

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT 1
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
INVESTIGATIONS JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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April 8, 2025
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HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Gale A. Brewer, Chairperson of the
Committee on Oversight and
Investigations

Amanda Farías, Chairperson of the
Committee on Economic Development

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COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT: (CONTINUED)

Rafael Salamanca, Jr.
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A P P E A R A N C E S

Kate McKenzie, Executive Director of the Mayor's
Office of Food Policy

Michele Lamberti, Vice President of Legislative
Affairs from the New York City Economic
Development Corporation

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Matthew D'Arrigo, Hunts Point Produce Market

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Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Sharon Brown, Rose of Sharon Enterprises

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SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a mic check on
Committee on Oversight and Investigations in the
Committee Room, recorded by Tayshia Sherman. Today's
date is April 8, 2025.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon, and
welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for
the Committee on Oversight and Investigations.

At this time, we ask that you silence all
electronic devices, and at no time is anyone to
approach the dais.

If you would like to sign up for in-
person testimony or have any other questions
throughout the hearing, please see one of the
Sergeants-at-Arms.

Chair, we're ready to begin.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: [GAVEL] I'm Gale
Brewer. I am Chair of the Committee on Oversight and
Investigations. Obviously, this hearing is Committee
on Oversight and Investigation, but it's also
Economic Development. Thank you for joining us.

We will be examining the City's food
infrastructure and its effect on the quality and cost
of produce we consume. I would really, really, really
like to thank Majority Leader Amanda Fariás, Chair of

the Committee on Economic Development, for Co-Chairing this hearing and for going with me. I learned from her at Hunts Point. I'd also like to thank the representatives from the Administration, the public, and my Council Colleagues who will join us later today.

In our country and city's ongoing cost of living crisis, the rise of food prices has hit many New Yorkers very hard. No question that food prices soared after the COVID-19 pandemic and years of supply chain disruptions that followed. But even before 2020, our city had long struggled to supply its communities with fresh food at the same price and the quality of even nearby suburbs. Our density is unique for America and the source of many of our greatest strengths, but it also makes life hard for food distributors who overwhelmingly rely on trucks that cannot easily navigate our tight street network, despite efforts to use rail and water. The specialized infrastructure we've developed to get food in and out of our dense metropolis, mostly at the Hunts Point Market in the Bronx, is somewhat obsolete, too small, and inefficient to accommodate New Yorkers' nutritional needs. Trucks idle for hours

outside Hunts Point, waiting to unload goods, spewing exhaust into the neighborhoods, wasting workers' time, and increasing costs, all while produce loses its freshness before it can be delivered to grocery stores, although when you're there, you see the amazing hard work of the companies and the workers to make sure that it is fresh. They really go to the nth degree. At the same time, modern supermarkets and food distribution systems have struggled to establish themselves in many parts of the city, with many local chains, such as Pathmark, closing over the past several decades. I know they certainly did on 125th Street. Research shows that as the size of urban food retailers increases, so does the quality and affordability of produce. Yet New Yorkers overwhelmingly rely on small corner groceries with limited fresh food options, although I'll speak for myself, I like the small options in terms of the delis, the bodegas, and even the smaller supermarkets, but I know they're not as inexpensive as the larger suburban ones, which I do not like going to.

Today, we are talking to the Mayor's
Office of Food Policy and the Economic Development

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Corporation to get a better understanding at what can be done to improve New York City's food distribution system and improve the quality and affordability of fresh food. Certainly, we learned a whole lot at Hunts Point, although I know that my Colleague already knows all that. We want to talk about recent developments in the ongoing effort to renovate and expand Hunts Point, as well as the state of tax and zoning incentive programs to draw larger supermarkets into underserved communities, and that's not even easy, even with a fresh program. We want to hear what steps the City can take to beat our reputation for overpriced produce, which plagues food markets everywhere.

I'd like to thank the following Council Staff who have worked incredibly hard, from the O and I Committee, Nicole Catá, Erica Cohen, Alex Yablon, and Owen Kotowski; from the Division Staff at O and I, Meg Powers, Uzair Kwartar, Brian Parkhan, and Amisa Ratliff; and on my staff, Shula Puder, and Sam Goldsmith. Everyone has been helpful, and I also want to let you know that we've been joined by Council Member Banks.

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3 I will now turn it over to the awesome
4 Co-Chair, Majority Leader Amanda Farías.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Good afternoon,
6 and welcome to this joint hearing of the New York
7 City Council Committees on Economic Development and
8 Oversight and Investigation.

9 I'm Majority Leader Amanda Farías, Chair
10 of the Economic Development Committee, and I'd like
11 to thank my amazing colleague and Co-Chair, Council
12 Member Gale Brewer, not only for this joint hearing,
13 but for also loving the Bronx a little bit with me
14 last week in Hunts Point. I also want to extend my
15 appreciation to the New York City Economic
16 Development Corporation, the Mayor's Office of Food
17 Policy, and other stakeholders for participating in
18 this important hearing.

19 Today's hearing, we will examine the
20 overall topic of City's food infrastructure system
21 and how the City provides affordable, quality food to
22 New Yorkers. During my tenure as Chair of the
23 Committee on Economic Development, I have held
24 several hearings focusing on the City's food policy
25 and distribution, including our City's Good Food
Purchasing Program, discussing the redevelopment of

the Hunts Point Distribution Center, and a recent hearing on the food quality in City shelters. Part of what the Committees look to discuss today is the City's responsibility to ensure that people have access to the most basic human needs, such as healthy and affordable food. The Committees are looking forward to discussing various initiatives with the Mayor's Office of Food Policy and about the City's progress made during its 10-year policy plan, Food Forward New York, and how it is expanding access to nutritious foods and engaging businesses in New York City.

 This past Friday, Chair Brewer and I toured the Hunts Point Distribution Center. We saw firsthand the synergy that drives vibrant marketplace and how essential the market is not only to the Bronx but to our great city. We look forward to hearing from EDC on the Administration's ongoing steps to improve and how investments in the Hunts Point Distribution Center are coming along. We also plan to hear about the Administration's progress and challenges with respect to the market's expansion and infrastructure development.

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Again, thank you to all for being here.

And before I conclude, I'd like to thank the Economic Development Team here at the Council, Council Luke Hamill, Senior Policy Analyst William Hongach, and Finance Analyst Glenn Martelloni for all their hard work preparing for this hearing.

I'll now turn it over to my Co-Chair, Chair Brewer.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Now we'd love to hear from the Administration. Go ahead. Thank you so much.

We've also been joined by Council Member Riley, but I know first of all we have to swear you in.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chairs. We will now hear testimony from the Administration. We will hear from Kate MacKenzie from the New York City Mayor's Office of Food Policy and Michele Lamberti from the New York City Economic Development Corporation.

Before we begin, I will administer the affirmation. Panelists, please raise your right hand.

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this

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Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
questions?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: I do.

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may
begin when ready.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Thank you.

Good afternoon, Chair Brewer, Chair Fariás, and
Members of the Committees on Oversight and
Investigations and Economic Development. My name is
Kate MacKenzie and I serve as Executive Director of
the Mayor's Office of Food Policy. Joining me today
is my colleague Michele Lamberti from the New York
City Economic Development Corporation. I welcome the
opportunity to speak with you today about food
infrastructure, the quality, and the cost of produce.

At MOFP, our mission is to advance the
City's efforts to increase food security, promote
access to and consumption of healthy foods, and
support economic and environmental sustainability
across the food system. Our work is guided by Food
Forward New York City, the City's 10-year food policy
plan, which lays out a comprehensive goal framework
to reach a more equitable, sustainable, and healthy

1 food system by 2031. Food Forward New York City
2 emphasizes the importance of equity and choice,
3 enabling a food system where everyone is able to
4 access nutritious, high-quality foods that are
5 culturally relevant and affordable. The plan also
6 highlights the ways in which the City is committed to
7 supporting both our food workers and our food
8 businesses, strengthening the sustainability and
9 resiliency of our food system, rethinking our food
10 infrastructure, and deepening our connections with
11 the region.
12

13 A key focus of Food Forward is the need
14 to develop infrastructure that supports sustainable
15 and equitable food production and distribution. This
16 includes reinforcing the City's own food
17 infrastructure while also strengthening regional
18 partnerships to create a more resilient and
19 interconnected food system. Another way of saying
20 this is that through advancing the plan, we are
21 improving food system infrastructure across urban and
22 regional levels, including the infrastructure for
23 managing the flows of food through primary and
24 secondary processors and distributors serving
25 wholesale and retail markets, the emergency food

system, and City institutional food service. By taking this type of integrated approach, we achieve economic efficiency and build appropriate food supply redundancy as well as resilience.

When Food Forward was released in 2021, it responded to the lessons learned during the early days and continuing days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our food supply chains and the infrastructure to support them weren't yet ready to withstand major disruptions, limiting our ability to transport and store perishable foods and guarantee their quality. Food supply chain disruptions that you've pointed out and labor shortages during the pandemic spurred widespread price volatility. While some of those immediate shocks have subsided, it is clear that food prices have continued to rise, straining household and City agency budgets across the country. For example, since 2022, food prices have increased by about 2.6 percent annually across the United States. Between January of 2024 and this January, grocery prices rose by nearly 2 percent and restaurant prices climbed 3.5 percent. Notably, it almost goes without saying, the cost of eggs has reached record highs, increasing by over 10 percent in February and 60

percent over the past year. These rising prices impact the food and nutrition security of New Yorkers. A 2024 No Kid Hungry New York poll found that nearly four in five New Yorkers said that affording groceries has become more difficult, and 85 percent have reported that rising costs of food have outpaced their incomes. According to the Department of Agriculture, in 2023, a typical U.S. household spent 75 dollars per person per week on food, 5 dollars more than the previous year and 25 dollars more than pre-pandemic times in 2019. Overall, food prices are anticipated to increase by yet another 3.5 percent this year.

Before diving into the causes and implications of food price volatility, it's important to understand them in the context of New York City's food system and the critical role of strong infrastructure. About 19 billion pounds of food flow through New York City each year. This flow is the product of a complex mix of regional, national, and global supply chains that grow, process, and distribute food in a rich local food economy that prepares food for purchase and disposes of food waste. The workings of these supply chains affect the

daily life of every single New Yorker. Yet, unlike New York City's other essential systems from our roads and our water and electrical networks, for example, our food system is not centralized in design or management. Our food system is what we call a distributed system made up of tens of thousands of large and small businesses and non-profit, essential non-profit organizations in the local, regional, national, and global, and millions of consumers interacting largely independently to match food supply and demand.

So, our food system is unique in two major ways. First, our city's ethnic diversity necessitates multiple complex supply chains that source products from across the region and the globe to cater to our distinct tastes and needs of New Yorkers. Second, and relatedly, the majority of food businesses, as you've pointed out, Council Member, from grocery stores to restaurants and distributors, are small-scale and independently owned rather than national operations. This varied and nimble business landscape is well-suited to serve our unique needs and supports both economic opportunity and food system resilience, but it also poses risks, including

coordination challenges and the general vulnerability
associated with small-scale independent businesses.

