



**Testimony Prepared by the Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board to the
City Council Committee on Sanitation & Solid Waste Management**

Oversight Hearing Concerning Street and Sidewalk Cleanliness

Thursday September 24, 2020

Good Afternoon Chair Reynoso and members of the Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management.

I am Kathy Nizzari of the Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board (MSWAB). We want to first thank NYC's Strongest, our Sanitation workers, who have kept us safe as we hunkered down in our homes these past 6 months. The men and women of the Department of Sanitation also lead the city's massive and complicated hunger relief efforts that provided food assistance to nearly 1.5 million New York City residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their valiant work ensured that our health and safety were protected. Next, we want to thank the Mayor's Office for reallocating funds to supplement the Department of Sanitation's efforts to keep streets and parks clean. And we also wish to thank Council Members for allowing us this opportunity to present testimony for this oversight hearing concerning sidewalk and street cleanliness.

MSWAB strongly believes that any further reductions in Sanitation's budget without cooperation from its citizens and support from other City agencies will compromise the health and safety of all New Yorkers. The recent increase in local rat populations since the compost program was cut is evidence of that. We are grateful that essential food scrap drop-off sites have been restored and are hopeful that proper outreach and education will help ameliorate this issue. We ask that Council Members and the Mayor's Office maintain DSNY's budget and services for the foreseeable future to allow time for the review and improvement of DSNY's services to efficiently and effectively protect the health and safety of its residents, while meeting the City's zero waste and climate goals.

In addition, the City should continue evaluating long-term solutions that includes policy changes that will shift the City's waste burden back to producers and consumers through adopting policies like Extended Producer

Responsibility (EPR) and Save As You Throw (SAYT), while near-term solutions to bridge service gaps may include service swaps (e.g. substituting a waste collection service for recycling collection).

We understand the present budget crisis is like no other faced by NYC and that departments citywide have been subject to dramatic cost-saving stopgap measures. DSNY's budget was reduced by \$106 million this fiscal year, resulting in the suspension of its landmark organics collection program, reduced street cleaning and litter basket services, and suspension and reduction of other important waste-reduction solutions. NYC is still reeling from the loss of these crucial services that help the City progress towards its Zero Waste goals with potentially more cuts to come. While we understand the necessity of these cuts, any further reduction in DSNY's budget will affect essential services that protect the health and safety of New Yorkers.

As the City considers its options, the MSWAB will be happy to assist Council Members and the Mayor's Office as they work on strategies to achieve these critical goals.

New York City remains the densest urban area in the U.S., with 28,000 residents per square mile. Our land scarcity is both a blessing and a curse as it puts extraordinary pressure on NYC residents and systems to preserve our land and environmental quality. New Yorkers depend heavily on DSNY to provide a safe and clean environment in and around their homes and places of work. With respect to public spaces, DSNY's efforts to maintain street and sidewalk cleanliness reduces the amount of trash from entering the City's fragile stormwater system. Removing waste in a timely fashion acts as a vector control to ensure and enhance public health. After inclement weather, street sweepers and snow plows remove dangers related to slip and trip hazards. And, of course, litter and odor-free streets help sustain our quality of life.

Thank you for your time.

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Members of the Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board: Matt Civello, chair; Rona Banai, vice chair; Kim Davis, secretary; Diane Orr, treasurer. Members: Margot Becker, Joyce Bialik, Diana Blackwell, Maggie Clarke, Debby Lee Cohen, Peter Cohen, Ellen Cooper, DeNeile Cooper, Lorial Crowder, Ann Marie Cunningham, Meredith Danberg-Ficarelli, Lisa Denby, Wendy Frank, Katie Hanner, Cullen Howe, Sophia Huda, Melissa Iachan, Christine Johnson, Sarah Lehrich, Kate Mikuliak, Kathy Nizzari, Alexis Obernauer, Jacquelyn Ottman, Ushma Pandya, Kristi Parson, Tinia Pina, John Reali, Martin Robertson, Rick Schulman, Brendan Sexton, Marc Shifflett, Amy Uong, Aditi Varshneya, Chana Widawski

Testimony of the Brooklyn Solid Waste Advisory Board

Regarding the allocation of funds for street and sidewalk cleanliness



September 24, 2020

This comment is presented on behalf of the Brooklyn Solid Waste Advisory Board (BkSWAB). We are grateful for the opportunity to present testimony for this oversight hearing.

