



# sanitation

Jessica S. Tisch Commissioner

**Testimony of  
Jessica Tisch, Commissioner  
New York City Department of Sanitation**

**Hearing before the New York City Council  
Committees on Finance and Sanitation and Solid Waste Management**

**Friday, May 12, 2023  
1:30 P.M.**

**New York City Department of Sanitation's FY2024 Executive Budget**

---

Good afternoon Chair Brannan, Chair Nurse and members of the City Council Committees on Finance and Sanitation and Solid Waste Management. I am Jessica Tisch, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Sanitation (DSNY). I am joined today by First Deputy Commissioner Javier Lojan, Joseph Antonelli, Deputy Commissioner for Management and Budget, and Gregory Anderson, Deputy Commissioner for Policy and Strategic Initiatives. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on DSNY's Fiscal Year 2024 Executive Budget.

You may not know it yet, but there's a revolution taking place on the street of this City. This is a trash resolution. A complete overthrow – and overhaul – of our old way of doing things. We have – through the implementation of both new setout time rules and several operational changes – dramatically reduced the amount of time that trash sits in bags on the sidewalk awaiting collection and fundamentally transformed the impact that waste has on public space in New York City.

Before these changes, New Yorkers could set out their waste in bags at 4 p.m. the night before collection, and nearly all collections happened on the 6 a.m. shift, letting trash bags sit at the curb for a minimum of 14 hours before they would *start* to be collected. Some collections would be scheduled for the 4 p.m. shift, meaning our daily 24 million pounds of waste could sit on the sidewalk, blocking pedestrians, attracting rats, and blemishing our neighborhoods *for as many as 32 hours*. This is the number one reason New York City has for too long been called “Trash City.”

Today, bags of waste can be set out no earlier than 8 p.m. The first collection crews leave the garage at midnight and nearly 30 percent of all collections in high density neighborhoods happen on that first shift of the day. The remainder are scheduled on the day shift, which now starts at 5 a.m., instead of 6 a.m. And for the first time in memory, no trash collections are scheduled for the 4 p.m. afternoon shift. This represents a massive overhaul of how the Department of Sanitation approaches collection operations. In addition, we implemented these changes in a largely cost neutral way, working with labor to make changes that would have the greatest impact.

Now, it's difficult to see things that aren't there. But think back to March, or last summer, or any other time in the last two decades, and imagine walking down a dense residential block at 4:30 in the afternoon before trash day. There were piles of bags stacked all along the sidewalk and twice as many if it happened to be recycling day. Those bags had no hope of moving before 6 a.m. the next morning and would often linger on the sidewalk into late morning.

On a street with businesses, bags would be out at all hours of the day oozing trash juice on the sidewalk until collection by private carters in the early morning hours.

Fast forward to today. Every week that passes, we see more containers and less trash on the streets during the highest-trafficked hours of the day. That's the beginning of a revolution.

In neighborhoods where there has been more compliance with the new setout time rules, these changes have made a dramatic difference in the experience of our streets and our neighborhoods.

DSNY worked with New Yorkers and property owners and managers citywide to encourage that compliance. We offered a one-month warning period in April and issued 22,600 warnings, focusing on commercial and high-density residential areas where the problems are most pressing. Agents and officers are now revisiting these same places where we issued warnings to make sure they got the message and, if not, issuing a summons. DSNY will continue to conduct enforcement on these new rules, not for enforcement's sake, but with a focus on the most egregious violators and the large buildings and commercial properties that have the greatest impact on the public realm.

### **Shared Responsibility for our Public Spaces**

We are doing our part to clean up New York City. But every New Yorker has a role to play in maintaining the cleanliness of our neighborhoods – in a city this size, it can't just be the 10,000 members of the Sanitation Department doing this work.

Property owners and commercial establishments are responsible for the cleanliness of their sidewalks, public areas, and along the curb 18 inches into the street. We have a renewed focus on enforcing basic cleanliness rules, the kinds of things that keep our streets clean.

But enforcement only goes so far when the penalty for inaction is too low. Right now, fines for violating basic sanitation rules are set by local law at just \$50, an amount that is far too low. This was reduced from \$100 by the City Council in 2021, sending the wrong message that cleanliness is not a priority in our city. I am calling on this Council to reverse course and create stiffer penalties. I am eager to work with you to make this happen.

As Deputy Commissioner Anderson testified last month, DSNY strongly supports Intro. 544, sponsored by Council Member Ossé, which would increase penalties for larger properties for failing to set out waste properly. We support reasonable increases to other penalties as well, to create a strong deterrent for egregious or repeat offenders that see fines as just the cost of doing business. We need more tools in our enforcement toolbox to uphold this shared responsibility.

### **Strategic Partnerships for Cleanliness**

In the last month, DSNY has implemented two important new partnerships with our fellow agencies to make New York City cleaner.

First, we are now working much more closely with the Police Department (NYPD) to address the scourge of abandoned vehicles on our streets. This problem, like illegal dumping, does not affect every neighborhood, but in those areas where it does, the impact is profound.

Abandoned vehicles fall into two categories: derelict vehicles with no plates and little resale value under DSNY jurisdiction and all others under NYPD jurisdiction. Too often, New Yorkers would file a complaint about an abandoned vehicle only for that complaint to ping pong back and forth between both agencies and land in a bureaucratic morass with no resolution.

Next week, a new Citywide Abandoned Vehicle Task Force will hit the streets to address this issue comprehensively. The NYPD has detailed six uniformed members to DSNY to enable the two agencies to work much more closely to address abandoned vehicles. And already, joint operations between the two agencies at the precinct and district levels, which used to happen just once or twice a month, now happen several times a week.