With that in mind, our food
infrastructure is similarly varied and complex. Our
infrastructure spans multiple phases of the food
system, includes both physical spaces, such as
warehouses, storage, and storefronts, as well as
networks of transportation and market systems, from
our rich farmers market to online retail access, and
clearly our emergency food providers of food pantries
and kitchens. Across these settings, the City has
made significant investments to improve all types of
infrastructure. So, you've just visited Hunts Point,
and so I just want to point for everyone's attention
that the Hunts Point Distribution Center is the
largest food distribution hub in the country,
distributing over two and a half million pounds of
produce alone every year. However, having opened in
1967, the existing produce market facility is way
beyond its useful life. It no longer adequately
serves the space and operational needs of the
cooperative. The existing refrigerated warehouse
buildings do not have the capacity to meet market
needs and must rely on idling trucks to serve as

additional warehouse storage. Infrastructure deficiencies have also created problems, leading to the persistent intermodal traffic conflicts, delays, congestion, and idling. Taken all together, the existing conditions result in operational inefficiencies, increased costs, and increased diesel emissions.

As part of Hunts Point Forward, a 2022 report that included over 70 recommendations for investment throughout the peninsula, EDC and SBS have been redeveloping and modernizing the market, the produce market. To strengthen New York City's infrastructure and increase storage capacity, New York City has dedicated 130 million in addition to state and federal monies that will amount to approximately 630 million in total. The project will replace the existing produce market facility with a modern, state-of-the-art intermodal facility. It includes the replacement of all existing buildings with two new refrigerated warehouse buildings, a new administrative building, a waste management building, and a maintenance facility totaling approximately 916,000 square feet. The new facility will expand the produce market's current capacity, increasing

operational efficiency, eliminating the need for diesel-powered transport refrigeration units currently operating on site, and keep jobs in the Bronx. The project will meet the space and operational needs of the cooperative's produce market's current location while improving traffic patterns and site-wide circulation, addressing again those intermodal traffic conflicts and encourage rail usage.

In addition to the produce market renovations, after nearly 10 years, GrowNYC's regional food hub located in the Hunts Point neighborhood is finally set to open in May. The new 60,000 square foot food distribution hub will quadruple Grow's aggregation and distribution square footage, allowing them to expand their food distribution capacity to 20 million pounds a year, which is a significant increase from the organization's current capacity of 5 million pounds per year. The hub will support mid-sized regional farms by connecting New York City's wholesale buyers with high-quality farm products while ensuring all New Yorkers have access to these fresh, nutritious foods. The facility has seven produce coolers and a

freezer, a biodigester on-site to reduce food waste, a gray water system, green and blue roof features, drought-tolerant plants, and a rainwater collection system, permeable pavement, and EV charging stations. This facility will distribute to its current 370 food partners throughout the city and continue to grow in that place.

New York State produces enormous quantities of diverse food products, the majority of which are marketed nationally and internationally. With demand rising for local and regional food for urban, public, and private markets, there's new attention to the infrastructure gaps that limit the quantity of New York and neighboring state food supply to both public and markets in the city. Recent and ongoing research for the investment of infrastructure to scale up the volumes of regional food supply for city markets, including public agencies that serve schools, our hospitals, and our senior and early feeding sites, have resulted in state and federal investments in regional infrastructure, and these projects are going forward. New York City is supportive of these investments in regional food infrastructure.

Another key aspect of our food distribution is, of course, the transportation of food itself. Nearly 90 percent of goods in New York City are transported by truck, and roughly half of the City's food supply moves through just four major bridges and two tunnels, making the City's food distribution system vulnerable to traffic congestion and infrastructure strain. Instead of viewing our island geography as a limiting factor, we're working to capitalize on the waterways that surround us. In 2023, Department of Transportation and EDC announced the Blue Highways Initiative to shift more freight transport from congested roadways to the city's waterways. Marine transportation has the potential to reduce transportation costs, decrease roadway wear and tear, streamline delivery routes, and ensure more reliable distribution in the face of emergencies or road closures.

Hunts Point's proximity to the water and its position as a critical City food distribution node provide an opportunity to utilize the Blue Highways network in connection with the Brooklyn Marine Terminal. The redevelopment of the Brooklyn Marine Terminal will invest in the site and

operational upgrades make it more efficient and competitive, allowing the Marine Terminal to attract more businesses. A Hunts Point Marine Terminal would enable the barging of perishable food into the Bronx and the nearby Hunts Point Food Distribution Center from Brooklyn Marine Terminal, again decreasing truck traffic in the city, adding resiliency, and making New York City more competitive in the food distribution supply chain as food distribution companies consider where to locate their warehouses, their distribution centers, and ultimately where they create jobs. By investing in infrastructure to improve port operations at Hunts Point, Brooklyn Marine Terminal and other sites along the East River, we're increasing resiliency to ensure New York City is better equipped to move food in and around the city, especially during times of emergency.

Nearly half of the food distributed citywide is refrigerated or frozen, requiring specialized storage and transportation. Cold storage maintains the quality and freshness of items like produce. However, the finite supply of real estate in this city makes it difficult to expand or establish large-scale cold storage facilities, something we

became increasingly aware of during COVID, and in response, the City is exploring avenues to expand its cold storage infrastructure. So, certainly cold storage makes fresh produce more accessible, and multiple access points to healthy and affordable food is the primary goal of Food Forward, whether through traditional supermarkets, farmers markets, bodegas, street vendors, or through the City's emergency food network. 2,000 stores across the city participate in the Health Department's Shop Healthy NYC, which increases nutritious options in neighborhoods that otherwise have little access to healthy foods. The FRESH program, Food Retail Expansion program to Support Health, supports the development of full-service grocery stores in low-income areas by providing both zoning and tax incentives to property owners and supermarket operators. The tax incentive program is administered by the New York City Industrial Development Agency, and the zoning benefit is administered by the Department of City Planning. To qualify for the IDA benefits, supermarkets must make capital investments into or existing space, dedicate 30 percent of retail space to perishable goods, and devote at least 500 square feet of retail

space to fresh produce. Currently, there are 43 IDA and DCP FRESH incentivized supermarkets open and 17 more in development.

Through zoning, we can attract supermarkets as well as other food businesses. Recent zoning changes through City of Yes for Economic Opportunity allow food production and processing in storefront space for the first time. These new regulations could facilitate multi-use food spaces. City of Yes is building on increasing commercial vitality. According to a DCP report last November, more than 70 percent of neighborhoods across the city have seen an increase in food and drink businesses since 2020, providing more options where New Yorkers can eat. Our city's soft infrastructure provides additional food access points, the network of farmers markets that serve as access points for regionally sourced fruits and vegetables, and the network of more than a thousand emergency food providers creates an essential safety net of support that connects some of our most vulnerable neighbors to quality healthy food.

Given the complexity of access and affordability, Mayor's Office of Food Policy launched

a food access and affordability work group last June which convened City agencies, our academic institutions, public health foundations, and community partners to coordinate information sharing. A report later this spring from this work group will outline immediate priorities. This effort is part of the Health Department's chronic disease prevention plan and will shed light into how food pricing, retail environments, and the choices and behaviors that New Yorkers have the ability to make and purchase healthy food.

With this understanding of the City's food system and our infrastructure, I'm now very briefly going to address some of the causes of rising food prices, their impacts on City agencies, and how the City can help New Yorkers stretch their food budgets. The rise in food prices that we've seen is a complex issue that involves a mix of domestic and global factors. In the last two decades, there have been food system shocks affecting food prices and supply volatility from terrorism, notably 9/11, hurricanes, in particular for us, Irene and Sandy, the COVID-19 pandemic, overall global conflict, and now trade tariffs. Drought, avian flu, and access to

undocumented labor are contributing factors to these increases as well. Climate change and extreme weather events pose additional challenges to the affordability by impacting food production, storage, and distribution. Increasingly unpredictable and extreme weather conditions can both raise production costs for farmers, for things like irrigation, their pesticides, and fertilizers, yet reduce their crop yields. Extreme weather events can disrupt food distribution networks and further limit the supply of fresh and available produce, all of which lead to a higher food cost borne by New Yorkers. Food prices are influenced by ripple effects from these shocks, including labor shortages, supply chain disruptions, and inflationary costs impacting every single stage of food supply chains. It's often not just one factor, but a combination of factors that pushes food prices higher over time.

Generally, City policy and programs cannot address the primary drivers for price volatility, which, besides the larger system shocks, are also influenced by the production and manufacturing decisions of supply chain actors, consumer demand, and by the speculation in financial

markets. At the City level, we do not have the ability to mitigate the impact of these costs, with the exception of the authority held by the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection during states of emergency to enforce against price gouging. DCWP's ability to address price gouging complaints applies to a subset of products that are deemed essential, such as milk, eggs, bread, and most recently, baby formula. Nonetheless, policy and programs that improve efficiency, expand storage capacity, like I've described, and provide alternative distribution channels can have a price mitigating effect.

So, to turn back just very briefly to the impacts of rising food prices, my office has been in very close touch with City agencies to assess the impact on meals served to their clients. While agencies are committed to maintaining their menu items, these rising food prices, especially for eggs, require staff to explore alternative solutions, including temporarily removing items from the menu if needed. Agency's food contracts account for more than food prices. They also cover the logistics, the labor, and the meal delivery and food delivery costs, all of which have risen and put pressure on existing

contracts. For example, following negotiations with its distributor, the School's Office of Food and Nutrition Services approved an updated food distribution contract that accounted for a higher delivery markup to account for rising costs. That said, the agencies are committed to serving meals that consistently meet nutritional requirements and are very closely monitoring this evolving situation to maintain the quality of meals being served.

While the City cannot control prices, we do administer programs that help food budgets stretch farther. The Health Department's several nutrition security programs to lower barriers to fresh, quality produce for New Yorkers with low incomes, such as Get the Good Stuff and Groceries to Go, provide discounts on fruits and vegetables at grocery stores and bodegas. And Health Bucks, as you all know, enables SNAP participants to access more fresh produce at all New York City farmers markets.

When New Yorkers need additional support to feed their families, they also turn to the Emergency Food Network. In Fiscal '22, the Department of Social Services transformed its 30-year-old Emergency Food Assistance Program to become Community

Food Connection and introduced fresh produce for the very first time. In Fiscal '24, nearly 700 food pantries and soup kitchens participated in the program, which saw more than 35 million visits and allocated more than 43 million dollars in fresh fruits, vegetables, beans, and other staple foods. And of course, we rely on our safety net program of SNAP, which serves nearly 1.8 million New Yorkers, is the largest safety net program to provide income assistance to eligible families.

