

COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT 1
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND SOLID
WASTE MANAGEMENT

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February 27, 2024
Start: 10:07 a.m.
Recess: 12:23 p.m.

HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Shaun Abreu, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Chris Banks
David M. Carr
James F. Gennaro
Julie Menin
Sandy Nurse
Vickie Paladino
Yusef Salaam
Sandra Ung
Inna Vernikov
Kalman Yeger
Susan Zhuang

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Lincoln Restler
Shahana Hanif
Gale A. Brewer

A P P E A R A N C E S

Javier Lojan, First Deputy Commissioner of New York City Department of Sanitation

Joshua Goodman, Deputy Commissioner of Customer Affairs and Customer Experience at New York City Department of Sanitation

Ryan Merola, Chief-of-Staff and Deputy Commissioner of External Affairs at New York City Department of Sanitation

Kate Kitchener, Director of the Bureau of Recycling and Sustainability at New York City Department of Sanitation

Arif Sunmom, GrowNYC

Marisa DeDominicis, co-founder and Executive Director of Earth Matter

Christine Datz-Romero, Executive Director of the Lower East Side Ecology Center

Justin Green, Executive Director of Big Reuse

Courtney Scheffler, compost coordinator and driver with GrowNYC

Eric Goldstein, Natural Resources Defense Council

Winson Wong, Co-Founder and CEO of a company called Afterlife Ag

Lena Frey, Compost Coordinator at GrowNYC Workers Collective

Carol Robins, self

Erik Menjivar, Bargain Committee of the GrowNYC Workers Collective

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

Celeste Perez, State Climate Policy Manager at
the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance

Sra Feigelman, Compost Program Manager at East
New York Farms

Christopher Leon Johnson

Rhonda Keyser, Chair of the Brooklyn Solid Waste
Advisory Board

Clare Mifflin, Executive Director of the Center
for Zero Waste Design

Gil Lopez, Organics Committee of Queens Solid
Waste Advisory Board

Alex Hayden (this is an alias for Alex Stein)

Andy Blancero, former instructor of the master
composter course

Anita Chan, Earth Matter New York board member
and member of 350 NYC WasteNot

Anna Sacks, self

Lonnie Portis, New York City Policy and Advocacy
Manager at WE ACT for Environmental Justice

Samantha MacBride, professor at Baruch College
and former DSNY analyst and manager

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2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a microphone
3 test for the Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste
4 Management. Recorded on February 27, 2024, located in
5 Chambers by Nazly Paytuvi.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning and
7 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for
8 the Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste
9 Management.

10 At this time, if everyone can please
11 silence their electronic devices.

12 If you wish to submit testimony, you may
13 at testimony@council.nyc.gov.

14 Chair, we are ready to begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: [GAVEL] Good morning,
16 everyone. I am Chair Shaun Abreu. Welcome to the
17 Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management's
18 Oversight Hearing on the City's Infrastructure to
19 Handle and Process Organic Waste.

20 Thank you, Members of the Committee, the
21 Department of Sanitation, and advocates for joining
22 us today.

23 Composting programs are vital to our
24 City's waste diversion and sustainability goals. The
25 food waste that we send to rot in landfills every day

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2 ends up emitting greenhouse gases and worsening our
3 climate crisis. The more of it we can divert towards
4 beneficial reuses, the better for us as a city and a
5 planet. We are already living with the effects of
6 climate change here in New York City. Extreme weather
7 conditions have damaged our homes, endangered our
8 health, tested and destroyed our infrastructure, and
9 made our day-to-day lives less comfortable. We can't
10 afford to wait any longer on making progress towards
11 achieving zero waste.

12 The City has committed to sending zero
13 waste to landfills by 2030, but we have made little
14 progress to achieve that goal. Our waste diversion
15 statistics are deeply disappointing compared to other
16 sizable cities such as Phoenix and Seattle. To get
17 there, we must take seriously our waste diversion
18 goals and organics programming. What cannot be reused
19 must be recycled. The proper disposal and processing
20 of organic waste reduces the amount of refuse sent to
21 landfills, cuts down on emissions, and ultimately
22 saves our City money as we realize the benefits of
23 reusing organic materials. Composting, in particular,
24 offers a way to support our agriculture and transform
25 our waste into a valuable and marketable product.

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2 This is not the time to diminish support for the
3 critical work of community composters. There is no
4 justification for delaying until the last possible
5 moment the implementation of curbside collection of
6 organic waste.

7 I want to take a moment to uplift the
8 work of community groups that have envisioned a
9 different future for the city and that have fought
10 tirelessly to make it a reality. I see you here
11 today, and I thank you for joining us. We are here
12 because of all the people who have fought to
13 organize, who have volunteered their time and
14 resources, and who have rallied to establish the
15 composting infrastructure that we have today. It is
16 thanks to these community groups that we were able to
17 build the momentum that helped us expand DSNY's
18 curbside collection of organic waste.

19 It is unacceptable, and I must say it is
20 unacceptable, that despite all the work that's been
21 done to build up the City's composting infrastructure
22 and educational outreach, we are facing budget cuts
23 that could reverse the progress these groups have
24 made. I want to be clear, the City already spends
25 hundreds of millions of dollars on organics right now

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2 by sending it to landfills and incinerators. With
3 organics collections set to go citywide later this
4 year, it's incumbent upon us to strengthen the
5 programming that we know works and keep fighting for
6 expansion, transparency, and stakeholder involvement
7 in what could be the most successful organic
8 diversion program in the country if done right.

9 During today's hearing, I want to learn
10 about the City's long-term plan to support community
11 composting. We need to work together to develop
12 solutions so that the community groups who administer
13 these programs, important programs, can plan their
14 futures and continue delivering localized, culturally
15 competent, and engaging composting programs. I also
16 want to learn about the actions that the City is
17 planning to take to prioritize composting for the
18 processing of organic waste as required by law. I
19 look forward to hearing testimony from DSNY,
20 environmental justice advocates, and other interested
21 groups who can offer any advice for how the City
22 could be doing more to reduce waste and how to
23 protect composting as an important part of the City's
24 work to process organic waste.

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2 I would like to thank everyone on my team
3 and Council Staff for their work on these bills and
4 for their efforts in moving this Committee forward. I
5 would also, when they get here, I'd like to
6 acknowledge some of my Colleagues.

7 In addition to conducting oversight on
8 the City's infrastructure to process organic waste,
9 we will be hearing Intro. number 55 sponsored by
10 Council Member Sandy Nurse in relation to requiring
11 Department of Sanitation to accept commercial solid
12 waste at City-owned or operated marine transfer
13 stations and rail stations, Intro. number 97
14 sponsored by Council Member Sandra Ung in relation to
15 increasing civil penalties for repeated littering
16 violations, a Preconsidered Intro. sponsored by
17 Council Member Lincoln Restler in relation to public
18 organic waste receptacles, and a Preconsidered
19 Resolution sponsored by Council Member Sandy Nurse
20 calling upon the Department of Sanitation and the
21 Department of Parks and Recreation to continue to
22 engage and collaborate with local communities to
23 encourage and allow community composting to be
24 carried out on Park land. I'll wait for my Colleagues
25 to get here so they can speak about their bills.

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2 Today, we will begin with hearing the
3 testimony from DSNY followed by members of the
4 public.

5 I will now turn it over to our Committee
6 Counsel to administer the oath.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you. My
8 name is Morganne Barrett, Committee Counsel for the
9 Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management.

10 Our first witnesses will be from the
11 Department of Sanitation, First Deputy Commissioner
12 Javier Lojan, Deputy Commissioner of Public Affairs
13 and Customer Experience Joshua Goodman, Chief-of-
14 Staff and Deputy Commissioner of External Affairs
15 Ryan Merola, and Director of the Bureau of Recycling
16 and Sustainability Kate Kitchener.

17 I will now administer the oath. Please
18 raise your right hands.

19 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
20 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
21 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
22 questions?

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: I do.

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: I do.

25 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MEROLA: I do.

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2 DIRECTOR KITCHENER: I do.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you. You
4 may begin when ready.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: I'm sorry,
6 just one moment.

7 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: I would like to
8 recognize Colleagues, Council Member Susan Zhuang and
9 Council Member Ung.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you.

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: Good
12 morning, Chair Abreu and the Members of the Committee
13 on Sanitation and Solid Waste. I am Javier Lojan, the
14 First Deputy Commissioner for New York City
15 Department of Sanitation. I am joined today by my
16 colleagues, Joshua Goodman, Deputy Commissioner for
17 Public Affairs and Customer Experience; Ryan Merola,
18 Chief-of-Staff and Deputy Commissioner for External
19 Affairs; and Kate Kitchener, Director of the Bureau
20 of Recycling and Sustainability.

21 Thank you for the opportunity to testify
22 on a topic of deep importance to DSNY, the handling
23 and processing of compostable material. This waste
24 stream is everything from the kitchen and everything
25 from the yard accounts for about one third of what

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2 New Yorkers throw away, eight million pounds of
3 residential waste each day. For more than two
4 decades, past Administrations have been working to
5 achieve citywide composting and make the separation
6 and diversion of this food waste and yard waste goal
7 mainstream. Today, despite a massive fiscal
8 challenge, the Adams' Administration is on track to
9 do just that, keep the material out of the landfills
10 where it contributes to climate change and instead to
11 process it and put it into beneficial use here in New
12 York City both as compost to beautify our parks and
13 gardens and as renewable energy to heat our homes. In
14 the process, we are getting it out of the black bags,
15 off our streets, out of our landfills, and away from
16 the rats.

17 In August 2022, after years of stops and
18 starts, delays, and unfulfilled commitments from the
19 City, Mayor Adams committed to making curbside
20 composting work and treat this important service part
21 of the core function of the DSNY instead of a small
22 niche program that is difficult for the public at
23 large to access. The development and implementation
24 of the largest, easiest curbside composting program

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2 ever was no small feat, and many of the advocates and
3 elected officials in this room helped make it happen.

4 DSNY distributed tens of thousands of
5 bins, sent hundreds and thousands of mailers, and
6 purchased 158 net new collection trucks as part of
7 this historic investment in making this program work.
8 As a result, every resident of Brooklyn and Queens
9 now receives this service every week on the recycling
10 day, and this October, the Administration will extend
11 this universal service to the Bronx, Manhattan, and
12 Staten Island, making curbside composting citywide as
13 promised.

14 The most important thing about this
15 program is its simplicity. There is no need for
16 signups, no special dates to remember, or specific
17 locations to visit within limited hours. Simply place
18 your materials out on the recycling day and we'll
19 ensure they're put to good use. This is a composting
20 program for all New Yorkers. Make the separation of
21 compost and material easy, and people will do it, and
22 we have numbers to back this up. In Fiscal Year 2023,
23 DSNY diverted a record 211 million pounds of
24 compostable material from landfills, an incredible
25 increase from just over 150 million pounds the year

2 before. This is a testament to the value of simple
3 universal programs, especially given that it includes
4 only a part of our ongoing citywide rollout. These
5 kinds of programs not only improve the customer
6 experience, they are more efficient than smaller
7 programs because of the economies of scale. We are
8 now collecting more compostable material with fewer
9 truck routes than in old programs. The ease-of-use
10 principle holds true for our network of nearly 400
11 smart composting bins across the five boroughs where
12 residents can drop off their compostable material
13 24/7 through an easy-to-use smartphone app. These
14 bins are serviced six days a week and have proven to
15 be very popular. We are also on track to bring

16 curbside compost collection to every Department of
17 Education school by the end of the school year,
18 giving the next generation of composters familiarity
19 with the ease and importance of this program.

20 Material collected through each of these initiatives,
21 curbside residential collection, smart bins, and
22 schools is put to beneficial use either through
23 composting or through anaerobic digestion. The
24 Department produces tens of millions of pounds
25 finished compost every year at the Staten Island

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2 compost facility where weeks ago, Mayor Adams and

3 Commissioner Tisch cut the ribbon on a major

4 expansion. The 33-acre site is now permitted to take

5 up to 165 million pounds of compulsive material per

6 year and, as a result of the new technology on site,

7 it can process it in half the time it used to take,

8 weeks rather than months. While the City has

9 sufficient permitted and contracted capacity to

10 process compostable material from a citywide program,

11 we are currently engaged in a procurement to

12 distribute that capacity more evenly across the

13 region. City procurement rules limit the extent to

14 which we can talk about future status of processing

15 infrastructure for protectable waste, but beneficial

16 use and waste equity are both key to our long-term

17 planning.

18 I would like now to turn to the series of

19 bills that are on the agenda today. The first is

20 Introduction 55, sponsored by Council Member Nurse,

21 which would require the City to accept commercial

22 waste at City-owned-and-operated marine transfer

23 stations. Only two of the City's transfer stations

24 have any additional capacity, 91st Street MTS and the

25 Southwest Brooklyn MTS. However, there are

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2 significant costs that come with this approach, which
3 make requiring this approach impractical. DSNY would
4 have to add additional City and vendor staff to
5 process waste on the new shift overnight. In
6 addition, our export contracts with substantial
7 built-in redundancy and an emphasis on rail and barge
8 export are not cheap. Our facilities may not be
9 competitive with private transfer stations in New
10 York City and the larger metro area. As it stands
11 now, requiring DSNY to take commercial waste under
12 any circumstance is cost prohibitive.

