

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS, STATE &
FEDERAL LEGISLATION 1
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL
OPERATIONS, STATE &
FEDERAL LEGISLATION

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Wednesday, February 25, 2026

Start: 10:33 a.m.

Recess: 11:39 a.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - 8th Floor -
Hearing Room 3

B E F O R E: Hon. Gale A. Brewer, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Eric Dinowitz
Oswald J. Feliz
Ty Hankerson
Frank Morano
Althea V. Stevens
Susan Zhuang

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS, STATE &
FEDERAL LEGISLATION
A P P E A R A N C E S

Pauline Toole,
Commissioner of the Department of Records and
Information Services (DORIS)

Laura Ringelheim,
Executive Deputy Commissioner for Asset and
Property Management at the Department of
Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS)

Matthew Berk,
Assistant Commissioner for Planning,
Dispositions, and Property Management [in Real
Estate Services] at the Department of Citywide
Administrative Services (DCAS)

Jack Connors,
City Legislative Manager at Open New York

Alec Ferretti,
The Association of Professional Genealogists

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS, STATE &
FEDERAL LEGISLATION

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1 COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS, STATE &
2 FEDERAL LEGISLATION 3

3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Check one, two, check
4 one two, this is a prerecorded sound test for the
5 Committee on Governmental Operations, State & Federal
6 Legislation. Today's date is February 25, 2026, being
7 recorded in Hearing Room 3.

8 (PAUSE)

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, and
10 welcome to today's New York City Council Hearing for
11 the Committee on Governmental Operations, State &
12 Federal Legislation.

13 At this time, please silence all
14 electronic devices.

15 If you would like to testify, you must
16 fill out a witness slip with one of the Sergeant at
17 Arms.

18 Just a reminder, no one may approach the
19 dais at any time.

20 Chair, we are ready to begin.

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.
22 [GAVEL] I am Gale Brewer, City Council Member, and I
23 am honored to be here today. I am also very honored
24 that Council Member Stevens is here with us, and
25 Council Member Feliz is on Zoom.

1
2 We are here for the Committee on
3 Governmental Operations, State & Federal Legislation.

4 I want to welcome the representatives from the
5 Administration, members of the public, and, as I
6 indicated, two members of the City Council.

7 At today's hearing, we will be doing a
8 couple of things. First, we'll be having the second
9 discussion, we'll be talking with DCAS about the
10 oversight of vacant and underused City property. DCAS
11 manages 15 million square feet of city-owned
12 properties across the five boroughs. It is essential
13 that every square foot is used for the greatest
14 benefit for New Yorkers, whether that is for housing,
15 agency use, or even being leased out to private
16 tenants. And of course, my issue for bringing this is
17 that if you look at the storefronts around City Hall,
18 253 Broadway, and 280 Broadway, they're vacant, and
19 we'd love to have them be inhabited.

20 Both the current and former mayors used
21 executive orders to create a task force to review
22 unused or underused City property that could be
23 turned into housing, but there is no similar attempt
24 to leverage City property for non-housing purposes.
25 And there's currently no accurate way to determine

1 whether a city-owned property is completely vacant or
2 underutilized. The City-Owned and Leased Property,
3 known as the COLP dataset, is published by the
4 Department of City Planning but is based on data
5 provided by DCAS. It's supposed to provide this
6 information, but the data isn't particularly useful.
7 Each record in COLP is a unique use of a tax lot by
8 an agency. So if an agency has multiple uses for a
9 tax lot, there are multiple records for that agency.
10 The data also does not specify if a property is in
11 use but underutilized. And while COLP data does
12 identify properties with no use, it is not clear what
13 exactly this means.
14

15 I think we need a better understanding of
16 how DCAS is managing these city-owned properties so
17 we can ensure that they are being used for the
18 maximum benefit of New Yorkers.

19 Additionally, we'll be hearing three
20 pieces of legislation:

21 First, we will be hearing my bill,
22 Introduction Number 87, which will combine the
23 Archival Review Board and the Archives Reference and
24 Research Advisory Board into a Library and Archival
25 Review Advisory Board. The boards already hold joint

1 meetings and submit joint reports, so this should not
2 be a major change.
3

4 Second, we will also be hearing
5 Introduction Number 541, sponsored by Council Member
6 Feliz, which would require that whenever the City
7 acquires real property, if that property becomes
8 vacant, DCAS must lease or rent the property within
9 five years. That's his bill.

10 And Introduction Number 542, also
11 sponsored by Council member Feliz, would require DCAS
12 to report on the use or vacancy of space in city
13 buildings.

14 And I know that we will hear first from
15 the Department of Records, known as DORIS, because
16 that commissioner has another appointment.

17 I want to thank, from the Government
18 Operations Committee, Johari Frasier, Erica Cohen,
19 and Saiyemul Hamid, and my staff, always Shulamit
20 Puder, and everyone who made this possible. We've
21 also been joined by Council Member Frank Morano from
22 Staten Island, who is my buddy who went to the
23 Cardinals' inauguration with me. Thank you very much.
24
25

1
2 So now, without further ado, we will have
3 the swearing in of the participants from the agency
4 today. Thank you very much.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, we will now hear
6 testimony from the Administration. Before we begin, I
7 will administer the affirmation.

8 Panelists, please raise your right hand.
9 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
10 nothing but the truth before this committee and to
11 respond honestly to Council Member questions?

12 UNIDENTIFIED: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE)

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right, you may
14 begin when ready.

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Commissioner, go
16 ahead.

17 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: (UN-MIC'D)
18 (INAUDIBLE)

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: You have to push the
20 button to turn it on.

21 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: Turning it on, it's a
22 day for challenges, a day for challenge.

23 So good morning, Council Member Brewer
24 and Members of the Committee on Government
25 Operations. I'm Pauline Toole; I'm the Commissioner

1 of the City's Department of Records and Information
2 Services. I appreciate the opportunity to testify at
3 this hearing on Intro 87, which would amend the City
4 Charter to merge our two existing advisory boards at
5 the department.
6

7 As you know, DORIS is responsible for
8 three key government functions: establishing and
9 enforcing records, practices, and policies, providing
10 access to city government information, and preserving
11 the historical records of city government. We do this
12 through the three divisions, Municipal Records
13 Management, the Municipal Library, and the Municipal
14 Archives, with essential support from the Information
15 Technology, External Affairs, and Administration
16 units.

17 One of our advisory boards, the Archival
18 Reference and Research Advisory Board, was
19 established in 1977 when the agency was created. At
20 that time, the board played an active role in shaping
21 the new agency and met almost monthly. Now, 49 years
22 later, the board largely serves as a sounding board
23 around the agency's outreach initiatives.

24 The second board, the Archival Review
25 Board, was established in 2003 after former Mayor

1 Rudy Giuliani removed the mayoral records of his
2 administration from the City to have them processed
3 by outside consultants. The same Local Law that
4 established the board also created Charter procedures
5 that must be followed if an outside entity is
6 contracted to process historical city records. This
7 outsourcing can only occur if the commissioner
8 certifies that there is a necessity under
9 extraordinary circumstances.
10

11 Beginning in 2014, the boards have been
12 holding-- That's not right-- beginning in 2024, the
13 boards have been holding joint meetings. The most
14 recent annual report for Fiscal 25 was issued
15 jointly; the proposed local law codifies these
16 current practices, and it preserves the appointment
17 structure, giving both the mayor and council speaker
18 responsibilities and creating a combined nine-person
19 board with the mandate to advise the commissioner and
20 evaluate the management of both the archival and
21 library collections, which will provide oversight.