The BkSWAB commends, and thanks, the City for its decision to restore \$2.8m to the Department of Sanitation's budget for the re-establishment of organic waste drop-off sites and community composting projects. We would also like to thank the Mayor's Office for the provision of additional funds to support the cleanliness of streets and parks. In particular, the decision to focus the restoration of litter basket trucks on neighborhoods most impacted by Covid-19 is a welcome development.

More generally, the BkSWAB recognizes the essential nature of streetside and cleanliness services, and that their budget should be protected as far as possible. At a time when the outdoor environment has never been more important due to the constraints on indoor activity, the budget cuts enforced in the spring have led to a decline in environmental quality and cleanliness in parks and on sidewalks, alongside an increase in vermin such as rats. A clean community fosters local pride amongst its residents, in turn enabling and reinforcing altruistic behaviors such as recycling and waste prevention.

As such, the BkSWAB recommends that future budget cuts – which we acknowledge may be necessary given the economic outlook - should be focused on identifying inefficiencies and maximizing revenue streams rather than cutting frontline services. This could include the reallocation of truck routes (for example, reducing the frequency of waste collections in areas that retain thrice-weekly collections), increasing quality of recycling, and investigating longer-term policy options such as Save As You Throw (SAYT) and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).

The findings of the audit conducted from 2015-2019 by the Office of the New York State Comptroller, presented in Report 2019-N-1, bear this out. The overwhelming conclusion is that DSNY does not use readily available data to inform the allocation of resources – in this case, to street cleaning. If DSNY applies the approach of combining the expertise of its staff with available and easily obtainable data across its range of services, the result would be an

increase in both efficiency and effectiveness – potentially alleviating the need for cuts to frontline services in the future.

The BkSWAB is committed to working with elected representatives and citizens towards a waste management system that effectively supports the environment and economy of New York City while enhancing the living spaces inhabited by all its residents.

Thank you for your consideration.

The Brooklyn Solid Waste Advisory Board

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Oversight-Sidewalk and Street Cleanliness in NYC

Sanitation Hearing

1. Have you experienced a difference in street and sidewalk cleanliness since these budget cuts took effect in July? How and where? Yes, there has been more outpouring of garbage at the litter baskets. Also, the streets are filled with mud due to the National Grid pipeline work. The overall conditions of the sidewalk are filled with litter.

2. Do you have any suggestions for how the City can improve street and sidewalk cleaning operations during our current fiscal challenges?

Advocate Suggestions:

The city needs to turn its focus on creating a city-wide plan to reduce garbage

The city can enforce or re-enforce a ban on single-use restaurant dine-in dinnerware, plastic bag's and foam containers to reduce garbage.

Implement a clear plastic bag rule for the residential/commercial garbage (Example Halifax)

Send recycle and garbage schedule reminders via text and email to commercial and residential owners and renters

Incentivize restaurant owners to minimize the single use containers

Support environmental services like www.deliverzero.com

During current fiscal challenge incentivize the DSNY citation task unit by implementing a ticket quota system and offer a bonus if they meet their quota

Offer a tax break for building/commercial space owners that have minimal fines/citations

Street signage of garbage/recycle schedule

Social media and public signage marketing campaign regarding litter

National Grid should be responsible for the street cleaning during their pipeline work.

3. Do you think that there are any environmental consequences of reduced street cleaning? a. Should we be concerned about litter in sewers or entering waterways?

Yes, not only is it affecting the general health of the area it will eventually contribute to the increase of crime as garbage represents neglect. We should be very much so concerned with the garbage entering our waterways. That water flow is flowing into our sewer systems. Litter can create flooding of the sewer systems and make its way to our waterways which can cause a major health risk and put both the wildlife and humans at risk.

Debora Rivas

The Clean Bushwick Initiative