13 The second is Introduction 97, sponsored
14 by Council Member Ung, which would increase the civil
15 penalties for businesses that have failed to clean
16 their sidewalk or 18 inches into the street or from
17 removing obstructions from the sidewalk. The bill
18 will raise the amount of the first fine that DSNY
19 issues and increase the second and third fines. In
20 September, Commissioner Tisch urged this Body to
21 increase the amounts for the first-, second-, and
22 third-time penalties so that our enforcement of the
23 Basic Cleanliness Rules had real teeth. We appreciate
24 the partnership with Council Member Ung for

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2 introducing this bill that achieves this and for the
3 Chair's support in hearing the proposal.

4 The third is Preconsidered Introduction
5 358 sponsored by Council Member Restler to require at
6 least five organics drop-off sites in each community
7 district. As we testified, DSNY has brought curbside
8 composting to all of Brooklyn and Queens, and by
9 October 2024, residents in all five boroughs will
10 receive curbside service. As a popular supplement to
11 curbside collection, we have also installed nearly
12 400 smart composting bins in 25 community districts,
13 giving millions of New Yorkers easy access to a drop-
14 off point for their organics any day of the week. We
15 appreciate the bill's goal of making available in
16 every community district a drop-off point, and we are
17 open to evaluating the need for more drop-off points
18 as we roll out future curbside service later this
19 year and continue to assess the smart composting bins
20 success.

21 The final bills are Preconsidered
22 Resolutions by Council Member Nurse, the first in
23 support of collaboration between DSNY and the Parks
24 Department on encouraging interested parties to
25 engage in composted-related activities in parks, and

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2 the second in support of the current version of the
3 Extended Producer Responsibility Act in Albany. We
4 are happy to continue working with our partners in
5 Parks on this end, and we are deeply supportive of
6 the State passing the Packaging, Reduction and
7 Recycling Infrastructure Act in 2024, which we agree
8 with Council Member and the Chair is long overdue.

9 In addition to the bills being discussed
10 today, DSNY would also like to raise the issue of
11 commercial organic separation. Local Law 146 of 2013
12 requires certain commercial establishments to
13 separate their compostable material, but this law is
14 now substantially out of step with the City's
15 commitment to diversion of compostable waste. The
16 commercial waste zone system will improve commercial
17 diversion in that DSNY is requiring carters to charge
18 businesses less to collect recyclables and compost
19 than to collect trash, but we also urge the Council
20 to consider an update that would allow DSNY to have
21 source separation at all commercial establishments in
22 line with the progress made in residential diversion.

23 Again, Chair, we thank you for the
24 opportunity to testify about this important topic.
25 With that, we look forward to taking your questions.

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2 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you so much for
3 your testimony. I would like to recognize Council
4 Member Nurse and Council Member Yeger. I'd also like
5 to recognize Council Member Julie Menin.

6 To start off, my first question is most
7 of the organics collected through the City's curbside
8 program is used for methane production rather than
9 compost. I am concerned that some New Yorkers may
10 feel misled about what is happening with their
11 organic waste. Could you describe the agency's
12 decision to market its curbside organics collection
13 as a curbside composting program and, relatedly, can
14 you describe the thought process behind labeling your
15 smart bins with large letters that read compost in
16 all caps?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: Of course.
18 Thank you, Mr. Chair. The underlying basis of this
19 program is about beneficial use. The material gets
20 out of the landfills, off the street and instead is
21 put to good use either as finished compost for use in
22 our parks and gardens or as a way to heat our homes
23 and reduce the City's reliance on fracked natural
24 gas. I think that composting is a term that New
25 Yorkers are familiar with. If we put beneficial use

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2 on the side of the bin or anaerobic digestion on the
3 side of the bin, it's not really describing what
4 happens in a meaningful way and it's not getting
5 people to want to participate. Our work over the last
6 several years has really been focused on helping
7 these programs to reach the widest possible audience,
8 and we think beneficial use is the core of the
9 program.

10 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Yeah, I think, people
11 who are putting their food scraps in these bins, a
12 lot of my constituents, I don't think they're aware
13 what it's being used for so if the messaging that
14 it's should be broader than that, maybe that would, I
15 think, be more informative for my constituents who,
16 when they're putting their food scraps, they think
17 this is resulting in just composting.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: And it is
19 resulting in compost, right? A substantial amount of
20 it goes to compost.

21 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: We'll get into what
22 percentage now so approximately what proportion of
23 organic waste is currently processed into compost?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: Right now in
25 the City, and again, I want to emphasize that this is

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2 a snapshot in time. It can change day to day and it's
3 in the process of changing longer because we have an
4 active procurement on this topic. Right now, you're
5 looking at about an 80/20 split, and the point is
6 that everything goes to benefit. That's about 80
7 percent to digestion and 20 percent to composting at
8 the moment.

9 We do have a procurement underway, a
10 competitive sealed bid, that in accordance with the
11 law prioritizes additional composting capacity over
12 digestion. However, I do want to emphasize that both
13 of these end uses are forms of beneficial use. When
14 the material simply goes to landfill, no one
15 benefits.

16 Both anaerobic digestion and composting
17 have advantages obviously anaerobic digestion takes
18 significantly less space, for example, so there is a
19 place for both in the City going forward, and both
20 are forms of beneficial use.

21 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: How is the digestate
22 from anaerobic digesters processed, and what
23 proportion is beneficially reused?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: I think
25 probably DEP could speak to that in more detail, but

2 my understanding is that the anaerobic digesters
3 basically mimic the processes that take place within
4 the human stomach. I learned that when I took the
5 tour as a member of the public. It produces a few
6 different materials, and there are multiple
7 beneficial uses. Some of it is gas, which is used to
8 heat and power homes, primarily at the moment in
9 Brooklyn, is my understanding. Some of it is used to
10 produce fertilizer. Some of it is used to produce the
11 material that caps a landfill, an infill construction
12 material. One thing that I think is interesting about
13 the anaerobic digestion process is when you think
14 about food waste, and this is why it can be
15 challenging to look at the tonnage, and you have to
16 look at it at different points in the process, the
17 bulk of it is water weight. When you're talking about
18 your food waste, something like 22 percent I think it
19 is, we should check on that, but I think it's 22
20 percent of it is solid and the rest of it is water
21 weight so when you talk about what is beneficially
22 used, it's important to remember that your
23 denominator shouldn't include the majority of it
24 that's just water. When you get down to those

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2 finished solids, I've seen analyses that put the
3 beneficial use number at around 95 percent.

4 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Does the City believe
5 it is feasible to process the majority of its organic
6 waste into compost? Do you believe that you have that
7 infrastructure in place as it is?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: I think we
9 have to point to the procurement on that one. We know
10 that we have sufficient capacity today to process the
11 material collected at the curb. We are undergoing a
12 competitive seal bid to help to reposition that
13 capacity with a focus on borough equity in accordance
14 with the law, with a preference for composting. It's
15 an ongoing process right now, but the fact is that
16 yes, we can process what we pick up at the curb.

17 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: The majority of
18 organics collected in the curbside and smart bin
19 programs is sent to Newtown Creek Wastewater Resource
20 Recovery Facility, where it is combined with sewage
21 for anaerobic co-digestion. One of the end products
22 is sewage, sludge, biosolids, which are then
23 landfilled, incinerated, or used for agricultural
24 purposes. You may or may not have the breakdown here,
25 but what is the breakdown of landfilling versus

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2 incinerating versus using for agricultural purposes,
3 and what other uses, productive or otherwise, are
4 these solids for?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: I think DEP
6 would have that. I think that's the question that
7 gets back to that 95 percent that I've heard, but
8 that's worth double checking on, and I will just say
9 to the fact stated at the beginning of the question
10 about the majority of material going there, again,
11 there's a procurement happening right now so that
12 state of play may not be the case in the next few
13 months.

14 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Certainly, and we
15 would definitely love to have that breakdown. To that
16 end, you may also not have this information. How much
17 contamination is screened out and disposed of?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: I don't have
19 tonnage information. I can speak a little bit about
20 what we've done to limit contamination. There's a
21 couple of things that we're really proud of in our
22 program that have limited contamination and made it
23 easier for New Yorkers to use so that New Yorkers
24 don't have to worry quite as much about am I putting
25

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2 in the right stuff, whatever, we can deal with the
3 contamination on our end in this program.

4 One is the smart bins, which require
5 awareness of the program at point of use, the
6 smartphone app. You would not believe, or maybe you
7 would, but I was certainly impressed by how beautiful
8 the material coming out of those bins is in terms of
9 the lack of contamination. That's one piece, and then
10 another piece is at the Staten Island compost
11 facility, we've got equipment that screens out
12 contaminants on our end so this is how, for example,
13 we were able to lessen restrictions about what kind
14 of bag you put your compostable material in, thereby
15 making the program much easier. We now have the
16 capacity on our end to remove that contaminant.

17 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: What is DSNY doing to
18 engage existing sites in the community to respond to
19 the RFP you mentioned to process organic waste?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: I just want
21 to be careful not to prejudice the procurements.
22 That's why I'm just what I'm checking on. The
23 procurement, like all City procurements, it's in the
24 City record, I'm not sure how much outreach we're
25 allowed to do around it, but we've worked very

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2 closely with these community groups. Obviously, we
3 are tremendous supporters of community composting and
4 so thankful for the work that community composters
5 have done over the years and would encourage everyone
6 who believes they may be responsive to take a look at
7 that.

8 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: And you support
9 restoration as well, right?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: So thankful
11 for everything the community composters have done to
12 get us to this point.

13 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you for that.
14 All right. My next question is, so local law requires
15 the City to plan a maximized composting as part of
16 its upcoming 20-year Solid Waste Management Plan. We
17 know that's up in two years already. What actions are
18 the City taking now to prepare sites and personnel to
19 conduct the composting process?

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: We
21 undertook the ambitious project to upgrade our Staten
22 Island Compost Facility capacity as I testified with
23 the Mayor and the Commissioner's leadership. So that
24 upgrade launched last fall and the compost facility's
25 capacity dramatically grew from having the capacity

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2 to accept 30 tons of food waste per week to 600 tons
3 per week. Separately, complimentary to our own
4 facilities upgrade, like Deputy Commissioner Goodman
5 mentioned, we put out a sealed competitive bid to
6 increase our organics processing capacity citywide
7 and it's still ongoing, but by its end, we will have
8 increased capacity for both composting and digestion
9 as specified.

10 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: With respect to the
11 Staten Island site, how much of the organics
12 collected by DSNY is currently being sent to
13 municipal compost sites? I do know that in your
14 testimony, you said it's about 200 million pounds
15 that site is capable of processing. Could you speak
16 to that and also what percentage of DSNY organics is
17 being sent to the Staten Island site?

18 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: For
19 Fiscal Year '23, we received about 31,000 tons, and
20 then out of that, 26,000 tons of that came from
21 commercial landscapers. I don't have the breakdown of
22 what was sent to certain sites, but that's what we
23 accepted for the last fiscal year.

24

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you. I'm going
3 to ask two more questions. Do my colleagues have any
4 questions?

5 I would like to recognize that we've been
6 joined by Council Members Carr, Paladino, and
7 Vernikov.

8 I'm also recognizing Mr. Banks, my good
9 Colleague Banks.

10 Composting can be space-intensive, and in
11 New York City, space is highly valued. However,
12 keeping composting activities within the city allows
13 us to more fully enjoy its economic and social
14 benefits. How will DSNY balance these contrasting
15 interests in developing its composting
16 infrastructure?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: It really
18 gets at exactly why we think that there is a role for
19 both composting and anaerobic digestion in the future
20 of processing of compostable material. The space
21 aspect, the borough equity aspect, the environmental
22 justice aspect of where the trucks go, that's sort of
23 the issue that we're undertaking right now, not sort
24 of, that is the issue that we're undertaking right
25 now with the competitive sealed bid, is trying to

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2 balance these so that every part of the city gets to
3 participate in the largest and easiest curbside
4 composting program ever and also so that every part
5 of the city feels an equal share of the local
6 processing capacity in their neighborhood.

7 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: You mentioned earlier
8 that the breakdown of anaerobic digestion is 80 to 20
9 composting. What is that ideal percentage for you? Is
10 it 50/50? Is it the reverse? What's the goal of the
11 administration here?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: I think that
13 this is one where we know that the outcome of the
14 competitive sealed bid could go to court if we say
15 that our preference is this percentage or that
16 percentage, right, so we have to be careful about
17 that. I just want to say that I think it's really
18 important that we understand that both of these are
19 forms of beneficial use, and I can share some
20 numbers. When you talk about that, 80/20 split, the
21 City is still composting 9.2 million pounds of
22 material a year. It's incredible. 10 million of stuff
23 that was going to end up in a landfill that ends up
24 instead as finished compost to go to our parks and
25 gardens and that we give away for free to residents.

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2 Obviously, that number is going to increase as the
3 citywide program comes online and as the procurement
4 process is completed, but there's got to be a role
5 for both forms of beneficial use.

6 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: The breakdown that you
7 gave me, 80/20, is that information anyone can get
8 online or is only is the agency privy to that
9 information?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: Oh, it's in
11 the Solid Waste Management Plan.

12 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Okay, because I think
13 having that information in real-time, how much of it
14 is going through anaerobic digestion versus
15 composting, how much of it is getting landfilled, how
16 much of it is getting incinerated, how much is going
17 back to beneficial uses, I think all of this is
18 information that the public deserves to know in the
19 same vein that people should know that their scraps
20 aren't actually going to composting, it's is actually
21 going to anaerobic digestion. I think transparency is
22 very important. It's something that I'm stressing
23 here, but I'm happy to move on to my other question.