22 I want to publicly acknowledge that the
23 members of both boards have volunteered their time to
24 suggest improvements, review the agency's collection
25 processing plans, and report on activities from the

1 municipal archives and our external affairs
2 divisions. They are creative, thoughtful people, and
3 the agency has benefited from their insight.
4

5 DORIS strongly supports the proposed
6 Local Law, as do the members of the two advisory
7 boards. Combining the two existing advisory boards
8 into a smaller board will be efficient and still
9 serve the guidance and oversight purposes.

10 I'd be happy to answer any questions
11 anyone may have. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.
13 I'm very partial to the records of this agency. So
14 I'm glad to hear about this. Everybody knows the
15 story, but I want to make sure everybody hears it,
16 which is that when I was in the City Council before,
17 I think some guy by the name of Bloomberg, and I
18 liked Mayor Bloomberg, but he decided he wasn't going
19 to keep DORIS. It was going to be merged with DCAS.
20 Well, I was head of Government Operations at that
21 point, and I had a heart attack. And then de Blasio
22 came in, and I made damn sure that DORIS stayed
23 separate. I just want everybody to know that story
24 because it was done with the assistance of the
25 archivists, of whom there are many. And if you're an

1
2 archivist, not like I am, they're the most fabulous
3 people who do care about our history. So I just, I
4 think, Frank, you enjoy that story.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Absolutely.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Anyway, so my
7 question is, I think you just sent in some reports, I
8 just was wondering if you could evaluate or just let
9 us know what they said. I have not had a chance to
10 read them because I think they just came in.

11 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: When are they
13 supposed to come in? How would it change in the
14 future?

15 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: Well, the language
16 wasn't clear in the Charter as to whether the report
17 should be issued on a fiscal or calendar year basis.
18 And some time ago, one of the boards was doing
19 calendar year, and one of the boards was doing fiscal
20 year. And when we began combining, we decided to do a
21 fiscal year. So the joint annual report was just
22 submitted, and it covers the processing work in the
23 municipal archives. It shows the number and the
24 quantity of records acquired by the archives in the
25 fiscal year, which was over 1,000 cubic feet and 1.6

1 terabytes of data. It reviews the digitization work
2 we're doing. A big project at the agency is making
3 the historical records more generally available to
4 the public. So we do that by digitizing things. That
5 is not just putting a stack of papers in a printer,
6 pushing a button, and turning them into PDFs. We have
7 this kind of sophisticated software that's meant for
8 historical preservation. So, it renders the document
9 to a very high resolution, and we digitized and made
10 available more than 101,000 records on our Vital
11 Records site, which is used around the world and
12 provides people who are interested in family history
13 with 13 million records. Eventually, we're on--that's
14 our goal, and they're free, and they're downloadable,
15 and they're beautiful. We digitize the 1890 Police
16 Census, which is a unique document. Most census data
17 from 1890 was destroyed in a fire. So this New York
18 reference tool is uniquely valuable. And we began
19 working on Mayor David Dinkins' photograph
20 collection, which is, I don't want to say a pet
21 project, but it is something that we're really trying
22 to focus on. And with Mayor Dinkins, as with other
23 mayors, so much of the collection documents the
24 mayor's activities, but it also documents what was
25

1 going on elsewhere in the city. And the people in the
2 photographs aren't always named. So part of the
3 project is digitizing it, but then engaging with
4 people who were in that administration to help
5 identify the other personnel in photos, which is
6 really kind of a fun thing.
7

8 Anyhow, it goes on, it talks about this
9 great grant we got from the federal government to
10 preserve the Brooklyn Bridge collection, of which
11 there are more than 10,000 drawings, and they're
12 beautiful. A section of them, seven of them, were
13 just on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art
14 (INAUDIBLE) like extraordinary works.

15 And then, we have a grant to process and
16 digitize the Commission on Human Rights records.
17 That's a very valuable collection with national
18 significance. And so part of that is doing the
19 archival work of processing and digitizing, and then
20 part of that is figuring out how to engage
21 communities around the work of that commission and
22 its predecessors—which were established starting
23 with La Guardia and then Wagner and then eventually
24 as the Commission.
25

1 And then you know, our small staff, you
2 know, it provides research services to patrons, and
3 they responded to over 7,000 requests in the year and
4 dealt with over 2,000 on-site visitors and
5 digitized... just for on-demand research, let's say
6 someone is in Harbor Beach, Michigan and they want a
7 record about New York City and they e-mail back and
8 forth. We'll digitize and produce that. And then it
9 goes on and talks about the really wonderful public
10 programs that the agency has organized over the
11 years, including multiple Lunch and Learns per month
12 and a project that we initiated that's called
13 Neighborhood Stories, which interviews residents of
14 the city, about their history, they're not full oral
15 histories, but they take people's remembrances and we
16 have those, uh, we're about to launch a whole website
17 of them, and the goal is those individual stories
18 will connect at some point with government decisions
19 documented in the historical records. So there really
20 is a Nexus, and that is a way for us to also engage
21 communities that are generally not thought to be
22 interested in government records because the records
23 document what happened to their streets, what
24
25

1 happened to the schools, et cetera, et cetera. And
2 this is a way to make that collection.
3

4 So those are the highlights of the
5 report.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you. That's
7 fabulous, and I'll look forward to reading it.

8 The other issue, of course, is that the
9 boards meeting together now, are all of the slots
10 filled? Are there people who have certain expertise
11 that need to be on it? How is the committee
12 comprised? Thank you.

13 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: Well, the Archival
14 Reference Review Advisory Board doesn't have any
15 criteria for its membership, but our goal was to have
16 it represent the diversity of the city, ensuring
17 there were representatives from every borough, uh,
18 bring on people who were interested in history and
19 government, and try to use them to explore ways of
20 presenting historical records.

21 The Archival Review Board does have
22 requirements, and that has two appointments by the
23 Speaker, two appointments by the Mayor. Both of those
24 positions have been filled, one by the deputy counsel
25 to the Mayor and the other by an archivist, and then

1 the Speaker has a Records Manager Archivist
2 representative, who is a staff member of the Council
3 and a vacant appointment.
4

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. So it's four
6 people, is what you're saying?

7 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: Yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay.

9 And the other question is, are there,
10 like, terms, or is it just at will? How long do these
11 people serve, or is it not (INAUDIBLE)...

12 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: They serve until
13 they're replaced... (CROSS-TALK)

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, so it's at
15 will...

16 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: But the ARB members
17 have four-year terms, and the archive-- ARRAB members
18 can serve in perpetuity.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. And so, how
20 would that best be for the future? How would you
21 think it would work for the future if we're...

22 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: Well, the proposed
23 legislation has four-year terms...

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And I want to know
25 that's okay with you?

2 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: Well, that is okay.

3 At one point, we talked about a staggered
4 implementation so that not everyone would leave at
5 the same time. Because as the board gets, you know,
6 established anew, if everyone's appointed at the same
7 time, that creates a level of turnover that's not
8 necessarily ideal.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: That's why I was
10 asking.

11 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: So I think, you know,
12 if you have half of the people appointed for four
13 years and half appointed for two, you'll have an
14 ongoing advisory presence.

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Who is the, uh...

16 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: Yeah, the
17 knowledge...

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: sort of intellectual
19 property of people's knowledge.

20 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: Exactly.

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. And do they
22 consult with outside-- Do they have outside speakers
23 come and speak, or is it mostly just looking at what
24 is being presented to them by your wonderful agency?
25 How does that work?

1
2 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: It's all been what
3 we've presented. And then, if board members have
4 questions, we work those through.

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.

6 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: Thank you. Once
7 again, I apologize for the delay.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Not your fault. The
9 line was very long downstairs. Thank you.

