



sanitation

Edward Grayson Commissioner

Testimony of Edward Grayson, Commissioner New York City Department of Sanitation

Hearing on Street and Sidewalk Cleanliness & Intro. 471

New York City Council Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management

Monday, October 4, 2021
10:00 A.M.

Good morning Chair Reynoso and members of the City Council Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management. I am Edward Grayson, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Sanitation, and I am joined by Stephen Harbin, Chief of Cleaning Operations, and Ricky Cyrus, Assistant Chief of the Enforcement Division. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Department's efforts to keep our City clean and to provide comments on behalf of the Administration on Intro. 471.

Our Department's mission is to keep New York City healthy, safe and clean. We celebrated our 140th birthday earlier this year and, despite the change from the Department of Street Cleaning to the Department of Sanitation, our commitment to cleaning our City has not wavered over those 140 years. I have been a proud member of this Department for nearly 23 years now, and my parents were as well for decades before me.

Just about one year ago, I testified in front of this committee in my first hearing as Sanitation Commissioner on this very topic. Then, the City was on the cusp of the second wave of COVID infections, without approved vaccinations, dealing with tremendous budget cuts and facing the prospect of widespread layoffs. Today, we still face many of the same challenges we did a year ago, but the outlook is brighter. Our City is on the path to recovery; our schools, restaurants, theaters, and workplaces are open.

Then, service cuts and manpower shortfalls, combined with pandemic-related increases in the use of our streets and public spaces, had led to more litter on our streets, overflowing corner baskets, and an overall sense that the City was dirtier than it had been in years.

Today, we still face several of those challenges, particularly regarding changes in New Yorkers' attitudes and behavior, but we have seen dramatic improvements as well. As I will describe, several budget cuts have been restored, and we have put new programs in place. New Yorkers have joined us in record numbers to help clean up their blocks and their neighborhoods. And we have honed our approach to persistent challenges regarding illegal dumping to work toward a cleaner city.

FY 2022 Budget Highlights

This year's Recovery Budget, released by Mayor de Blasio in April, included several new and restored cleaning initiatives aimed at supporting our City's recovery.

In the Executive Budget, the Administration restored baseline funding for the Department's litter basket collection services. In partnership with the City Council, the Administration added an additional \$8.6 million in funding for supplemental litter basket collection, making a total of more than \$17 million in new or restored funding for litter basket collections this fiscal year. Today, DSNY is funded to run 588 litter basket trucks each week, a 116 percent increase from 272 trucks per week in July 2020. This additional service has contributed to cleaner streets and improved quality of life in our communities.

The Department of Sanitation has also created the Precision Cleaning Initiative (PCI), with teams to conduct targeted cleanings of litter conditions, illegal dumping, and overflowing litter baskets. These conditions are eyesores that affect New Yorkers' quality of life and threaten NYC's recovery. Teams are dispatched based on DSNY field observations, 311 complaints and referrals from other City agencies and community groups. To date, PCI crews have collected more than 10,052 eyesore conditions and emptied a total of 25,388 additional litter baskets citywide.

We have also restored our dedicated syringe litter staff within our Environmental Police Unit to conduct proactive patrols in areas with highest concentrations of syringe litter. These six dedicated officers are specially trained to properly handle syringes and other potentially hazardous waste. Since the restoration in March, our dedicated team of EPU officers has collected a total of 27,485 syringes from New York City streets.

This Fiscal Year, we have also received more than \$4 million in funds from City Council members through the NYC Clean Up initiative, our highest total since the program began seven years ago. I thank all of the members for their commitment to our mission and for their partnership as we work to keep New York City clean.

Community Cleanups and Partnerships

All 8.8 million New Yorkers, as well as the millions of visitors and commuters, have a role to play in keeping our City clean. Litter and trash does not just magically appear on City streets – each piece, bag or pile has a person associated with it—someone who tossed it on the ground, dumped it on the corner, or threw it out a car window. As we recover and move along toward a post-COVID New York City, I ask all New Yorkers to do the right thing: Don't litter. Use our corner litter baskets properly. Clean up after your pet. Move your car for alternate side parking. Sweep the sidewalk in front of your home or business. And if you see a litter condition that needs DSNY attention, please let us know by calling 311.