24 The Mayor has stated that he hopes to
25 open the doors to the green economy for working New

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2 Yorkers. Can you name the green jobs that the City
3 will likely be hiring in order to process organic
4 waste, and please specify which of these are entry
5 level.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: Broadly,
7 this is a question better directed to our colleagues
8 at City Hall who are overseeing the City's larger
9 efforts to expand green jobs, but, our composting
10 program is part of the green economy and the City's
11 commitment to a sustainable New York. We're running
12 the largest and easiest composting program ever, hit
13 the largest ever organics diversion number in FY23,
14 which was even before the Brooklyn program came
15 online, and the sustainability program obviously fits
16 very broadly into a commitment to green jobs and a
17 green economy.

18 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: I take concern with
19 the fact that we can't name the green jobs and also
20 by the same time, they're also eliminating green jobs
21 on community composting. I think there's a workforce
22 issue here that the Admin needs to grapple with and
23 work on.

24

25

2 I want to turn over to community
3 composting and then I'll have my Colleagues ask
4 questions.

5 Community drop-off sites and composting
6 facilities have been faced with serious financial
7 hardship in the wake of the Mayor's most recent
8 budget cuts. They have had to end long-term programs
9 and lay off much of their staff, and the residents
10 who depend on these programs have been robbed of an
11 important community resource. Just three years ago
12 when DSNY ended curbside collection of organic waste,
13 these drop-off sites were the only thing available to
14 New Yorkers wanting to recycle organic waste, and
15 they broke participation records. Why is the City
16 deciding now to defund these programs that have made
17 such a positive impact?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: I just want
19 to say a few things about this. You know that the
20 City is rolling out the largest and easiest curbside
21 composting program ever, bringing service to every
22 single residence in the city in a relatively quick
23 timeline after many years of talk and stops and
24 starts. I think it's important to state for the
25 record that we would not be in this position today to

2 roll out this program if it weren't for the work of
3 the community composters. The community composting
4 organizations spent decades advocating for beneficial
5 re-use of compostable material for getting it out of
6 landfill, to your point, providing opportunities to
7 do so when they were the only thing available, when
8 there was very little else available broadly at the
9 height of the pandemic. We are so thankful for their
10 work, their advocacy, appreciative of everything
11 they've done. The Mayor's been very clear. This is an
12 incredibly challenging fiscal climate that the City
13 is facing today. Significant and difficult cuts have
14 been made across City agencies and at the Sanitation
15 Department as well. We were very happy to hear that
16 private philanthropy has stepped in to fund the
17 community composting groups.

18 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: That shouldn't have
19 happened, that shouldn't be the way. This Council
20 will make it a big priority. You're going to hear us
21 on March 14th for the budget hearings, community
22 composting is here to stay. We're not only grateful
23 for the work that they've done but also for the work
24 that they'll continue to do. I think that's very
25 important, especially as we consider the rollout of

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2 curbside composting citywide as more smart bins show
3 up. The participation rates are always higher with
4 community composting people who understand their
5 local communities, understand how to promote that
6 civic engagement because it is a civic really
7 opportunity that we can't rob people from, and so I'm
8 going to make this a priority for this Committee and
9 for this Council. Community composting is here to
10 stay. I'm going to turn it over.

11 [APPLAUSE]

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Excuse me, I'm
13 sorry. No applause, please, if you're going to just
14 go like this. Thank you so much.

15 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: I'm not going to lie.
16 I like the applause, but I can't say that. Sorry.
17 Sorry.

18 I'm going to turn it over to some of my
19 Colleagues for questions. I'm first going to turn it
20 over to Council Member Nurse who can also provide her
21 remarks for her bill.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you, Chair
23 Abreu, and congratulations on your first Sanitation
24 Committee hearing.

25 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you, thank you.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Love that you're
3 allowing the first claps.

4 Okay, I just had a couple of bills. I'll
5 just say a few remarks about it, but then I have just
6 a few questions. One, I just wanted to say I was
7 really encouraged to see the DSNY release the NYC
8 Zero Waste Report earlier this year from our package
9 of bills last year, and I'm excited to dive into it,
10 but the bills I have here are, I have Intro. number
11 55 in relation to accepting commercial solid waste at
12 city-owned-or-operated marine transfer and rail
13 transfer stations. As you all know, we've spoken
14 about this topic for over two years and even prior to
15 my time, it's a long-standing priority from many
16 environmental justice advocates.

17 Next, I have a Preconsidered Reso
18 encouraging DSNY and Parks to continue to collaborate
19 with local communities on community composting. I
20 think this is incredibly urgent now, and I'd love to
21 hear more about concrete ways in which that can
22 happen given the cuts and layoffs to composters.

23 Lastly, we passed this before, but the
24 Reso on EPR, we're super excited about that. I think
25 it's so urgent and will do a lot to bring much-needed

2 resources to the Department to help build on some of
3 the programs that you have.

4 I did read through the testimony that you
5 all provided. The commercial waste at marine transfer
6 stations, we've had this conversation for a long
7 time. You all have been studying it and analyzing it
8 and assessing it internally, but what we've never
9 heard at any of these hearings is any direct analysis
10 of the cost breakdown. We understand that it will
11 require 24-hour operation. I understand that it will
12 require more workers, but there are also additional
13 benefits. Waste is expensive. The way that we are
14 handling our waste is extremely expensive, and there
15 are other benefits, such as keeping truck vehicle
16 mileage down and allowing carters to empty their
17 payload with more efficiency so I'd love to have some
18 more concrete details beyond just a statement that
19 it's cost prohibitive so we can actually understand
20 the benefits of this bill.

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: Yeah,
22 and we appreciate that, Council Member. It is one of
23 those things that we do always look at. We do want to
24 study this more and want to get you some concrete
25 numbers. For now, we just know that it is cost-

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2 prohibitive, but it will be one of those things that
3 we look at closely.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: How do you know
5 it's cost-prohibitive?

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: Looking
7 at what we would have to pay right now for our
8 vendors at 91st Street and Southwest, just taking an
9 additional shift and what we charge per ton, just
10 like a high-level estimate.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. Have you
12 spoken with any carters about their interest in
13 utilizing these two facilities that have excess
14 capacity?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MEROLA: Member, so we
16 have asked for that information from carters, and we
17 are compiling that and can come back with it, but
18 that was, as you remember, part of what we were
19 asking for from carters that would ultimately be a
20 part of Commercial Waste Zone so we're now in a place
21 to take a look at that.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MEROLA: So we can
24 come back to you with it.

25

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. Yeah, my
3 initial conversations have been pretty positive. I
4 think a lot of folks would be excited to tip at a
5 City facility and not have to wait in line,
6 especially when you have carters that own tipping
7 facilities or transfer facilities. They got to get in
8 the back of the line for those company trucks to come
9 there. I think having a somewhat neutral first-come,
10 first-serve would be actually incredibly beneficial
11 to those folks as the CWZ rolls out.

12 I just have two final questions, Chair,
13 and I'll try not to go too long. I know in 2006,
14 there was a compost facility siting task force that
15 was created. Did that ever meet or is it just one of
16 these working group task force that goes nowhere?

17 DIRECTOR KITCHENER: That was before my
18 time at the Department, but I'm not sure that it ever
19 did meet.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. Okay. If in
21 the followup, we could request any information about
22 anything that that task force did, I think that would
23 be really helpful to understanding some of the
24 questions that the Chair was getting at earlier.

25

2 Lastly, I was really excited to see the
3 Sweep NYC page rollout. It already was like yielding
4 results. I had breakfast with a friend the other day,
5 and we pulled up her address and on the 25th of
6 February when she entered in her address, it showed
7 that a broom had not been to her address since
8 January 29th, which was an incredible amount of time
9 given she had to move her car nearly eight times
10 between that and so just curious why that would
11 happen? I know we had a couple snow days, so I
12 understand that calculation, but how can it be almost
13 20 days and the mechanical broom doesn't even pass
14 by?

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: One of
16 the things that we are looking to refine with that
17 app, there's an internal app that feeds that app. One
18 of the things that's great about the app, and thank
19 you for that, is looking at routes where we
20 historically had issues in. A lot of times if we
21 traverse a segment outside of the segment time, we
22 shouldn't get credit for it, and in the past, we
23 might have gotten credit for it internally. Those are
24 one of the things that we have looked at and we look
25 at closely every week so every week we bring our

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2 borough commanders down along with the district
3 superintendents and we pull up their stats and
4 percentages and obviously everything should be 100
5 percent, right, everybody should get services. You do
6 have to move your cars. We should come down and sweep
7 right, and there are times we're noticing challenges
8 and we're adjusting routes as necessary and in some
9 cases we have to add additional resources, whether
10 it's having another piece of equipment go into the
11 route, but it is one of those things and I would be
12 glad to take that information..

13 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yeah, I'll give you
14 the screenshot of it, but can you just break down
15 what you mean by the credit, like I didn't understand
16 it.

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: Sure, so
18 every block has a unique segment ID, right? Each of
19 our sweepers have GPS devices. When the sweeper goes
20 down the block, a GPS ping goes to satellite, and
21 then internally we get it in our application, right?
22 Previously, you could have gone down a segment at any
23 time of day, and we would have said, okay, you went
24 down and got credit for it, but that was incorrect,
25 that was not the way it should be. It should be only

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2 within the posted regulated time. Now that we've
3 refined our application, if, let's say, you have a
4 9:30 a.m. to 11: a.m. sweep, if our sweeper doesn't
5 go down that block at that time, we don't want to
6 take credit for it. We want to make sure you're
7 getting done within that segmented time so that's
8 what I meant by it.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay, so the broom
10 might have gone down the street, just not in that
11 window?

12 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: Yeah,
13 and one of the things to note Council Member, is that
14 there are times where operationally our equipment, if
15 the block is open, the sweeper will go down the block
16 if it's before the posted time because it helps them
17 get through the routes quicker.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Right.

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: So those
20 might be instances, I'm not saying that's the case
21 there, but those might be instances where we find,
22 we're like you're not going down the posted
23 regulation time, but you're not getting credit for it
24 in this application, but there might be different
25

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2 reasons for it, and definitely I would love to look
3 at that and know exactly.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: So would there be
5 tweaks to it? I'm done. Will there be tweaks to it?

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: Yeah.
7 Yeah. I think it would be, even if it's not within
8 the time, I think for someone to be like, what the
9 hell, I haven't had my street swept for 20 days, even
10 for them to know, okay, it was outside. I still had
11 to move my car and I'm pissed, but at least that at
12 least this happened, I think would be helpful.

13 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: No,
14 absolutely, and there are tweaks that we're looking
15 to do. I think the main issue we want to fix is if
16 there's any routing issues because we want to make
17 sure all the routes are completed on schedule so
18 that's one thing that we're going to look at first.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you. Thank
20 you, Chair.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: Just to add
22 really fast on that topic, that the time period
23 you're describing included three snowstorms that led
24 to (INAUDIBLE)

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yes, I acknowledged
3 the snow days in my line of questioning.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: But also
5 Lunar New Year's Eve, Lunar New Year's Day, Lincoln's
6 Birthday, Ash Wednesday, and President's Day.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yeah.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: So depending
9 on what the frequency is for that block, it is
10 possible that they had no ASP throughout that entire
11 three week period.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: That's a long time.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: We don't
14 like to cancel ASP if we don't have to.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: I hear you. Thank
16 you.

17 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: I would like to
18 acknowledge Council Members Salamanca, Restler, and
19 Gennaro.

20 I will now turn it over to Lincoln
21 Restler to share his remarks.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thanks so much,
23 Chair Abreu. Congratulations on this distinguished
24 appointment and really deeply appreciative of your
25 outspoken advocacy on behalf of community composting,

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2 and I think it's so important that you're centering
3 this topic and issue at your first hearing. I want to
4 thank the Department of Sanitation for their hard
5 work. I think you all have been one of the most
6 effective agencies in this Administration, and even
7 though we are often complaining to you about a very
8 large range of issues, we appreciate your
9 responsiveness and partnership and efficacy in
10 general.

11 We have a bill today, unfortunately
12 something got lost in the process, so I think the
13 most updated version of the bill was not correctly
14 re-introduced, but the bill that we are re-
15 introducing requires 25 compost bins in each
16 community district. These public composting bins are
17 essential for New Yorkers to be able to compost on a
18 daily basis. When they're done with their half-eaten
19 sandwich or their banana peel, they should be able to
20 compost it and compost it readily. That's why our
21 legislation would require approximately 1,500 public
22 composting bins across the City of New York,
23 prioritizing high pedestrian trafficked areas, such
24 as parks, commercial corridors, transit hubs, places
25 that New Yorkers are walking and passing by every

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2 day. I think that you all have done a good job
3 innovating with these public composting bins. They
4 are part of the solution to really increasing our
5 composting rates citywide and achieving a zero-waste
6 future. In addition to the community compost drop-off
7 sites, in addition to making curbside composting
8 universal, this is another way that we should help
9 New Yorkers incorporate composting into their daily
10 lives and ensure that everything that is compostable
11 is getting composted.

12 We are eager to see this bill passed into
13 law. I really want to thank, again, Chair Abreu for
14 his leadership and the opportunity for hearing on
15 this bill and would welcome if the Department of
16 Sanitation has any policy on the updated version of
17 our bill that will ultimately be re-introduced.