10 COMMISSIONER TOOLE: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So now we'd love to
12 hear from DCAS.

13 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
14 Thank you. Good morning, Chair Brewer and Members of
15 the Committee on Governmental Operations, State and
16 Federal Legislation. My name is Laura Ringelheim, and
17 I'm the Executive Deputy Commissioner for Asset and
18 Property Management at the Department of Citywide
19 Administrative Services, commonly known as DCAS. And
20 I'm joined by my colleague, Matthew Berk, Assistant
21 Commissioner for Planning, Dispositions, and Property
22 Management in the Real Estate Services Line of
23 Service.

24 I'd like to thank you for the opportunity
25 to come before you and discuss surplus city-owned

1
2 real estate, in particular the DCAS surplus
3 portfolio.

4 As you know, DCAS is responsible for
5 providing agencies with the real estate they need to
6 support their operations. DCAS also has its own
7 portfolio of property, which totals approximately
8 1,800 tax lots, including over 55 court and multi-
9 agency office buildings, 400 long and short-term
10 lease agreements, 500 lots with unique
11 characteristics, and 900 lots with limited
12 marketability. And while this number may sound like a
13 large and significant amount of property, I would
14 like to provide some details about the portfolio, its
15 challenges, and its opportunities.

16 So in 1996, when tax foreclosure
17 processes in New York came to an end, DCAS had
18 approximately 11,000 tax lots in its portfolio. And
19 there were rigorous efforts to relocate these
20 properties to better benefit the City. And as a
21 result, many were allocated towards new parks,
22 affordable housing, economic development, and other
23 City priorities—others were sold through public
24 auctions, and the vast majority of surplus properties
25 that we are now left with have limited marketability

1 and largely do not meet the operational needs of the
2 City.

3
4 The lots in our surplus portfolio include
5 wetlands, land underwater, and mapped streets
6 totaling over 500 lots. In addition to that, the
7 portfolio contains sliver lots, access ways, and
8 interior lots, which have also limited marketability.
9 For these limited market properties, which total over
10 900 tax lots, we have what we call our SAIL Away
11 (Slivers, Accessways and Interior Lots) Program,
12 which allows DCAS to directly dispose of these
13 undevelopable properties to abutting property owners.
14 So picture a one-foot by 100-foot deep strip between
15 two brownstones, and that is the prototypical image
16 of our sliver lots. However, interest from an
17 adjacent owner is needed for a sale, and since the
18 inception of SAIL Away in 2010, DCAS has offered for
19 sale around 100 lots through this program and sold 39
20 of those lots, totaling \$6 million in revenue.

21 In addition, DCAS administers over 400
22 revenue-generating long and short-term agreements for
23 the private use of City property. We also have
24 properties that are on hold for future use by other
25 agencies, including for HPD and EDC, for affordable

1 housing and economic development projects. Tenants
2 vary from small and medium-sized businesses to
3 community benefit organizations and homeowners, and
4 uses range from retail stores and restaurants to
5 community facilities to industrial ground leases and
6 accessory residential uses. This portfolio generates
7 over \$35 million in annual revenue for the City.
8

9 In addition to these mostly vacant lots,
10 DCAS has a portfolio of approximately 10 small
11 surplus buildings that are currently unused. These
12 buildings average 12,000 square feet, but many are
13 smaller than 3,000 square feet, and all have capital
14 needs to be brought into a state of good repair for
15 use.

16 We have been working with partners,
17 including some of the City Council, to activate these
18 buildings through ULURP and subsequent public
19 auctions. Before any public auctions, however, DCAS
20 makes an offering to the properties one last time to
21 City agencies for possible reuse. Specifically, DCAS
22 has worked with HPD to review many of these sites for
23 housing opportunities, and we look forward to
24 continuing these conversations with our Council
25

1
2 partners that will lead to opportunities for public
3 activation of sites.

4 Throughout the years, DCAS has
5 consistently worked with agencies to identify
6 properties suitable for their operational needs, as
7 well as for strategic dispositions for housing and
8 economic development by way of example. Each agency
9 has access to the DCAS database of properties, and
10 vetting of sites for future uses is an ongoing
11 collaborative effort. When new properties are
12 surrendered to DCAS as surplus, a review is
13 conducted, and in many cases, DCAS offers the
14 property to agencies for potential reuse. When a
15 property is found that meets an agency's need, DCAS
16 works with them to transfer that property to that
17 agency.

18 Despite the challenges, DCAS has been and
19 is making tremendous efforts to activate these
20 properties. It's a priority of the Administration to
21 ensure we're using properties for housing while also
22 providing essential City services. DCAS is part of
23 the Land Inventory Fast Track Task Force (the "LIFT
24 Task Force") with the Mayor's Office and other agency
25 partners.

1
2 Separately, DCAS has been reviewing its
3 portfolio for suitable sites for mayoral priorities
4 and recently was successfully partnered with the New
5 York City Small Business Services and the New York
6 City Department of Cultural Affairs to locate
7 temporary artist studios in vacant retail spaces,
8 such as 2 Lafayette Street. Aside from this location,
9 DCAS is currently evaluating future opportunities for
10 two retail spaces located at 5th Avenue and 86th
11 Street in the Bay Ridge Municipal Garage in Brooklyn.

12 With regard to Intro 542, DCAS shares the
13 desire to make data available for public consumption
14 in the most usable and intelligible format. We would
15 like to point out that much of the data is already
16 available, published by the City, and is updated on
17 Open Data.

18 DCAS and City Planning put forth the COLP
19 City Owned and Leased Property data set on Open Data,
20 which contains information on City ownership or lease
21 status and agency use. In addition, City Planning
22 puts out the PLUTO data set that contains detailed
23 information about each tax lot. And even though some
24 of this data may be published in different formats
25 and some data points may present challenges to

1
2 generate, we look forward to engaging in conversation
3 to ensure that the properties are put to the most
4 productive use in the most efficient manner.

5 In addition, regarding Intro 541, DCAS
6 supports the intent of the bill, and we share the
7 desire to ensure vacant City properties are used in
8 the most productive way possible. However, given the
9 unique characteristics of inherent limitations in the
10 DCAS surplus portfolio, as outlined in my testimony,
11 there are many properties that are inappropriate or
12 impractical for leasing for traditional uses.
13 Moreover, there's a lack of interest from the private
14 sector to lease certain of these properties.
15 Therefore, we look forward to working with you on
16 creative strategies for portfolio activation and
17 leasing. And we're always looking critically at our
18 portfolio to come up with creative solutions for
19 activation of these unique properties.

20 With that, we welcome any questions or
21 comments you may have.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: I have a number of
23 questions (BACKGROUND NOISE)

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Go ahead...
25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: questions related
3 to your testimony. I'll begin, though, with one
4 that's not. I noticed yesterday that-- yesterday was
5 the first Stated Meeting that we've had since
6 October, where there was no borough flag flying over
7 City Hall. Do you have any insight as to why the
8 borough flag is not flying anymore? That was one of
9 Commissioner Molina's achievements.

10 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
11 I don't know, but we will look into it...

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: No? Great.

13 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
14 And get back to you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you very
16 much.

17 Talking about the 1,800 lots you alluded
18 to in your testimony, you mentioned 900 with limited
19 marketability, 500 wetlands or underwater, 400 lease
20 agreements, and 10 vacant buildings. Of the 1,800
21 lots, how many are revenue-generating today versus
22 sitting completely idle?

23 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
24 So 400 are revenue-generating—400. So, just to
25 clarify this, the 500 tax lots that are underwater

1
2 literally are underwater wetlands. So there's really
3 no opportunity... (CROSS-TALK)

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Got it.

5 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
6 In most of those cases, to generate revenue from
7 those lots.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Of the 900 lots
9 that were deemed to have limited marketability, when
10 was the last time each was independently evaluated
11 for alternative use?

