We need the City to step up in
8 the long-term and fund composting citywide.

9 I see a bright future for composting
10 sustainability in New York City when we invest in
11 these kinds of programs and we need Big Reuse and the
12 LES Ecology Center to remain so that we have the
13 infrastructure we need. In short, if you evict these
14 sites, we are going to have to pay more for them down
15 the line both in money and in climate disasters.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

17 ALEXA JAKOB: Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Laura
19 Hechtlinger followed by Marya Friedman.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 LAURA HECHTLINGER: Hi, my name is Laura
22 Hechtlinger. Thank you for the opportunity to
23 testify today. The processing centers at Big Reuse
24 and the Lower East Side Ecology Center are essential
25

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1
2 for an equitable and sustainable waste management
3 system in New York City.

4 Without these centers, more food scraps will end
5 up in landfills which directly contribute to
6 pollution and climate warming emissions. This is an
7 indirect conflict with the City's stated climate and
8 zero waste goals. The New York City Composting
9 program has already been decimated in the wake of
10 COVID-19. In the absence of a city run program,
11 local groups stepped up to fill the gap where the
12 City left off.

13 I am a resident of Brooklyn. When the curbside
14 collection program was shut down, I was concerned
15 about what would happen to the program long-term and
16 began looking for other options for recycling my food
17 scraps. Unfortunately, I soon learned about a new
18 drop off site that was being organized by one of my
19 neighbors called the North Brooklyn Compost Project.

20 This drop off is volunteer run and donation
21 based. Scraps collected here get processed by Big
22 Reuse in Queens. I have had the opportunity to
23 volunteer with the North Brooklyn compost project and
24 I have seen firsthand how important community
25 composting is to resident of my neighborhood. The

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1
2 support for community composting has been
3 overwhelming. The drop off was essentially doubling
4 in size each week to accommodate all the scraps that
5 were being brought in. The drop off site has also
6 been a great tool to educate members of the community
7 about the benefits of composting and its impact on
8 the local environment.

9 I initially began composting my food scraps for
10 environmental reasons, however, through this
11 experience I have learned how composting also
12 supports green jobs, saves taxpayer resources and
13 helps build community. The Parks Department must
14 recognize how important these sites are and how much
15 the local community benefits from the work these
16 organizations do. The decision to evict these sites
17 is short sided and in direct conflict with the will
18 and wellbeing of the communities they serve.

19 I urge you to protect, preserve and also, expand
20 these community composting sites. As a resident of
21 North Brooklyn, I am also counting on Council Members
22 in North Brooklyn, Stephen Levin and Antonio Reynoso
23 to fight this with all their might. Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up is Marya
25 Friedman followed by Carolina Diaz Chan.

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

3 MARYA FRIEDMAN: Hello, my name is Marya Friedman
4 and I am a resident of Brooklyn and I want to start
5 off by thanking both Chairs, the dedicated Council
6 Members, the Department officials moderators and
7 community organizers who have spoken today and I want
8 to start with a statistic. Which is that according
9 to the EPA and their most recent Municipal Solid
10 Waste Report, 20 percent of municipal solid waste
11 generated each year in the United States as food
12 waste.

13 So, composting then has the power to become the
14 magical reversal of one-fifth of our way stream. It
15 is our direct community-based solution to turn trash
16 into the treasure of a fertile future.

17 As with many of the others in attendance today, I
18 used to rely on Brooklyn's residential composting
19 pick up bin to drop off my compost every week. I
20 have been composting for years. I started in college
21 because I was going to our college farm and helping
22 to churn every Sunday morning, which is actually how
23 I made some of my closest friendships. So, I
24 continued to do that when I came back home to the
25 city and my parents also started composting first at

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1 the drop off on 23rd Street near where they live and
2 then with the residential program.
3

4 So, now, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic,
5 both the residential pickup has been cut. Also, the
6 pickup site at the Grand Army Plaza Green Market that
7 I go to on Saturday. So, I have been having to
8 either bike my compost into Manhattan if I want to
9 drop it off at night after work or rely on one of the
10 weekend drop off hours. Thankfully, there are
11 community based organizations like BK ROT in addition
12 to Big Reuse and Lower East Side Ecology Center that
13 have thought of solutions to this.