18 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you, Council
19 Member. Council Member Gennaro, if you have any
20 questions, now would be the time. All right, thank
21 you, Council Member, has no questions.

22 I'm now going to turn it over to Council
23 Member Menin for questions.

24

25

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Thank you so much,
3 Chair, and I want to congratulate you on your first
4 hearing on this Committee.

5 A couple of different questions I have.
6 In my District, I'm receiving a lot of complaints
7 about composting bins being broken or not usable or
8 specifically being unable to open them. Can you talk
9 about that, how many reports are you getting of that,
10 and what is the agency's process to fix them?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: Good
12 morning, Council Member. I'm surprised to hear that.
13 We have a dedicated team that handles complaints
14 related to the smart composting bins that you can
15 make a report directly in the app. We do get concerns
16 about it now and then as you would with any sort of
17 customer-facing program. I wouldn't say that it's an
18 overwhelming volume, and they're typically corrected
19 very quickly so if people are reaching out to your
20 office with these, would encourage them please do
21 make a report in the app. We'd love to get somebody
22 up there to take a look at it right away. I'm not
23 sure if you're talking about when the bins are full,
24 which would be separate from when they're not
25 functional, but if people's concern is that they're

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2 full and won't open because they're full of material,
3 they are emptied six times per week, and we're
4 thrilled to see how popular they are, that people are
5 using them, definitely going to continue to evaluate
6 as curbside service comes to your District in the
7 fall.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Okay, no, this is
9 specifically that they weren't working, that they
10 were having trouble opening them or there was some
11 other issue with them so that's just good to know so
12 we will make sure to refer all constituents to
13 actually go onto the app and..

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: In the app
15 and we would love to service those.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: I did have a
17 question how the City's collected tonnage rates
18 compared to other cities. Could you give us a picture
19 of that, of how we're doing as a city compared to
20 other major cities?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: I can talk a
22 little bit about the program design and about what
23 we're seeing sort of against ourselves. I'm not sure
24 what we have compared to other cities at the moment
25 because a lot of times, I understand it, the

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2 reporting structures are set by state law and they
3 may not match apples to apples. For example, I know
4 in California they have to report their construction
5 debris as part of their diversion rates so their
6 diversion rates don't compare to ours because they're
7 done differently, but, we did, in developing the
8 largest and easiest curbside composting program ever,
9 look at models that had been successful in other
10 North American cities, in particular Toronto,
11 Portland, Seattle, and San Francisco, and we tried to
12 model what had worked in those cities so things like
13 working off of a leaf and yard waste first model and
14 then making food waste kind of an added bonus of the
15 program was how they were able to build long-term,
16 economically viable, and widely used programs, and
17 then, in terms of a comparison against ourselves, we
18 just saw in the FY23 MMR a record amount of
19 compostable material diverted. It was 211 million
20 pounds compared to something like 150 million in the
21 FY22 MMR, and that was even before the Brooklyn
22 curbside program came online, and it included the
23 time period where the Queen's program was on pause so
24 the FY24 MMR is going to, again, shatter a record on
25 the amount of material we are diverting, but as far

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2 as direct comparisons to other cities, certainly
3 something we could look at.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Okay. Thank you
5 very much. Thank you, Chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Council Member Carr.

7 I will continue with questions. Local law
8 requires certain New York City food service
9 establishments and retail food stores to separate
10 their organic waste and, as we all know, businesses
11 are not serviced by DSNY but rather by private waste
12 hauling companies, which will now be required to
13 price the organics collection services lower than
14 trash collection. How will DSNY, along with BIC,
15 ensure that private waste hauling companies are not
16 comingling source separated organic waste with other
17 refuse, if doing so would hypothetically result in
18 higher profit and lower operating costs for the waste
19 hauler?

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: The
21 commercial waste zones program will come into effect
22 this fall, and when it does, we will have the
23 authority to write violations to private carters for
24 comingling of organics with non-organics, and we're
25 looking to aggressively enforce this against carters

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2 who do not comply with these regulations so that is
3 one of the things that we are, and we are staffed for
4 that, so we will be looking for that.

5 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: What will it take to
6 conduct enforcement against businesses and carters
7 which refuse to comply with source separation
8 requirements?

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: Are you
10 referring to specifics of what the components of like
11 our enforcement officers will have to do or exactly
12 what...

13 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: I guess from an agency
14 perspective and resources, what would it take for
15 DSNY to enforce businesses and carters that are
16 refusing to comply with source separation
17 requirements, and also, how do you see the Council
18 being helpful here in terms of, I don't know if
19 there's any additional legislation that we should be
20 pursuing that would enhance source separation for
21 commercial businesses?

22 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: Yeah, so
23 one of the things that we, as I mentioned, we do have
24 sanitation police officers staffed once the
25 commercial waste program begins. Depending on the

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2 violations we find when it rolls out, we will adjust
3 accordingly, but for now we feel like we have enough
4 sufficient sanitation police officers to enforce
5 this.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: And then on
7 your question about a role for the Council in this
8 which, really, we appreciate the question very much.
9 Commercial organics is currently governed under Local
10 Law 146 of 2013. This law was written in a very
11 different time, and we would love to look at it
12 together with the Council and work on possible
13 updates. For example, the fact that it only covers
14 back-of-house material. There's a lot of room to see
15 how to bring the commercial program more in line with
16 the residential program.

17 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: So you think there's a
18 lot more we can do to divert organic waste.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: There is
20 certainly a lot to look at. The law is now 11 years
21 old. It was the result of complex negotiations more
22 than a decade ago. We would love to take a look at
23 what an update to that law might be.

24

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: I would like to
3 recognize Council Member Hanif. Council Member Hanif,
4 if you have questions, now's your time.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much,
6 Chair Abreu, and thank you all for being here this
7 morning.

8 I've heard from constituents that they've
9 seen DSNY trash trucks mistakenly taking compost from
10 brown bins and mixing it in with standard waste. What
11 steps is the Department taking to ensure operation
12 collections are running smoothly and constituents
13 aren't separating their organics for naught?

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: It could
15 be different issues here. One of the things that you
16 may be finding is once we do a full rollout in
17 October, there'll be 20 districts that are going to
18 be using what we call our hybrid collection approach,
19 meaning we collect the refuse and the organics in one
20 truck, which is, you might've seen it around, it has
21 two sides and one side, the refuse goes and the other
22 side organics goes.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: But is it true that
24 what I'm hearing from my constituents is correct?

25

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2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: I was
3 going to say there may be instances, so we don't want
4 to have our sanitation workers be the judge of
5 somebody's waste. A lot of times residents will
6 contaminate it, and if it's heavily contaminated with
7 refuse, we're not going to tell them to put it in the
8 organic side. We'll put it on the refuse side. So it
9 could be that instances that they might find it would
10 be contamination in there and that's why you'll see
11 them put them in the refuse side.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I see.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MEROLA: Member, if I
14 could add to the First Deputy Commissioner.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Sure.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MEROLA: When we do
17 get instances like this, candidly, I'm not personally
18 familiar yet with a constituent complaint like that,
19 but we do investigate it so if we could connect
20 afterwards and understand the routes that you were
21 seeing, we will take a look.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I really appreciate
23 that.

24 I want to be clear that the intent of my
25 bill was to establish a citywide composting program,

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2 not a citywide anaerobic digestion program. I'm
3 concerned that such a large percentage of collected
4 organic waste is not actually being composted. Can
5 you share the Department's plans to expand compost
6 processing capacity over the coming years?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: In
8 accordance with the law, the Department has a
9 competitive sealed bid procurement process happening
10 right now that prioritizes additional compost
11 capacity. We believe that both composting and
12 anaerobic digestion are forms of beneficial use.
13 Prior to the passage of your law, prior to the
14 rollout of this program, this is millions of pounds
15 of material that was going to landfill. Instead of
16 going to a landfill, instead of feeding the rats,
17 instead of going to waste, it is being put to use
18 either as millions of pounds of finished compost or
19 as power to heat our homes. Both of those are a net
20 positive for the City. However, we are currently
21 expanding our capacity and re-evaluating our capacity
22 with a preference for compost, even though we believe
23 that both of these are necessary part of the steady
24 state of a citywide program.

25

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Love that. I was
3 disturbed to hear that in the summer, the digester
4 eggs at Newtown Creek, which the City is heavily
5 relying on for organics processing, were
6 malfunctioning, resulting in products being burned
7 off as carbon dioxide. Can you provide a detailed
8 timeline of what has occurred at Newtown Creek and
9 the current status of the operation?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: DSNY cannot.
11 DEP runs that facility, or rather, I believe it's
12 their vendor, National Grid, that runs it on behalf
13 of DEP, but that would be a question for the
14 Department of Environmental Protection. Again, with
15 an ongoing procurement, the amount of material going
16 to that site may change.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Okay, that's great
18 to know. I'll follow up with them.

19 Do you have preliminary data on program
20 participation in Queens and Brooklyn, which rolled
21 out in full in October of last year including how
22 many tons of compost have been collected and how it
23 compares to previous years, and then I have a few
24 more questions about the doors knocked, doors
25

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2 contracted that CBOs knocked, mailers sent out, brown
3 bins distributed, and decals distributed.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: Yes. It was
5 about 100,000 bins distributed in the first two
6 boroughs, and there were mailers sent to every
7 residence so that's about 1.7 million, I think,
8 households that received mailers. The door knocks
9 were a combination of CBOs and DSNY outreach staff. A
10 lot of that was done in house, but we did knock the
11 door of every building with one to nine units in the
12 entirety of Brooklyn and Queens. I should remember
13 the number, it's something like 600,000, 500,000,
14 it's a lot of doors.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And that was you
16 said joint with the CBOs.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: Yes. CBOs
18 did some and DSNY did the bulk of it, but yes, we
19 worked in concert on that, and then as far as
20 participation goes, report monthly tonnage numbers
21 citywide are posted on our website, and those numbers
22 are going to become, right now you're looking at a
23 patchwork of programs when you look at that number,
24 and so it's a little bit hard to parse, but we did

25

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2 see a record amount of diverted material in the FY23
3 MMR, and we expect the FY24 MMR to beat that record.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Amazing. Amazing.
5 This is great news. I'm really happy to hear this.
6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you, Council
8 Member. Council Member Carr.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you very much,
10 Chair. Thank you, Department, for being here today.
11 Appreciate your time.

12 It goes without saying that a Staten
13 Island Council Member has to be anti-landfill, and
14 that means being against landfills everywhere, and so
15 I'm supportive of the composting program, curbside
16 pickup program as it's being rolled out, and I look
17 forward to the rollout later this year for Staten
18 Island. Very happy to be there with the Commissioner
19 and the Mayor at that announcement.

20 My question is about the Staten Island
21 composting site in particular. We're in the vicinity
22 of the neighborhood of Travis, and residents continue
23 to complain to me about the odor that sometimes
24 reaches them from the composting facility, and I
25 imagine that this is going to increase with frequency

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2 perhaps as more composting is done and so I'd like to
3 know what is happening at the site in order to
4 prevent that kind of a nuisance from afflicting
5 nearby neighborhoods and perhaps what more could be
6 done to address that.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: One thing I
8 know of offhand and I think we'd like to get back to
9 you with more details, I know that there's water
10 spraying down on the piles on particularly windy
11 days, when they think that the odors may carry, but
12 can get a little more information about what is done
13 and what may be possible to do.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Okay. I appreciate
15 it That's really my only question, Chair. Thank you.
16 I look forward to hearing back from the Department.

17 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Since October last
18 year, what was the organics tonnage per borough? Do
19 you have that information?

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: In
21 Calendar Year '23, in Brooklyn we collected
22 11,000,770 pounds, and in the borough of Queens, we
23 collected 25 million pounds.

24 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: I get a lot of emails
25 and complaints from my constituents in the Upper West

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2 Side especially about their compost smart bins being
3 full all the time, and I can tell you what they do.
4 They go to community composters, right? They go to
5 their farmer's markets as an alternative. But for me,
6 that speaks to potentially a larger problem, I don't
7 know if there is. Is there a lack of servicing of
8 these smart bins? We have a lot on the Upper West
9 Side, a lot of these smart bins, which we're grateful
10 for that infrastructure, but they're full every time.
11 What do I say to my constituents?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: So I would
13 say a few things about that. This is the best problem
14 to have, right, people are using a program that
15 diverts material from landfill. That's really a
16 testament to how much interest there is to the
17 success of the program is so gratifying to all of us,
18 and thank you for your advocacy and getting your
19 constituents to use these. They are emptied every day
20 except Sunday, and we are going to look at what that
21 usage looks like, not just after Manhattan receives
22 curbside service, because we do anticipate that many
23 people who currently use the smart composting bins
24 will instead do curbside separation in their
25 building, but also after, under the law, DSNY can

2 begin writing tickets for failure to source separate
3 organic material on the residential side in April of
4 '25. After that is when you'll probably see a lot of
5 the larger buildings, really even though it is
6 mandatory as soon as service begins under the law,
7 the law as written does not give us the ability to
8 enforce until the spring, and so when that happens,
9 we're going to really take a look at the smart bins
10 and see what usage of them looks like that.

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOJAN: Can I
12 also add one thing? One of the things that we looked
13 at when we rolled out these smart bins was how to
14 service them, right, so we had to keep it cost
15 neutral, and those bins are being serviced by our
16 school truck routes, which they're dispatched on our
17 7 p.m. shift every night. We have made adjustments
18 operationally so our collection operations office
19 looks at the app closely and we've made some
20 adjustments over the few months where we're seeing
21 some Saturday night services necessary and maybe some
22 Monday morning services necessary, but we are making
23 adjustments as it goes along and, like Deputy
24 Commissioner Goodman said, once Manhattan rolls out,
25 we'll adjust a little bit closer there because by

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2 then by then everybody should have the service weekly
3 so that's one of the things I wanted to add.