12 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
13 So we constantly reevaluate the entire surplus
14 portfolio. So, particularly for SAIL Away, for which
15 I mentioned those lots, we are continuously looking
16 at them to see and putting out for offer if any of
17 the abutting land owners would like to purchase them.
18 I would say routinely they're looked at again, these
19 are sliver lots or interior access ways or other
20 places that not a lot of people would want, and
21 occasionally we do get somebody who's interested in
22 buying them.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: You know, I
24 learned a lot about SAIL Away through your testimony,
25 which I confess I didn't know much about before. But

1
2 you mentioned \$35 million in annual revenue and that
3 SAIL Away sold 39 lots for \$6 million since 2010.
4 Since the Sale Away program began in 2010, only 39
5 lots have been sold, that average is fewer than three
6 per year. What's preventing faster disposition?

7 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

8 I will have my colleague Matt take that question.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: Thank you,
10 Council Member.

11 It's the interest from the abutting
12 property owners that is the most important piece to
13 convey these properties. If someone isn't interested
14 in buying, let's say a little sliver of their
15 backyard-- if someone isn't interested in buying a
16 little sliver of their backyard, then we can't
17 unfortunately force the sale. So it's something that
18 we have to hold on to and wait for a future use or
19 opportunity.

20 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: They get to use it
21 for free. Why should they pay?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: (LAUGHS) Exactly.
23 I'm wondering if you've evaluated bundling limited
24 market lots for auction rather than relying just on
25 the adjacent owners?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: Before SAIL

1 Away became a program in the City Charter in 2010,
2
3 the practice was to offer those properties through
4
5 public auction. But unfortunately, what we found is
6
7 that sometimes people buy properties on speculation,
8
9 they haven't seen the property and they're buying a
10
11 piece of someone's, let's say, corner of their
12
13 building. So that is why we created the SAIL Away
14
15 program to allow for those sales directly to the
16
17 abutting property owners, which are the most
18
19 appropriate users for those properties.

20
21 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Two final
22
23 questions, if I may Chair? In a hybrid work
24
25 environment, how much of the City's office footprint
is currently underutilized and have we reduced our
leased space accordingly?

26
27 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
28
29 So that was another project that we began in the last
30
31 administration, but continue to work with our agency
32
33 partners to really analyze what's being used and
34
35 where can we either relinquish lease space or
36
37 consolidate. I don't have the exact figures at this
38
39 point of where we've been able to consolidate, but we
40
41 can also get back to you on that. And as far as the,

1 the, you know, having telework now as an option,
2 we're also looking in ways to more efficiently use
3 space. So if someone is not sitting at a desk, how
4 can we use that real estate better?
5

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: You mentioned
7 Brooklyn, specifically Bay Ridge and obviously
8 Manhattan—nothing about my borough in Staten Island.
9 I'm wondering if you can provide a borough by borough
10 breakdown of surplus or underused City property, and
11 specifically how many are located in Staten Island.
12 Are there city-owned properties, for instance, on
13 Staten Island that have been vacant for more than
14 five years?

15 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
16 Well, I can tell you off the top of my head that 55
17 Stuyvesant had been vacant. It was an EDC project
18 that they RFP'd. And that didn't go through, but now
19 it is part of a new court redevelopment project.
20 Apart from that, I think we have a community...

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: Well, as far
22 as vacant lots go in Staten Island, there are many
23 properties in that borough that are wetlands, land
24 underwater, also properties that were acquired for
25 resiliency purposes that are intended to be vacant

1 for the foreseeable future. So though there's a large
2 chunk of those properties. But as far as buildings
3 go, 55 Stuyvesant is definitely one that's undergoing
4 ULURP right now for active reuse. And there are a
5 couple of other small buildings that I think are
6 pending decisions on future use—one is 67 Targee
7 Street, the former Criminal Court, and then the rest
8 are just the surplus portfolio.

10 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

11 Which we can provide you with a list of.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: That would be

13 great. Thank you very much.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you.

15 Of course, my question would be the
16 buildings around City Hall. I'm delighted that the
17 last administration did a much better job of the City
18 Store. I'm not about the City Store, but I was
19 wondering about the addresses I gave you, plus the
20 future for 2 Lafayette Street, and anything else that
21 is around here. Because it's hard to have a
22 streetscape that's active and then complain, as
23 people do in my area—"How come so many vacant stores,
24 Gale?" And yet here's the City doing the same? So,
25 how are we activating these stores?

EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

1 So, for 253 Broadway, which you had mentioned, that
2 retail storefront is not city-owned space; it's a
3 private landlord, and the City owns a cooperative
4 share of its office space in that building. So it's a
5 private landlord that has the tenants there. So we're
6 not able to fill it unless we become a lease tenant,
7 which is actually what has happened at 280 Broadway.
8 We do lease that space. The City is an all-city-owned
9 building as part of an economic development project
10 in the 80s, and the ground floor retail space was
11 leased. We do lease back two of those spaces, and the
12 others are private tenants. But again, the landlord
13 is responsible for filling its vacancies. We don't
14 have any jurisdiction over that. 2 Lafayette, on the
15 other hand, I think we had, during the last
16 administration, done a couple of auctions. Those were
17 not successful, but we would love to either use an
18 auction mechanism or look again for a City need that
19 might be able to use that space, or I think we
20 temporarily had Cultural Affairs and an art exhibit
21 there, which was a fantastic use of the space. So any
22 of those are up for grabs, concession agreements,
23
24
25

1 we're always looking for new ways to use that
2 property.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, 2 Lafayette,
5 obviously, we're talking about the storefront and the
6 entire building, or just the storefront?

7 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
8 Just the storefront.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: But I guess what I'm
10 saying about 253 and 280, we all need to put some
11 pressure on whoever the owner is. Because people in
12 the neighborhood think it is owned by the City. So
13 you are blamed for lousy management of commercial
14 space.

15 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
16 Right, we...

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So are we doing
18 anything to put some-- Can we help with some pressure
19 on these owners? It is really horrible to have that
20 space—homeless, garbage, filth, et cetera.

21 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
22 We definitely can talk to landlords and see if
23 there's anything we can do to help them lease that
24 space. I think, you know, we at least got the
25

1 scaffolding down around 253, which makes the space
2 more attractive.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Right.

5 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
6 And anything else that we can do to help, you know,
7 clean up the space, the area in front of the space.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: All right, I mean, I
9 think there should be a priority just because of the,
10 you know, I'm a believer that you can do all you can
11 for the, you know, people of the city of New York.
12 But if you have a face that is not what people think
13 it should be, then the government is blamed and not
14 thought about as productively as one would think. So
15 offline, I may try to get the names of those owners
16 and put my own pressure on them.

17 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
18 Okay.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: The courthouses—when
20 I was head of Oversight and Investigation last term,
21 we did go to the Bronx courthouse. Those are all your
22 courthouses. Leaks everywhere. I know it's a funding
23 issue, but it's hard for the people who are visiting
24 defendants, judges, staff, et cetera. So I'm just
25 wondering if the Bronx courthouse is in the worst

1 shape? I think Manhattan also has some problems, et
2 cetera. So what are we doing about courthouses in
3 general? Because obviously, the court work is the
4 State. But you own the buildings.
5

6 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

7 Correct. And we work closely with the Office of Court
8 Administration for funding needs and repairs to those
9 buildings. But, from the last time-- I think I had
10 testified again about those courthouses, there is
11 constant remediation work happening. I could not tell
12 you today as to what has been done over the past year
13 or two, but we can certainly get back to you on our
14 ongoing efforts, including roof repairs, facade work,
15 or many of those projects that were ongoing a few
16 years ago and may have been completed.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, that would be
18 helpful to know, particularly in the Bronx, which
19 would seem to be the worst in terms of leaks, to be
20 specific.

21 My other question is that you indicate on
22 the website that most of the properties for lease are
23 vacant lots, as we heard earlier, used by property
24 owners. Wouldn't it be possible that-- I think some
25 of these are near houses of worship? I know for

1 instance that's a place that there are lots of them.