In the past year, the Department has greatly expanded our Community Clean Up program, working with volunteers and community partners across the five boroughs. DSNY provides tools and operational support for neighborhood cleanups. We have also introduced a Community Clean-Up Van to raise awareness and support these events. The Department lends tools, trash bags, masks, brooms and dustpans to volunteers and can now deliver these tools directly to the volunteers through the new community clean-up van. The Department has partnered with an estimated 7,200 New Yorkers on 278 volunteer cleanups during Fiscal Year 2021, which ended

June 30, 2021. The cleanups represent a 546 percent increase from Fiscal Year 2020 and a 186 percent increase from pre-pandemic Fiscal Year 2019. We encourage all New Yorkers to chip in and help us keep New York City clean.

City Cleanup Corps

The City Cleanup Corps (Corps) is Mayor de Blasio's New Deal-inspired program. The Corps is intended to foster the city's economic recovery by employing 10,000 New Yorkers to refresh and revitalize our city to make it welcoming to residents, workers, and tourists alike. Since its launch six months ago, the Corps has contributed significantly to cleaning the city's streets and sidewalks in neighborhoods across the five boroughs. To date it has helped remove more than 600,000 bags of trash and cleaned over 25,000 rain gardens of trash and debris.

Additionally, the Corps has been actively helping our neighbors impacted by Hurricane Ida. Since Ida hit, Corps members have helped remove 72,000 bags of debris and cleared rain gardens and storm drains of trash and debris to help mitigate the possibility of flooding all over the city.

Illegal Dumping

Illegal dumping is a particularly pervasive problem in New York City today. There are any number of reasons that drive this – unpermitted contractors renovating homes and storefronts, businesses trying to save money and not hiring a private carter, unscrupulous operators dumping in the dark of night.

Illegal dumping occurs when someone removes trash from a vehicle and leaves it in a public or private space. It is a major problem in many parts of the city, leading to unsightly and unsafe conditions for residents, particularly in areas with vacant lots, dead ends, overpasses, railroad lines, and industrial zones. To combat illegal dumping, DSNY employs a team of Sanitation Police Officers who stakeout known dumping locations, investigate 311 complaints, and impound vehicles that are involved in illegal dumping activity. Fines for illegal dumping start at \$4,000 and can be as high as \$18,000 for repeat violators.

DSNY also conducts enforcement of improper disposal, a lesser violation that generally involves a smaller quantity of material and does not use a vehicle. The number of 311 requests for enforcement of improper disposal increased to 5,094 in FY21, up from 3,837 in FY19.

This summer, we recently launched a pilot program of increased, concentrated enforcement. Between late July and early August, we concentrated our efforts in Brooklyn Community Board 5 and issued 24 summonses for illegal dumping, 15 summonses for littering from a motor vehicle, nine summonses for improper disposal, additional summonses for related violations -- and some higher level enforcement actions, including 16 vehicle impounds and even one arrest. We removed litter and debris from several public sites, leading to cleaner and safer streets for residents of these neighborhoods.

A similar enforcement surge in the Hunts Point section of the Bronx also yielded very positive results. To date this year, we have issued 143 violations related to illegal dumping and impounded 83 vehicles. We hope that this increase in enforcement – and potentially other

efforts in the five boroughs in the coming weeks – will prompt all residents and businesses to follow the rules and keep our City clean.

Intro. 471

Intro. 471, sponsored by Council Member Dromm, would prohibit obstructions or nuisances in or upon sidewalks, flagging or curbstones, streets and medians of streets and establishing a rebuttable presumption regarding responsibility for the placement of signs constituting such obstructions or nuisances. This legislation is aimed at holding the party identified on an “A”-frame sign, also known as a “sandwich board” sign, responsible for creating the sidewalk obstruction rather than the building abutting the sidewalk where the sign has been improperly placed. This bill would also expand the public areas for unlawful placement of A-frame signs to include traffic medians. The bill contains a rebuttable presumption that the individual or business named on the A-frame sign is responsible for unlawfully placing the sign on the public sidewalk or traffic median.

