



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

ANTONIO REYNOSO

Brooklyn Borough President

City Council Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management Hearing on the FY24 Preliminary Budget 3.15.23

Good afternoon Chair Nurse and thank you for holding this hearing today. I am here today to speak about a few priorities to improve climate resiliency and quality of life in our city: Commercial Waste Zones (CWZ), organics, containerization, and the Brooklyn District 13/15 garage.

Commercial Waste Zones: A zoned system for commercial waste will improve public health, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect workers, and make our streets safer. I was very disappointed to learn that DSNY intends to postpone implementation of the first zone until the end of next year, with full rollout expected to take at least two years after that. This means full implementation will not happen until *at least seven years* after we passed this bill in 2019.

Last term, the City Council passed a budget that provided DSNY with funding for 38 staff specifically dedicated to CWZ, as well as funding for outreach and marketing. Yet at the hearing last month, Commissioner Tisch testified that the program is “fully funded based on need” with 20 civilian staff (three of whom had yet to be hired) and 10 uniformed staff, with outreach not slated to begin until Q3 of 2024. We’ve also heard from multiple sources that these staff have consistently been reassigned to other projects, such as the Queens compost rollout. As much as I support expanding compost collection, it should not come at the expense of this program.

I disagree with the Commissioner’s assessment that it would be “premature” to start outreach now. A small business owner recently contacted my office when a new carter took over their existing contract, concerned because they assumed that DSNY had chosen the new carter for them as part of CWZ. This speaks to the misinformation that is out there, which needs to be addressed in order to ensure a successful rollout. With full staffing dedicated solely to the program, we could begin outreach now, speed up the RFP review process, and begin implementation sooner.

Organics: I appreciate DSNY’s commitment to expanding organics collection citywide. Organic waste currently makes up about 1/3 of the City’s waste stream. Separating it keeps it out of landfills, where it produces greenhouse gases; brings down costs in DSNY’s largest budgeted area (\$478m in FY24 for waste export); and decreases the amount of waste that NYC dumps on environmental justice communities in other parts of the state and country. The smart bins and option for curbside collection will make it easier for New Yorkers to participate. However, I remain skeptical that the program will be successful in the long-term unless participation is

mandatory. This will require extensive outreach and education using multiple languages and platforms, as well as an investment in operations and staffing, and it is concerning that there is not dedicated funding allocated to this initiative in the FY24 budget. Especially given that a supermajority of the Council supports Intro 244 (which would create the mandatory program), the Council and administration must work together now to ensure there is sufficient funding for it to be implemented quickly once the bill is passed.

Containerization: Every New Yorker agrees: the rat problem is bad and only getting worse. Containerizing waste is a proven solution to this issue. Since I expressed my dismay last year regarding cuts made to the pilot program, the pilot was in fact implemented; however, with the residential portion limited to only one block in Manhattan. Meanwhile, I have constituents from Downtown Brooklyn to Coney Island complaining about unsightly garbage piles and the rodents they attract, and DSNY has spent \$4 million to pay McKinsey to study something we already know works based on many examples from other cities and countries. DSNY promised us a “market-ready Request for Proposals — including recommended commercial terms, performance requirements, and specifications.” It has been 23 weeks since the 20-week study was reported, and I am very much looking forward to seeing this RFP released.

Brooklyn District 13/15 garage: I included this in my testimony and budget response last year, and want to reiterate that Brooklyn Districts 13 and 15 are in dire need of a new sanitation garage, yet this remains unfunded in the Capital Plan. These garages are still operating from among the worst physical plants in DSNY’s inventory, with BK 13 located in a dilapidated building and parking its trucks on an HPD-owned site slated for affordable housing development, and BK 15 using trailers in an area plagued by flooding. A new garage was proposed at Coney Island Creek decades ago, and City Council approved site selection in 2006, but implementation was delayed so long that National Grid put the site on the private market in 2020. I want to again ask the administration to negotiate with National Grid to acquire the site before it’s too late, and to move forward with this new garage as soon as possible.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to working with the Council throughout the budget process to ensure that DSNY has a robust budget to meet the city’s needs across all its programs.