14 BK ROT now has a residential pickup service.
15 They wouldn't be able to make this possible without
16 Big Reuse supporting their operations and allowing
17 them to use their site to process compost.

18 I want to share a statistic -

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

20 MARYA FRIEDMAN: From BK Rot, which is that 30
21 percent of the city's compost is being processed by
22 both Big Reuse and the Lower East Side Ecology
23 Center. It is imperative that we save both of these
24 organizations and the land that they use because
25

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1
2 that's 30 percent of what could be 20 percent of our
3 city's way stream.

4 Thank you vey much for your time.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Carolina
6 Diaz Chan followed by Renee Pappous.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

8 CAROLINA DIAZ CHAN: Hi, my name is Carolina Diaz
9 Chan and I am a resident of Canarsie Brooklyn. At
10 the beginning of 2020, I finally made the decision to
11 start composting at home. I had previously applied
12 to get a compost bin from the compost collection
13 program but found that we were outside the pickup
14 zone in Canarsie.

15 The closest drop off location was at the Wyckoff
16 House Museum which is only a 15-minute drive from my
17 house and that's where we started dropping off our
18 compost. When the pandemic hit, the farm operations
19 at the museum were forced to close their composting
20 operations for a couple months and worried where we
21 would take our compost, my husband and I talked to
22 our landlord and they were gracious enough to allow
23 us to buy our own compost bin to do composting in
24 front of our building.

25

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2 I then reached out to LES Ecology Center for
3 resources and they very graciously provided us with
4 wood chips and wood shavings for the bottom of our
5 compost bin that we needed to place over concrete.
6 LES Ecology Center gave us these materials for free
7 and they were so helpful with sharing additional
8 compost tips.

9 As you know, LES Ecology Center and Big Reuse are
10 currently facing eviction by the New York Parks
11 Department. We need these organizations desperately
12 in New York City because they are some of the last
13 composting programs whose budget was cut by 90
14 percent this year.

15 Additionally, as an environmental justice issue,
16 most New Yorkers are not as lucky as I am to have a
17 landlord willing to allow me to compost on their
18 property and without public compost drop offs near
19 their home, most New Yorkers would not be able to
20 compost at all. I am furious to say the least, that
21 New York City has allowed their compost collection
22 program to fall apart when at its peak, it was the
23 largest compost program in the country.

24 New York City endures to promote their zero waste
25 to landfills by 2030 program and yet, if we do not

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1
2 continue to save what is left of our composting
3 program, that will absolutely never happen. Our
4 planet doesn't have time for us to waste. What we do
5 in the next ten years will have a huge impact on
6 saving our environment. Recycling is certainly not
7 our only solution to zero waste and composting is
8 just as important if not more so.

9 We need to make public composting easy and
10 accessible for all New Yorkers. I am asking the City
11 Council today to save the LES Ecology Center and Big
12 Reuse sites from being evicted by the New York Parks
13 Department. These programs should be our proudest
14 and we should make fully funding composting in New
15 York City -

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

17 CAROLINA DIAZ CHAN: As one of our highest
18 priorities. To the New York Parks Department, please
19 step up because community composting does belong
20 inside New York City Parks. Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Renee
22 Pappous followed by Debby Lee.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.
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2 RENE E PAPP OUS: Hello, my name is Renee Pappous
3 and I am an Astoria Resident in District 22. I am
4 testifying as a community composter, a volunteer for
5 the micro-hauler Astoria Pug and a concerned citizen
6 of the City of New York.

7 My first roommate in Astoria, we were responsible
8 for sorting and preparing our buildings trash for
9 collection. Watching my roommate spend hours wading
10 through the building refuse was frustrating and
11 troubling. The task was unpleasant to say the least
12 and it highlighted to me all the hours and resources
13 we spent just to send our discarded items to rot
14 outside of the city.