The Department receives many complaints about the improper placement of signs by businesses in front of other businesses, in the street or on traffic medians. This practice is also readily used by real estate businesses to promote open houses. The Department looks forward to working with the City Council to move forward on this important piece of legislation.

Conclusion

On behalf of our 9,700 employees, I want to thank the City Council for your support in our effort to clean our streets, sidewalks and public spaces. Our frontline workers are the true heroes of this effort, working day after day in all manner of conditions, doing the tireless work of picking up litter, emptying corner baskets, and collecting our trash and recycling. For 140 years, our employees have worked to make New York City neighborhoods cleaner and to improve quality of life for our residents and visitors.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and we are now happy to answer your questions.



Dumbo Improvement District
20 Jay Street, Suite 510
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Date: October 4, 2021

Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management
Testimony- Kalvis Mikelsteins, Dumbo BID

Dear CM Reynoso and distinguished committee members. Thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Kalvis Mikelsteins, director of operations at the Dumbo Business Improvement District in Brooklyn. Like many BIDS in the city, we maintain a robust sanitation program, in order to keep the sidewalks and streets clean and clear for New Yorkers and visitors alike.

I've come in front of your committee to speak briefly regarding an issue that is ever present not just in Dumbo, but many parts of New York, especially the business districts and commercial corridors. The amount of trash/recycling bags put out for collection by medium and large scale residential/commercial properties is increasing, particularly as online ordering and home deliveries continue to grow. The amount of trash bags lined up on narrow streets is both unsightly and hazardous, spilling into bike lanes & parking spaces. These piles often attract illegal dumping, further exacerbating the situation.

I understand that the city budget plays a disproportionate role in DSNY's ability to handle the inordinate amount of waste generated in the city, and so I urge council members to consider new alternatives to address the issues of improper waste storage and illegal dumping. Stronger interagency ties between DSNY, DOT, DOB, NYPD, BIDs, and other city bodies concerned with improving the public realm, could yield a better understanding of the issue. While there are many potential approaches that could be tested, none will be effective without a comprehensive approach led by city hall to bring all relevant city agencies to the table. Working together, pilot programs such as the DSNY clean curbs program should be extended to include residential properties.

Committee members, we must think both critically and creatively about solutions to manage waste disposal in dense, heavily trafficked parts of the city. I believe that creative policy solutions, paired with technological advances, are needed to solve this issue.



TESTIMONY BEFORE NYC COUNCIL

COMMITTEE ON SANITATION

October 4th, 2021

Good afternoon Chair Reynoso and Members of the New York City Council. My name is XYZ and I'm testifying today on behalf of the NYC BID Association. I am also the Executive Director of the XYZ BID.

The BID Association represents the 76 Business Improvement Districts throughout the City that serve as stewards of our diverse commercial corridors and neighborhood public spaces. Our mission has always been to support the almost 100,000 local businesses we serve, to keep our neighborhoods clean and safe, and to bring prosperity to our communities. Never has our work been more vital and essential than it has been during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are pleased to present testimony today on street and sidewalk cleanliness.

One of the core functions of most Business Improvement Districts is to provide supplementary sanitation services. These services include the installation and emptying of additional trash and recycling receptacles, street sweeping, graffiti removal, and pressure washing. Many of our BIDs also undertake significant beautification and landscaping projects involving sidewalk tree pits, medians, street planters, and plaza planting beds. In FY20, BIDs collectively serviced 282 linear miles of City streets, collected more than 3.4M trash bags, removed 274,000 instances of graffiti, and employed 685 sanitation workers. In FY20 the estimated collective BID investment in sanitation services was \$43.5M, which made up 25.5% of all BID expenditures. Our BID managers and employees have worked non-stop throughout the pandemic to keep our streets and sidewalks clean. We believe that clean and safe streets are a critical factor to bringing back the consumers, residents, and tourists needed for our economy to recover.

