



**NYC-EJA’s Comments in Support of Big Reuse, Public Park Access, & Green Jobs at
Queensbridge Baby Park**

NYC Parks Queensbridge Baby Park Visioning Session

January 28th, 2021

My name is Dr. Tok Oyewole, and I am speaking on behalf of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA), a non-profit citywide membership network linking grassroots organizations from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in their fight for environmental justice, founded in 1991.

For decades, NYC-EJA has led efforts for comprehensive policy reforms to address the disproportionate burden of New York’s solid waste system on a handful of environmental justice communities. NYC-EJA has also advocated for equitable access to green space in communities of color, for recreation and the health benefits that open spaces provide. NYC-EJA is a co-organizer of the Save Our Compost Coalition, and we are today speaking in support of preserving Big Reuse’s composting site during the Queensbridge Baby Park revisioning, to prevent a loss that would reduce the number of the City’s green jobs, and would increase the quantity of compostable organics going to polluting transfer stations, landfills, and incinerators - and the resultant greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants - in communities of color.

Big Reuse’s site is one of the few remaining backbones of New York City’s food scrap recycling program, which was partially restored amidst the threat of total budget cuts, in a fight that thousands of New Yorkers pushed for in 2020. While we have heard rhetoric from Parks leadership that composting does not belong on Parks land, and that the community needs access to open space, it is a false dichotomy to pit such needs against one another, especially when there is space to co-exist and even expand the uses of this park. Furthermore, dropping off food scraps in publicly accessible green space, and the activities that precede or follow this, is often a recreational activity in and of itself. There is underutilized space nearby for NYC Parks operations to take place, meaning all stated goals of the Parks Department can be accomplished without evicting Big Reuse. Big Reuse provides their compost to over 200 groups, has approximately 1,000 volunteers annually, and in 2019 generated about 1.5 million pounds of compost at this site - in addition to having wide support within their community.

In addition to all of these benefits, this fight is critical because the impacts of our solid waste system are already highest in New York City where truck-dependent transfer stations are clustered, causing higher rates of asthma, heart disease, COPD, various cancers, and other health impacts. Closing this site would worsen these disparities in and out of New York City, and would result in higher emissions of air pollutants that exacerbate impacts of COVID-19.



New York City Environmental Justice Alliance

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On the ground – and at the table

We urge Parks to protect Big Reuse’s composting site *and* other beneficial recreational public uses and green jobs, at Queensbridge Baby Park, and to protect the other compost sites threatened across the City.

Given all of the support we have heard this evening (*all 10 out of 10 break-out groups of this visioning session expressed support for Big Reuse remaining in their current location*), and in hearings and press conferences before tonight, Parks leadership and lawyers should not be able to generate false justifications, legal or otherwise, to push composting off of public lands - not when Parks manages so much of the City’s green space, not when Parks generates some of the leaf litter these composters process, and not when we urgently need to expand City composting capacity. This park and all City parks can support multiple community needs.