



New York City Environmental Justice Alliance

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On the ground – and at the table

May 23, 2020

New York City Environmental Justice Alliance Testimony Regarding Waste & Organics, Green Jobs, Renewable Energy, & Climate Justice in the NYC Budget (Updated)

Hello, my name is Dr. Tok Michelle O. Oyewole, and I am testifying on behalf of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA). Founded in 1991, NYC-EJA is a non-profit citywide membership network linking grassroots organizations from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in their fight for environmental justice. Today we are writing to ask that the City does not decimate its Climate Justice and Zero Waste plans and goals by eliminating opportunities for organics recycling and composting, and we are reiterating requests made in March 2020 for improvements to the current state of solid waste management in NYC, such that negative health impacts of the system are less clustered in the same few neighborhoods. We also urge the NYC Council to prioritize the implementation of Local Law 97, to continue solar installations, and to push for infrastructure projects from the NYC Climate and Community Stimulus Platform.

City Organics and Composting Programs

The Mayor's proposed budget would undercut much of the progress this City has made in diverting food scraps and yard waste from landfills, incinerators, and transfer stations in environmental justice communities. The Administration plans to slash the DSNY budget by \$106.5 million, with more than \$28 million of that coming from a total elimination of all funding of recycling and composting organic waste. This short-sighted action has the potential to have long-term implications, setting the City back further from its sustainability goals.

While this program must be expanded to include a mandatory organics program inclusive of environmental justice communities and NYCHA residences, **today we are urging the City Council to ensure that the City at least maintain the ability to continue some sort of organics recycling and composting, and not toss away the progress we have made in the past few years.**

Today, we ask that cuts to the NYC Compost Project and partners, and to GrowNYC, be restored, with expansion for community outreach and education, and that there be equitable distribution of organics and e-waste drop-off sites throughout the City. In the near term, we will continue to request to see growth of the City's consistently-underfunded organics collection program to a mandatory residential organics program for everyone. We will continue to advocate for improvements in the management of transfer stations in NYC, and reduction of waste and truck burdens in EJ communities elsewhere.

The cuts to the NYC Compost project and partners, and to GrowNYC, together represent approximately \$7 million, and with some additional funding, could go a long way toward allowing New Yorkers to continue to source separate food waste and preventing this major waste stream from going to landfills and emitting greenhouse gases.

This comparatively small amount of funding in the big picture would ensure that: at least eight non-profit organizations that rely on City-funding to provide organics collection and processing services, as well as community education, could continue their good work; at least 170 food scrap drop-off sites across all five boroughs can continue to divert this potent source of greenhouse gases from landfills; at least six community composting facilities can continue their work of processing the food waste to turn into usable compost to grow food in community gardens and urban farms during a time of food insecurity; and the City could continue vital education and outreach, needed to ensure that all New Yorkers, including all of our school children, understand why and how to compost and recycle – such training in the schools is a small investment that will pay off for decades by helping our children develop life-time habits of sustainable living. We cannot understate the urgency of this ask to NYC-EJA and our members, and hope the Council ensures that this important priority not be left behind in the budget process.

Investing in Staff for Overnight MTS Shifts

Commercial refuse is collected at night and primarily dumped in private transfer stations in a handful of neighborhoods. The City's Marine Transfer Stations are equitably distributed throughout the City, and are not yet at capacity in accepting waste. Staffing the Marine Transfer stations at night would help to reduce burdens in the handful of communities overburdened by both truck traffic and private transfer stations, which are not currently adhering to City zoning laws (e.g. in Southeast Queens) – this would reduce the impacts of odors, leachate, dust, truck idling, and air pollution, and facilities that are not all fully enclosed. This would also allow more carters to use the MTS's under the upcoming change to a Commercial Waste Zone system. Extended hours and staffing at MTS's can also help private carters to route trash away from private facilities that are currently enabled to evade City zoning laws by failing to meet stricter zoning codes for facilities near residences.

Opening Gansevoort Marine Transfer Station

In NYC's 2006 Solid Waste Management Plan, the City committed to allocating \$25 million to open the Gansevoort Marine Transfer Station, handling metals, glass, and plastics. This is supposed to be matched in kind by the state government through the signing of an MOU. It is 14 years later and the Marine Transfer Station is still not open, which means that recyclables are still routed in large quantities to transfer facilities in overburdened neighborhoods.

Implementing Commercial Waste Zones Law: Trucks and Transfer Stations

The carters selected under the Commercial Waste Zones law will be required to follow strict standards - we want to ensure that those who bid and receive contracts based on robust submissions, properly adhere to the laws. This includes: ending commingling of garbage and recycling; installation of electric vehicles, ensuring use of MTS's, investments in facilities improvements, and charging stations to motivate their transition to electric vehicles, among other things. Regarding the carting contracts with private transfer stations, we want to ensure that inspectors check and suspend work at transfer stations that do not have enclosed buildings and do not meet high performance standards as required by law, and do not award these bad actors extended, decade-long contracts under the Commercial Waste Zone system.

Mandating Residential Organics Collection

In the proposed fiscal year 2020 and 2021 budgets, funding for "Waste Prevention, Reuse, and Recycling" was reduced compared to previous years, despite our need to meet robust zero waste targets by 2030. Again, among many needed initiatives, the City should make the necessary investments to mandate residential organics as promised years ago, as opposed to voluntary programs in a few neighborhoods.

Enabling Microhauler Organics Processing at DSNY-funded Facilities, while Opening More Organics Processing Facilities

Funding should be allocated within the budget to make investments that would enable zero- and low-emissions micro-haulers to access DSNY-funded Organics Processing facilities such as BigReuse, Earth Matter, and Red Hook Composting Facility, as they have repeatedly requested. They have been enabled to scale up their organics collection under the forthcoming Commercial Waste Zones system, but within the same law they were disabled from tipping at privately run transfer stations. This begs the questions, how are micro-haulers going to be able to scale up their diversion of waste from landfills, and what measures is the City taking to support this goal?

Green Stimulus Fund for Climate, Jobs & Renewable Energy

The impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on jobs and health has necessitated that the City invest in green infrastructure projects to put our communities back to work in good jobs that move us towards our climate goals.

The City must fully fund the implementation of Local Law 97 in order to tackle the biggest source of carbon emissions in the most polluting buildings, and create 40,000 good jobs in the process. The City must also press on with its solar goals and prioritize environmental justice communities for solar jobs. In the very near future, a citywide composting program is an essential service that would also provide good jobs for impacted communities while reducing our waste burden.

The City should tap into available resources, including those authorized via the federal CARES Act, existing FEMA funds, municipal liquidity grants, as well as state and federal workforce development grants.

Thank you for considering these urgent budget requests – the City does not have any more time to waste in meeting its climate justice goals.