2 I agree with you that it makes no sense to have

3 somebody from another location just look at a map and

4 say, "Let's bid on this." So I have been through this

5 before, so I feel strongly that what you're doing is

6 correct. But is there some way so that you get them

7 off of your list to have the adjacent person take it

8 over, even for free? So that gets off of your-- in

9 some cases, you might get some property taxes out of

10 it, I don't know. Sometimes it's next to a faith-

11 based, therefore it would not be property tax

12 eligible. But looking at this, it seems to me there

13 are some very small slivers. I know one park in my

14 area between two brownstones, they're now using it as

15 a park, a community garden type thing. It's working

16 out really well. I guess it was, you know, I don't

17 know if it was yours or Parks, but it's the same idea

18 — get it off of my rolls and give it to the block

19 association and they'll do something with it.

20 So I just didn't know if you have a for

21 free or a dollar, or does it always have to be sold?

22 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

23 No, I think you hit the nail on the head. I mean,

24 part of it is property taxes, right? Sometimes they

1 don't want to acquire even for free, but the adjacent
2 landowner might not want to acquire that because then
3 that becomes part of their tax liability when they
4 might have use of it at no cost to them.

5
6 But, I think, particularly the
7 suggestions that you made, if we do have any adjacent
8 to houses worship, or we can explore other options,
9 but I think we do have some flexibility in terms of
10 how we, you know, encourage sales of those
11 properties.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I think if you were
13 to provide the borough base, you can do Staten
14 Island, I can do Manhattan, we can figure out I'd be-
15 - between the two of us, if there is some solution so
16 that they are actually used by the adjacent in a
17 productive manner.

18 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
19 We can definitely do that... (CROSS-TALK)

20 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Even if you get a
21 little bit of property tax, that would be helpful.

22 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
23 Yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So of the 55, city-
25 owned buildings at DCAS manages, how many are either

1
2 vacant or are partial vacancies? Where are the
3 vacancies located?

4 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

5 There are almost no vacancies in the 55
6 buildings that we manage. The only ones that come to
7 mind are things like the 9th floor of 1 Centre
8 Street, which is currently undergoing massive capital
9 construction to move an agency in there, and the same
10 with the 25th floor. But routinely we are, I want to
11 say, constantly inspecting whatever we can or asking
12 our agency partners to complete floor plans so we can
13 ensure that they're using their space to the max.
14 And, particularly, a new administration will come in,
15 and they'll have new needs for agencies or expansion
16 of agencies, and we always look first at what is
17 available. But there isn't for the City, especially
18 for office space; courts have jurisdiction of their
19 own space, but for our back office space, that's
20 constantly under review. So very little space is
21 vacant unless it's under construction.

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, picking up on my
23 colleague's question. So I guess what you're doing is
24 a systematic account of the properties to determine
25 which ones are obviously vacant, but more

1 importantly, underutilized. And then I assume you
2 obviously have where you're renting, which is not
3 necessarily the same thing we're talking about. But
4 if you're renting and you want to bring people back
5 because of the savings to a city-owned building,
6 obviously, you have long-term rentals. So you can't
7 just end the rental at a particular moment. But how
8 are you looking at this portfolio? Because there are,
9 I mean, I know when I go to DSS, it's a beautiful
10 building, brand new down on Greenwich Street, of
11 course. So, how do you look at some of these agencies
12 and try to figure out ways that we can save money?

14 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
15 For both.... (CROSS-TALK)

16 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: long term because
17 it's not going to happen tomorrow.

18 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
19 Sure, sure. For both least and city-owned sites, we
20 have now, after a project that was starting in the
21 middle of de Blasio's administration, gotten floor
22 plans and as-built drawings of what each floor looks
23 like. So each desk is accounted for. And those are
24 routinely filled out by the agencies, indicating
25 occupancy. And to update that, you know, this was an

1 ongoing effort since 2018, and we really finished
2 getting all the floor plans into our new archivist
3 system.
4

5 So now we have the ability to routinely
6 have the agencies certify how many people are at how
7 many desks, and... (CROSS-TALK)

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: They probably lie a
9 little bit because they want some space.

10 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
11 They probably do a little bit. We try to encourage,
12 you know, honesty, or you know, kind of a carrot
13 stick approach, especially where PEGS might come up,
14 you know, if they can relinquish office space and
15 take the credit for that. And, we as DCAS, being the
16 agency that leases for other agencies, also look at
17 when leases are going to expire and what's an
18 expensive lease, and what we can get out of, and
19 where we can consolidate.

20 So, right, it doesn't happen overnight,
21 but-- and these are the results I don't have for you
22 yet, what we have been able to give up or what's in
23 the plan to give up that we won't need to keep that
24 much volume of office space, especially...
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So you have-- do you
3 know how much leased space you have just generally?

4 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
5 We have about 27 million square feet, and that's
6 both... (CROSS-TALK)

7 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: (INAUDIBLE)

8 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
9 of leased-- that's both office space and other space,
10 including industrial or parking. About 60% is office
11 and 40% other.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: 60/40, okay.

13 The other question I have is, I know we
14 talked about the courts, but do you know where you
15 need repairs in all of your different buildings? Do
16 you keep track of that? Obviously, the courts are the
17 ones that I've heard about the most.

18 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
19 Sure, sure. Well, we do have a ticketing system. So
20 we do keep track. Everything is put through the
21 archivist ticketing system for work orders and
22 repairs. That's the way we keep track of repairs that
23 have been done and what's outstanding.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And that would be in
3 your buildings in particular, not the leased ones,
4 obviously?

5 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
6 Correct.

7 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: How do you work with
8 the communities to determine if you're moving forward
9 with salvaging these buildings for future use? I
10 noticed in your testimony that you did talk about
11 working with the community. How do you, how does DCAS
12 do that if at all?

13 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
14 Sure, Matt, you want to take that one?

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: Sure. So, in
16 order to repurpose a building for a new government
17 use and spend capital funds, site selection ULURP
18 would be required. So that's our opportunity to
19 engage with the public, the community, council
20 members like yourself, and borough presidents in
21 order to get the feedback needed and get the
22 approvals to change the use and set up new government
23 operations.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay.
25

1
2 And in terms of, again, sort of back to
3 this issue of underutilized properties, that again,
4 is part of a database, or is that something you do
5 internally?

6 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

7 Also part of the database.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Part of the database,
9 okay.

10 There are some issues. Are you looking
11 at the database? Between Pluto and your database, it
12 is hard sometimes to compare apples to apples. Are
13 you looking at that issue? Yes, do you want to...

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: Yes...

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Is that your
16 specialty?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: Yes, we
18 definitely have data experts within DCAS Real Estate
19 Services. We also have a very adept IT team that
20 knows both the business end of it as well as the data
21 pieces behind it. So we do a lot of synthesizing of
22 data in order to make recommendations and decisions
23 to activate properties and put them to the best use.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, because it's
25 hard sometimes to figure out exactly what the use is,

1
2 but given the two databases that you have to look at
3 in order to determine that, are you aware of that?

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: We are
5 definitely aware of a little nuance in the data, the
6 one-to-one relationship versus the one-to-many or
7 many-to-many relationship. And that is something we
8 are always working on with our IT group to understand
9 the data.

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Maybe Lisa can help
11 you (UNINTELLIGIBLE). I've noticed that she
12 (UNINTELLIGIBLE) just so you know.

13 My question is-- back again to this issue
14 of efficiency of the space we have within the
15 building, what are the incentives? In other words,
16 with the agencies, how do you incentivize them?
17 Obviously, there is a little bit of self-referral,
18 but how do you incentivize them to use the space
19 within their building effectively and not
20 overcompensate? I should say. The PEG would help. Are
21 there any other methods of doing that?

