

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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February 11, 2021
Start: 10:38 a.m.
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HELD AT: Remote Hearing (Virtual Room 1)

B E F O R E: Costa Constantinides
CHAIRPERSON

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Dharma Diaz
Steven Levin
Carlos Menchaca
Eric Ulrich

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Recordings.

3 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: PC recording rolling.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Recording to the cloud

5 all set.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Backup is rolling.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Sergeant Lugo, your
8 opening statement, please.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, everyone.

10 Welcome to today's remote New York City Council will
11 vote of the Committee on Environmental Protection.

12 At this time, would all panelists please turn on your
13 video? To minimize disruption, please place
14 electronic devices to vibrate or silent. Thank you
15 for your cooperation. Chair, we are ready to begin.

16 CHAIRPERSON CONSTANTINIDES: Thank you,
17 Sergeant-at-arms. And good morning, everyone. I am
18 Costa Constantinides, Chair of the Committee on
19 Environmental Protection and today the Committee will
20 hold a vote on the plan to transition the use of
21 Rikers Island from make corrections facility holding
22 detainees to Renewable Rikers, a sustainable,
23 renewable contribution to New York City's green
24 future. We will also hear a vote on Intro 1966 A, a
25 pilot program to test the city's wastewater.

1 Treatment plans for the presence of SARS COV-2, the
2 strain of coronavirus that causes Covid 19, and
3 submit a report with the results of that program.

4 Rikers Island's violent history will always be a
5 staying on New York City's history, but the bills we
6 are voting on today have potential to change the
7 future of the island into something that the entire
8 city can benefit from and can help [inaudible

9 00:01:32] structure out of many of the communities
10 that are most affected by Rikers legacy. Five years
11 ago the Littman Commission, independent commission,
12 convened in 2016 and outlined the scenario for
13 beneficial reuse for Rikers Island that included a
14 power storage research facility and a public
15 Greenway. The Renewable Rikers plan envisions

16 ultimately shuttering the jail facilities on Rikers
17 Island and transitioning Rikers to renewable energy
18 as part of the city's efforts to reduce fossil fuel
19 usage 80% by the year 2050. Intro 1592-- 1592 A--

20 Intro 1592 A-- I want to make sure we are right on
21 the record-- would establish a process for
22 transferring the land through the Department of
23 Corrections to the Department of Citywide
24 Administrative Services. And by annual evaluations,

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2 any portion in not active use for housing of persons
3 or providing of services for such persons would be so
4 transferred, but the entirety being transferred no
5 later than August 31st of 2027. Additionally, the
6 legislation establishes a Rikers Island Advisory
7 Committee consisting of relevant commissioners,
8 persons impacted by Rikers, experts in environmental
9 Justice and sustainability which would evaluate and
10 make recommendations on potential uses of the island
11 for sustainability and resiliency purposes. This
12 local law would take effect immediately. Intro 1593
13 - A would require that a feasibility study be
14 conducted as an appendix to long-term energy plan to
15 ascertain whether certain different types of
16 renewable energy sources, combined with batteries
17 storage, are feasible on Rikers Island. The long-
18 term energy plan, as amended 2019 as part of the
19 Climate Mobilization Act would be completed by
20 December 31, 2021 and the feasibility study required
21 by this legislation would be completed as an
22 appendix. The initial plan by June 30 of 2022. This
23 local law would take effect immediately. Finally,
24 Intro 1966 - A would require the Commissioner of the
25 Department of Environmental Protection, in

2 consultation with the Commissioner of the Department
3 of Health and Mental Hygiene to create a pilot
4 program to test the city's wastewater facilities for
5 the presence of SARS COV-2, the frantic coronavirus
6 that causes Covid 19, and submit a report with the
7 results of this program. This local law would take
8 effect immediately. We have an opportunity today to
9 the chart a greener New York City, a more sustainable
10 New York City, the New York City that creates
11 renewable energy, New York City that helps wash away
12 at least some small measure, the stain of Rikers
13 Island on our city's history and look to a greener
14 and brighter future. I want to thank all the
15 activists that, you know, help envision this plan and
16 push this plan forward. And help us listen
17 throughout the five boroughs as we put it together.
18 I want to thank all of our committee staff. Samara
19 Swanson, our legislative attorney, our policy
20 analyst, Nadia Johnson and Ricky Chala, our financial
21 analyst, Jonathan Seltzer, my legislative counsel,
22 Nicholas Wasowski, my Chief of Staff, Nick Rolson,
23 and, you know, I also want to thank Brad Reed and
24 Laura Popa both for their hard, hard work on these
25 pieces of legislation, as well as our speaker Cory

2 Johnson for his environmental vision and his vision
3 for a better and more green New York City. So, with
4 that, I would recommend a yes vote on all the items
5 on today's docket.

6 COMMITTEE CLERK: Good morning. Excuse
7 me. William Martin, Committee clerk. Roll call
8 vote. Committee on Environmental Protection.
9 Introductions 1592 A, 1593 A, and 1966 A. All items
10 are coupled. Chair Constantinides.

