



Building a Better Community Since 1994

April 28, 2020

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

We are writing to express our dismay at learning about the impending suspension of the City's organics recycling program to begin next week, May 4th. The impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic have been harsh, unforgiving, and will have lasting ripple effects. At North Brooklyn Neighbors, we have fought along with partners and allies for many years to reduce trash and divert waste from landfills. The City cannot afford to turn its back on those efforts.

The fiscal constraints the City now faces are real and will force many hard choices. In a matter of just a few weeks, our City has been dealt a substantial blow that can be felt by all of our communities. An unimaginable loss of life, massive economic displacement, and public institutions like schools and libraries operating virtually are only a few of the issues on our plate. Instinct calls us to retreat, regroup, and rethink priorities. But we don't beat this by retreating. We beat this by showing our resilience.

COVID-19 is a health crisis and an economic crisis occurring during an environmental crisis. We must find ways to overcome each crisis without exacerbating another.

Mr. Mayor, we urge you and the City Council to take a long view of recycling and waste reduction programs. Since March, in response to the pandemic, our organics program has been completely dismantled. Community gardens have been shuttered to non-members and barred from collecting compost from the public. Large-scale community compost collections have been closed and defunded. Now, curbside collection is set to be suspended for at least 14 months.

History shows us that temporary suspensions do not have temporary effects. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the City suspended plastic and glass recycling in July 2002 to close a budget gap. Plastic recycling was suspended for 12 months and glass for 21 months. Once recycling resumed, rates plummeted and they have still not fully recovered, even now in 2020. Recycling compliance works best when practice and behavior are consistent.

Projections show that the organics program saves money over time by processing waste locally instead of incurring the costs for transport and landfilling out-of-state. The program is already having profound impact. A modest investment in the organics program has removed millions of pounds from the waste stream per year, created capacity to distribute free locally sourced compost, and strengthened citywide gardening activities.

A retreat from organics collection will likely have public health implications that we will need to be attentive to. With many more New Yorkers cooking and consuming food at home, a significant portion of waste is shifting from the commercial stream to residential. Rats normally rely on food sources found in restaurant refuse but now that has largely moved to private homes -- the rats will follow. The brown bin program, with its rodent-resistant containers, prioritizes safe disposal to reduce the health risks posed by


rats. As rodents search for new sources of food, we must keep food waste out of easily chewed trash bags and in the very bins provided by the City to residents for collection by DSNY.

This is an opportunity to make further inroads with organics collection. Research shows that it is an ideal time to make lasting changes when normal routines are disrupted. Most New Yorkers are generating more food scraps than normal, and many are also using their down time to maintain outdoor spaces creating yard waste. By not abandoning organics recycling collections, the City has a chance to introduce the program to residents who might otherwise not be receptive and help make the program more successful in the long-term.

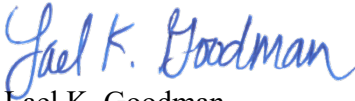
As we face this time of unprecedented crisis, let's commit to learning from past experiences and seek policy solutions that are sustainable and build on our resiliency. We know there's a path that will allow us to retain organics recycling and meet the public health demands posed by this pandemic.

We greatly appreciate your thoughtful consideration and look forward to working together on a solution.

Sincerely,


Anthony Buissereth
Executive Director


Lisa Bloodgood
Board Co-Chair


Lael K. Goodman
Environmental Justice Program Manager


Nicole De Feo
Board Co-Chair

cc: Speaker Corey Johnson
New York City Council

Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams

Commissioner Kathryn Garcia
NYC Department of Sanitation

Council Member Costa Constantinides, D-22
Chair, Committee on Environmental Protection

Council Member Stephen Levin, D-33

Council Member Antonio Reynoso, D-34
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