Unfortunately the COVID-19 pandemic led to well-publicized cuts in city sanitation services. BIDs are only supposed to provide *supplemental* sanitation, but during the pandemic we've seen a dramatic decrease in trash pick-ups and an overall decline in street conditions. To the extent possible when and where possible, BIDs have attempted to fill in gaps in service. This is in no way sustainable and we strongly encourage the City to restore all funding cuts to sanitation services as we continue to see historically-underserved neighborhoods across our City. In many areas of the City, even the pre-pandemic service levels were not sufficient. We also still need many more trash cans in most business districts across the City.

We also want to register full support of the City Council's CleanUp NYC initiative which has injected significant funding into fantastic non-profit partners that we've worked side-by-side with to keep neighborhoods clean.



Lastly, both illegal dumping and illegal use of trash receptacles remain a major issue in some corridors. Additional enforcement activity is needed to ensure that our trash cans are not used for illegal commercial or residential uses, and can therefore adequately serve our public streets. Some neighborhoods have dramatic and persisted illegal dumping concerns as well.

We are grateful to the Department of Sanitation for their work keeping New York City clean, and we strongly encourage this and future administrations to ensure they have the resources they need to do their work. We will certainly continue to do our work. Our city's economy and future depends on it. Thank you.



Empowering communities to Power Change

October 5, 2021

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WE ACT for Environmental Justice
1854 Amsterdam Ave, 2nd Floor
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RE: Sidewalk and Street Cleanliness

Dear Chair Antonio Reynoso and Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the matter of sidewalk and street cleanliness.

WE ACT for Environmental Justice, an organization based in Harlem, has been fighting environmental racism at the city, state, and federal levels for more than 30 years. We have used collaborative problem solving techniques to address the problems of inappropriate garbage disposal and rampant rodent and roach infestation in Northern Manhattan in order to reduce negative health impacts from garbage and pests in this community.

I am Lonnie J. Portis, Environmental Policy and Advocacy Coordinator at WE ACT. I routinely analyze New York City policies and programs for equity and climate justice and co-lead a group of community members mobilized around waste and sanitation problems in Northern Manhattan.

Our members have consistently mentioned the stark difference between the cleanliness of the streets and sidewalks of the Upper East and West Sides and Northern Manhattan (Harlem, Washington Heights and Inwood). As one member put it, **“Enough is enough and totally unfair that Harlem is neglected when many other parts of Manhattan are provided better sanitation services”**.

Our members identified some of the dirtiest blocks in Northern Manhattan that are littered with animal waste, litter, and overflowing trash bins:

- West 141st-145th Streets between 7th and 8th Avenues
- West 135th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues
- West 132nd Street between Lenox and 5th Avenue
- La Salle St between Amsterdam Ave and Broadway
- West 145th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam
- 132nd Street between Lenox and 5th Avenues
- Lenox Avenue between 126th and 127th Streets

**West Harlem Environmental Action (WE ACT for Environmental Justice) is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization.*
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- West 140th Street between Amsterdam and Convent Avenues
- West 145th Street between Amsterdam and Broadway (south side of street)
- East 99th Street between 1st and 2nd Avenues
- Cabrini Blvd at 179th Street
- West 173rd Street between Amsterdam and Audubon Avenues
- Fort George Hill

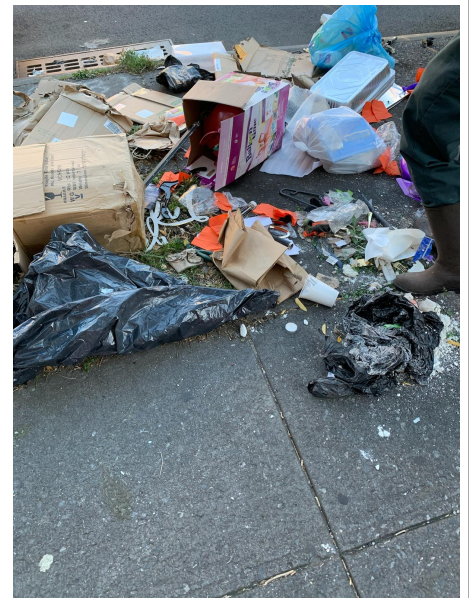
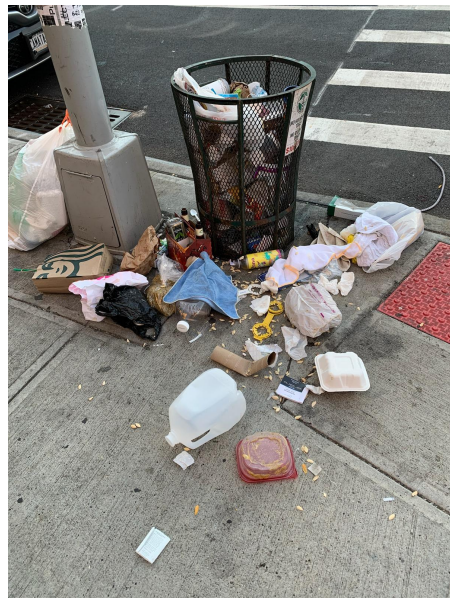
In addition, attached, are photographs from our members' daily commute documenting the condition of Northern Manhattan streets and sidewalks.