4 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you. On the
5 enforcement side for commercial businesses, do you
6 have a number on how many citations have been issued
7 in the last six months to commercial businesses for
8 improper composting, setting out trash at the wrong
9 time, or setting out trash improperly, for example,
10 not in approved container.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: We do have
12 that information. We look at it pretty regularly. I'm
13 sorry to say we don't have it in front of us.

14 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: That's all right. If
15 you can just follow up with that information.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: Yeah, we do
17 have it.

18 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Would be greatly
19 appreciated.

20 I want to turn over to GrowNYC for a bit.
21 If you could speak to the GrowNYC's Zero-Waste
22 Schools Program, we consider to be very vital at this
23 Council so it's unfortunate to see the cuts that are
24 coming there. What education is given to schools
25 given the funding cut to this vital program?

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2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: There's a
3 few things I'll point to here. I want to say again,
4 as mentioned earlier, we are so appreciative of the
5 work that CBOs and community composters have done
6 over the years, not just on collection and
7 processing, but on education and outreach as well, of
8 course.

9 In about a month, we will make good on a
10 commitment of this Administration that every DOE
11 school receive composting service in the school.
12 We've been rolling that out in phases over the past
13 several years, and we're very close to completing
14 that. Composting in schools involves education for
15 the custodial staff and for the students because the
16 students are the ones doing the separation so DSNY is
17 engaged in active in-school education and outreach to
18 get the next generation of composters. They compost
19 at school, they go home and they talk to their
20 parents about it. It's incredibly important to us. We
21 have a significant number of other educational
22 programs that include sustainability in the schools
23 we work closely with DOE on.

24 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: We believe very
25 strongly that GrownYC must be part of that equation.

2 My other question is what happened to the
3 2.1 million in funding that was allocated to the
4 build out of the Rockaway Avenue Compost Site for the
5 LES Ecology Center? This funding was allocated
6 through the Eastside Coastal Resilience Project, not
7 solely through the DSNY budget. The buildout of the
8 Rockaway Ave Compost Site was a promise made to the
9 Ecology Center through the relocation of their
10 programs as a result of the ESCR construction.

11 DIRECTOR KITCHENER: Unfortunately, that
12 2.1 was part of the PEG and the November plan, and so
13 although we had done design to start to build the
14 facility, we had never actually started construction
15 on the Rockaway site.

16 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thanks for your
17 transparency, and it'll be something that I'm sure
18 will come up in the hearings that we're going to have
19 in the next few weeks. Expanding our infrastructure
20 is very important. We need, especially in Manhattan,
21 right, we're seeing good signs somewhere, but in
22 other places, we need to make sure that's equitably
23 done, and I think that the LES Ecology Center is
24 going to be very important to that as well.

2 My potentially last question, unless
3 anyone has any other questions, is really just
4 outreach. Considering that many New Yorkers are not
5 yet in the habit of separating their organic waste
6 from the rest of their waste and may not have the
7 tools to do so and that DSNY's outreach and education
8 budget has been cut significantly, how does the
9 agency plan to help New Yorkers adapt their behaviors
10 by October of this year when source separation
11 becomes mandatory? We're only a few months away.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: Yeah, thank
13 you for that question. We agree. It would really not
14 be beneficial to launch a program that nobody knows
15 about. As the largest and easiest curbside composting
16 program ever, one of the great things about it is
17 that it does some of its own outreach, right? The
18 program is so much easier to use that basically the
19 message is so much simpler than it's been in the
20 past. Set it out every week on your recycling day,
21 use whatever bin you want, anything from your
22 kitchen, anything from your garden, no signup, no opt
23 in, no complicated rules, no restrictions, no special
24 day, no limited hours, right? It's so much easier to
25 use, and that helps with the messaging and outreach.

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2 In Brooklyn and Queens, we knocked every door of the
3 one- to nine-unit buildings, and we sent mailers, and
4 we found that those two interventions, when we track
5 participation over time, when we look at people
6 engaging with our content, we can see that those are
7 the two things that really made a difference. We
8 certainly intend to do both of those things in the
9 three remaining boroughs.

10 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: The City currently
11 proposes a once-per-week collection of organic waste
12 from residences. What should New Yorkers do with
13 organic waste on the days that DSNY is not providing
14 the service?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: There's a
16 few options here. This is one of the benefits of the
17 smart composting bins and sometimes people say, oh,
18 but aren't you going to not have a need for them
19 after their citywide residential curbside service.
20 That question exactly shows the ongoing need for the
21 smart composting bins, and one of the reasons I think
22 that they're so popular. In between my trips to my
23 smart bin because I don't have residential service
24 yet, I keep my compostable material in the freezer.
25 Everybody has a different approach that works for

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2 them, but we've tried to develop wraparound services,
3 deliberately give people multiple options about how
4 to dispose of that material properly.

5 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: What advice do you
6 have for New Yorkers who wish to comply with local
7 law and source separate the organic waste but have a
8 landlord or property manager who refuses to engage
9 with brown bins or organic waste in general?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: In spring of
11 2025, when DSNY gains the legal authority to write
12 tickets for failure to source separate, we expect to
13 see that problem substantially disappear. We've heard
14 those kinds of concerns, but I really want to do it
15 and I live in a high rise and my super, my building
16 management tells me to get lost. When they get a
17 Sanitation citation, we think they'll be less likely
18 to say get lost. In the meantime, we are writing
19 warnings. When we see complaints come in on social
20 media, someone says I really want to do it, if we can
21 get an address, we have gone out and written warning
22 notices since, of course, under the law it is
23 mandatory, but in April of 2025, there will be a fine
24 associated with failure to source separate.

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: My last question is,
3 are metrics on brown bin participation and/or
4 contamination rates being collected? If so, where can
5 the general public access this information? I think
6 you already answered the part on contamination rates
7 earlier.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GOODMAN: Yes, and
9 then also the monthly tonnage is posted online. Right
10 now, that would include multiple kinds of programs,
11 but this October, when we're at full rollout, looking
12 at that monthly tonnage will be a meaningful metric
13 about the success of the Curbside Composting Program.

14 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you so much for
15 your time today. Really appreciate all of your
16 contributions and insights. Really, again, appreciate
17 your time today.

18 We'll now move over to public testimony.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you, and
20 we will turn now to public testimony.

21 Each panelist will be given two minutes
22 to speak.

23 The hearing will be adjourned for five
24 minutes. After that, we will turn to public
25 testimony, and our first panelists will be Rhonda

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2 Keyser, Clare Mifflin, and Gil Lopez. We'll resume at
3 11:24.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, everyone.
5 We will be beginning shortly, if everyone can just
6 please have a seat. Thank you so much.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Okay. Thank
8 you all for your time and patience being here this
9 morning.

10 We will begin now with public testimony.
11 Each panelist will be given two minutes to speak.

12 For panelists speaking in-person, please
13 come to the dais as your name is called and wait for
14 your turn to speak.

15 For panelists who are testifying
16 remotely, once your name is called, I will unmute you
17 and the Sergeant-at-Arms will give you the go-ahead
18 to begin. Please wait for the Sergeant to announce
19 that you may begin before delivering your testimony.

20 During your testimony, you must remain on
21 topic and maintain decorum. Witnesses are not
22 permitted to record themselves or the Committee
23 during their testimony. A recording of this hearing
24 will be provided online.

25

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2 Our first panel, we will begin with a
3 small panel from Zoom. First will be Rhonda Keyser,
4 Clare Miflin, and Gil Lopez, then we will turn to in-
5 person testimony. The first panel will be Arif
6 Sunmom, Marisa DeDominicis, and Christine Datz-
7 Romero. One moment.

8 Okay, Rhonda, you will be first. Please
9 wait for the Sergeant-at-Arms to announce that you
10 may begin.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: You may begin.

13 RHONDA KEYSER: Sorry, hold on. Hi, I'm
14 Rhonda Keyser. I'm Chair of the Brooklyn Solid Waste
15 Advisory Board, or SWAB. Thank you, Chair Abreu and
16 to the Council for your thoughtful questions today,
17 and to the DDSNY for your presence.

18 The Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and
19 Bronx SWABs have previously recommended that the City
20 prioritize composting over the practice of co-
21 digestion to process the 80 percent of the city's
22 residential and commercial organic streams. Our
23 testimony today extends our previous recommendation
24 to the infrastructure required to support composting

25

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2 and is on behalf of the Brooklyn, Manhattan and Bronx
3 swabs with pending approval from the Queens' SWAB.

4 We believe the infrastructure needed to
5 support composting will be at least as cost effective
6 as anaerobic co-digestion, the City's majority
7 processing method. If planning and infrastructure for
8 composting are done right, composting can be
9 competitive with the predominant process we employ
10 now, which is disposal of organics as refuse to
11 landfill and incineration. If the environmental and
12 social harms avoided by composting organics rather
13 than disposal as refuse and the social benefits of
14 composting and compost are factored into the cost
15 benefit analysis as they should be, the competitive
16 advantage goes to composting easily. The
17 infrastructure discussion has often been clouded by
18 concerns about processing capacity constraints that
19 are cited as an obstacle to a successful organics
20 program in New York City. These constraints we know
21 are no longer an issue. The current composting
22 capacity of the City's organics processing at Fresh
23 Kills facility on Staten Island has been expanded as
24 we've talked about today to 104,000 tons per year and
25 the Newtown Creek Wastewater Resource Recovery

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2 Facility organics processing capacity through
3 anaerobic co-digestion is estimated between 65,000
4 and 130,000 tons per year. Today, therefore, just
5 these two facilities can process between 169,000 to
6 234,000 tons of organics per year, or 15 to 21
7 percent of our total residential organics per year.
8 To put this current organics processing capacity into
9 perspective, by 2025, after the full rollout of
10 curbside organics collection to all boroughs, we
11 estimate at best...

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much.
13 Your time has expired.

14 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: You can finish.

15 RHONDA KEYSER: Okay. Thank you. We
16 estimate at best that the participation will be about
17 10 percent of the 1.1 million tons of total organics
18 will be diverted for refuse so these simple back-of-
19 the-envelope numbers indicate that we likely have
20 some time before we start to encounter processing
21 constraints, even as we roll out the mandatory
22 curbside collection to the three remaining boroughs
23 of Staten Island, Manhattan, and the Bronx.

24 As a reminder, recycling's progress is
25 instructive. Recycling of metal, glass, plastic and

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2 paper was mandatory as of 1989, and today in '24,
3 after 30 years of education, outreach and
4 enforcement, and one notable stop and start, New York
5 City's capture rate for all recycling streams
6 combined, excluding organics, has stagnated at 50
7 percent. It is unlikely that we will experience the
8 participation necessary to achieve a 50 percent
9 capture rate anytime soon with organics without
10 meaningful education and outreach.

11 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you so much.

12 RHONDA KEYSER: Thank you. The New York
13 City Compost Project is such outreach, and we
14 recommend not defunding it as you're planning. Thank
15 you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you.

17 Next, we will hear from Clare Miflin.

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

19 CLARE MIFLIN: Hi, thank you. My name is
20 Clare Miflin. I'm Executive Director of the Center
21 for Zero Waste Design. New York City has had a vision
22 through three Mayors of a greener thriving city that
23 has more street trees, has more raingardens, acts as
24 a sponge. This is more equitable. This has been a
25 vision for decades, and community composting is

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2 necessary to achieve this vision so I would say that
3 cutting community composting is cutting the future
4 vision of New York City. As the city change from
5 relying on gray infrastructure, concrete pipes,
6 things like that, to relying on street trees,
7 raingardens, and parks to infiltrate stormwater,
8 they've spent billions of dollars on this. Doesn't it
9 make sense to spend seven million dollars a year on
10 community composting? Because that is what you need.
11 You can't maintain green infrastructure in the same
12 way as you could maintain pipes and concrete. It's a
13 very different thing to maintain so community
14 composting is really good quality. There are no
15 little bits of plastic in it. It's done locally. It
16 engages volunteers and can create good green jobs if
17 it's consistently funded. I'm really happy that
18 Council Member Nurse is talking about working with
19 Parks because community composting spread, done with
20 Parks could really change the city, and I think just
21 in terms of how the City approaches it, you can
22 approach changing behavior with rules and fines, but
23 you don't convince a lot of people. If you really
24 want to change behavior, you have to inspire and
25 engage people, and community composting does that. It

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2 gives people hope. It gives people a way to tangibly
3 participate in making the city greener and more
4 equitable and better, and it gives people far more
5 conviction than a fine would to do the right thing. I
6 think that needs to be factored in as the City
7 changes the way it moves forward, and I'm very happy
8 that there's going to be curbside organics citywide
9 and that they're making moves towards
10 containerization, but both of those things, just
11 containerizing trash, that will make our recycling
12 rates worse. With small tweaks, the programs could be
13 way better.

14 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you so much.

15 CLARE MIFLIN: Thank you so much.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you.

17 Next will be Gil Lopez.

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

19 GIL LOPEZ: Hi. My name is Gil Lopez. I'm
20 going to skip over most of my qualifications. I will
21 say that I'm on the Queen's Swab on the Organics
22 Committee. I do work for Big Reuse, but not for the
23 New York City compost project, which has completely
24 been defunded. There's no jobs that have been saved
25 by the City budget. It was all private money, but I

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2 am funded. My work is funded by several Council
3 Members. Thank you to many of you who are here today.

