

May 21, 2020

Testimony to the New York City Council Finance Committee

Good afternoon, my name is Anthony Buissereth and I am the executive director of North Brooklyn Neighbors. We are a 26-year-old grassroots, environmental and community planning organization serving Greenpoint and Williamsburg with a legacy of fighting, along with partners and allies, to reduce trash and divert waste from landfills.

In this testimony, we ask that the City does not decimate its Climate Justice and Zero Waste plans and goals by eliminating opportunities for organics recycling and composting. We urge the City to take a long view of organics recycling and not to reintroduce millions of pounds of waste to our landfills.

The Mayor's proposed budget would undercut much of the progress this City has made in diverting food scraps and yard waste from landfills -- a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. The Administration is slashing the DSNY budget by \$106.5 million, with more than \$28 million of that coming from a total elimination of all funding of recycling and composting organic waste. This is short-sighted and has potential to have long-term implications, setting the City back further from its sustainability goals.

Today we urge the City Council not to abandon organics collections during this crisis but to recommit to organics diversion programs that have made significant impacts in our communities. Please do not toss away the progress we have made in the past few years.

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.

We are asking that the Council restore organics program cuts including curbside collection. Though the brown bin program has yet to reach all of New York City, suspending the program will likely have grave consequences over time.

In the interest of access and equity, we are specifically asking that the cuts to the NYC Compost Project and partners, and to GrowNYC, be restored, with expansion for community outreach and education. These programs ensure that all New Yorkers can participate in organics collection and help raise awareness about the importance impacts of diversion and waste reduction.

The cuts to the NYC Compost project and partners and to GrowNYC together represent approximately \$7 million, and with some additional funding, could go a long way to allowing New Yorkers to continue to source separate food waste and preventing this major waste stream from going to landfill and emitting greenhouse gases.

This comparatively small amount of funding in the big picture would ensure that:

- at least eight non-profit organizations that rely on City-funding to provide organics collection and processing services, as well as community education, could continue their good work;
- at least 170 food scrap drop-off sites across all five boroughs can continue to divert this potent source of greenhouse gases from landfills;
- at least six community composting facilities can continue their work of processing the food waste to turn into usable compost to grow food in community gardens and urban farms during a time of food insecurity; and
- the City could continue vital education and outreach, needed to ensure that all New Yorkers, including all of our school children, understand why and how to compost and recycle – such training in the schools is a small investment that will pay off for decades by helping our children develop life-time habits of sustainable living.

We cannot understate the urgency of this ask to our organization, and hope the Council ensures that this important priority not be left behind in the budget process.

Thank you.