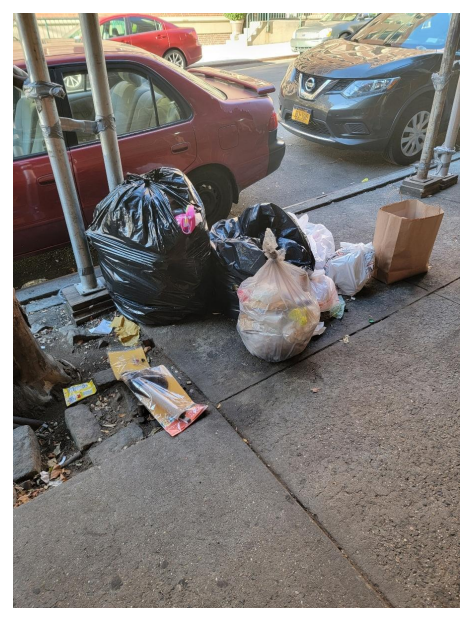
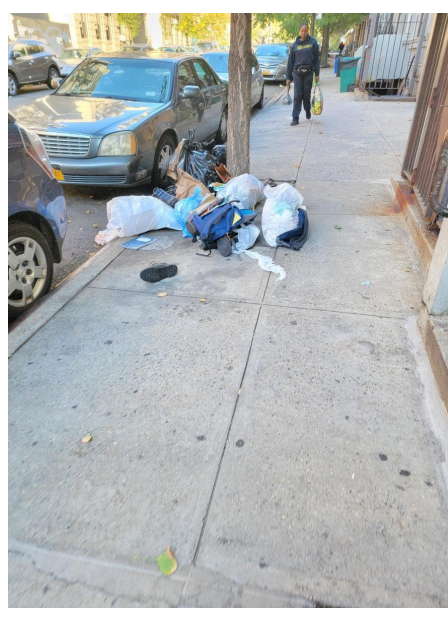
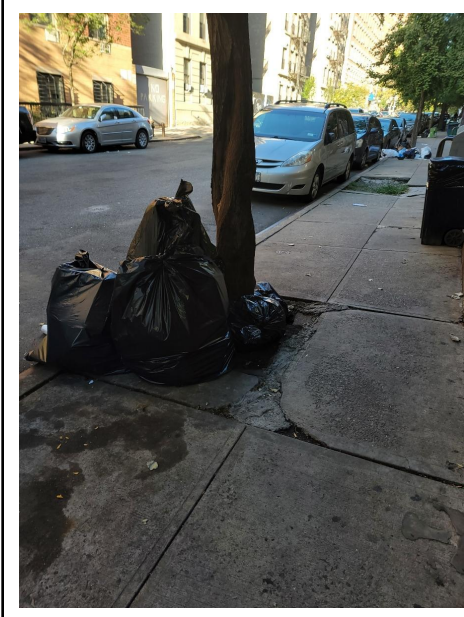
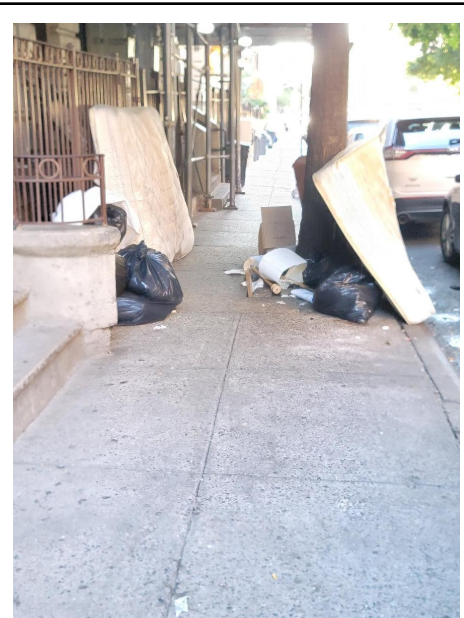
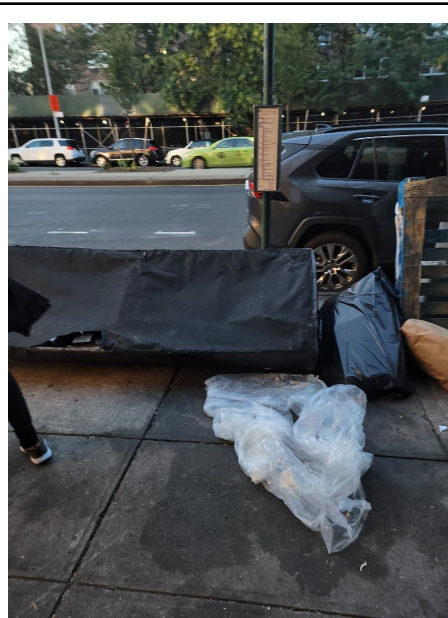
Improved sanitation has significant impacts not only on health, but on social and economic development. Residents of Northern Manhattan need more sanitation pick up, better receptacles for trash and compliance by owners that they keep the sidewalks clean. We urge the Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management to address the inequities in street and sidewalk cleanliness throughout the city.