4 I have a few things that I want to say so
5 I'm going to dive into it. I first want to say that I
6 believe that brown bins and the smart bins are
7 absolutely imperative for New York City and the
8 municipal program. We have so much organics that we
9 need to deal with that it is actually very necessary
10 that these programs exist. Anaerobic digestion has
11 been used improperly today. What the City does is
12 anaerobic co-digestion when the City mixes our clean
13 food scraps, which residents work so hard to separate
14 from the other waste streams, and the City then mixes
15 them with sewage. That's a completely different
16 thing. It's not completely different, but it's very
17 different from anaerobic digestion. That waste
18 byproduct of digestion can be used to fertilize
19 fields of edible crops. You cannot do that with
20 anaerobically co-digested material so I want people
21 to be very clear about their language when they talk
22 about this, and I want to be clear that the Mayor's
23 PlaNYC prefaces the use of organic material collected
24 by DSNY to go to anaerobic digestion so earlier when
25 the DSNY person was talking about, 80 percent to

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2 anaerobic digestion and 20 percent of compost is
3 going to flip, not if the Mayor and his
4 Sustainability Office have anything to do with it,
5 which is ironic because in 2019, City Council passed
6 a Climate Emergency Act, which said that we were
7 going to do everything we can to reverse the impacts
8 of climate change in the city. Now, when we burn our
9 biogas created by anaerobic co-digestion, it does
10 create..

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time has expired.

12 GIL LOPEZ: Okay, so I just want to say
13 that community composting is very important. Having
14 the ability for people to volunteer in their
15 community to see composting happening brings us
16 closer to understanding and being a part of our way
17 systems, which makes us more human. The process of
18 touching compost, turning into good soil, applying it
19 to gardens with children, with aging adults, I do
20 this all the time, it's very important work and the
21 idea that the City can implement the brown bin, which
22 I acknowledge is absolutely imperative, and
23 completely throw the community that's been doing this
24 work for decades no bones at all is ludicrous and
25 completely disrespectful.

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2 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you so much. I
3 hear you. I hear you. Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you. We
5 will now move to our first in-person panel, starting
6 with Arif Sunmom, Marisa DeDominicis, and Christine
7 Datz-Romero. You may approach the table.

8 ARIF SUNMOM: Good morning, Chair Abreu
9 and Members of the Committee. Thanks again for taking
10 time to hold this hearing today and for all the
11 thoughtful questions and taking time to dive deeper
12 into these issues.

13 GrowNYC is here today to support the
14 restoration of funding and reinvestment in community
15 composting. The Mayor's budget cuts have eliminated
16 funding for GrowNYC and seven organizations that make
17 up the New York City Compost Project. While GrowNYC
18 has received (INAUDIBLE) funding to support the
19 program, this funding will not carry us through the
20 next fiscal year. The loss of funding will result in
21 the loss of some 65 jobs, 50 of which are union.
22 GrowYC currently operates 50 food scrap drop-off
23 sites across New York City, collecting 22 tons of
24 food scraps on a weekly basis from 7,000 weekly
25 participants. Since GrowYC began its program in 2011,

2 we've diverted 24 million pounds of food scraps from
3 almost 3 million individual drop-offs. While the
4 tonnage diverted may seem small in comparison to the
5 tonnage collected by DSNY, we have invaluable
6 educational components to our programs and engage
7 communities through free compost give-back events,
8 street care events through the five boroughs. This
9 education component cannot be replicated by the smart
10 bins. Our programs have been characterized by the
11 Administration as small, inefficient, and only for
12 the true believers. We are small by design. As far as
13 efficiency, GrowYC's collection program has
14 consistently averaged between six to seven pounds of
15 food scraps per donor. That represents 86 to 100
16 percent of what a typical New York City household
17 generates according to the 2005 Waste
18 Characterization Study. That is a very high capture
19 rate, one that might be considered efficient. As far
20 as the true believers. Yes, the reason the
21 participants in our programs are true believers is
22 that they have benefited from the education provided
23 by our staff to understand that composting process
24 and why it's an important tool in mitigating climate
25 change. It seems to us that as the City strives to

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2 expand the curbside composting program, the City
3 would want true believers to maximize the program.

4 We implore the City Council to preserve
5 these vital jobs that educate the public to
6 participate in the City's curbside program actively
7 and enthusiastically when it becomes available to all
8 New York City residents by restoring funding to
9 GrowNYC and the New York City Compost Project.

10 Finally, we're concerned with Intro. 358
11 that does not specify what a public organic waste
12 receptacle is. If they are intended to be smart bins,
13 we think a wiser investment would be greater
14 community impact. With a greater community impact
15 would be restoration of funding for community
16 composting. Thank you for your time.

17 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Marissa, you
19 may begin. Thank you.

20 Please turn on your microphone.

21 MARISA DEDOMINICIS: Thank you. Good
22 morning. Thank you for this opportunity to speak. My
23 name is Marisa DeDominicis and I'm a co-founder and
24 ED of Earth Matter, a compost facility located on
25 Governors Island. We request the Council passes

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2 Intro. 55, Intro 97-A, Reconsidered Intro. by Council
3 Member Restler, and Preconsidered Resolution by
4 Council Members Nurse and Krishnan. In addition,
5 please support the Preconsidered bill, formerly
6 Intro. 1100-2023 by Gale Brewer, which will provide
7 for large parks to compost. We request as well the
8 Council pass a budget that includes seven million in
9 the FY25 budget to restore the community composting.
10 Why? Since 1994, DSNY has invested in community
11 composting groups that contributed to putting
12 composting in New Yorkers' vocabulary. We're thrilled
13 there's mandatory municipal composting. We commend
14 the City and the Council and the Mayor for passing
15 this milestone and we thank DSNY for all their work,
16 but the success and continuance of the City's
17 investment in composting needs to include and expand
18 our work. We need support of what has been
19 established and also the work of the community
20 composters. There's a continued need for education
21 and processing compost in order for our food scrap
22 diversion rates to increase from its current levels,
23 which we believe are very low. The small amount of
24 the FY25 budget needed to support community
25 composting work assists the City's efforts

2 exponentially. City Council Members, thanks for
3 advocating for the increase in the compost
4 infrastructure and the related increase in green
5 jobs, helping to make our soils healthier, our grass
6 greener, and leading to the reduction of the amount
7 of food scraps currently exported to be incinerated
8 or landfilled, which we all know despoils our
9 collective soil, air, and water. Thank you for this
10 opportunity to speak in your work

11 CHRISTINE DATZ-ROMERO: Good morning. My
12 name is Christine Datz-Romero. I am the Executive
13 director of the Lower East Side Ecology Center, and
14 I'd like to thank Chair Abreu to hold this hearing
15 today and to make community composting in his first
16 meeting give us such a prominent place.

17 It was really interesting to hear the
18 DSNY testimony because they thanked us a lot for our
19 work leading up to this milestone, but we've proven
20 again and again that we are there to really do the
21 hard work on the ground to get really people literal
22 about and engaged in community composting, and now is
23 not the time to cut these programs. If anything, they
24 are needed more than ever because we have a huge task
25 in front of us to really convince people to compost.

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2 Just because you provide a brown bin doesn't mean
3 that people are going to just participate. There are
4 a lot of hurdles as DSNY has acknowledged, and we are
5 part and parcel of that. We have been part and parcel
6 of that for the last 30 years, at least in in some
7 cases, and we are looking forward with the support of
8 the Council to continue that work.

9 I just want to also mention I really
10 appreciate you bringing up the Canarsie buildout
11 because Sanitation has invested probably over a
12 million dollars in the design fees that went with
13 this program, and now we need to bring it over the
14 finish line. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Of course.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you all
17 for your time.

18 Our next panel will be Justin Green,
19 Courtney Scheffler, and Eric Goldstein.

20 You may begin. Thank you.

21 JUSTIN GREEN: Hi, I'm Justin Green. I'm
22 the Executive Director of Big Reuse. I'm here to
23 testify to restore the budget for community
24 composting programs. First, I'd like to thank Chair
25 Abreu for your support for community composting, your

2 support for environmental work in the city, and for
3 this hearing. I also want to thank our many other
4 supporting Council Members. We've really seen broad
5 support throughout the Council for community
6 composting, and it's been great. We also applaud
7 DSNY's rollout of organic waste collection and
8 expansion of the Fresh Kills composting facility.

9 We are concerned about DSNY's co-
10 digestion of food waste with sewage NAD because it
11 undermines community participation by not actually
12 making compost as you pointed out. It supports
13 ongoing fossil fuel infrastructure at National Grid
14 and produces a digestate which concentrates
15 microplastics and over 700 chemicals in leftover
16 digestates which reduces its usability and is of
17 questionable beneficial use.

18 Big Reuse has been a dedicated partner of
19 DSNY Compost Project for the last decade. Before the
20 elimination of our funding in December, we annually
21 composted 2.2 million pounds of organic waste from
22 parks, leaf and yard waste, and food waste at three
23 community-based sites, produced over 1,000 cubic
24 yards that went to over 300 groups, parks and street
25

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2 tree care events, benefiting and engaging tens of
3 thousands of New Yorkers.

4 DSNY budget cuts forced us to lay off 10
5 curbside organic waste staff and seven community
6 composting staff. We have temporary emergency private
7 funding that has allowed us to keep on three staff,
8 but the funding runs out in May. With a budget of 1.8
9 billion dollars, DSNY can easily afford to support
10 community organizations and the botanical gardens as
11 they have for the last 30 years to continue
12 community-based programs uplifting composting. Thank
13 you so much.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you.

15 Next, we will hear from Courtney Scheffler.

16 COURTNEY SCHEFFLER: Hi, my name is
17 Courtney Scheffler. I'm a proud member of the GrowNYC
18 Workers Collective, a labor union with the Retail,
19 Wholesale, and Department Store Union. I work as a
20 compost coordinator and driver with GrowNYC, and
21 together with our partners at the New York City
22 Compost Project, we serve communities throughout the
23 five boroughs by providing food scrap collections,
24 processing, outreach, education, access, and finished
25 compost.

2 Our workers provide essential work waste
3 diversion services to neighborhoods all over the
4 city. The City Council must fight to fully restore
5 this program by ensuring sufficient funding for
6 community composting in this budget and also
7 mandating that this program exists through
8 legislation. We are asking for organics to be
9 processed hyper-locally to where they are produced
10 through community composting over anaerobic digestion
11 for the health of our neighborhoods and for our
12 livelihoods. Forty-five of my coworkers are facing
13 imminent layoffs, and I will be living paycheck to
14 paycheck but with half of my paycheck gone with the
15 loss of this programming. This program, it's not
16 expensive. It constitutes only 0.3 percent of the
17 City's Sanitation budget, and we've been here before.
18 There were budget cuts to community composting during
19 the pandemic, and every week I was asked when compost
20 would return, when compost would be accessible. I
21 worked at Parkchester Green Market in the Bronx. Food
22 scrap drop-off sites there were the first to be cut
23 and the last to be restored. It was up to us to build
24 trust with workers that was broken with communities,
25 and we are chronically disappointing and breaking

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2 that trust with communities when we are facing budget
3 cuts like this. Investing in communities is always
4 worth it, especially those that are
5 disproportionately experiencing environmental
6 injustice. It is a disgrace to cut these programs
7 that are just beginning to remedy barriers to waste
8 equity in the Bronx, and smart bins alone will not
9 exemplify waste equity by any means. This comes just
10 as our union has entered negotiations for our first
11 contract to make our workplace truly sustainable.

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.

13 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: I know you're like two
14 sentences from finishing, so you can finish.

15 COURTNEY SCHEFFLER: Sure. Instead of
16 negotiating our first contract as a union, we're also
17 negotiating for our jobs. Funding the New York City
18 Compost Project and these programs at GrowNYC, it's a
19 means for this Administration to realize its proposed
20 environmental objectives. Thank you for your time.

21 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Good morning, Chair
22 Abreu. Congratulations on assuming leadership of the
23 Committee. You're off to a great start with this
24 hearing.

25

2 I'm going to summarize my written
3 testimony. New York City will never have a
4 sustainable and equitable waste disposal program if
5 it can't get organics processing right. Council, to
6 its credit, passed Local Law 85 of 2023, but
7 mandating curbside alone won't do the trick. As Clare
8 Mifflin said earlier, we have to change behavior, and
9 if you want to do that, you need to engage and
10 inspire people. Community composting does that. We're
11 delighted to hear of your commitment to fully fund
12 the community compost program in the FY25 budget.
13 Beyond that, the entire decades-long effort to get
14 organics out of landfilling and incinerators is not
15 going to succeed unless we identify sufficient
16 capacity to process organics in or close to the five
17 boroughs. Anaerobic digestion won't do it. While it
18 may be better than landfilling and incineration, it
19 doesn't provide the broad environmental benefits and
20 presents a variety of environmental and operational
21 challenges as the repeated snafus at Newtown Creek
22 Sewage Treatment Plant digesters have demonstrated.
23 Yet, the City has dawdled for 20 years in getting
24 additional capacity for composting other than the
25 recently announced expansion of Fresh Kills

2 Composting Facility. The City slashed, as I
3 indicated, funding for community composting. The
4 golden opportunities to expand composting at
5 Governors Island with Earth Matter and at Rikers
6 Island have yet to be seized. The City's Parks
7 Department has ignored existing laws, and most parks
8 have not even managed to compost even their own leaf
9 and yard waste. In over two decades, the mandates of
10 the 2006 Solid Waste Management Plan to set up a
11 compost siting facility have gone by the wayside nor
12 has the 2006 Solid Waste Management Plan mandate to
13 rebuild marine transfer stations to handle processing
14 of all kinds of solid waste, including organics been
15 completed.