In conclusion, rising food prices continue to pose significant challenges for food and nutrition security in New York City, making it more difficult for many residents to access fresh and healthy affordable food. The City remains committed to strengthening its food infrastructure and Emergency Food Network, providing these essential nutrition security programs, and serving healthy foods. That said, fluctuations in food prices are multifaceted and largely beyond our control as they're influenced by geopolitical factors, supply chain disruptions, local challenges and constraints. Nonetheless, we welcome this discussion, truly welcome this discussion, and look forward to

identifying opportunities for continued collaboration with both of you, your teams, and further advocacy. Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and we welcome your questions.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you. Council Member Gutiérrez is also on Zoom along with Mr. Banks, and we are really pleased that Council Member Riley is here in person.

First of all, thank you very much for all of your advocacy, Kate MacKenzie, because you've been doing this for a long time and it's really, really appreciated.

I want to just ask about the Food Forward because that was a 10-year policy plan published in 2021, as you said, and you know the food prices were up then but obviously much more now so I didn't know if your office has adjusted its approach to any of the contents of the plan considering our current environment, and you did list some ways in which the City can address quality and rises in food prices, but is there something else that we should be doing in terms of publishing and updating the plan?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Thank you so much for that question. So, the five goals of the

plan, the first one that we've spent a lot of time talking about here, which is ensuring access to affordable, culturally appropriate food, and the others are sort of ever clear. Those goals, I can't see any reason to change those, but the strategies and the rising, the change in the context, it pushes us to do more in different things. So clearly right after the pandemic, as you witnessed and experienced too, we needed to really shore up our emergency food system in a different way so things like looking at the allocations that we provide to our food pantries and our soup kitchens, influencing the things like the racial inclusion and equity neighborhoods, giving an extraordinary amount of choice for all of those food pantries to order what they want and need. That was not the case before that. So, recognizing, I'll point out one from your District, Westside Campaign Against Hunger, who has a number of food sources, they should be able to figure out what they need and order accordingly so some of those changes to long-standing programs are things that we made in response to the plan. Things like Groceries to Go, which was ultimately from get food to a recovery food program to now ensuring that some of our neighbors who

otherwise would not qualify for SNAP have benefit programs available to them. That's something like we've done with groceries to go. A significant amount of work is going into really rethinking the FRESH program. I took a note how you pointed out the connection between the larger size of stores and the quality. There's often a relationship there and recognizing that with our real estate in this city, it's often hard to attract those types of businesses. I'm personally interested in finding ways that are not just about retailers, but also things like we've seen in Boston and up in Utica, other forms of retailers that might be trying non-profit models of grocery stores and things like that. So those are the things that we're working with some of our City agencies to expand on. Again, I think really doubling down in these times more than ever, the support for our safety net programs of SNAP and even things like childcare and, certainly, now that we have our universal school meals nearly made permanent, those ensure that our children are fed at least two meals a day without question. In addition to underscoring the safety net programs that we have, shoring them up,

we're also looking at the businesses and clearly the infrastructure that I've outlined.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: It's particularly important because I believe that the number of people receiving SNAP benefits in New York was 1.8 million, but a 5.8 percent increase in the first four months of 2025. That's a huge number.

I believe there's a, as a result of the report, the New York City Regional Food Working Group that you convene, and I want to know more about what they do. I guess they're about 100 regional partners. You focus on things like my favorite topic, agriculture in the watershed, infrastructure issues, which you have mentioned, and other long-term topics so I just didn't know what can you share about any takeaways from those meetings? Do they meet? What do they talk about? What can we do to add to this discussion today from that discussion?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Sure. So, just for context for others, the Regional Food Working Group started during the pandemic, early days when we were thinking about like interstate travel, and you needed something to put in your windshield that you could move from one place to another, and

1 having, I think it was long-haul storage so that some
2 of our trucks could stay at Hunts Point overnight. So
3 just talking across state lines seemed so obvious and
4 something that we continued throughout certainly the
5 pandemic, and I would say into and until about 2023.
6 Now, we've taken a lot of those conversations and
7 some work that my team is working on with something
8 called the City Food Policy Project, which is looking
9 at certain crops that are grown in New York State,
10 and really finding ways that we might be able to
11 maximize things like cabbage, or things like...

12
13 CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Lettuce, lettuce.

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Things like
15 lettuce and leafy greens, to find ways to get them
16 into a washed and bagged facility that could come
17 into our public schools. But there's a lot of, you
18 know, certainly with DCP and looking at ways in which
19 some of these, like not one-off at this point, but
20 what that did, and again I'll refer to the soft
21 infrastructure of simply maintaining relationships,
22 has really proven successful in ways that we see a
23 lot of fruits to their labor right now.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. I mean they
25 all know the story, but many years ago when I was in

the Council, I talked about the lettuce washing machine. Do I have one yet? I was going to bring the little one that EDC gave me 20 years ago, but I'm just wondering, are we any closer to getting a lettuce washing machine because they have one in California. So Californians brings the lettuce, they wash it in California, they bring it to New York. Bumpity, bumpity, bump, all the way across the United States. So I'm wondering, can we get a lettuce washing machine? You could call it the Gale Brewer lettuce washing machine.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: The naming opportunities are wonderful, and I would say that some of the produce.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I'm not kidding.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: No, I hear you, and I think this, you're describing a lot of the parts of the supply chain, right, of like in order to get lettuce into our salad bars and schools, they get it in a way that is bagged and washed and chopped and all the things, and I believe that as we're looking at the modernized Hunts Point marketplace, things like that will certainly be considered.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: You'll put one in
in the modernized? I didn't see it in the RF...

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: I would
imagine it would be for consideration at that, but
some of the looking outside of the five boroughs to
be able to bring it in, that's the regional
connections that we're making as well.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Council Member
Krishnan joined us. Thank you very much.

One more question, then I'm going to turn
it over to my Colleague. In that same report, New
Yorkers voted to create a true cost of living measure
to track the annual costs in our city of meeting
essential needs, including food. How is your office
working with agencies to implement that measure?
Because if we have, it's like everything else, you
have data, you can make the policy and change it if
necessary. It's all about data.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Deputy
Mayor Almanzar's portfolio is also my colleague,
Sadia Sherman, and Sadia is with the Mayor's Office
of Racial Equity and Justice, and Sadia's team is
coming out with some of the true cost accounting
methodologies, and we have been chatting with her

team for the better parts of two years to make sure that things specifically around food prices are captured within that.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So when is that?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: I believe it is this, I'm 99 percent sure it is this spring, but we'll get back to you and invite you to learn more about that.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. I'd like to turn it over to my Colleague.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Thank you, Chair. Food system experts say produce freshness depends on adequate refrigerated storage space, yet we know in New York City, in our region, we really don't have that many refrigerated storage spaces and warehousing considering the size of the population that we have to serve. Has MOFP done any research into why New York City and the region have such a shortfall of cold storage space for produce?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Do you want to take this? So, in my testimony, I noted the very, very high cost of real estate in this city, and I know that there have been some studies that are looking at like what is the capacity that's needed,

1 and certainly as the produce market is modernized, I
2 referred to, I believe, a whole brand new set of
3 refrigeration specifically for produce. I just want
4 to also point out what Council Member Brewer said in
5 her remarks about really how grocery store workers
6 are really working hard at this, and I want to lift
7 that up too because it's also about, you know, the
8 proper like storage temperatures and what goes where,
9 and so much of that is something that the grocery
10 stores are supporting as well to make sure that we
11 don't have just, you know, lettuce on the floor, but
12 it's also refrigerated in the right way. So, I do
13 know, is there anything else that my colleague from
14 EDC might like to share on that?

16 VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: No. I think that
17 was great. Thanks, Kate, and thank you for the
18 question. I think from EDC's perspective, we are
19 really focused right now on the Hunts Point produce
20 market redevelopment, and so a big focus of that will
21 be on the two new refrigerated warehouses, which
22 we're really excited to be able to bring online, both
23 for the additional refrigeration capacity, but also
24 really so we can get rid of those thousand transit
25 trailers that are sitting outside so that's the first

step that we're most focused on, but excited to see those come online in the future.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARIÁS: Great. Thank you.

We like to just keep posted on that. You know, a lot of those trucks end up idling, and you know, it's been going on for several years, so it's important to be looking at that infrastructure.

And then in terms of looking at enough support for building out our food system infrastructure here in the city, do we have any natural linkages with regional food farm hubs? And just kind of touching on your testimony speaking about the regional food hub with GrowNYC that's set to open in May, is that going to be a system we depend on to help alleviate or reduce some of the costs for the essential foods that we're looking at that maybe are going to fluctuate, dependent on all the factors that was mentioned in your testimony?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Yeah. So, GrowNYC's regional food hub is to supply great quality wholesale product to, currently it's a lot of non-profit organizations that maybe have childcare centers or other programs, so it is a source of food that is to buy in the same way that another, you

1 know, source might be. But they're really connecting,
2 again, on the great quality of that product, and
3 again, having, I think it's close to 400 partners
4 right now, but looking to grow even more. So, we
5 also, and I can share, you know, sort of a spin off
6 of what Council Member Brewer was speaking about with
7 the regional working group. We have a lot of,
8 there's, I think, four other aggregation sites across
9 the state, some of whom are even supplying the city
10 with food. Headwaters Food Group is one of them, and
11 there are others that might even be providing
12 testimony here. So, really trying to look to those
13 programs, not just certainly to supply us, but also
14 teach us a lot about how they're operating, how they,
15 you know, meet their margins. We all know that food
16 businesses are really hard to, it's almost unheard of
17 to make a profit, but thinking about what is the
18 successful model that we can learn from.

19
20 CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Great. We've also
21 been joined by Council Member Williams and Salamanca.

22 Is there a need to support hyper-local
23 food production systems where access is greatest and
24 affordability can be addressed? And what do you folks
25

think that support looks like in terms of it being
hyper-local?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Yeah, so in
May, the report from the affordability and access
working group that's been not just interagency, but
with academic partners and community groups, we'll be
coming out with some recommendations to address some
of that, because we all know, depending on where we
live, the same market basket of food can cost
something very different. So, while we may not have
the ability to intervene in the prices, we can really
understand more about that and then figure out how we
could maybe get things like more Health Bucks or more
of those incentives programs in those areas with
highest costs.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Thank you for that
response. I'd like to just ask a couple questions on
the Hunts Point redevelopment. Is NYC considering, I
know you folks are considering activating the Blue
Highway and moving the food via barge and water to
reduce truck dependency? Is that something that we're
looking at?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Yes.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Okay. And then
have we examined the ability of the existing ports
and related infrastructure to contribute to that
effort?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Yeah. I mean, I
would say that in general, we're looking very
holistically at the Blue Highways Network. We are
trying to utilize our great position on the water to
really be able to take trucks off the road and to try
to move as much by barge as possible. I'd say that we
are looking at a number of like different sites.
Hunts Point, obviously, because of its location on
the water could be a great opportunity. And we've
also explored, you're familiar with some of the other
sites, but also on the Brooklyn Marine Terminal as
well.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Sure. And then,
you know, when we were there visiting, we were able
to see the accessibility or maybe even the prospect
of the accessibility towards the train lines that are
there. To what extent will the plan redevelopment
reactivate existing train lines? We know we have
several that are active, but majority of them are
inactive in this current moment.