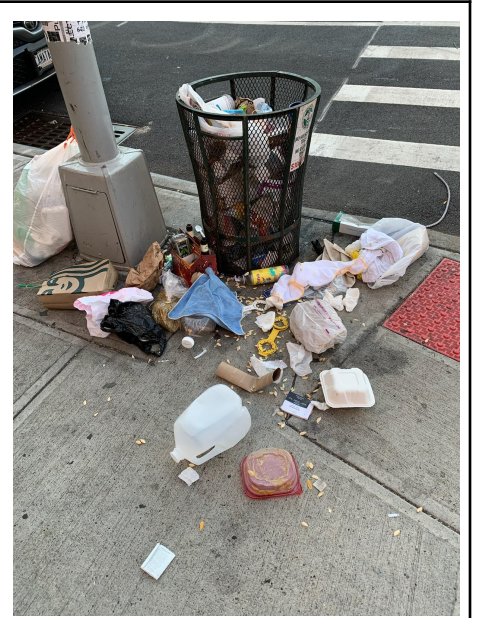
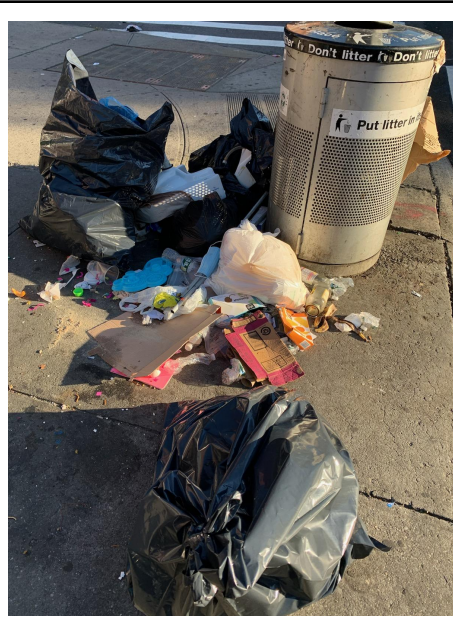
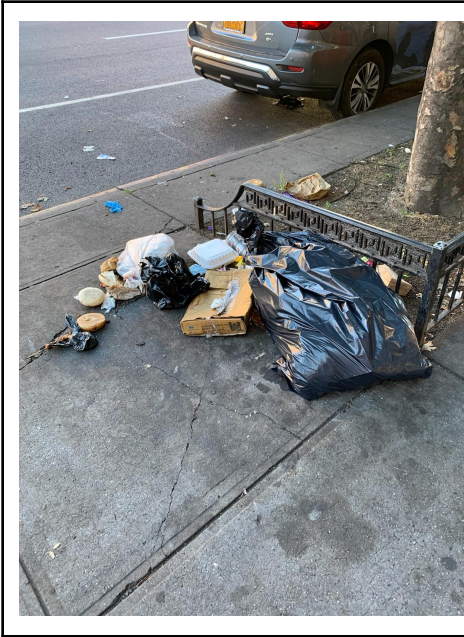
Lonnie J. Portis

