



Thursday May 23, 2019
Testimony Prepared by the Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board
to Sanitation and Solid Waste Committee
Hearing on Final 2020 Budget

Thank you for allowing the Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board (MSWAB) this opportunity to present testimony concerning the future of New York City's residential curbside organics collection program.

MSWAB is a volunteer citizens' advisory board dedicated to helping NYC achieve its zero waste goals. We advise the Manhattan Borough President, City Council, City Administration and others on policies and programs regarding the development, promotion and operation of the City's waste prevention, reuse and recycling programs. We are a Board comprised of solid waste management industry professionals, waste reduction and diversion consultants, sustainability professionals, and concerned citizens appointed by the Manhattan Borough President's Office.

MSWAB applauds Mayor DeBlasio for setting ambitious goals in his 2015 OneNYC plan to make New York City more sustainable and for seeking to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills and for incineration. Specifically, OneNYC sought to expand the city's residential organics plan to serve all New Yorkers by 2018, to achieve zero waste to landfills by 2030, and to achieve an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Ramping up the city's organics program is important for several reasons, including the fact that when deposited in landfills, organic material emits methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Organics also constitute almost 30% of the residential waste stream, so reducing the amount sent to landfills is an important part of reducing the city's overall greenhouse gas emissions.

However, it will be virtually impossible to achieve zero waste to landfills by 2050 or an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 without a well-functioning residential curbside organics program that serves New Yorkers in all five boroughs. Unfortunately, this program is now stalled. In late 2018, DSNY suspended its planned expansion of the curbside organics collection to additional neighborhoods and reduced the frequency of collection in neighborhoods that it was currently collecting, apparently because the amount of organics collected was low, making the program inefficient and costly.

On Earth Day, April 22, 2019, Mayor DeBlasio released his 2019 update to OneNYC. Among other things, the update states that the city will transition to a mandatory citywide organics collection program. While encouraging, the update gave no details on how this will be achieved, when a

mandatory system will go into effect, and how it plans to address the many challenges that remain, including ensuring that there is sufficient capacity to process organics when the program becomes mandatory. As such, it provides no roadmap to DSNY for implementing such a program. In addition, the FY 2020 DSNY budget contains no funding for resuming expansion of curbside organics collections to neighborhoods that currently do not have it.

The MSWAB believes that the only way the curbside organics program will be successful and realize cost efficiencies at scale is to transition to a mandatory collection program. Meanwhile, it makes sense to redouble efforts with the current voluntary program to allow residents to become familiar with the program and to work out issues that will inevitably arise before moving to a mandatory program.

We strongly urge the Council and the Mayor's Office to work together to do the following:

1. **Continue expansion of curbside program to all NYC neighborhoods:** Restore funding so DSNY can continue its expansion and serve all five boroughs as soon as possible, as well as conduct research to better understand what's working and what's not working in areas already receiving curbside organics collection, including understanding and addressing the unique challenges of curbside organics collection in multifamily buildings where the bulk of NYC residents live, and the building type that is historically problematic for curbside recycling and organics collection.
2. **Provide funds for public education and promote food waste prevention:** Provide funds for a city-wide public education campaign to explain the importance of the city's zero waste goal and how to properly recycle and participate in the city's organic program. Begin immediately to test alternative approaches with the goal of changing resident attitudes and behavior. Explore the potential to promote food waste prevention in addition to organics collection; in doing so, study efforts undertaken by other cities, such as England's Love Food Hate Waste campaign.
3. **Provide details and timeline for transitioning to mandatory program:** Provide sufficient detail to DSNY on how it plans to transition to a mandatory organics program so the agency can begin planning now and ensure that it has the resources necessary to implement such a program, including a timeline for expansion of the program and when the program will become mandatory.

The MSWAB would be happy to work with the Mayor's Office to provide further input and guidance on any of these recommendations.

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