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Sure. And so I think in tandem, I think the reality is that most of the produce is still going to move by a truck, but we do think Blue Highways and rail are a great way to kind of move some of that produce into a different mode, such as rail. We anticipate utilizing rail to a greater extent at the Hunts Point produce market, and to that end, one of the requirements for our design build, the RFQ that's up now, is to add another platform. We're really hopeful that that will both reduce some kind of congestion between trucks and rail, which should make some of our suppliers able to use it more readily, so we are definitely looking at ways to improve and increase rail freight at Hunts Point as part of the redevelopment process.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: And is that currently included in the price point that we have in terms of the estimate?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: I believe so, yes.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Okay. Great. I'm going pause for now on my questions and kick it back over to Chair Brewer, and the last thing I'd say is we've also been joined by Council Member Avilés.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very
much.

We'll go to the questions from my
Colleagues in a minute.

I just want to talk about the
supermarkets for a minute, because two questions.
One, do you talk with grocers about impediments to
investment in new supermarkets or renovation of
existing locations? I know you talked about the FRESH
program. I'm concerned in Manhattan, because I have a
bill that says from Murray to 96th Street, which is
that commercial rent tax, which I hate, at least
exempt the grocery stores, and particularly the small
ones. Maybe skip Amazon and Whole Foods and so on,
but I can't get any traction because everybody says,
oh, we lose money. Well, the supermarkets are barely
surviving. So my question is, what do we do to help
our supermarkets generally? That's the one way I
would like to help them. And then do you keep track
of the number and size of supermarkets in our city?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: DCP
maintains a list of the sizes, in particular because
the current iteration of FRESH has such size
recommendations and requirements. But, Council

Member, one of the recommendations that we'll be advancing this summer is a more intentional and engaged dialogue with supermarket providers to understand, to your point, are the current zoning and tax incentives that we have useful? If not, what would be? And also, particularly, I feel it's important to mention that with the potential cuts around our federal SNAP program, we really want to be in deep partnership with our supermarket advocates.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And when I say supermarket, I'm talking about delis, bodegas, etc. I assume you're talking about the same thing.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: All the things, yes.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I have to say that that must be a high, high priority. I can't tell you how hard it is. As you know, I'm in them all day long, how hard it is for the smaller ones.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Yes.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. The other thing was, just back to this cold chain business again, because it comes up a lot in the discussions. I understand that you have a concern because of the cost of land. I got all that. But what are we doing

to try to address some of those in the five boroughs?

I can't believe there aren't some other locations
that could be used as cold chambers. Is there
anything more that you could say about that?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: So, outside
of the role of EDC and the development of that, we
are investing capacity building for our emergency
food network, and certainly to ensure that there's
proper refrigeration in those because we have such a
strong focus on produce going through that network.
So, whether it's in the emergency food system,
certainly again, thinking about those grocery stores
and the like, we are certainly invested in making
sure that we have enough capacity for cold storage
there.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. It is not
only, in my opinion, which is so important, the
emergency opportunities that you have made. I have to
say congratulations to you, focus, a huge focus. But
also, there are all those micro-fulfillment centers,
I don't know, they have names as we know, I don't
need to name them all, which are in the residential
areas, and they're shipping directly to consumers.

So, do you know whether those new cold chain systems are feasible in New York City?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: I do not know. And also, as we were putting together Food Forward back in 2020, the emergence of a lot of those, and I remember your...

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: They didn't exist before.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Your focus specifically on drawing attention to the emergence of that was something that we were following closely.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. And then just finally, the trucks that come into our city are huge. Obviously, we're trying to do other methods, rail, water, etc., not just at the hub, but in our city. So how do you, how does that, I mean, again, it's not your business specifically, I suppose it's DOT, I don't know who else, these trucks are huge, they're not weighed, they're killing the streets, they're bad for the traffic. Just generally, do the supermarkets request them? Do they need them? Is there some other way to work with those supermarkets?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: I don't have the answer to that, but I would be happy to

include that in some of our conversations with the
grocers.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. First,
Council Member Salamanca and then Council Member
Riley. Go ahead.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you.
Thank you both, Madam Chair and Majority Leader, and
welcome. So I represent Hunts Point, I represent the
world's largest produce markets, well, produce, meat,
fish, and the over 700 businesses that are at Hunts
Point. If we can just start with, can you give us a
percentage of the food that comes from Hunts Point?
It feeds what percentage of New Yorkers in the tri-
state area? Do you have a number on that?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Thank you for
the question, Council Member. I do not. I could
probably speak more broadly to the amount of, like I
know for the produce that market, I think it's like
at least 50 percent of the produce that runs through
the market feeds New Yorkers. I think it's 35 percent
of New York City's meat runs through the meat market,
and 45 percent of the fish runs through the meat
market. They're really significant.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: I go around, I got a number one time that the markets gave me. They said they feed about 75 percent of New Yorkers in the tri-state area. So, we could say that the markets play a major role in our food source in the City of New York. My question is, I saw here that the Governor just made an announcement regarding the potential cuts from the federal government for the elimination of the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program, which will result in the loss of over 325 million dollars. Are you aware of that?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: We are. I would say that we have been in constant communication with our federal partners at the Federal Highway Administration, and have been told our grant is executed. They've already committed a million dollars to the design, and we are not aware of any concerns with that funding. But we are fully on top of that, and understand like the concern around federal funding.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: All right. So, they're saying here in this statement that there is a potential of 13 million dollars that will be lost,

and this project aims to increase community resilience and protect New Yorkers' food supply by protecting two critical facilities against flooding. So, should we lose that funding, what is EDC prepared to do to fill in that gap?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Yeah. I mean, I think I can say, Council Member, that like you, we are fully committed to this project going forward. It's like a huge priority for us, as I know it is for you. We would explore all other public and private options to fill in any future gaps, but are not at this point anticipating one.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Okay. All right. My other question is, I know that the produce market is up for a facelift, and I know that my Colleagues were there last week. My dad worked in the produce market for 18 years, was a Local 202 member. He took me to work with him when I was a young adolescent. So, I understand the importance of the markets, not only in terms of job creation and employment and what it does for families, I'm here today because of that job that my dad had, but also the importance that it plays for in terms of our food supply. But the concern that I do have, it has a

negative effect, which is the environment and the air quality and how it affects our air qualities, and right now these markets are running on diesel fuel, especially, well, the produce market is running on diesel fuel because the tractor trailers, they use it for refrigeration, and I know that we've been able to secure, I believe we're at 600 million dollars, right, for a facelift. Can you give us an update as to what's the next steps? Where are we with the construction of a new market?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Yeah. I'm really happy to do that and really want to echo our concern. We share like your same concern around environmental concerns, particularly in the neighborhood around those refrigerated truck units. And so one of the main components of the complete redesign of the produce market is really to eliminate those. Like we want those gone and we'll have two new, much larger refrigerated warehouses so that we can get rid of those.

In terms of the process, we released a request for questions, I think it was like early March. We had an initial info session with over 80 attendees. Responses are due at the end of April and

this is for the design build, as you know, and we anticipate the RFP for the design build to go out this summer.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Would this be a design and build project?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Okay. I look forward to this project and you will have my full support on how we can do to move this forward.

I know that the Majority Leader spoke a little bit on the Blue Highway project, which I am extremely happy about. Through the advocacy of my office, we were able to clear out the barge, right, and move the detainees out of there. So, do you have an idea when we're going to actually get rid of that floating jail that's just sitting there empty?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Unfortunately, Council Member, I am not as up to date on the barge as you, but I am happy to bring that back and get you an answer on that.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Okay. The only concern that I have is, and I wanted to put this on the record. It's important, I know that there's a letter floating around from EDC trying to get support

on the Blue Highway project on the property where the barge is currently located. But in conversations with my office, we had conversations on the parking lot of the fish market. And so I just want to make it clear that (TIMER CHIME) that barge was there for over 30 years. The community wants access to that waterfront space. It's not to say that we can't share that property, but it's important that you go back to the community before a letter starts circulating for a letter of support and actually get a vote from the community board. Let the community tell us what we actually want on that piece of property. But know that I am supporting this process. Just looking for transparency and ensuring that they are part of that process.

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Thank you for that, Council Member. I'm happy to bring that back.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you.
Thank you, Madam Chairs.

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you, Chair Brewer and Chair Farías. Good morning, good afternoon. How are you doing today?

Just a few questions regarding the FRESH program. In 2009, the FRESH program was launched and

up to date, and please correct me if I'm wrong, 28
projects have obtained the FRESH tax incentives and
22 have completed it. Can you briefly describe the
mission and current priorities that EDC has
pertaining to the FRESH program?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Sure. Thank you
for the question, Council Member Riley. So, as you
described, the FRESH program is a way that we are
able to help supermarkets come into communities,
particularly like low-income communities, poverty-
burdened communities, communities that lack access to
food. And so to date, we're excited to say that it's
actually 43 IDA and DCP-incentivized FRESH
supermarkets are open, and we have 17 more in
development.

In terms of the program, my colleague
Kate mentioned there are specific criteria, so it has
to be like 500 square feet, it has to have 30 percent
available for perishable foods, and we're able to
provide a couple of different incentives so it's like
a building tax stabilization, a lands tax abatement,
reduction of mortgage recording taxes.

And so I can speak generally about how
the IDA would evaluate, I think, looking at those

criteria, making sure it meets the criteria of the neighborhoods that those that really need those supermarkets the most. And also know we're really excited that over 200,000 New Yorkers live within a quarter of a mile of an IDA FRESH supermarket. So really happy with that program. Those supermarkets, as you know, exist in all five boroughs. Bronx is actually our number two borough in terms of number of supermarkets. But yeah, happy to try to answer any other questions. If I don't know, to get back.

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Does EDC incentivize existing grocery stores to lower prices through examples like the FRESH program?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: I don't believe so, Council Member. I really think it's for getting new supermarkets or I think it's new supermarkets or supermarkets who are entering an existing or newly created space to begin operations.

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Does EDC keep record of M/WBE businesses that apply for the FRESH program tax incentive?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: I'm pretty sure we do, but I can check on that and get back to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Can you get that information to me?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Of course, of course.

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: When identifying a food desert, can you identify what metrics you guys utilize to identify food deserts in New York City?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Yeah, and I can get back to you on specifics. I know DCP has a map, and I don't know if my colleague is able to talk to this more, that kind of lays out the criteria and also the neighborhoods in the city that are eligible. But Kate, if you...

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Well, just to say, yes, the Health Department is also very influential in this. And I will say that since, and you pointed out the FRESH program started, and I think it was 2008, 2009, how we buy food has changed a lot since then. And I'm particularly interested also in how we factor in things like online purchases of food to determine proximity of grocery stores in neighborhoods. So, that's something that we don't have the perfect science to yet, but we do know that more and more people are able to buy food online. And

yes, there are pros and cons to all of that, but
looking at that when it comes to neighborhood
proximity to quality grocers.

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Okay. And last
question. If large grocery chains divest from
neighborhoods, does EDC maintain awareness of the
situation and attempt to conduct outreach with
smaller vendors in the area?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: I know that our
FRESH program is always looking to provide more
information about what's available. I'm not sure in
particular about when larger supermarkets close, but
happy to look into that and get back to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: All right. Thank
you.