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Uptown's Dirtiest Blocks







OCT. 4, 2021
New York City Council
Sidewalk & Street Cleanliness Hearing

Thank you Chair Reynoso and Committee members for your time this morning.

I am Liz McMillan and I am a member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice serving on the Climate Justice Working Group. WE ACT is a community based organization that has been fighting for and with residents of Northern Manhattan to address environmental health hazards that disproportionately affect communities of color.

Today I'd like to testify to my experience living in Central Harlem with the declining sidewalk and street cleanliness. It seems as though there is more trash and vermin than about 3 years ago. I can barely walk down the street without a trash wind tunnel collecting artifacts as I go. The trash cans provided on street corners are overflowing and the left over (or possible put there) trash from collection day make it hard to enjoy your block on nice weather days. Not to mention the possibility of storm drains becoming overflowed because of trash in the street clogging and making it impossible for rain water to drain properly.

If that isn't enough, rodents have now taken over some streets where is notorious to walk down a block and have several dart back and forth in front of your feet. Not a fun sight especially at night. And with many construction projects around Harlem, it seems the number has doubled. Not only is it unsightly, but has to be highly unsanitary nor safe for children and pet dogs to have around.

There has to be more that can be done. This is why I felt it important to lend my voice to the testimonies here to ask the City step in and do it's best to not only thoroughly look into to it, but take some action in resolving these issues and help return New York City back into a safer, cleaner city.

Thank you again for allowing me to provide testimony on such an important issue,

Liz McMillan

October 1, 2021

Dear Chair Reynoso and Committee Members

Please see below my written testimony submitted for the Sanitation Committee hearing about Dirty Streets on Monday October 4, 2021.

Revolt. Disgust, Anger. I cannot believe I live in a neighborhood filled with trash, vermin and litter - which includes syringes and liquor bottles left to be crushed into shards of glass waiting to be stepped on by children or pets.

I have lived in Central Harlem (Lenox Terrace) for six years, and while Harlem has never been litter free, these last couple of years during Covid have been increasingly worse. And while there is always a certain degree of personal responsibility (why do smokers need to throw their cigarette butts on the sidewalk or into the gutter- a rhetorical question, of course) much of the blame is on the lack of sanitation pickup by the City of New York and the laxness of compliance by building owners in keeping the city sidewalks clean. Get rid of the wire baskets and bring in the big belly containers that do not overflow.

A few times I have done community clean up with Congressman Espaillat's office, and the very next day the street I live on (132nd between Lenox and 5th Avenue) is trashed, which means that Central Harlem needs much more attention than we are currently receiving.

As a retired person, who spends my time on climate and environmental justice including, as a member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice, I have the opportunity to bounce around NYC - all boroughs, though mostly Manhattan. No where is the city as dirty with litter as Harlem.

I know that there will be other testimony by those in the healthcare field who will speak more eloquently than I about the harm to the environment (to people, pets and the harm to trees and plants) by the trash and litter, so I will defer to them. Or testimony by environmental scientists who will bemoan cigarette butts washing into our rivers and oceans, harming aquatic life.

Enough is Enough. The City is responsible. We need and demand more sanitation pick up, better receptacles for trash and COMPLIANCE by owners that they keep the sidewalks clean. None of this is rocket science, please, I beg of Councilman Reynoso and Committee members to act now.

Sincerely yours,

Nan Faessler

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