15 Luckily, I learned about Big Reuse and their drop
16 off sites in Astoria. The sites were convenient and
17 accessible. Moreover, Big Reuse and the New York
18 City Compost Project taught me how and why composting
19 is a necessary alternative to sending scraps to
20 landfills.

21 I learned that composting promotes a circular
22 economy, creates green jobs, safeguards frontline
23 communities and mitigates climate change. How could
24 I not drop off scraps every week when the stakes are
25

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1 so high? And Big Reuse makes it so easy for an
2 average citizen like me to participate.
3

4 For these reasons and many others, I was devastated
5 when Mayor de Blasio slashed the community composting
6 budget earlier this year. And further devastated to
7 learn the Commissioner of the Parks Department does
8 not support Big Reuses efforts. Especially knowing
9 that the Parks Department benefits from Big Reuses
10 finished compost.

11 Please let us work together to find a way to
12 allow Big Reuse to continue its operations on its
13 Queen Bridge site. Our current and future neighbors
14 depend on it. Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you and Council Member
16 Levin has a question.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I just wanted to thank
19 this panel and all the panels. I have been listening
20 intermittently through other meetings this afternoon
21 and I just want to indicate to you all my
22 unconditional support for these efforts to save Big
23 Reuse. I represent North Brooklyn, so while the site
24 is about a mile from my District, I do have a number
25 of sites that bring composting to the Queens Borough

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2 Bridge site from McCarren Park, Transmitter Park now
3 as well. So, I am eager to work with you all and my
4 colleagues to implore the Parks Department to
5 reconsider this obviously terribly misguided policy.
6 And you know, this is kind of the perfect example of
7 government you know, acting in a way that is clearly
8 not in the interest of the wellbeing of the City and
9 just its unwillingness to change ways is very
10 frustrating. And so, I just want to let you all know
11 how committed I am to this cause as well and I will
12 be with your 100 percent of the way. Thanks.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member.
14 Next up is Debby Lee followed by Anna Sacks followed
15 by Greg Genco, who will be our last registered
16 speaker.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 DEBBY LEE: Well, good afternoon, almost good
19 evening to everybody. Thank you so much Chairs
20 Reynoso and Koo for making this possible. Council
21 Member Levin for being here. Matt Drury, I hope you
22 are still here from Parks and that you are listening,
23 that somebody from Parks is represented. I am
24 grateful that our youth from Cafeteria Cultures
25 Programs had the opportunity to testify today. Thank

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1
2 you Councilwoman Carlina Rivera also for not only
3 supporting composting but composting education.

4 I am the Executive Director and Founder of
5 Cafeteria Culture. We are an environmental education
6 organization with a home base on the Lower East Side.
7 And we work creatively with youth to achieve
8 equitable zero waste. Climate smart, school
9 communities and solutions and a plastic free
10 biosphere and I am obviously here to advocate for
11 permanent status, long-term leases for Lower East
12 Side Ecology Center and Big Reuse for the benefit of
13 all communities for future generations.

14 This kind of interagency inertia is just
15 unacceptable. And now, I am going to take off my hat
16 as Executive Director and I am going to speak as a
17 taxpayer, a mother and a cancer patient, a stage 4
18 cancer patient. Who regularly uses the East Side
19 River and the joy of my day is to run to the Lower
20 East Side Ecology Center's location in East River
21 Park. Because when I see that in the East River Park
22 for me, that is one of the most beautiful examples of
23 what a climate smart city should look like. It's all
24 there in one piece. And I look at the other members
25 of the community using that space, enjoying that

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1
2 space. The true definition of what a public space
3 and a park space should be. There is no time for
4 interagency inertia right now. This is the time for
5 demonstrating how city agencies, organizations and
6 communities can work together to enact the most
7 innovative and collaborative climate smart solutions.