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you, Chair.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Council Member
Farías is next for questions.

We've been joined by Council Members
Bottcher, Vernikov, and Council Member Joseph, who
had to go back to the other.

Council Member Avilés going to ask
questions. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you, Chairs.
Thank you. Good to see you today.

Apologies if this might be a repeat
question. I wasn't here earlier, but in the
discussion around cold storage, can you tell me what
the need for cold storage facilities are and kind of
where is EDC in its planning to meeting that need
and/or vision?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Sure. Thank you
for the question, Council Member. I might defer the
study on the need for cold storage to my colleague,
but I can say with respect to cold storage at EDC,
right now our focus is really on the redevelopment of
the Hunts Point produce market. And so, as you're
probably aware there, we really have a serious lack
of refrigeration, and so there are a thousand of
these transport refrigeration units that are really
idling on diesel, unfortunately, and are not great
for our community members, like a challenging and
already environmental justice community, and so our
priority right now is to really focus on the
redemption of the produce market where we will be
building two new larger warehouse refrigerated
facilities that will be able to really take those

trailers offline so that's where our focus is right now. And I would defer if Kate has anything to add on just broader cold storage.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: I would say certainly that that's right. Also, it's a question that has to be asked sort of in the what is the use case, right? And I think we learned, you know, during the pandemic where we needed to store so much food to get it into people's homes, that was a specific use case, and it's sort of like we would never have that need, you know, to be able to do anyone that needs food to get that to them. But what I can tell you is that where, for instance, in the emergency food space, we hear a need for cold storage or refrigeration, we work to make grants possible for what we call capacity building within the emergency food space. If we hear, you know, I spoke earlier about GrowNYC, which is opening up a regional food hub that will have seven different refrigerated units available in that so the use case is to be able to have a 20-million-pound-a-year food distribution flow. So, that's thinking about that use case. And I think, you know, it is just clearly acknowledged that when we were, whether it was storing vaccines or

1 storing meals, we acknowledged that we were
2 challenged when it came to refrigerated space in the
3 city. And, as there's a lot in the testimony here
4 about just the distributed network of our
5 infrastructure in New York City, how we have assets
6 like these big hubs of whether it be the fresh direct
7 building that wasn't there years and years ago, it
8 has the capacity for cold storage. And so just
9 looking at, and my colleagues at NYCEM, Emergency
10 Management, do have a catalog, it's probably more
11 than a catalog, but an inventory of all of the
12 different assets in the city that have cold storage
13 capacity, so that if and when we needed to activate
14 something, we would know who to call.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So, I guess I have
17 several questions related to that. I'd love to
18 understand. I continue to hear that there is a lack
19 of cold storage facility in the city and an enormous
20 amount of produce, food product is getting
21 transported still very far to only come back into the
22 city on a daily basis on trucks so still that we're
23 hearing double routes of moving. So, I guess, so do
24 we have a sense of how much storage we would just
25

need for our basic daily consumption network and how much we'd need to build out?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: I think as it relates again to my colleagues speaking about the asset that is managed here around Hunts Point, they've scoped that out and are building to suit those needs. But I would be very interested to hear more about the stories that you're hearing about trucks coming in and coming out. I would very much like to learn from that.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So, how large are the warehouses that are getting built to offline the thousand transport units?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Thank you, Council Member. I do not know the answer to the question of how large they are. I know the size of the whole site will be 916,000 square feet, but we can follow up with you on the size of the warehouses.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Yeah. I mean, I represent Brooklyn Marine Terminal and this question of obviously cold storage and lack of and emergency use clearly, which is why we are so keen on protecting the Marine Terminal for its actual use was the port that was being able to bring in when trucks

2 didn't (TIMER CHIME) want to come into Brooklyn
3 during COVID. So, cold storage is critical, but
4 having a workable port also is critical to the blue
5 highway system and minimizing its footprint
6 significantly is a huge problem for so many of us,
7 but, thank you. Thank you, Chairs. I have more
8 questions, but I could go on next round.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Council Member
10 Bottcher.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Thank you so
12 much. Good afternoon.

13 What's your opinion about the idea of
14 City-owned grocery stores?

15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: As I
16 mentioned in my testimony, we have a great deal of
17 different sizes and supermarkets, and I think that
18 there are a lot of new and different forms of grocery
19 stores. As I was mentioning to Council Member Brewer,
20 there are some stores in Utica, for example, called
21 Bargain Grocery. We've been in conversation to
22 understand how we can really utilize a low-cost
23 grocery model. Sometimes in other parts of the state
24 or country, it's operated in a non-profit model. So,
25 I am more than happy to learn about any form of

grocery stores to be able to serve the needs of New Yorkers.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEr: What about the notion of the City owning and operating grocery stores itself?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: What I have learned is that operating a grocery store is hard, and ensuring the quality of certainly the worker protections, ensuring the quality of food, the margins are slim at best, and it's a hard business so I would want to make sure that, any market can be successful, and I'd want to understand more from perhaps my colleagues in Chicago or Washington who have dabbled in those ideas.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEr: Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I think it's a terrible idea. I'm just throwing that out. We can't even figure out how to run too many things right here.

Council Member Avilés, do you want to go ahead with your other question then I'll go ahead? Go ahead with your other questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Oh, it's good to know the Chairs. Thank you, Chairs.

So in terms of, let's see, so you're going to get back to me on the warehouse sizes and you mentioned the discussion around the use cases. And so I guess NYCEM is the holder of this map that will tell us what our capacity is during an emergency situation.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: It's an, catalog was not the right word, it's an inventory, yeah, of different existing assets, whether they be non-profit partners, corporate partners, and others, so that, again, if we needed to activate, we would know where to be.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: And does EDC have a map of its current facilities and capacity in terms of coal storage across the city?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: I'm sorry, Council Member. I spaced out for a minute.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: I have been there a lot.

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Apologies.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: No worries, no worries.

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Can you repeat the question?

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Does EDC have an inventory of coal storage facilities across New York City?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: I don't know the answer to that question, but I'm happy to look into it and get back to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Great. And in terms of the investment my Colleague was mentioning, the 600 million dollars for, I guess, the produce market itself. I guess my understanding is this investment has been happening over time. Could you tell me a little bit about the investment to improve the produce market, and if it is New York City's one of our main assets?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Yeah, sure. So, I can talk through, probably, it's easiest for me to talk to, probably, the city, state, and federal funding, and my understanding is that we are really at the initial stages of using that funding, even though it's been committed. So, it would be 130 million of New York City capital, 130 million of State capital, 110 million from USDOT, another 10 million from USDOT for EV freight charging, and a another 25 million from USDOT for another grant. So,

that's 145 from USDOT. And then the rest, we are working on a robust like public-private partnership to fill in the remaining financing.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Got it. Thank you for that.

And in terms of the charging capacity, which I know is something you've been working on, can you explain a little bit to me about where you are in that process of electrification?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Yeah. Sure, sure, sure. So, my understanding for, and that's the EV freight charging hub that will be, I believe, at the AOU-2 site, my understanding is that we anticipate awarding off the RFP this summer.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: And how much is the RFP?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: I'm sorry. I don't have that number off the top of my head, but I can find that out for you.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Got it. All right, Chairs.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, back to the market. So, we do know that the RFQ is due on April 28th, as I understand it, and then there'll be a

request for proposals to be released to short-listed options during the summer. So, what factors will EDC use to determine which RFQ submission will be short-listed? This is a big question, a big deal for all of us.

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Sure.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And also, I want to add, when we were there, I have an idea. They all may laugh at me, but it's something to consider. There are places in the country where you can, as a tourist, meaning a New Yorker or a visitor, visit the market. You can't do the current one. There are safety concerns. And obviously, safety concerns, intellectual property, and staff would have to make sure that it was safe for everybody. But is that part of your discussion? And my lettuce washing machine.

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Thank you, Council Member Brewer. I will bring back the request for the lettuce washing machine. I, myself, am a frequent visitor to other markets when I'm not in New York so we'll bring back that request as well.

In terms of, I am obviously not on the team that will be deciding on the recipient of the developer for the project. I can get back with

specific criteria, but I'm assuming it's the usual like financial viability of the project, like commitment to our hiring goals and standards, like making sure that they can really fulfill the project, because this is something that we want and will go forward with, but in terms of the specific criteria, I can check back for you on those, and I'm not sure if those may also be available on our website with the request for the RFQ.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: All right.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Council Member, if I could just share, the last time I visited the market, 4 o'clock in the morning in September with NYC Tourism to consider something just like that.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: That's great. I'm glad we're all thinking along the same lines, but it would have to be into the RFQ or only in the RFP. In other words, you can't do this unless you have somebody including it in their proposal so now I'm worried April 28th is soon. I don't know if you can add to an RFQ or can you get back to us as to how that would be possible?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: I can get back
to you on that.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: In addition to the
need for general redevelopment of the market as a
whole, many of the cooperators will also need to
install their own equipment specific to their
products and operations. Has the EDC worked with
cooperators to take those needs into consideration
during the planning stages?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: (INAUDIBLE)

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Okay. And how does
EDC plan to balance maintaining continuity of
existing operations? This is something that's super
important to me as we've had many conversations about
the large plans that come in front of us in the city
and the continuation of those, including the
transition of individualized team members, which in
the Bronx, we've seen some transitions of who reps
the Bronx and the planning of that, of the projects
and assets, but also just in the continuity of the
larger politics of New York City from one mayor to
the next. How do you folks plan to take those things
into consideration and implementing any of the

substantial changes or processes of the redevelopment
of Hunts Point?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Sure. And thank
you for that question. I think in general, as you've
noted, EDC, as other full City agencies, and this is
a quasi-agency, have obviously worked through like a
number of different administrations, a number of
different changes. I'd say that this project is a
priority for us. It will be continued throughout
changes in administration, just as our other projects
are, and we will ensure that it is stewarded through
because it is so important to the city.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: And is there like
a strategic plan, strategic vision? Is there points
during a calendar that we have? I know we're coming
closer. Our goal is to wrap up all of the
negotiations and agreements by end of year at Hunts
Point to move the project along. But is there like a
physical piece of paper that has a timeline that will
then be transferred over? I'm more so worried about
the continuity of planning. And this isn't just Hunts
Point continuity, we're looking at BMT, we're looking
at Industry City, like all of these other areas that
we have large plans, large contracted negotiations,

and strategic plans for that we need to make sure
continue on and someone is focused on maintaining the
funding or keeping to the budgets that are allocated,
and the commitments to community.

