

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 25, 2021

Start: 12:06 PM

Recess: 12:15 PM

HELD AT:

REMOTE HEARING (VIRTUAL ROOM 1)

B E F O R E: COSTA CONSTANTINDES, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: DARMA DIAZ  
STEPHEN LEVIN  
CARLOS MENCHACA  
ERIC ULRICH

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

1 COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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2                   TECHNICIAN 1: And the Cloud is up.

3                   TECHNICIAN 2: Backup is rolling.

4                   TECHNICIAN 1: Sergeant Polite, you may begin the  
5 opening.

6                   SERGEANT POLITE: Thank you. Good morning and  
7 welcome to the remote hearing on the Committee on  
8 Environmental Protection. Will Council Members and  
9 staff please turn on their video at this time. Thank  
10 you. To minimize disruptions please place all cell  
11 phones and electronics to vibrate. Chair, we are  
12 ready to begin.

13                   CHAIR CONSTANTINIDES: Thank you Sergeant at Arms.  
14 Thank you. Good afternoon everyone. My name is  
15 Constantinides. I am Chair of the Environmental  
16 Protection Committee and today, today we'll hold  
17 we'll hold a hearing and vote on the planned  
18 transitional use of Rikers Island from a correctional  
19 facility holding detainees to renewable Rikers, a  
20 sustainable but doable contribution to New York  
21 City's green future. As I said it just two weeks ago  
22 Rikers Island has a notorious past, today's action  
23 will help us turn Rikers Island into an integral  
24 contribution towards our sustainable future. Just 13  
25 months ago we introduced the Renewable Rikers bills,

2 which help formulate a new vision for the island.  
3 Committees historically targeted by the Criminal  
4 Justice system. Communities too often burn it with  
5 the city's most polluting infrastructure. The  
6 communities facing Environmental Justice challenges  
7 can look forward to some measure of relief. Intro  
8 1591-B would require the Commissioner of  
9 Environmental Protection in consultation with the  
10 Commissioner of sanitation to assess the feasibility  
11 of constructing a wastewater treatment facility on  
12 Rikers Island. The study would consider population  
13 projections and possible alternatives for wastewater  
14 treatment, and disposal as well as minimum capacity  
15 and maximum capacity a wastewater treatment facility  
16 on Rikers Island should have, how much wastewater  
17 might be able to be diverted from other facilities  
18 and the capacity on Rikers Island for the capture of  
19 combined sewer overflow or CSO. This required study  
20 will also consider the potential for organic waste  
21 recycling via composting operations, organic  
22 codigestion and bio solids we use. This study will  
23 also assess in a separate review the presence of  
24 methane, the potential installation of methane  
25 recovery systems, and the use of such systems for any

2 wastewater treatment facility. Finally, the Rikers  
3 Island Advisory Committee will make recommendations  
4 to the Department regarding the Feasibility Study and  
5 a separate review regarding the presence of methane.  
6 Individuals whose lives have been affected by the  
7 Justice System, Environmental Justice organizations,  
8 environmental organizations, planning organizations  
9 and labor organizations and help re-imagine a new  
10 Rikers Island. It needs posting the oldest sewer  
11 plants and final towage potential relief, and Rikers  
12 Island can reflect the hope for a better, greater  
13 future. According to NRDC, The National Resource and  
14 Defense Council a disproportionate percentage of  
15 people in jail on Rikers Island are black and black  
16 mixed despite making up for more than half of New  
17 York City's population. Furthermore, as late as last  
18 year the midst of the COVID Pandemic approximately  
19 72% of the people held on pre-trial detention were  
20 also held because they were unable to afford money  
21 for bail. This victory in the campaign to close  
22 Rikers Island Jail and transform the Island into a  
23 model of green infrastructure, and jobs coming from  
24 years of organizing a front line and bond at the  
25 Justice communities and organizations directly

2 impacted by incarceration there. I want to recommend  
3 a yes vote on all proposed legislation. Before we do  
4 that I just want to thank the committee staff Samara  
5 Swanston our Investigative Attorney, our Policy  
6 Analyst Nadia Johnston and Ricky Charla, our  
7 Financial Analyst Jonathan Seltzer, Bradley Reed,  
8 August Waite, (sp?) Locanda Bell (sp?) Laura Copa  
9 for all her great work, all the attorneys that were  
10 involved, my Legislative Director and Counsel Nichola  
11 Widzowski and my entire team and lastly our Speaker  
12 Corey Johnson who is helping us move this forward and  
13 moving New York City potentially being green, and  
14 green new deal direction. So with that I recommend a  
15 yes vote on this bill today.

16 WILLIAM MARTIN: Good after noon (coughs) excuse  
17 me. William Martin Committee Clerk roll call vote  
18 Committee on Environmental Protection Proposed  
19 Introduction 1591-B. Chair, Constantindies.

20 CHAIR CONSTANTIINIDES: I Vote aye.

21 WILLIAM MARTIN: Levin.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Permission to explain my  
23 vote.

24 CHAIR CONSTANINIDES: Certainly, Council Member.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you very much Chair.

3 I just want to thank you Chair, I want to thank the

4 Speaker, I want to thank Committee Counsel Samara

5 Swanston, and all the advocates who are pushing to

6 make sure that we as a Council pass this legislation

7 but also that we as a city see government make good

8 on the commitments that we made when we, when we

9 voted on the Borough Based Jails Plan back in 2019

10 that... To ensure that Rikers is not going to be

11 Rikers Island. Some steam for the developers to

12 build luxury housing or for some people to make

13 money. There was a lot of, a lot of discussion about

14 that at the time, and we insisted and asserted that

15 Rikers was going to be closed that it was no longer

16 going to be a jail, but this might take time a matter

17 of years. But we were doing, we were putting that

18 plan into practice and starting the gears in motion

19 to make sure that that happens, and that it happens

20 in a way that is...it can't be reversed. We know that

21 we're not going to be in office next year. The stats

22 will be in office and there will be a new mayor a new

23 administration, but if we get things going in a way

24 that is, that is irreversible and on a road towards

25 sustainability, you know, that's what we should be

2 doing, and so this, the passage of this bill today is  
3 an important part of that, and it's also... It's the  
4 right thing to do. We know that the greatest impact  
5 that our city has on climate change is how we consume  
6 energy, and we have 8-1/2 million people in this  
7 city, and then most that we can be off the grid as it  
8 relates to our fossil fuels is our...that's our down  
9 payment to future generations in our city and in our  
10 entire world, and we're the largest city in America.  
11 We've been leading by example. This is a once in a  
12 century opportunity not just directing when it comes  
13 to Criminal Justice reform, but also when it comes to  
14 how we, how we combat climate change in unique ways.  
15 So, Chair, I want to thank you. This is an important  
16 part of you legacy as Chair of this committee, and I  
17 want to thank Samara for all the work that she's  
18 done, Committee Counsel and your staff and then I  
19 vote aye on this today. Thank you.

20 WILLIAM MARTIN: Thank you. Menchaca.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Alright. Thank you.  
22 Chair, thank you.

23 WILLIAM MARTIN: Darma Diaz.

24 DARMA DIAZ: I also vote aye.

25

2 WILLIAM MARTIN: Thank you. One moment. Okay, by  
3 a vote of 4 in the affirmative zero in the negative  
4 and no abstentions both Introduction 15 and 1-B has  
5 been adopted by the committee.

6 CHAIR CONSTANINIDES: Okay, seeing no other  
7 members and with thanks to all the staff and all the  
8 Council Members who voted aye today, I will gavel  
9 this committee hearing closed. (gavel)

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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 March 6, 2021