8 At Cafeteria Culture we like to use that word -

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 DEBBY LEE: Climate smart. I just want to say,
11 this is really climate stupid and I have plenty of
12 energy to continue educating youth on composting. I
13 am exhausted by advocating for this kind of climate
14 smart, low cost community composting solutions and
15 Mayor de Blasio, where are you? Parks Commissioner,
16 where are you? Hear what the community is saying.
17 Thank you everybody for your time today.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Council Member
19 Holden does have a question.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member Holden, you
22 may -

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay, I am unmuted now.
24 Thank you. This is so inspiring, all of the
25 advocates coming out and you have my total support

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2 and I just want to echo Council Member Levin's
3 comments that we will fight to reinstate the curbside
4 pickup certainly on composting.

5 My neighborhood, my Community Board, as a member
6 of the Community Board, we were one of the first
7 Community Boards to have in Queens, to have the
8 compost curbside. It worked. It was difficult you
9 know convincing some of the residents and it took
10 some time but we were able to that and I felt, you
11 know when we eliminated it during this pandemic, we
12 are slipping backwards and we are going to have to
13 start all over again. But I believe we have a lot of
14 volunteers.

15 I think we could do a program, a test program by
16 Community Board or Council District to reinstate it
17 with the help of volunteers and I just want to echo
18 some of the advocates that spoke and said, why didn't
19 the Parks Department Deputy Commissioner Biederman
20 stay on and listen? And the least they could do - he
21 has done that at a number of hearings we have had and
22 it's a shame. Shame on them. Shame on Parks. Let's
23 reinstate the composting sites throughout the city.
24 Let's create more.

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2 So, I want to thank everyone who stayed on this
3 and is fighting for the greater good. Thank you so
4 much everyone.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member.
6 Next up we have Anna Sacks followed by Greg Genco,
7 who will be our last panelist.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

9 ANNA SACKS: Hi everyone. Thank you. I am
10 speaking on behalf of myself right now. I am part of
11 the Save our Compost Coalition and I want to address
12 my testimony to the Mayor. I am very frustrated at
13 your inaction. We have been working on this issue
14 since August. We have had countless meetings, not
15 just me but NRDC New York Lawyers for Public
16 Interest, Earth Matter, GrowNYC, Big Reuse, Lower
17 East Side Ecology Center. This has consumed a huge
18 amount of our time.

19 What we wanted to be working on was thinking
20 about composting for the future, gearing up for the
21 next budget fight and making sure that our community
22 compost sites are equally distributed in New York
23 City, so that every single Council District has a
24 site.

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2 We were side tracked by this and it is extremely
3 frustrating to have this nonissue that your
4 administration has made into an issue and has
5 consumed a huge amount of our time.

6 And so, I want to say shame on you Mayor. Where
7 have you been and why has it gotten to this point
8 where they are about to be evicted and it is taking a
9 huge rallying of community to even get this hearing?
10 I think that your Administrator just doesn't want
11 composting in parks and he needs to admit, realize he
12 was wrong and say, you know what, I rethought this
13 and composting is important to parks. It makes
14 sense. It belongs in parks.

15 I also want to say that evicting Lower East Side
16 Ecology Center and Big Reuse with no interim in plan
17 means less composting and are on an already stretched
18 budget. It means fewer new drop off sites, fewer
19 hours that they are going to be open, less
20 composting, more waste to landfills and incinerators.
21 That is not the future that we want. That's not the
22 future that we fought for.

23 And I just, I am just so disappointed also that
24 the Commissioner of Parks wasn't here today because
25 we are really addressing his problem with composting

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2 in Parks that he needs to fix. Composting is
3 essential and it makes a lot of sense to be in parks
4 and Mr. Mayor, please stop wasting our time.

5 Oh, last point, sorry, but we cannot kick this
6 down the line six months from now.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 ANNA SACKS: We are going to be dealing with
9 another budget crisis and we don't have the capacity.
10 We don't have the bandwidth to be dealing with both
11 the budget crisis and advocating for that and having
12 to deal with not having permanent solutions for Big
13 Reuse and Lower East Side Ecology Center.

14 So, it cannot be kicked down the line, we need to
15 solve this now. Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is Greg
17 Genco.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

19 GREG GENCO: Okay, sorry about that. Yeah, thank
20 you to the Council Members, Big Reuse Activists who
21 are fighting for a just and equitable community and
22 no thank you to the Parks Department for wasting our
23 time today forcing us to fight a common sense policy.