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Yeah. Sure, and
I definitely hear your concern, Council Member. I
think we share the concern in making sure that the
project goes forward. I can say for now that the set
points in time at least are really like the RFQ
process, the RFP process, and hoping to have that
done obviously by the end of the year but we'll see
what happens with the administration. But making sure
that we can do as much as possible, as quickly as
possible, which is what we will continue to do.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Okay. And can I
get an overview of the lands at the produce market?
How much is City land versus state land, federal or
private lands? Do we have that in front of us?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: I do not, but I
am happy to get back to you with that.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: And I guess my
follow-up is the nature of the relationships between
the markets at EDC. Can you talk a little bit about
that? If the cooperatives at the market want to make

capital improvements, who's the approval process? Is it just EDC? Is it independently? Is it another agency?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Yeah. Sure, and so that's a question that I probably will have to take back to get more clarity on, but I'm happy to do that so the approval process for capital improvement.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: I will follow up with...

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Yeah, of course.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: The individualized questions.

100 million was allocated for infrastructure improvements at the Fulton produce market. That's something we spoke about actually when we were on the tour. And an additional 40 million was given to Hunts Point area by Mayor Adams for the Rebuild, Renew, Reinvent plan. Do you folks have what the funding will be used for at Hunts Point and how the funding is going to be utilized?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: Sure. I'm happy to talk about that. So, from the Hunts Point Forward plan, the money was transferred to the New York City Department of Parks and the Department of

Transportation in 2022. My understanding is that on the Parks side, 15 million dollars has been put towards Barretto Park and that that's in the design phase. And that 25 million is with Department of Transportation and they were looking at six intersections along Hunts Point Avenue and in design procurement.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Okay. And in 2012, the plan was short of the funding needed to upgrade Hunts Point. Does this funding aid in completing that long-term goal or is there still a budget gap?

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: I'm not certain on that answer.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Okay. We'll send that as follow-up.

I will end there and pass it back over to Chair Brewer. Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I just want to know that in terms of the produce that comes into Hunts Point produce market, how much is local and how much is from out of town? And then following up from my other long-term question of how can we get more local products to be purchased by City agencies, which is, you know, again, sort of like the lettuce

washing machine has been going on for years. This is purchased by DOE, meaning the Department of Education, by Correction, by DFTA, etc. Does that go through Hunts Point or is it directly? All right, so that doesn't have any impact. But my question would be how much is local, how much is out of town, and does any of this discussion have anything to do with New York City purchasing locally?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: All great questions.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yeah, but they never get answered.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: But here's what I can tell you. We know that what we're buying from, let's say, Chair Fariás has a distributor. Her company is based in New York, and I'm asking her to tell me of the potatoes, the carrots, the lettuce, where's everything coming from. We have now been at that for four years, and increasingly the data that I get from the, not you, but you, store is improving. So, we're closer than we've ever been to knowing how much is coming from New York state fields as opposed to having an address in New York. I think it is a really important question that we want to get more

1 clarity around as it comes to Hunts Point directly,
2 especially in light of things like tariffs and
3 understanding what our vulnerability to really higher
4 prices are there. But I can tell you also that since
5 we've been in conversations, we now require, through
6 DCAS, all of our apples and onions to come from New
7 York State. That was always not the case, but that is
8 the case now. And increasingly, with some federal
9 funding that is still here, we are buying more and
10 more New York State-specific products, everything
11 from yellow and green squash to shredded white
12 potatoes to corn on the cob to sweet corn, apple
13 slices, and a lot more. So, through those
14 opportunities, and again, all of that regional
15 infrastructure that we're building, we're getting
16 more specific food products in. And as you know,
17 because you know this so well, the opportunities for
18 that largely are through schools, and then
19 secondarily through the DCAS agencies of corrections
20 and ACS, because they're buying the ingredients for
21 meals, not necessarily the full package.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Right. Okay. All
24 right. And so in terms of the market, you don't have
25 that data, local versus...

VICE PRESIDENT LAMBERTI: I do not,
Council Member. I know that I believe some of our
market operators may be here later, and they may be a
great source for that type of information.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Sorry. I just have
one more last question. Can we talk a little bit
about, if you can, on the interconnectedness of our
food networks, food waste, even just like our
composting program that we're now rolling out, the
Sharing Excess programs that we have, and the network
of going either to schools or to pantries, etc., and
how we're holistically looking at this from, yes,
this space's aggregate amount of food, but also the
larger network of making sure people have the food
that they need on their tables.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Yeah. And I
love that, because it's also where we started in
looking at the whole system of the food system, and
that's from growing food to getting rid of the waste
and the non-edible parts. Also appreciate the
acknowledgement of Sharing Excess, which is a new
partner at Hunts Point Produce Market, and some of my
colleagues on my food policy team have been

connecting colleagues at EDC with places like Barcelona and other cities, Milan, that have an actual tenant in their Hunts Point equivalent to deal with the organics. And so that is both from a, when I say deal with it, that means disposing of things in an appropriate way that are not edible, but also in this context supporting places like City Harvest or Entire Food Bank Network with the edible product. And so I would like to see that developed even more as an intentionality of the produce market, and also, you know, as you pointed to, whether it's the organics collection, it's an interesting question of like we want to see the organics clearly thrive and grow, but also we ultimately don't want to see it survive and grow, because we don't want there to be the organics waste in the first place. So, this all, you know, whether it's from teaching kids in schools to teaching neighbors about how to compost, that is all part of the cycle that we're clearly committed to, and I am looking forward to build like the further upstream solutions, like working with Hunts Point in an even more intentional way.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARIAS: I appreciate that response. I also want to just state that, you know,

even in our shelter system and getting meal preps to certain, you know, we have the hot food programs and the Meals on Wheels programs, those could also be included in this network of getting fresh produce or getting the fresh produce to cook those meals. You know, we have a lot of different providers with a lot of large contracts that are always trying to keep food or keep pricing in our communities. I mean, we consistently talk about Rethink NYC as an organization that we like to utilize and build partnerships with because they go to our local places. They could also be looked at as partners and being able to help the local food network, too, in this way with fresh produce and fresh foods.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Yeah. And in the spirit of infrastructure, we consider that to be some of the soft infrastructure of making sure, whether it's GrowNYC's regional food hub who's supplying older adult centers with ingredients to cook meals or even Rethink, right? Like part of this is, again, helping break down some of the historic silos or historic partners so that we can be doing more with some of the... I think one of the best things to come from the pandemic is the emergence of food

businesses and people interested in doing business with the City, and we are really trying to support and nurture that.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: One last question, this is the last one, I believe, is that local community gardens, local school gardens, etc., and I wanted to know if, I know there's another office that deals with that in the City Administration, but are there ways in which you think they, meaning the local, local, local farmers, not the ones upstate, which I also, as you know, appreciate tremendously, they can help us with some of these food problems? Is there some way that they can be involved? Obviously, they're not large farms, they're smaller, but is there something that they can do to help feed people?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Absolutely, and I think similar to the grocery store question, there is a, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach here, and I really want to appreciate the work of my colleague, Kiana, and especially in the Data Explorer Hub that was recently launched, that can also help pinpoint some of where food production is happening. As a mom of two public school kids, I love that my kids get a chance to see and learn about food through

the growing programs at their schools, and as we're doing a lot, again, around education, but clearly it's about more than that, and seeing especially some of our community gardens and urban farms that are growing, maybe it's at production scale, but also just that connection to food is so essential, and so I love certainly the urban agricultural plan, the progress reports that they've had too, but really support, again, the both-and approach to all of this.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you both very much. We are now going to go to our next panel. Thank you.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MACKENZIE: Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I now open the hearing for public testimony. We're going to hear specifically from the leaders of Hunt's Point, but we have to read the statement.

I remind members of the public that this is a government proceeding, that decorum shall be observed at all times. Members of the public, as such, shall remain silent at all times.

The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recording or photography is allowed from the table. Members of the

public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-Arms for inclusion.

If you want to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-at-Arms and wait to be recognized. You will have two minutes to speak on today's oversight hearing topic, which, as you know, is the City's Food Infrastructure and Cost and Quality of Produce in New York City.

If you have a statement or additional testimony you wish to submit, please provide a copy to the Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of the close of the hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

Now we're going to turn to an online panel. I must admit, we're not going to put them, make them speak just for two minutes. They can talk longer. We're going to hear from Arthur Goldstein, Nick Rodelli (phonetic), and Matthew D'Arrigo. Thank you very much. And they are on Zoom.

ARTHUR GOLDSTEIN: Hi. It's Arthur Goldstein here. I'm going to turn it over to Matthew D'Arrigo, a Board Member, and to Nick Rodelli, but

appreciate that the Council and EDC had a fabulous
tour of the market last Friday, and we look forward
to the conversation.

MATTHEW D'ARRIGO: Shall I go next,
Arthur? I'd be happy to.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Go ahead. Thank
you.

MATTHEW D'ARRIGO: I'm Matthew D'Arrigo. I
am an owner of one of the 26 merchant firms at the
Hunts Point Market, have been coming here to work for
51 years now since I was in high school. Growing up
in this market, it's more of a home to me than my
home almost, I would say. The changes in our industry
and the changes in our city and the changes in our
food supply have been slow and steady over the years
and over the last, if you look at it every five
years, you notice it, but you don't notice it day to
day. Our market is 58 years old now. It's been a
wonderful asset for the City of New York and has done
a tremendous job of distributing produce. The New
York metropolitan area is a unique area for produce
distribution because of the density of population,
the high price of real estate. I've heard a lot of
talk about cold storage and things of that nature.

1 It's a real challenge to find space. None of our
2 small greengrocer customers have a lot of back room
3 refrigeration, so they rely on our Hunts Point Market
4 as their warehouse. The rebuild that we've been
5 trying to get done for 25 years now, we have a real
6 shot at it again at this point. The size of the
7 market and the size of the cold storage that would
8 occur from the rebuild, I would think would be about
9 a 50 percent increase. The new market is mapped out
10 currently at 42,000 pallet positions. Our current
11 four buildings, row A, B, C, D, have about 20,000
12 pallet positions and there's about eight or 10,000
13 pallets that are on the TRUs, the storage trailers
14 that we use. The market has not been big enough to
15 hold its inventory since the early '70s. We are a
16 little bit of an overflow market, so there's always a
17 bit of oversupply there, but it's also what drives
18 bargains for the consumers. Produce is very much a
19 supply-demand dominant business. Contracts and things
20 like that do not impact our market. We are more a
21 day-to-day trading place. Our customers come every
22 day. They look for bargains. They negotiate very hard
23 with our salesmen, and every day things work out, and
24 sometimes prices go up, sometimes they go down, but
25

we are a market of last resort, and therefore we always have a little bit of an oversupply on, say, half of the commodities we sell and a little bit of an undersupply on half the commodities we sell, just as an average over time. The relationship we have with our customers and with our city is symbiotic in nature. There would not be a Hunts Point Market the size that we have if there weren't thousands of small greengrocers that use us as their warehouse and survive because there's no super large supermarket chain around them competing. They rely on us for their supply. They shop five days a week. The market has maybe two or three days of supply in it before it runs out, and I would say our customers have about another day, so it's very, very fresh by necessity. You really can't do it any better, and I don't think you want to because you want produce to stay fresh, and you want it to turn over as quickly as possible, so the symbiosis has been around forever, and I don't anticipate it going anywhere unless the big banner chains figure out a way to battle the real estate business in New York and come in and invade our boroughs. There are a few examples of success, but I don't anticipate anything happening to our customer

base or happening to the necessity of the Hunts Point Market. I can go on and on and on here. There was talk about rail, the barge, and over-the-road trucks being weighed, and so I can answer any specific questions that anybody might want to, but I think I'll end my comments here.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I think you're the only one speaking from the Market, right? Is that correct?