22 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

23 I think we're always looking at that
24 because it is hard to police that volume of square
25 footage of space without having the agencies

1 incentivized to really efficiently use that space.

2 Besides the PEGs, I think we do want to explore other
3 options.
4

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I've been, I won't
6 give names, but I've been in agencies recently, and
7 I've been surprised at the amount of space they have,
8 and I didn't see too many people there. I'm just
9 saying, and this is city space, not rental, so I'm
10 just pointing out...

11 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
12 Sure.

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: that there could be
14 more efficiency.

15 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
16 Well, we'll always take...

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I'm not giving you
18 the list, no.

19 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
20 (LAUGHS) Okay. That's what I was just going to ask
21 you for.

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So what is a Citywide
23 Space Saving Task Force? Who's on it, when does it
24 meet, what are the recommendations, et cetera? You
25 mentioned that in your testimony.

EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

1 Yes. So at the moment, we work closely with OMB and
2 DCAS. And, that really is the core of who constitutes
3 the Space Savings Committee, but we also work closely
4 with City Hall because it really takes the whole
5 village and everybody being on the same page in order
6 to maximize the savings. I think, you know, that
7 ongoing effort will continue, and we'll try to make
8 it stronger and figure out a way to incentivize the
9 agencies.
10
11

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And maybe make it
13 more transparent with some of your databases that
14 would be helpful for the public.

15 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
16 Sure.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: We obviously were
18 part of the migrant crisis. I supported a lot of what
19 the City did because I feel strongly about these
20 families, who, in some cases, were still here. But
21 they came and went in large numbers. So, were you
22 part of the leasing situation for either DHS or H+H
23 (Health + Hospitals), et cetera? Have all of those
24 properties been returned, those that are no longer
25 part of the City's portfolio? How does that look

1 today? Because that is a question that nobody really
2 knows the answer to.

3 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

4 So I cannot answer that myself today. I wasn't part
5 of it at the time that some of those agreements were
6 entered into. I mean, my understanding is many were
7 H+H, and...

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And they did their

9 own leasing (INAUDIBLE)...

10 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

11 Okay, I would have to get back to you on that. I know
12 DCAS played a role in some of the licenses. But I
13 would have to get back to you on what still exists
14 and what the status is.

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: (UNINTELLIGIBLE) or

16 did H... Like the hotels, for instance, H+H did that
17 leasing? You did that leasing? Or a combination of
18 it, depending?

19 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

20 I believe so. But I was not in the Real Estate
21 (INAUDIBLE) Service at the time, so I would have to
22 look into that.

23 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: The reason I ask is

24 that I think Brukner is the last building that has
25

1 migrants in it. I was in it maybe seven or eight
2 months ago. There were 2,000 men there. I don't know
3 whose building that is, whether it's yours or
4 privately owned. I don't. It is a very large complex.

5 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

6 I think Bruckner might be a DCAS license, but I would
7 have to look into that.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, that would be

9 something to know. I guess what I am trying to find
10 out is, are all the licenses finished? Are we still
11 paying money on some of these buildings? What is the
12 revenue situation, or I would say cost, if at all?

13 It's hard to keep track.

14 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

15 Okay. We could...

16 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I mean, I have two in

17 my districts that are vacant. I assumed they were
18 H+H. I assume that nobody is still paying rent on it.
19 I don't know. That would be helpful to know.

20 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

21 Okay.

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. I think you

23 feel that there's like a 1% vacancy rate on your
24

1 buildings, or is that something that's hard to
2 determine in terms of vacancies?

3 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

4 Are you talking about commercial?

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Commercial...

6 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

7 Commercial? And the buildings? Well, we...

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: One, I mean both-- I
9 am interested because you said that the owner of the
10 commercial, which is typical in private buildings
11 too, I have to say, a different owner upstairs, and
12 the commercial sponsor, many times, it may not be
13 your situation, keeps the commercial, that happens.
14 So my question is, do you have other commercials
15 around the city that are in that situation, like 253
16 and 280, with commercial that is vacant because the
17 owner is not renting, and maybe you have the space
18 upstairs, and then-- so that would be one question.
19 And then also, just generally in your buildings, is
20 it a very low vacancy rate? I mean, a municipal
21 building would be an example, for instance. I assume
22 that it's a low vacancy rate at the municipal
23 buildings.
24

1
2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Very low vacancy rate
3 there—2 Lafayette we know is vacant, I mentioned in
4 my testimony, Bay Ridge. Matt, do we have any others?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: Aside from
6 280 Broadway, which is under long term lease to a
7 private tenant until 2048, the only other retail
8 spaces that we have are 2 Lafayette Street, which the
9 city owns, as we mentioned, and there are three DCAS
10 retail spaces at the Bay Ridge Municipal Garage. Two
11 of those are currently vacant.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, 280 you said is
13 in the hands of that commercial owner until 2048?

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: Correct

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: 238. Okay. And it's
16 going to be vacant till then, is what we're thinking?

17 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
18 Hopefully not.

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: Hopefully
20 not, right? They have various different retail
21 spaces. I know they have had tenants over the
22 years...

23 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yeah, but it's vacant
24 right now. I'm just saying.

1 All right, when COLP, is that how you
2 pronounce it? List of properties having no use? What
3 exactly does that mean? Because again, this is that
4 data issue. What does that mean when COLP has in the
5 database the fact that it-- has no use, in other
6 words that might be the those properties that you
7 feel are underwater or have-- what does no use mean
8 in that database?
9

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: Thank you
11 for the clarification. It means just that, that there
12 is no active use by the City or any of its tenants or
13 anything like that. So the property is just vacant
14 with no day to day use. An example of that could be a
15 wetland property or a resiliency property that was
16 acquired to be vacant.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. And that's
18 where that large number comes-- But many of them, as
19 you suggested, are underwater or in a situation where
20 they can't be used. Okay, that's what that means.

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: Correct.

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: That makes sense.

23 Real estate deals take a while, two to
24 three years usually. That's at least probably the
25 minimum. Do you think it is hard to know that we will

1 need more space even though we feel like we have
2 fewer employees and more people are on Zoom, et
3 cetera, et cetera? Do you feel like we will need more
4 rental space in the future or that we will be able to
5 consolidate more into our city-owned spaces in the
6 next four years?
7

8 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

9 I think that's our goal. It's hard to know if there's
10 going to be some big expansion of something. But, I
11 think for many years, particularly with telework,
12 that we should be able to-- you'll see in the reports
13 that we might renew or amend, but to take new space,
14 it might be a relocation or a consolidation, but
15 really keeping the same footprint or reducing the
16 footprint.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. So, 2 Lafayette

18 is going to be renovated above, or we don't know yet?
19 And you've got 22 Reade Street, also with the African
20 Burial Ground issue. I've been around a long time, so
21 I know some of these things. What's going on with
22 those two buildings?

23 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

24 So, 22 Reade is well-- let me go with 2 Lafayette
25

1 first, slated for renovation. There's already a
2 capital budget for renovation, and...

3
4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, it's fully
5 funded, the renovation?

6 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
7 I'm not sure if it's fully funded, but there is a
8 plan to-- There's a lot of exterior work in the
9 building, systems work, and then the floors that need
10 to be renovated. So I'm not sure if we have enough to
11 do the entire building, but it is fully occupied at
12 the moment, and we'll continue to house City staff.

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: It's fully occupied,
14 but it's depressing to be in there.

15 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
16 Yes, it needs work, for sure.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, I think 22 Reade
18 is also occupied.

19 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
20 22 Reade for the most part is occupied.

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: But is it going to
22 stay or is it going to be torn down? It was slated to
23 be sold at one point.