16 Finally, at least for now, NRDC strongly
17 supports Intro. 55, which would direct the Sanitation
18 Department to begin accepting and processing
19 commercial solid waste at City-owned marine transfer
20 stations and rail transfer stations and using these
21 facilities, city facilities to ship wastes out of the
22 city that can't be recycled and can't be composted is
23 the most significant step the Council could take to
24 reduce the concentration of waste facilities in
25 already overburdened environmental justice

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2 communities. Thank you for your leadership. We look
3 forward to working with you and the entire Committee
4 Staff in the weeks and months ahead.

5 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you, Eric. Thank
6 you to this panel. Appreciate it.

7 I would also like to recognize Council
8 Member Gale Brewer.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you. Our
10 next panel will be Winson Wong, Lena Frey, and Carol
11 Robins.

12 After that panel, we will have Erik
13 Menjivar, Celeste Perez, and Sra Feigelman.

14 Hi, Winson, you may begin. Thank you.

15 WINSON WONG: Hi, my name is Winson Wong.
16 I'm the co-founder...

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: I'm sorry to
18 interrupt you. Please turn on your microphone. Thank
19 you.

20 WINSON WONG: Hi, my name is Winson Wong.
21 I'm the co-founder and CEO of a company called
22 Afterlife Ag. We are a micro hauler but also a
23 circular mushroom farm based out of Queens in New
24 York. We essentially upcycle organic waste and turn
25 it into substrate to grow mushrooms that we provide

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2 back to restaurants, schools, food distributors,
3 grocery stores locally within New York City, and then
4 after harvesting, our spent mushroom substrate is
5 actually donated to parks and gardens across New York
6 City as well. Our mission is to divert more organic
7 waste from going to landfills. We're expanding and
8 growing thousands of pounds each week starting March
9 later this year. Our customers are really excited to
10 see that we're providing them something that they can
11 reuse as part of their establishments that's local,
12 fresh, and healthy to eat, and we understand that
13 waste management is really costly, which is why
14 there's a massive opportunity to invest in
15 innovations like ours that is new and provide more
16 value with organic waste. We work with companies like
17 Cogent Way Solutions to essentially take their
18 organic waste and develop more value out of them so
19 I'm excited to see that there's plans to revise Local
20 Law 146, and I would love to see more businesses
21 source separate their organic waste in the city and
22 also more support for startups like ours to be able
23 to create more value with organic way so that we can
24 do more with climate justice. That's all. Thank you.
25 Yeah.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you. You
3 may begin.

4 LENA FREY: Yeah, hi. Good morning, Chair
5 Abreu and Council. Thank you for this opportunity to
6 speak. My name is Lena Fry, and I am a proud member
7 of the GrowNYC Workers Collective, represented by
8 RWDSU. I have worked as a compost coordinator at
9 GrowNYC for over four years and it is a job that I
10 love. I feel so much pride because while this work is
11 literally dirty, the services that we provide to New
12 Yorkers make this city a cleaner, healthier, and more
13 resilient place to live and work. Because the City
14 defunded GrowNYC's contract, me and my union co-
15 workers will be unemployed as of May 20th. This is
16 the second time that we have faced this. This is the
17 second time in just three months that I have sat here
18 and testified for the city to let me and my co-
19 workers keep our job, to let us keep providing vital
20 services to communities across the five boroughs. I
21 will not sit back and let my co-workers and I lose
22 our jobs without a fight, and I am asking for the
23 City Council to do the same.

24 The work that we do, along with our
25 partners at the New York City Compost Project, is

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2 distinct and complementary to the existing DSNY
3 services. Our work makes composting accessible to
4 people who do not have brown bin service, as millions
5 of New Yorkers do not. Our drop-off sites can be used
6 by people without smartphones and for those of us who
7 live in areas without a single smart bin within
8 miles, like myself. Every week, I speak to people
9 whose landlords refuse to participate in the curbside
10 service, preferring to risk a future menial fine, and
11 to those whose large apartment buildings have just
12 one single bin, which is woefully insufficient. For
13 these countless New Yorkers, community composting is
14 their only option. The Council must fully restore
15 funding to this essential program in order to save
16 union jobs and livelihoods. We should not rely on
17 private donations to fund basic, inexpensive, and
18 popular City services. Funding for community compost
19 must be mandated through legislation to ensure it can
20 thrive beyond the opaque pendulum swing of City
21 budget contracts, which we fight for year after year.
22 Thank you for your time and consideration.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you. You
24 may begin.

25

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2 CAROL ROBINS: My name is Carol Robbins,
3 and I'm just a big compost fan. I think that
4 composting should be a no-brainer, and I believe that
5 all New Yorkers should be made aware of that. Smelly
6 garbage, gone. Rats, gone. Methane leaking into our
7 atmosphere from landfills, gone. I think if the whole
8 world would go along with composting, we'd be a long
9 way towards saving our planet. It's one of the
10 easiest, cheapest, and safest ways to do it. No
11 mining, no factories, just healthy soil, plants, and
12 trees. Just the way nature always meant it to be.

13 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Are you a poet? That
14 was beautifully written.

15 CAROL ROBINS: I'm not.

16 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you all.

18 Our next panel will be Erik Menjivar,
19 Celeste Perez, and Sra Feigelman.

20 If there's anyone else who would like to
21 testify in person, please check in with the Sergeant-
22 at-Arms at the back of the room and fill out one of
23 these blue slips. If I don't have your name on one of
24 these slips, I cannot call you to testify. Thank you.

25 Eric, you may begin.

2 ERIK MENJIVAR: Good morning, Chair Abreu
3 and Members of the Sanitation Committee who might be
4 listening in, among them, my Councilwoman Vickie
5 Paladino. My name is Erik Menjivar, and I'm a proud
6 member of the Bargain Committee of the GrowNYC
7 Workers Collective, represented by RWDSU. I work as a
8 compost coordinator for GrowNYC, and along with my
9 colleagues of the Zero Waste Programs, we serve the
10 city of New York by providing food scrap collections,
11 compost outreach, education access, and finished
12 compost.

13 I would like to thank Chair Abreu for
14 your comments today in support of community
15 composting, and we as a union look forward to
16 speaking with you along the budget process. I'm also
17 happy to see different proposals and resolutions that
18 encourage composting and to provide some sort of
19 infrastructure, but with all due honesty, we already
20 had an infrastructure for organics collection and
21 community composting. That was the New York City
22 Compost Project. The best plan for infrastructure is
23 a collaboration of local organizations to collect
24 food scraps, process them, and provide compost for
25 our parks, homes, gardens, and farms. Instead of

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2 building off of this infrastructure with the brown
3 bin system and smart bin system, instead, we are
4 solely focusing on those two processes and ignoring
5 community composting. That in itself is an injustice.
6 This morning, we've been hearing disparaging comments
7 from lead leadership of DSNY, which is not uncommon,
8 as I was here last year testifying and hearing the
9 same exact comments as well as vagueness about plans
10 for the future of composting and organics collection.
11 We already have the solution to provide composting
12 for all New Yorkers. What this Council needs to do is
13 advocate more for the restoration of funding and also
14 to fight against the vagueness and also the
15 intolerance that is being provided by DSNY. To best
16 serve the needs of our communities, the City Council
17 must advocate not only for the restoration of the
18 program, but also demand the legislation in order to
19 ensure the existence of the program for years to
20 come. Thank you.

21 CELESTE PEREZ: Thank you. Good afternoon
22 now. My name is Celeste Perez. I am the State Climate
23 Policy Manager at the New York City Environmental
24 Justice Alliance, also known as NYC-EJA, and we are

25

2 also a member of the Transform, Don't Trash
3 Coalition.

4 In New York City, over 15,000 tons of
5 garbage are produced daily, generating massive
6 transportation impacts to and from privately owned
7 and operated waste transfer stations along the
8 waterfront. The current solid waste system is an
9 ongoing environmental injustice in which 75 percent
10 of the City's private waste is still trucked in and
11 out of just four community districts, some of which
12 have the highest rates of asthma, such as North
13 Brooklyn, the South Bronx, and Southeast Queens. For
14 this reason, NYC-EJA is here to express our strong
15 support of Intro. number 55, which would require DSNY
16 to begin using municipal marine transfer stations to
17 accept commercial waste. Passage of this legislation
18 would hasten the long overdue transition of New York
19 City's polluting truck-based waste export system to a
20 water barge-based system where one barge can replace
21 the capacity of 48 18-wheel tractor trailer long-haul
22 trucks, which is equivalent to 96 truck trips from
23 spewing pollutants into local streets. While the
24 total amount of waste handled at private transfer
25 stations in New York City has decreased 17 percent

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2 since the implementation of Local Law 152 of 2018,

3 newly released data from the Department of Sanitation

4 shows that the system is still remaining grossly

5 unfair and unequal. Private waste transfer stations

6 are more likely to be sited in communities with a

7 higher percentage of people of color living below the

8 poverty line and bring with them health-harming

9 emissions according to the New York City

10 Comptroller's recently released audit report on the

11 City's Fair Share Compliance. While there are 24

12 waste facilities crammed into these overburdened

13 community districts, a total of 45 other districts

14 have no waste facilities at all. We urge Mayor Adams

15 and the City Council to take immediate steps to

16 relieve these communities of excessive truck traffic,

17 pollution, and odors while reducing the miles that

18 are dangerous and polluting waste trucks all through

19 New York City streets by passing Intro. 55 of 2024,

20 and NYC-EJA alongside TDT looks forward to continuing

21 engagement with the Committee on Sanitation, Council

22 Members representing impacted communities to ensure

23 that we can continue to make rapid progress towards a

24 more just and equitable waste system. Thank you.

25

2 SRA FEIGELMAN: Good morning, City
3 Council. I'd like to start by thanking those Council
4 Members thus far that have supported the funding of
5 community composting. Thanks again.

6 I'm here today to address the City's
7 decision to cut New York City's state of the art
8 community composting program by 100 percent and
9 report on the community impact it has had thus far,
10 specifically in the community of East New York, who
11 has suffered heavy loss by your cuts.

12 Please allow me to share. For context, I
13 am the Compost Program Manager at East New York
14 Farms, a non-profit organization located in East New
15 York, Brooklyn. Our mission is to organize youth and
16 adults to address food justice in our community by
17 promoting local sustainable agriculture and
18 community-led economic development.

19 East New York has the highest
20 concentration of community gardens in all New York
21 City, and they also have a disproportionately high
22 levels of contaminated soil, food, and food
23 insecurity due to historic redlining, civic
24 divestment, and environmental racism and injustice.
25 Now for composting, the East New York Farms Compost

2 Program collects food scraps locally from residents
3 and community-based organizations, and we process
4 them into rich, nutritious, black gold compost. We
5 distribute compost directly to community members and
6 gardens in our neighborhood to help restore their
7 soil and supplement organic nutrients for gardeners
8 to allow their own resilient food system without
9 pesticides or chemicals. Our compost operation is
10 small; however, we process about 6,000 pounds of food
11 scraps by hand each season. We are also currently the
12 only available food scrap drop-off site in East New
13 York as GrowNYC was forced to close their Cypress
14 Hills operation this past week.

15 Big Reuse, who has supported our capacity
16 limitations for producing compost, has helped us
17 collect well over 12,000 pounds of food scraps this
18 season from drop-off sites stationed in East New
19 York, meaning the New York City Compost Project has
20 tripled the amount of food scraps that East New
21 Yorkers diverted from the landfill, meeting community
22 members increased demand to compost in East New York.
23 With their support, 2023 was our most successful year
24 on record for community composting, just in time for
25 City budget cuts to take it all away.

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2 I'd like to conclude by reinforcing that
3 New York City has one of the oldest and certainly the
4 most impressive community composting initiative in
5 our country. Our organization has attended
6 conferences and events where New York City compost
7 programming is presented as an example for the rest
8 of the U.S. and world to follow. It's impossible for
9 New York City to maintain this title without
10 continuing to fund community composting. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you. We
13 have one remaining panelist who will testify in
14 person. Christopher Leon Johnson, you may approach
15 the dais. Please keep in mind testimony is limited to
16 two minutes.

17 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Ready?

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Excuse me.
19 Please also keep in mind that members of the public
20 should not be filming or taking photos of themselves
21 during testimony.

22 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Showing my boy,
23 my guy, I'll take it off.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you.

25

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2 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: My guy, my guy,
3 that's my guy. I'll respect, that's my guy.

4 All right, what's up, Shaun. What's up,
5 Shaun Abreu? What's up? My name is Christopher Leon
6 Johnson. I'm in favor for the bill that's to increase
7 the fines for littering. Now my thing with the Chair,
8 I know you're the new Chair for sanitation, but you
9 deserve to be the Chair because you really was out in
10 the fights in the last session. When Sandy was the
11 Chair, now she's Chair of Criminal Justice, I think
12 it was suitable for her, but you're most suited for
13 the position here, but this is my thing, right. I
14 think that you're the Chair with the help of Sandy
15 Nurse and a few of these other Council Members need
16 to introduce a bill to start giving people incentives
17 for reported littering. Just like how you give
18 incentives for reporting dumping and reporting
19 idling, you should give people incentive to reporting
20 littering, right? It doesn't matter if people, you
21 increase the bill to 500 dollars, like I said, if you
22 start putting in more initiatives, like with idling,
23 giving people I think like what is it, 25 percent of
24 the, I think it's 25 percent, correct me, Committee
25 Counsel, 25 percent of the fee.