MATTHEW D'ARRIGO: I think so, yes.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: All right. Thank you, and thank you for the wonderful hospitality.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Can you give us the topline issues facing the markets today and any primary requests around alleviating some of those concerns or top line issues?

MATTHEW D'ARRIGO: Well, topline has always been that our market has not had adequate capacity to hold the inventory that the industry demands we take on, and we don't turn down product because it really offers a downward price situation which gives better options and opportunities for the consumer. So, to me, number one, lack of capacity for storage. We've made up for that in large measure by

the TRUs. Nobody likes those, including us. It puts a whole other level of handling and cost into our business. Instead of take it off, bring it in, and then load it back out, we take it off, put it on a cold storage van, take it back on, put it in the warehouse, and so you're moving things around unnecessarily. It would be wonderful to have a market where that does not happen, and the new rebuild would accomplish that. As far as other topline issues, the Market's 58. It's a noble beast, but it's time for a dramatic redevelopment. I think our refrigeration is inefficient. I think there's ways to have much better efficiency and energy savings for the market and lower our overhead, but it's a fairly simple place, the Market. So, our topline needs are pretty much right in front, and I've just told you what those are.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Thank you. I appreciate your response.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: The biggest question, of course, for the consumer is how we can lower prices, and obviously, I think that the quality stays pretty high, but prices are challenging. Obviously, the tariffs are making it even worse. So,

I was wondering if you felt the tariffs already, if you feel how it will impact, and I guess what we can do about it, if anything.

MATTHEW D'ARRIGO: So, the tariff question is going to have a couple of, I mean, this is just an opinion. I'm not an economist, and the economists can't agree on it in the first place. So, we are a spot market market. The tariffs, short term, I think for sure, are going to raise prices, and it will also drive down consumption a little bit, but we're heading out of import season right now. So, most, if not all of our produce, with the exception of Canada, because Canada has year-round supply of hydroponic tomatoes and things like that, Mexico will finish with grapes and melons in May, and then they'll be done until next October or so, or earlier than that. They have tomatoes earlier than that, but the vast majority of our product for the next six months is going to be domestically grown. So, the impacts of tariffs will only be on imports to growing, and I cannot think of any other imports off the top of my head. So, over the next six months, we're going to get a pass. Then, when you get back into import season, if the tariff war is still going on, you'll

see less imports coming because the importers will have had full warning. Right now, the importers are getting caught flat-footed. They've got deals that suddenly are going to have a tariff attached to them if it happens, and that's never good. So, there'll be some money lost at the import level, but next year, the money will be lost at the grower level in the other countries where the product is being produced, and so there'll be a lot of scrambling and contracts and how the business is going to be done. What that means in the Hunts Point Market is it's almost we're on the sideline because we take positions day to day, so nothing's going to sneak up on us and get us for a long period of time, but it will create, I think, in general, a little higher-priced market structure for produce next fall through winter and into spring as the import season unfolds. I think this summer, if there are higher prices, I think it's more from Mother Nature creating shortages and things of that nature.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. Council Member Avilés.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Hi there. Thank you so much for your testimony.

I was curious about the capacity issue that you were talking about and, you know, obviously using the TRUs to try to address it. So, I represent the area that includes Brooklyn Marine Terminal, and we talk a lot about cold storage. Do you need this cold storage on site or would a southern location that could be used through a barge service help to alleviate some of that challenge that you're facing with storage capacity?

MATTHEW D'ARRIGO: Speaking personally from the Bronx perspective, the market redevelopment will go a long way to solving our capacity issues. New York is expensive. I always have thought that the oversupply that comes into our market might be better off being handled in New Jersey at a cold storage for 17 cents a square foot rather than 32 or whatever it is, although we don't pay it, but that's what the market would dictate normally. But if you had cold storage in other boroughs, like in Brooklyn, I would urge that the City tries to keep it privatized because I do think that the one-size-fits-all and the kind of rigid structure that would develop from a public project, I think it would be overbuilt, frankly. So, the Brooklyn produce market, there's

merchants there. I think that's a good place to start about whether they need a redevelopment because that market might even be older than our market. There's, I think, almost no hope at the individual greengrocer level, except for maybe small business loans to get some infrastructure there. But if you've got the 25 merchants in the Hunts Point Market an adequate refrigeration system, which the new market would do, I think a whole lot would develop that would be very positive. I think it would add shelf life to the product, add freshness to the product, and generally be very beneficial to the industry. I'm not really sure I answered your question.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: No, thank you. Your response is helpful. I appreciate it. Thank you so much.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I think that's it. We really appreciate that. We had a great tour. Much thanks to your colleague. We love the bananas. We love the bananas.

MATTHEW D'ARRIGO: So, let me just, could I just interrupt for one minute, Council Member. The Council Member Brewer salad washing machine.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yes. How are we
doing that?

MATTHEW D'ARRIGO: I will single-handedly
spearhead the RFP to find the processing company to
come into the market and work there. I will tell you
this, it would be done by a firm and not by the
market because that's a highly specialized business
and you need a processing company to do it, but we
don't have one in there and we could sure use one so
I think you're on to something.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: You have made my
day. You've made my family's day. You've made my
history. I have this stupid little machine that they
gave me from EDC from 20 years ago on my counter at
home. I forgot to bring it in. You can't imagine and
thank you. I have no words.

MATTHEW D'ARRIGO: They're anything but
little in the industry. They're very sizable. (CROSS-
TALK)

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: We're going to
make a big one privately done. Thank you so much.

MATTHEW D'ARRIGO: You got it.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. Thank you
very much for your testimony, and we will be working

together. It's going to be called after you, Nick.

Thank you so much.

Stephen Katzman.

We've also been joined online by Council
Member Restler.

Matthew D'Arrigo, if you want to come on.

Oh, you were just finished. We're looking for Stephen
Katzman.

STEPHEN KATZMAN: I'm here.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. Go ahead.

STEPHEN KATZMAN: I am here.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARIAS: You can begin your
testimony.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Go ahead.

STEPHEN KATZMAN: Not sure what I'm
supposed to be saying.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Well, whatever you
wanted to talk about the market, the current and
future, anything to do with food in our city, food
production.

STEPHEN KATZMAN: Production? Okay,
Arthur, you're muted.

ARTHUR GOLDSTEIN: Thank you. Just to
bring Steve up to speed, he was in a meeting. So,

Matthew D'Arrigo basically did the overview and answered specific questions. So, if the Council Members have any further questions, Steve Katzman is one of the Co-Presidents of the Produce Market. You may, Steve, just want to mention the few years that you've been at the market as an overview.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I think we're okay, Arthur, but thank you very much and thank him also for his participation. Thank you.

So, coming to the podium, please. Adaeze Okoli from Rethink Food, one of our favorite organizations, Rae Gomes from the Fulton Street, Brooklyn, and Anita Lee.

ADAEZE OKOLI: Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: You have two minutes to speak. Whomever would like to start, go ahead.

ADAEZE OKOLI: Wonderful. Majority Leader Farías, Chair Gale Brewer, and Members of the Committee on Economic Development, Oversight and Investigation, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Adaeze Okoli, and I have the pleasure of serving as Chief-of-Staff for Rethink Food. Since our inception in 2017, Rethink has been

dedicated to creating a fairer, more sustainable food system and ensuring that every New Yorker has access to dignified, nutritious meals that reflect their cultural backgrounds. Through our network of local independent restaurants and our sustainable community kitchen, Rethink has delivered over 40 million high-quality meals that celebrate diversity in various cultures. We've also injected over 130 million dollars into our local economy, supporting 230 community-based organizations, partnering with 145 different restaurants across the city. Our partnership with Council Members gives us keen insight into community needs, helping us to ensure meals reach families who truly need them most. This year, Rethink is requesting 150,000 dollars from the Speakers' Initiative Welcome NYC, or Food Pantries Initiative, to support and drive our mission forward and provide meals to communities for holiday distributions, special community-based events, or emergencies that arise throughout the year, such as fires, outages, and more, and we hope to count on your support.

Our collaboration with partners in government has also offered us opportunities to

expand our partnerships with restaurants, a key part of New York City's food infrastructure that we are empowering to drive change by feeding New Yorkers and creating jobs in our community. While restaurants consistently rank among the top industries for creating new jobs, approximately 60 percent of restaurants fail within their first year and about 80 percent close within five years. To that end, Rethink is currently exploring a proposal that can mutually support New York State restaurant and agriculture industries, as well as non-profits, while promoting less food waste and healthier food options. This would be in the form of a food donation (TIMER CHIME) tax credit for donated meals to independent non-profits to then distribute to communities facing food insecurity. We believe there's a real opportunity here to incentivize even more restaurants and small businesses to make a difference by donating their surplus food. We appreciate the Council's attention to creative solutions to support our city's food infrastructure. Thank you so much for your partnership in working with New Yorkers.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. Who would like to go next?

RAE GOMES: I can go next. Hi everyone. My name is Rae Gomes. I'm representing Cultivating Justice LLC. It's my food equity consultancy. I've also been in food access and food systems work for over 10 years. So, I was very disheartened to hear some of the ways that MOFP and EDC plan on solving some of these problems that have been ongoing in New York City for years. And I just want to read a couple of things. I did some quick and dirty research around, and especially hearing, you know, wanting to support capacity building and emergency food organizations and also centering businesses. So those are the two things I just want to address. So in 2020, Food Bank of New York had 35.4 million dollars in their budget and, in 2022, they had 97.5 million dollars. City Harvest had 209 million dollars in 2020 and then in 2021, had 337 million dollars. And then Campaign Against Hunger in 2020 had 8.5 million dollars in their budget, and in 2022, they had 16.5 million dollars.

UNIDENTIFIED: (INAUDIBLE)

RAE GOMES: I'm not sure what that is. New York Common Pantry in 2019 had 12.6 million dollars in their budget, and in 2021, had 20.3 million

dollars. All this is to say that if these organizations wanted to solve food insecurity in New York City, their budgets doubled during COVID, and the problem of food insecurity still exists. The status quo to center businesses and corporate emergency food structures has not worked. It will not work. It will continue to not work. And as long as we keep relying on these approaches, food insecurity, high food costs will persist in the city.

And I also just want to distinguish between profit-based institutions (TIMER CHIME) and community-centered solutions. Hunts Point is a profit-based center. Their food hub and food system solutions that center communities, start with community, and are only interested in supporting community and not increasing their profits, and I implore you all to please look at these alternative food systems as a way of solving these entrenching issues. Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you. Next.