11 CHAIRPERSON CONSTANTINIDES: I'm very
12 excited to vote aye on all.

13 COMMITTEE CLERK: Levin?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Permission to
15 explain my vote?

16 CHAIRPERSON CONSTANTINIDES: Absolutely.
17 Absolutely, Council member.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I just wanted to
19 take a moment to-- I'm going to go off my video for
20 a second. I just want to take a moment to thank and
21 commend the Chair for this legislation and speak for
22 a second about this renewable Rikers plan. Sorry.
23 And let the public know that, you know, when we said
24 that we were going to do this, but that we were going
25 actually close Rikers, we got a lot of opposition at

2 the time saying that it was a bait and switch or that
3 this was never really going to happen. That we were
4 rebuilding new jails and we weren't going to close
5 Rikers Island that it was the jail expansion plan.
6 And just for the record, everyone should know that
7 the capacity on Rikers Island is around 20,000 or
8 more beds in the borough based jail plan is, I
9 believe, around 4000 beds. In but at the time, you
10 know, the integrity of this body and of that vote was
11 called into question and I am grateful that we are at
12 this point now where we can say affirmatively through
13 legislation that Rikers Island is going to close and
14 that we are looking forward into the future for
15 future generations by planning a renewable resource
16 for energy so that our city can be powered and not
17 relying--

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: And I will just
20 conclude right now. On dirty electricity or fossil
21 fuels, but could, in fact, be powered under its own
22 volition through renewable sources. And it is a very
23 important thing that we are doing this today and that
24 this legislation has come to pass and so I wanted to
25 just acknowledge the work that everyone has done on

2 it and that this is an instance where the Council is,
3 in fact, a carrying through on what it said it was
4 going to do. And, with that, I vote aye on all.
5 Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON CONSTANTINIDES: Thank you,
7 Council member Levin.

8 COMMITTEE CLERK: Menchaca?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Thank you.
10 Before I vote, though, I raised my hand earlier, if I
11 could ask some questions for the Chair. I think some
12 things are important for people to know. Can I ask
13 some questions?

14 CHAIRPERSON CONSTANTINIDES: Sure.

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Thank you.

17 So, the first thing is I was in a personal meeting
18 yesterday and someone brought up the concept of NYCHA
19 on Rikers and I think it would be great for the Chair
20 of this Committee who is really kind of pushing these
21 pieces of legislation that I support just to let
22 everybody know that none of these bills include
23 housing or bringing housing to NYCHA. It would be a
24 great thing for you to clarify. That is one.

2 CHAIRPERSON CONSTANTINIDES: I think that
3 these bills, and no way,, guarantee anything. These
4 bills would guarantee that we get the Department of
5 Corrections off of the island. These bills will have
6 a study for sustainability and resiliency purposes
7 and study our energy plan. And I think bringing any
8 housing to-- and this is me going as a personal--
9 this is me just saying that it would be very
10 complicated to put housing on Rikers Island being
11 that it is built on ashen garbage and there are
12 methane leaks. So I think that would be very
13 complicated.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Awesome. I
15 think it is just an important thing for our New
16 Yorkers to hear, as when I heard this I was
17 perplexed. The other question is, if the Mayor wakes
18 up tomorrow where there is a new administration,
19 which is going to happen soon, and the city scraps
20 the four borough jails, the legislation that we are
21 really passing today will not be impacted at all.
22 That it will move in perpetuity separate and apart
23 from the four borough jails. And I think that is an
24 important thing to clarify here today.

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2 CHAIRPERSON CONSTANTINIDES: As I said
3 before, these bills in the law and being sent by no
4 later than August 31st of 2027, the Department of
5 Corrections has to leave Rikers' Island.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Great. So I
7 think that's another really important component. So,
8 with that, I want to explain my vote and say, thank
9 you, Chair, for the incredible work that you have
10 done as leader of this committee.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

12 CHAIRPERSON CONSTANTINIDES: Go on, Council
13 member Menchaca.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Thank you. So
15 much of what this Council has done is move the
16 conversation from-- and I'm going to associate some
17 of my words with Council member Levin, but not all of
18 them, and say that we did move the needle on this
19 question on whether or not we should close Rikers and
20 it changed minds. Our discussions and the Council
21 and the debates that we had internally and externally
22 really changed the mood about Rikers and I think
23 where we failed was approving four borough jails.
24 That is the failure of this Council and I think that
25 what I think is important here is that this committee

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2 is really looking forward to creating a real vision
3 for something that is better for Rikers. Rikers is
4 still open today. The concept of a pretrial cage is
5 wrong and so I just want to, as I approve with my
6 vote on this committee, say yes to these bills and
7 more work needs to go back to the really right the
8 wrongs because, as I have learned and I become more
9 really radicalized around the idea that we have to
10 abolish these spaces that we warehouse and cage our
11 New Yorkers before they even get convicted. In
12 Rikers and these four borough jails really represent
13 that. So, I'm really excited to be testing this
14 about to really bring a whole new vision allow for
15 leadership to rise again. Thank you so much, Chair.
16 I vote aye.

17 CHAIRPERSON CONSTANTINIDES: Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE CLERK: Dharma Diaz?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DIAZ: I vote aye.

20 COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you. One moment.

21 Okay. By a vote of four in the affirmative, zero in
22 the negative, and no abstentions, all items have been
23 adopted by the committee. Thank you.

24

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2 CHAIRPERSON CONSTANTINIDES: All right.

3 So, with that, I will gavel this committee hearing of
4 the Environmental Protection vote closed.

5 [gavel]

6 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you, Chair
7 Constantinides.

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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 February 28, 2021