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2 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: We can look into that.

3 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah. 25

4 percent, all right. That amount of money, people
5 start reporting more littering. The problem is people
6 feel they could do what they do because the cops
7 don't enforce the law and the sanitation police don't
8 enforce the law either so without real sanitation
9 enforcement and real inspiration of sanitation
10 enforcement, that means like giving people money for
11 telling on people give me promote snitching, I like
12 that word, it's not going to do anything so I say
13 it's good to increase the fines. We need money for
14 the City. We have a big crisis going on, but you have
15 to start incentivizing people for reporting this
16 stuff because there's no point in reporting and
17 people not getting paid. If people getting paid for
18 this stuff, oh, trust me, you'll get a lot of
19 reporting of littering and idling and dumping and
20 etc. so just like how you report like 200 for a
21 letter, like you find business letters, per letter,
22 you need to do the same thing. 300 dollars, 25
23 percent, that'd be great for anybody that need the
24 money.

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Mr. Johnson, thank you
3 so much for your testimony.

4 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hey, welcome.
5 Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you.
7 Have I inadvertently missed anyone who would like to
8 testify in person?

9 Seeing none, we'll move on to Zoom
10 testimony.

11 Our first panelist will be Alex Hayden.
12 Please keep in mind that testimony should be limited
13 to two minutes and please maintain decorum and stay
14 on topic. Thank you.

15 ALEX HAYDEN: Yo, what the heck is going
16 on in New York City? I saw a bunch of Venezuelan
17 immigrants literally cooking rats the other day on
18 the sidewalk. I'm out there. I'm sorry, I got my wife
19 and her boyfriend, we're walking down the street and
20 my wife's boyfriend is eating somebody's...

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Excuse me, please.
22 Please stay on topic. Please stay on topic.

23 ALEX HAYDEN: That's about the sanitation
24 problem. Y'all got these big rats, man, these big-ass
25 rats in New York City, bunch of fentanyl needles

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2 everywhere. I'm on the subway system. I almost got a
3 fentanyl needle in my derriere so (INAUDIBLE) I'm
4 sick of you idiot New Yorkers letting this city
5 crashed and burned. (INAUDIBLE) and it's your fault,
6 you dumb bureaucrats, and that's why I'm getting
7 stabbed with fentanyl needles because you guys are
8 too coward to do anything about it. Baby back
9 bitches, all y'all, you know that. Mayor Eric Adams,
10 baby back bitch. Always...

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Excuse me,
12 please maintain decorum.

13 ALEX HAYDEN: Yeah, but why don't you help
14 us, please (INAUDIBLE) City Council women like you
15 and (INAUDIBLE) try to tell me what to do. Every
16 person on that Council is dumb, and y'all are ruining
17 this city. Y'all need to check yourself before you
18 wreck yourself. Y'all feel me? I (INAUDIBLE) and I
19 love New York City, but I hate what y'all are doing
20 to her. You should be ashamed of yourself. That's my
21 time, I'll yield the rest.

22 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Next, we will
24 have Andy Blencero.

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

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2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Andy Blancero, are you
3 available on Zoom to testify?

4 Andy, you may begin.

5 ANDY BLANCERO: Sorry, you had me muted
6 there for a second. Tough act to follow there.

7 I'm a Staten Islander and a former
8 instructor of the Master Composter course. I want to
9 say good afternoon and thanks everybody for engaging
10 this important conversation. As I said, I'm a Staten
11 Islander, and I want to mention that the pilot
12 program for the curbside collection was launched here
13 on Staten Island and it was only as successful as it
14 was due to Master Composter promotion, outreach,
15 education, and participation. Master Composters are
16 dedicated volunteers, recruited, trained, and managed
17 by the Department of Sanitation that help to increase
18 diversion rates and acted as frontline representation
19 for the Department of Sanitation to enable the
20 success of, say, pilot programs about curbside
21 compost collection. Their reward after all this work
22 is to be thanked but really somewhat spurned and
23 dismissed as elitists or as true believers. I
24 happened to spend some time out in Seattle working
25 with the Tilth Alliance, the origins of the Master

2 Composter Program that New York City designed their
3 program after, and the number one thing that they
4 teach out there is that it is not possible to compost
5 food scraps within the city limits. They describe it
6 as dangerous. Because of this removal of this waste
7 stream as a resource for the community, I observed
8 underutilized community gardens and other community
9 spaces and a reliance on commercial and industrial
10 compost that was in poor quality but without a
11 populace that was able to identify it as poor quality
12 because they lacked the tactile visual ability to
13 understand what good compost looks like.

14 I want to say a little bit more about
15 community gardens and community spaces. These are
16 great ways of understanding community composting, and
17 it reveals why the Department of Sanitation preferred
18 metrics of tonnage and yardage and number of people
19 reached are wrong-headed. The value of community
20 gardens is not measured by the tonnage of food they
21 produce or the percentage of New York City residents
22 that they feed. There are less tangible, less
23 trackable, certainly.

24 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time
25 has expired.

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2 ANDY BLANCERO: Thank you.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you.

4 Next, we will have Anita Chan.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

6 ANITA CHAN: Hi. Good afternoon, everyone.

7 My name is Anita, and I'm a lifelong New York City
8 resident, a composter, Earth Matter New York board
9 member, and a member of 350 NYC WasteNot. I've cared
10 about being responsible for my waste since I was a
11 kid because my family taught me not to litter and to
12 throw out trash in the right places and, as a
13 teenager, I was introduced to community composting
14 through East New York Farms, a community organization
15 composting at a local level.

16 As we discuss New York City's
17 infrastructure for handling and processing organic
18 waste, I want to emphasize that we cannot do so
19 without including community composting. The Mayor's
20 recent budget cuts caused a lot of green jobs to be
21 cut, and it is a huge setback to organic waste
22 diversion, improving street cleanliness, rat
23 mitigation, and New York City's progress towards
24 sustainability goals. Where I live, there are brown
25 bins from the Organic Curbside Collection Program and

2 orange bins from the Smart Bin Program, but they
3 cannot replace the green bins at community food scrap
4 drop-off sites, and all of the staff who engage and
5 educate the public and encourage them to participate.
6 I do support having universal and diversified access
7 to organic waste diversion, but the current state of
8 the brown bins and the smart bins is a waste of money
9 without robust compost education, much of which was
10 conducted by the now defunded New York City Compost
11 Project, but the host organizations, Earth Matter,
12 Big Reuse, Lower East Side Ecology Center, and the
13 Botanical Gardens remain resilient, but they do
14 require additional funding to sustain and grow their
15 positive impact. GrowNYC and numerous other
16 nonprofits have also massively contributed and
17 continue to do so through community engagement,
18 education, food scrap collection, and local
19 processing.

20 While it is true that the capacity of
21 existing composting sites cannot handle all the
22 organic waste that is produced in the city, turning
23 organic matter into compost locally should be
24 prioritized as the method of organic waste diversion
25

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2 above anaerobic digestion and certainly above
3 landfilling and incineration. We need to cut down on...

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much. Your
5 time has expired.

6 ANITA CHAN: Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you.

8 Next, we will have Anna Sacks.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

10 ANNA SACKS: Hi. My name is Anna Sacks. I
11 am the Legislative Chair of the Manhattan Solid Waste
12 Advisory Board and a member of Save Our Compost
13 Fellowship, but I'm testifying today on behalf of
14 myself. I appreciate the recognition that DSNY gave
15 to community composting, but lip service does not pay
16 the bills, and this is an expensive city to live in.
17 I think that it's great that so far there has been
18 private philanthropy supporting community composting
19 after DSNY and the Mayor defunded it completely, but
20 private philanthropy is actually going to expire
21 soon. It doesn't bring Big Reuse, LES, and Earth
22 Matter to June. They're actually having to rely on
23 cash reserves, which are really meant for only a true
24 emergency, not a manufactured emergency, and private
25 philanthropy, as I think we can intuitively

2 understand, is more for something like the opera or
3 the arts, museums. Private philanthropy does not want
4 to fill in these gaps, sanitation gaps, where it's a
5 public good and the City should itself be funding
6 these programs so there isn't private philanthropy
7 coming through. There is not going to be more, and so
8 I think that that was really misleading for the
9 Department to say that.

10 We're asking for 7 million to be restored
11 for community composting. This is 0.006 percent of
12 New York City's budget. It is a rounding error of a
13 rounding error. I don't agree with the argument that
14 we don't have this money. Somehow, we have the money
15 for 500 million for encrypted NYPD radios, but we
16 don't have 7 million for community composting. It
17 doesn't make sense. We will not have success in the
18 brown bin program if we do not have community
19 composting, if we don't have the education outreach,
20 and so we're investing millions of dollars in this
21 new program that we really do want to succeed, and
22 yet we're not investing in the education outreach
23 needed for it to succeed. I also am upset with this
24 trend that New York City environmental programs are
25 (INAUDIBLE) viewed as nice to have but not need to

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2 have, and they're the first to be cut whenever

3 there's...

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much. Your
5 time has expired.

6 ANNA SACKS: Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you.

8 Next will be Lonnie Portis.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

10 LONNIE PORTIS: There we go. Thank you,
11 Council Member and Chair Shaun Abreu, for holding
12 this hearing. I'm just going to be brief, give an
13 abbreviated version of my written testimony. I'm
14 Lonnie Portis. I'm the New York City Policy and
15 Advocacy Manager at WE ACT for Environmental Justice.
16 WE ACT is a proud member of the Save Our Compost
17 Coalition, which is a coalition of New York City
18 organizers working together to support and expand
19 community composting to uplift environmental and
20 climate justice. WE ACT urges the City Council
21 Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management to
22 work closely with the New York City Department of
23 Sanitation to build a holistic, robust infrastructure
24 to collect, transport, and process organic waste that
25 prioritizes micro hauling, community composting, and

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2 healthy soil creation. The City needs to be strategic

3 and purposeful when building out this infrastructure.

4 The foundation of that infrastructure should be

5 community composting. Community composting maximizes

6 the potential for diverse and beneficial uses,

7 creating healthy soil to increase the benefits of

8 green infrastructure, which includes street trees,

9 raingardens, and parks, which also reduce flooding

10 and they also cool their neighborhoods. This does not

11 only foster environmental sustainability but also

12 contributes to the creation of vibrant and healthy

13 and resilient communities. New York City is

14 undergoing a cultural shift when it comes to how

15 households, buildings, and the City handle organic

16 waste. Community composting operators are vital to

17 increase participation in all composting-related

18 programs through their valued outreach and education

19 efforts. The City has the opportunity to build

20 infrastructure to handle and process organic waste

21 that is climate and environmentally just. It's our

22 hope that the City Council and this Committee work

23 with the DSNY to ensure this. With well-planned

24 infrastructure, New York City can make significant

25 progress towards zero-waste goals and create healthy

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2 soil that we can reinvest into our community gardens
3 and parks.

4 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you, Lonnie.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you.

6 Next, we'll have Samantha McBride.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

8 SAMANTHA MACBRIDE: Good morning. I am Dr.
9 Samantha McBride, professor at Baruch College and
10 former DSNY analyst and manager. It is with immense
11 respect to Committee Chair Abreu and Council Members,
12 First Deputy Commissioner Lohan, and my former DSNY
13 colleagues that I speak today.

14 I have conducted a performance analysis
15 of the Department's newly relaunched residential
16 curbside organics collection program in the borough
17 of Queens. Using monthly tonnages on Open Data, the
18 City's 2017 Waste Characterization Study and U.S
19 census data, I have analyzed performance using
20 metrics that are standard to the waste management
21 industry and used in municipalities across America.
22 My analysis found the following.

23 In 2023, only 4.3 percent of the
24 residential curbside organics that could have been
25 collected in Queens for composting or anaerobic

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2 digestion were, in fact, collected. The rest, 95.7

3 percent went out with the trash. The 4.3 rate is

4 called the capture rate. In 2023 when all of Queens

5 had the simple universal program that was described

6 earlier, an estimated 300,000 tons of compostable

7 organics went out for disposal with Queens refuse. In

8 pounds, that is 600 million pounds. These quantities

9 moved through Queens transfer stations. They ended in

10 landfills and waste energy incinerators in eastern

11 United States.

12 For comparison, about 12,700 tons or 25

13 million pounds of residential herbicide organics were

14 collected for composting or anaerobic digestion

15 locally. Furthermore, the capture rate, the per-

16 household generation rate for separated organics.

17 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much. Your

18 time has expired.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BARRETT: Thank you all

20 for your testimony.

21 If you wish to submit written testimony,

22 you may do so on the Council website.

23 We had some other names registered to

24 testify via Zoom. If you are present, please use the

25 raise hand function and I will call you. Iben

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2 Falconer, Yvonne Yee, Serena Najee, Amy Platzmer, and
3 Justin Wood.

4 Seeing no hands on Zoom, we have
5 concluded public testimony. I'll pass it over to our
6 Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you, everybody,
8 for your testimony. This hearing is hereby adjourned.

9 [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 4, 2024