24 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
25 Correct. So there are always issues that come up. It

1 kind of comes up time and time again if we're going
2 to sell it or repurpose it. I think the African
3 burial ground issue, you know, it still survives, but
4 I can't say what the Administration might intend or
5 hope to do at that site.

6
7 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And is that slated
8 also for renovation or not at this time?

9 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
10 Not at this time.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: It's also depressing
12 to go into. It's horrible. Okay. When you go to that
13 versus DSS, oh, my goodness.

14 One of the other questions I have is when
15 you work with the private parties, do you work with
16 short or long term leases, or is it just depending, I
17 guess, on what the cost is and what the agency needs,
18 right? Just in terms-- as a policy, shorter term
19 leases?

20 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
21 To lease for City use?

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yes. Yes.

23 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
24 Mostly longer term leases. Usually, when we get to a
25 space that we know we need, there is a lot of

1 analysis that goes into that on multiple stakeholder
2 fronts, because we are going to make a long term
3 commitment to stay there, and usually get the benefit
4 of the bargain of being an A-rated tenant that is
5 going to stay for a long time.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay.

8 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
9 So, longer term is the usual. Unless-- we might do a
10 license agreement for a shorter period of time.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. Air rights, I
12 am very familiar with air rights. You sometimes have
13 unused air rights, I assume? I am always nervous
14 because when you sell them, they have to land
15 somewhere. And then sometimes landing for the
16 neighborhood is a challenge. So, everybody says,
17 let's use the air rights. I say, yeah, fine, where
18 are you landing the air rights?

19 So, I am just wondering, do you think air
20 rights-- Do you have some opportunities that make
21 sense to sell for revenue for the City, et cetera?
22 Just the whole issue.

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: So, air
24 rights are something that we look very closely at,
25 because planning for the future and agency needs and

1 cities of the future, you never know what you are
2 going to need. So we don't have an active program to
3 just dispose of air rights to whoever asks for them.
4 Air rights are only looked at for projects that
5 really further the City's or Administration's goals.
6 For instance, if air rights can be used for
7 affordable housing or for economic development
8 purposes, then we see air rights sales move forward,
9 and we partner with other agencies like HPD and the
10 Economic Development Corporation. But for DCAS public
11 auctions, air rights are not considered appropriate
12 for those.
13

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. Have you done
15 these for affordable housing? Have you sold air
16 rights for some of these other purposes?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: In
18 partnership with those other agencies, yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. Now, these
20 other agencies, it is so complicated for the public
21 to know-- because we always think DCAS owns-- no
22 Parks owns, HPD owns, EDC owns, DOT owns--is there
23 some kind of a database that makes this all clear? I
24 should know this as somebody who believes in the
25 data. But, you know, the newsstands are owned by x.

1 Those over there at the municipal building, they're
2 making crazy, those are DOT. They're not filled.
3 They're having some court suit that has been going
4 on-forever! Okay? I write a letter every week--I mean
5 every year, to the commission or whoever it is, "What
6 about the kiosks?" They look like hell. They have
7 graffiti on them, et cetera. But you get blamed— 1
8 Municipal, uh, 1 Centre Street, that's DCAS, "Oh,
9 those must be those kiosks-- belong to DCAS." So I
10 am just saying, is there a discussion amongst the
11 different agencies that own City property as to who
12 is going to work on these different projects? Or is
13 it that everybody's on their own?

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BERK: So, the way
16 the city-owned properties are handled is--I'm glad
17 you pointed it out, the misnomer that agencies own
18 their own properties, all properties that we talked
19 about, city-owned, are owned by the City. The city of
20 New York has title to them, and properties are then
21 allocated to the different agencies that have
22 responsibility for them. So, Parks has the Parks'
23 portfolio and NYPD has the precinct and whatnot. So,
24 the COLP data, if you sort by the agency tab, you
25 will be able to see the different agencies--that not

1 all agencies hold their own land. But you will be
2 able to tell that through the COLP data and the uses.
3 And then you will be able to associate with either
4 the address or the block and lot. So, for 1 Centre,
5 those kiosks are outside of the tax lot boundaries.
6 So, those would be on a different, distinct property
7 record than for 1 Centre.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, but for the
10 public, it's confusing. And they do blame you for all
11 of this. You know?

12 So, all right, I don't have any other
13 questions. I appreciate it. I think the follow up is
14 borough by borough breakdowns, and then also the
15 courthouses—particularly in the Bronx, that was a
16 disaster, but maybe it's all been repaired. I doubt
17 it. And then, we would like to work with you to put a
18 little pressure on the owners of those in our
19 immediate City Hall area, not 2 Lafayette, obviously.
20 And I love the art thing. Are you going to do more?

21 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:
22 I would love to do more. It was a great... (CROSS-
23 TALK)

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And we would love to
25 help you... (CROSS-TALK)

EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

I think we are working with Cultural Affairs now...

(CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Great, that would be terrific. But the two that are right in front of the buildings need pressure. That's where I could come in with. We may come up with a longer list, but those are the issues that I would love to follow up on.

EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RINGELHEIM:

Okay, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.

So, now we're opening the floor for public testimony. I remind members of the public that this is a formal government proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all times. You have to be silent.

The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recording or photography is allowed at that table.

Further, 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 in the hearing record.

1
2 If you want to speak, please fill out an
3 appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms and wait to
4 be recognized. When recognized, you will have three
5 minutes to speak at today's hearing, which is about
6 vacant and underused City property.

7 If you have a written statement or
8 additional testimony you wish to submit for the
9 record, please provide a copy of that testimony to
10 the Sergeant at Arms.

11 You may also email written testimony to
12 Testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours after the
13 close of this hearing. Audio and video recordings
14 will not be accepted.

15 For in person testimony, come up to the
16 table once your name has been called.

17 And now we will ask the first witness to
18 come up, who is Jack Connors from Open New York.

19 (PAUSE)

20 JACK CONNORS: Hello, hello, good morning.

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Good morning.

22 JACK CONNORS: I'm Jack Connors, the City
23 Legislative Manager at Open New York, a statewide
24 grassroots advocacy group that advocates for abundant
25 homes and lower rents. Thank you, Chair Brewer and

1
2 Members of the Committee, for inviting us to testify
3 today.

4 The Municipal Arts Society estimates that
5 there are more than 44,000 acres of city-owned land
6 in New York City, roughly the size of Brooklyn. At
7 least a quarter of this land is partially not in use
8 by the agencies that oversee it. As we confront a
9 historic housing crisis decades in the making, it's
10 crucial that DCAS and all city agencies make better
11 use of the sixth borough. A week ago, we celebrated
12 the groundbreaking for Timbale Terrace with council
13 members Encarnación and Salaam—341 affordable units
14 for New Yorkers making as little as \$30,000 a year
15 and 97 supportive units for formerly homeless New
16 Yorkers on the site of a former NYPD parking lot.

17 Since 2023, Sunset Park and Inwood have
18 built new libraries topped by deeply affordable
19 housing, new Utrecht Public Libraries, in the early
20 stages of pursuing a similar project and the City's
21 Educational Construction Fund, is pursuing a project
22 in Downtown Brooklyn that will redevelop an under
23 underutilized and outdated public school site with
24 over 1,500 mixed income units while providing a new
25 modern school building.

1
2 These projects are proof that co-locating
3 public goods yields real benefits for the communities
4 they're in. Now we need to replicate the success
5 hundreds of times across the five boroughs and make
6 haste. Timbale Terrace took a decade and three mayors
7 to break ground. Tens of thousands of New Yorkers are
8 expected to apply to live there, orders of magnitude
9 higher than the units available.

10 We're excited for the results of the Land
11 Inventory Fast Track Lift Task Force and hope to
12 build off blueprints like former Borough President
13 Levine's Housing Manhattanites Report, which found
14 170 city-owned sites within Manhattan alone that
15 could be a good fit for housing.