24 My name is Greg Genco, I live in Vinegar Hill but
25 I am a lifelong New Yorker. With that said, you

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1 know, I consider myself an American first and a New
2 Yorker second. Evicting Big Reuse Composting
3 Processing facilities without a replacement in favor
4 of a parking lot and other operational measures, as
5 truck repairs and maintenance is a policy failure of
6 epic proportions. And hearing Sam earlier call it
7 not a true closed loop like Central Park is rich and
8 embarrassing to the intellect of this passionate
9 community whose trying to save our city. Hearing Sam
10 describe Big Reuse Composting as degrading of city
11 lands is a joke and a piece of theater when you just
12 it should be replaced by maintenance of trucks.
13 Let's get it straight, nearly all of our city's waste
14 gets shipped to landfills in low-income communities
15 across New York, Kentucky, New Jersey, Connecticut,
16 Chester Pennsylvania.

18 This is our opportunity to do what is right and
19 be environmental stewards of our waste here in the
20 city and not send it to another poor American
21 community. But if empathy is not your thing, maybe
22 fiscal policy is. Last year, we spent \$420 million
23 to export our waste and in the year 2020, organics
24 recycling like composting is common sense.
25 Environmental and fiscal policy that should be

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2 prioritized tenfold over the space for maintenance of
3 vehicles for the City. We are on the brink of the
4 greatest human induced disaster, climate change.

5 City policy to evict composting processing
6 facilities will accelerate climate change and
7 increase the city's expenses year over year. It is
8 just irresponsible. I beg you, if you don't care
9 about climate change, make the right decision. Make
10 the fiscally conservative decision.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

12 GREG GENCO: Save this City. Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. If we
14 have inadvertently missed anyone who has registered
15 to testify and has yet to have been called to speak,
16 please use the Zoom raise hand function and you will
17 be called on in the order that your hand has been
18 raised.

19 Seeing none, I will invite the Chairs to make any
20 closing remarks and adjourn the hearing. I believe
21 Chair Koo has a quick statement, then Chair Reynoso.

22 CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Yeah, I guess I will speak
23 first. I just want to say thank you to everyone. I
24 don't want to ruin Greg's closing statement because
25 it really summoned everything up. The frustration,

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2 the illogical behavior by the Parks Department just
3 across the board. I hope this served – I know other
4 Parks Reps were still on the call. I hope they take
5 this back. It is almost over seven hours' worth of
6 testimony. All unanimously supporting the
7 maintaining of both Big Reuse and the Lower East Side
8 Ecology Center in their current spaces.

9 Thank you all for your advocacy. This is only
10 the beginning and this is a waste of time. This
11 should be very easy for the city to do and the fact
12 that we had to spend seven hours doing this truly
13 speaks to how horrific and just out of touch the
14 Parks Department is with what we need to be doing to
15 save our city in the year 2020. Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Chair Koo are you
17 there to close out the hearing?

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: We are not hearing it Mr.
19 Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: I am sorry. I forgot to unmute
21 myself yeah. Thank you to everyone who took the time
22 to testify today. Especially our students and to my
23 Co-Chair Council Member Reynoso for hosting this
24 joint hearing with me today. This hearing shed light
25 on the challenges composting faces in our city today

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and we hope that the city has listened and will be able to find a solution that works for all parties. Thank you again and have a good weekend, especially our Sergeants at Arms and staff for hosting this long, long meeting today. Thank you very much everyone.

CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Yes, I just want to echo - thank you Chair Koo for doing this along side Department of Sanitation. We couldn't have done it without you. So, I want to thank you and I agree, thank you to all of the staff, all the people that waited to speak. The Sergeant at Arms, everyone just for the great work and the great turnout. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah. So, you want me to close off?

CHAIRPERSON REYNOSO: Yeah, close out please Chair.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, this meeting is adjourned. [GAVEL]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date January 14, 2021