ANITA LEE: Hi. My name is Anita Lee. This is my first time testifying for City Council, so excuse anything I don't do right. I applaud MOFP's and this Council's effort in creating a more

resilient food infrastructure system. One point I would like to make is to ensure to create a framework so that these hubs like Hunts Point are accessible to a diverse set of food distributors and producers as reflective of the demographics and needs of the New York City. From my understanding, anyone can pay a daily rate to enter Hunts Point, but in order to rent space in the Hunts Point hub, you need to be approved by the existing members and pay duties to be a member. Members being anyone, even companies as large as Costco. And like apartment co-ops, becoming a member is very political and complicated since votes are involved, which may discourage diversity. In this vein, building a new produce hub at Hunts Point using City funds while keeping the rental entry system the same feels like concentrating opportunities to just a select few, which limits the opportunities for other competitors. Concentrating power to a few players does not reduce food prices. It does the opposite. Second point, has there been any movement to develop the Brooklyn Terminal as a food hub as well? Third point, regarding City-owned grocery markets, Essex Markets in Lower Manhattan is owned by New York City and leases its space to various accessible purveyors,

meat, fish, fruits, and vegetables, and finished foods for a diverse set of consumers so the idea of a City-owned grocery market in the model of a publicly traded grocery market chain should be expanded to City-owned public markets that lease spaces to various independent family-run businesses, which might avoid the over-complication of a City-owned supermarket. If you want to consider successful City-owned public markets, food markets, I feel Essex Market in Lower Manhattan might be one to look at for learning lessons.

In conclusion, please consider creating a set of rules to ensure that this taxpayer-funded Hunts Point project maintains easy access to a diverse set of small, medium, food distributors, and producers, so that we don't fund a project just for big players who already have a seat at the table and increase their power to set prices. Perhaps we should consider something similar to how a certain percentage of affordable housing is set aside and new housing develops in exchange for City financial support for Hunts Point and its food distributors, produce, tenants. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. I just want to clarify when I say against New York City-run, but I love Essex Street. That's different. That's the underlying is owned by the City, but the markets are individually, privately owned, and it's fabulous.

All right. Thank you all very, very much.

We have two people online.

Karen Karp first and then Rachel Lyons.

Karen Karp.

KAREN KARP: Hi, everyone. Hi, Gale. Hi, everybody. How are you? I just need to pull up my testimony, which I'm afraid is very long.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Two minutes.

KAREN KARP: I'm going to try to...
Actually, I'm sorry. You just caught me a little bit by surprise at this moment. I was just about to sign off. Could I defer to Rachel, and could you come back to me? Would that be okay?

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Sure. Yeah.

KAREN KARP: Thanks.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Rachel Lyons.

RACHEL LYONS: Hi. Can you hear me now?

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: We can hear you.
We love you. Go ahead. We love your union.

RACHEL LYONS: Hey, everybody. Hi, there.
My name is Rachel Lyons. I'm the Legislative Director
for the United Food and Commercial Workers
International Union. We represent 1.2 million members
in North America and 65,000 members here in the State
of New York. We work across all kinds of food retail,
from retail to meatpacking, food processing, grocery,
as well as in healthcare and cannabis. Thank you so
much for the opportunity to join the conversation
today. Thank you, Chair Brewer and Chair Fariás.

The conversation about a successful food
system and what it takes to make it successful is
fundamentally important to our members. We are here
to say that every part of this should include
provisions that support good jobs in New York City
for the nearly 1,000 grocery stores, and that should
include food safety and delivery in your
recommendations. The resilience of New York City's
food system is intimately connected to the success of
the workers. Worker-friendly food policies ensure
revenue for the City, customers for City businesses,
groceries for low-income workers, and jobs for union

workers. Two key points I'm going to drive home. Good jobs in grocery are good for everyone. We ensure that our shelves are stocked. We administer SNAP at the grocery store and are part of the food safety system. We really want everything to support all these economic development policies to include labor standards that support food workers. For example, in the FRESH program that we've been talking about today, we want to ensure that in the application process, stores operating with a collective bargaining agreement are part of the application process, as well as taking into account proximity to another union brick-and-mortar store. We know that we were talking about the geographic, the good job that it's done, including creating new grocery stores, but some of those (TIMER CHIME) pop up right next to an...

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.

Thank you.

RACHEL LYONS: Existing union grocery store that's been providing good jobs for the workers and members of that neighborhood.

And then a quick switch to another topic. Let's talk a little bit about delivery and food safety. The pandemic accelerated consumer habits of

ordering food for homes and has done so faster than anybody could have predicted. But there's a lack of food safety protection that applied to the delivery of groceries from store to consumer.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Start to summarize, Rachel.

RACHEL LYONS: We have safety provisions out at meat processing plants. We already have City provisions for in-store, but that crucial moment from store to consumer is without a ton of protections. We want to ensure that food originating from grocery stores is safely delivered to the front doors of consumers everywhere and ensure that whatever we do require is the burden and the funding comes from the employer to provide food safety training and proper equipment to the drivers who deliver from store to home.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Rachel, can you summarize up? Can you sum up?

RACHEL LYONS: Yep. In conclusion, UFCW members urge this Committee and the Council to incorporate strong labor standards in these food policies, as well as fair wages and good food protections. Thank you so much for your time.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.

And now we're going back to Karen Karp. Thank you.

KAREN KARP: Thanks, everybody. And actually, I'm very glad that I'm going after Rachel today because my testimony actually supports one of her major points. I have really two major points to make. One is I wanted to bring up a specific element about food affordability and about the role of City food infrastructure to maintain food affordability. One of the reasons that food has become so expensive, both for consumers, but if we talk about buyers that buy in a commercial environment, is because the food system has become so concentrated over the last 50 years. And now, most buyers, specifically who are serving City agencies and other corporations and restaurants, hotels, etc., are unfortunately too frequently bypassing public infrastructure like the Hunts Point Market because they are part of a vertically integrated supply chain where companies are contracting with farmers for direct shipment to their warehouses, which too frequently do not exist in New York City or even in the New York City

metropolitan area, but in New Jersey, Connecticut,
etc., and then those same companies are creating
contracts with buyers, including institutional
buyers, including institutional food buyers in New
York City and elsewhere, with fixed prices. And so
there is very little room, there is no room actually
for negotiation of those prices because the food
system is concentrated and vertically integrated end
to end. The function of the Hunts Point Produce
Market in particular keeps an open environment of
competition available for food buyers. And there's
hundreds of buyers there every day, there's dozens of
vendors there every day selling food and competing
against each other for that food, keeping competition
alive.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.

Thank you.

KAREN KARP: Okay. Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: If you want to sum
up, go ahead. If you want to sum up. Go ahead. Yeah.

KAREN KARP: My second point echoing
Rachel's, which is the summary, is that the food
system needs more highly educated, highly trained
individuals, which will create good food jobs, which

will alleviate at least for the 9 percent of people that work in food in New York City to have better incomes, which will improve affordability for them.

So, in summary, I am fully in support of the renovation of the Hunts Point Produce Market with programmatic elements built in for education, training, innovation, incubation, energy resilience, etc. Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. Thank you very much.

Christopher Leon Johnson and Sharon Brown, and we're here to talk about the food infrastructure.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Ready? Yeah. Hello. Hello, Chairs Fariás and Chair Brewer. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson. I'm speaking in opposition to all New York City-owned food stores. Let me explain why. Because that concept is nothing but a communist, Soviet, Leninist, Marxist idea that was set up by the New York City DSA and Zohra Mahdani, who will not be mayor of New York City. Let's make that clear. We all know that Andrew Cuomo will be mayor of New York City. Let's make that

clear. I'm calling on the next mayor of New York
City, Andrew Cuomo, to reject all... wait. (CROSS-TALK)

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: This is a
government proceeding.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: You took a
picture of Cuomo. You took a picture of Cuomo.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: It's a government
proceeding. You have to stay on topic.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: I'm staying on
topic. I'm staying on topic.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: (INAUDIBLE)
staying on topic. You have to stay on topic.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: He's a
politician, right?

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: The food quality.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: There's a
difference between electoral politics and government
functionality. This is a government...

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yes.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Hearing where
we're solely talking about the Economic Development
Corporation Oversight and Investigation Committees...

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah. I'm doing that.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARIÁS: Focused on Food Infrastructure and Quality of Food in New York City so if you would like to make a comment on topic, you are allotted time.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: I am.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: You took a picture with him so let's get that. You took a picture, right? Let's go for it. You took a picture with him so let's keep that real. You took a picture with Andrew Cuomo. All right. So, but like I said, this is a bad idea for the City of New York. I'm calling on our next mayor to reject the proposal. This does nothing but benefit DSA. These corrupt unions like Unite Here 100, DC37, 32BJ. This benefits all the corrupt unions and let's keep this real. They're not going to hire people, regular people. They're going to hire their own people, the DSA and members, the little corrupt members of DC37 within the major unions to work those type of jobs. This is not going to benefit nobody at all within these City-owned food stores. Bottcher, I don't know what he's thinking. I don't know if that donut that he ate from

the string has gone to his head, but this is not going to work. City-owned food stores is nonsense. I call on the City to completely reject this notion (TIMER CHIME) and...

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Thanks for your testimony.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Thank you.
Thank you.

SHARON BROWN: Hello. My name is Sharon Brown. Before I get started, remember the hostages, release the hostages, let Yahweh's people go, defend Israel. Also, some of our hostages were starved because it's a food theme. Just remember our hostages. We have 59.

Okay. Homeless to homes and home gardens. We need to get people into homes, and then when we get people into homes, directly into homes without red tape, we can also start helping them make gardens so that they can sustain living in a home of their own, even plants and things in their house, and they can learn how to grow food, and it will be sustainable for them, not only to go places and get

food, but also to grow fruits, vegetables, and whatever kinds of foods they can grow in their home, and also in their backyard, front yard, or something like that. If we can try to get people into homes, veterans, military, homeless, we would be able to help them with food. I want, as I said before, I want to make not-for-profit restaurants and grocery stores, clothing stores, different kinds of chain stores, and people can go there for free. Of course, there are going to be regular stores where people purchase things, but we can have not-for-profit stores where people go to if they have some kind of need over time that is consistent regularly. If something arises, some kind of emergency, they can go to these kinds of stores and shop. They don't have to use money. They can come in and shop. We can find out what they need, and they, I don't know that everybody needs a referral because we can't have red tape, so (TIMER CHIME) I would like a store where people feel free to shop.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BREWER: We've now heard from everyone who has signed up to testify. If we inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify

in person, please visit the Sergeant's table and
complete a witness slip.

If we inadvertently missed anyone who
would like to testify virtually, please use the raise
hand function in Zoom, and a Member of our Staff will
call on you in the order of hands raised.

Okay. No one is coming forth.

So, I'd like to note again that written
testimony, which will be reviewed in full by
Committee Staff, may be submitted to the record up to
72 hours after the close of this hearing by emailing
it to testimony@council.nyc.gov, and I would like to
thank our wonderful Co-Chair, Council Member Amanda
Farías, and all Staff. Okay. [GAVEL]

CO-CHAIRPERSON FARÍAS: Thanks, Gale.

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 May 7, 2025