16 More than anything, rent burdened New
17 Yorkers need council members who are saying yes to
18 affordable housing, especially on vacant and
19 underutilized land. Balancing new production with
20 tenant protections, we can build an affordable city
21 for everyone.

22 We appreciate the Council's time and
23 attention to this matter. Thank you again for the
24 opportunity to testify.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.
3 Any questions?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you. Thank
5 you for your testimony and for being here.

6 I know you have said, and Open New York
7 has said, we need more housing of all types, right?
8 In your view, is there any neighborhood in New York
9 City that has already taken on more than its fair
10 share of density? I ask this because, in my
11 neighborhood, every time a house is sold, and there
12 are plans to knock down a one or two-family house and
13 put up ten units of housing or 14 units of housing,
14 there is almost a riot. Residents grab pitchforks.
15 And I am wondering what Open New York's view is on
16 the burden of the whole city, and if it has been
17 evenly shared.

18 JACK CONNORS: I mean, I think it would be
19 hard to argue that if you look at the New York
20 Housing Conference, which has a great database where
21 you can see, uh, I think it's broken down by council
22 member and which area-- which neighborhoods have
23 added significant housing both last year and over the
24 last 10 years and which have not. I mean, I'm sure
25 everyone in this room can think of, you know, there's

1 Williamsburg Waterfront, Long Island City, there's
2 Council Member Won's District, there are many areas
3 of the city that have added tons of new housing. And
4 there are other areas of the city where housing
5 production has stagnated or declined in many cases.

6
7 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Do you believe
8 that zoning reform should be contingent on
9 infrastructure capacity—schools, sewers, transit,
10 emergency services, or should density come first?

11 JACK CONNORS: I mean, that's a loaded
12 question. I think a lot of that has to do with the
13 way we plan. In a past life, I was doing transit
14 advocacy, and it's kind of this rigmarole between the
15 City and the State, where the City says, well, we
16 can't have more density there, we don't have the
17 (INAUDIBLE), this example, the transit infrastructure
18 to support it. Then you hear the State say, Oh, we
19 can't build a subway line out there, we don't have--
20 I'm sorry, did I say density? We don't have the
21 infrastructure (INAUDIBLE) says the City, then the
22 State says we don't have the density to support the
23 infrastructure. But I do also think that, though,
24 there has to be-- we used to do this all the time. I
25 mean, New York, and now TOD, is this kind of radical

1 thing to many. But, I mean, the whole 7 line was
2 Greenfield Development. There was a time when we
3 figured out how to strike that balance. So I think
4 there is a way, and especially, it is important to
5 keep in mind things like everyone's vision is of
6 giant skyscrapers. No, I mean, in the past-- we're
7 talking about duplexes, six-plexes, these are things
8 that used to provide the missing middle of housing,
9 so that a senior who is getting older and they don't
10 want to maintain their new home, they can take their
11 three-floor flat and turn it into three units of
12 housing so that they can live on maybe the ground
13 floor (INAUDIBLE). We used to provide for this
14 flexibility, and we don't anymore.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: I am so glad that
17 you mentioned the needs of different communities and
18 that not everybody needs skyscraper apartment
19 buildings.

20 Should local communities and Community
21 Boards retain meaningful input over rezoning, or do
22 you believe land use decisions should be primarily
23 citywide mandates?

24 JACK CONNORS: I mean, I think I would say
25 the voters have spoken on that. There was a, yes,

1 community should of course have discretion over
2 certain aspects of development, but we have also seen
3 that there needs to be a recognition of the fact that
4 this is a citywide, and really a regionwide issue of
5 constant housing production that is taking place over
6 decades and decades that has gotten us to this point
7 of a historic housing crisis. And last November, when
8 the voters had a chance to weigh in on that, they
9 said that, yes, the local process should play out,
10 that every stakeholder involved in the ULURP process
11 should operate in good faith, and that should be an
12 opportunity for elected officials who have a more
13 borough and citywide focus to weigh in as well if
14 that development ultimately doesn't shake out.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thanks very much.

17 JACK CONNORS: Mm-hmm.

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.

19 Pitchfork will prevail.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: (LAUGHS)

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: We will now turn to
22 virtual panelists. Once your name is called, we will
23 unmute you, and the Sergeant at Arms will set the
24 timer and give you the go ahead to begin. Please wait
25

1
2 for the Sergeant at Arms to announce that you may
3 begin before delivering your testimony.

4 I will call on Alec Ferretti (phonetic),
5 who is on Zoom as I understand it.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

7 (PAUSE)

8 ALEC FERRETTI: Can you hear me?

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yes.

10 ALEC FERRETTI: Hi, sorry, I'm actually in
11 Egypt right now, so I was not able to attend in
12 person and I'm on my phone because the internet is
13 not super stable. I'm here and ready whenever.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Go right ahead.

15 ALEC FERRETTI: If you are ready.

16 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Go right ahead.

17 ALEC FERRETTI: Okay. So I'm actually here
18 about DORIS and not the DCAS proposal, just to
19 clarify, but I'm speaking on behalf of the
20 Association of Professional Genealogists, a
21 professional organization representing more than
22 2,000 members worldwide who rely on New York City's
23 records to do our work and help New Yorkers
24 understand their own history. And that work depends
25 on reliable stewardship of public records and

1 enforceable access to them. APG strongly opposes
2 Proposal 0087-2026 as it's currently written.
3

4 Consolidating the two archives boards can
5 be reasonable, but this bill does not keep the same
6 functions of the boards as it currently advertises.
7 Instead, it strips the City's archives oversight
8 structure of the very independence that makes the
9 oversight real.

10 As Miss Poole referenced, we've been here
11 before. In 2002, there was controversy over the
12 Giuliani administration's placing the records of a
13 private organization. In response to that, the City
14 Council created the ARB specifically to protect the
15 priceless and unique public records of the City of
16 New York.

17 Today, the Archival Review Board is a
18 truly independent oversight body. Under the City
19 Charter, any member of this board can inspect and
20 review archival work and record keeping practices
21 during work hours. And that is the point. The
22 overseers on that board can actually oversee the
23 agency.

24 The new bill inserts a critical change
25 that board members can inspect and review records

1
2 only with the concurrence of the chair, and the chair
3 of the board is the DORIS commissioner. That means
4 under the new structure, oversight will only happen
5 if the agency being overseen agrees to allow it. No
6 serious accountability system is built that way
7 because it's a conflict of interest.

8 APG urges the Council to reject this bill
9 or amend it to preserve independence. At a minimum,
10 we should strike the concurrence of the share
11 requirement. And better still, the commissioners
12 could be removed as a chair entirely, and the board
13 could elect its own chair. That way, the oversight
14 board oversees DORIS and not the other way around.

15 Thank you very much, Chair Brewer, and
16 members of the Committee, for your time.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.
18 Enjoy wherever you are. And we look forward to
19 hearing from you in the future. And we thank you very
20 much for your testimony.

21 ALEC FERRETTI: Thank you very much.

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: We have now heard
23 from everyone who has signed up to testify. If we
24 inadvertently missed anyone who would like to
25 testify, please visit the Sergeant at Arms table or

1
2 complete a witness slip. If we inadvertently missed
3 anyone who would like to testify virtually, please
4 use the Zoom Raise Hand Function, and we will call on
5 you.

6 I do not see anybody who has raised their
7 hand. So I would like to note again that written
8 testimony will be reviewed in full by the staff, and
9 it may be submitted to the record for up to 72 hours
10 after the close of this hearing. You may email
11 written testimony to: Testimony@council.nyc.gov.

12 I would like to thank everyone who
13 participated. This hearing is now ended. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is no interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date March 27, 2026