Overall, derelict vehicle removals by DSNY are up 21 percent this calendar year to date. Removals of abandoned and derelict vehicles in partnership with NYPD are up 132 percent.

Second, DSNY has assumed operational control of graffiti removal operations conducted by the Economic Development Corporation (EDC). For approximately two decades, graffiti removal in the five boroughs has been handled by EDC – despite the fact that 311 complaints about graffiti are and have always been routed to DSNY. Now, DSNY both takes the complaints and directly coordinates removal activities, streamlining the customer experience for all New Yorkers that report graffiti.

For the first time, more service requests are resolved each day than received, and we are working to eliminate the backlog of more than 2,000 service requests since the beginning of the year. Since April 1, crews have cleaned nearly 800 locations in total.

### **TrashDash**

We are reorienting the entire agency around cleanliness and a customer service approach. We have created TrashDash, a weekly report and interactive dashboard to provide a detailed, district-level view of 311 service requests, actions, and response time. Modeled on NYPD's CompStat, this tool for the first time ever gives managers at every level of the Department consistent and up to date information on service requests and will ensure that not just the executives but the entire department have a relentless focus on customer service.

Just yesterday, we held our very first TrashDash weekly meeting and brought in the staff from the Manhattan Borough Office. Senior-ranking chiefs grilled superintendents on everything from missed collections to overflowing litter baskets to strategies to ensure compliance with the new setout rules. We are continuing to refine our performance indicators and plan to make TrashDash reports available to the public in the near future.

### **Street Vending Enforcement**

In March, Mayor Adams announced the transition of the Office of Street Vending Enforcement from the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP) to DSNY. Legal street vending is a vital part of New York City's economy. However, vendors who do not play by the rules have an overwhelming impact on cleanliness and quality of life, and the City has never before had a meaningful strategy to address these issues.

Our focus is on the infractions that affect communities the most, things like obstructing sidewalks, curb cuts, and building and subway entrances, leaving equipment and goods out overnight, and creating dirty conditions. Since April 1, DSNY officers have conducted 144 street vendor inspections citywide. This is a compliance-first approach, rather than a license-check-first approach.

DSNY toured many communities with elected officials who asked DSNY to help solve the vending problems with which their residents and businesses grapple. Many Council Members and community leaders know this is a cleanliness and quality-of-life issue. Sanitation Police Officers are accustomed to dealing with the intersection of public space and businesses and communities. They understand cleanliness and safety and are specially trained for this kind of issue. DSNY is uniquely qualified to do this work.

The FY24 Executive Budget includes \$2.87 million to support this effort. This includes new headcount of 40 people in our Sanitation Police unit, including 35 officers, 4 lieutenants, and 1 inspector. This new funding grows over time to \$4.65 million in FY27 and the out years. In addition, beginning in FY25, a share of this new funding is offset by the transfer of current funding for street vending enforcement from DCWP.

### **Universal Curbside Composting**

As I mentioned at the Preliminary Budget Hearing, Mayor Adams has committed to creating a universal curbside composting program for the first time in the City's history. This program is already running in Queens year round and will roll out borough by borough over the next 17 months, beginning with Brooklyn this fall.

The new program is built on a number of efficiencies that drive costs down, including the use of dual-bin trucks and a rightsizing of the workforce to reduce overtime. The leaf-and-yard-waste-first approach was designed based on an analysis of successful programs in other cities. In March, we issued a proposed rule to make yard waste separation mandatory, an appropriate first step toward a mandatory universal program. We expect to finalize this rule in the next few weeks.

This citywide curbside program is part of a comprehensive approach to organic waste diversion. Earlier this year, we completed the installation of 250 Smart Compost Bins across all five boroughs. We will install an additional 150 bins this summer in Manhattan, which will receive curbside collection last. These bins are accessible 24 hours per day via an app for iOS and Android called NYC Compost.

The FY24 Executive Budget includes \$23.16 million in new funding for this program, including \$4.5 million for bin deliveries, outreach and communications. This funding includes 289 new

staff this year, including 233 Sanitation Workers for collection operations. In FY25, funding increases to \$24.43 million, including 335 new staff.

### **Containerization**

Last month, DSNY released “The Future of Trash,” a 95-page report that was the result of a six-month, intensive department-led study of the feasibility of waste containerization in New York City. Containerization – defined as both the use of shared containers and individual bins based on a street’s residential density – is feasible in 89 percent of New York City residential streets comprising 77 percent of the City’s residential waste output. Like many good things, it will not come easily.

Of the street sections analyzed, 39 percent would be appropriate for shared stationary containers. This requires repurposing up to 10 percent of available curb space on blocks with residential buildings and approximately 150,000 parking spaces total. On some blocks, up to 25 percent of existing curb space would be occupied by containers, but on most blocks the share would be far lower.

Another 50 percent of residential street sections would be appropriate for individual bins without eliminating any existing uses of curb space. These include substantial lower-density areas of Staten Island, eastern Queens, southern Brooklyn, and the northern Bronx.

Containerization offers the potential to be among the most transformative changes to our City’s streetscape in decades and one of the biggest public infrastructure projects in a generation. As I mentioned, the path to containerization is not an easy one, and it will take time and some challenging tradeoffs. But the path is clearer now than ever before.

The FY24 Executive Budget includes \$5.66 million in new funds between FY23 and FY24 to rapidly deploy the first scaled pilot of mechanized collection of shared containers in Manhattan District 9. This pilot will include approximately 10 residential blocks in a subset of the district, as well as 14 public schools, and we expect it to launch by the fall.

### **PEGs**

This budget also includes new reductions as part of the Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEG). The good news is this: these cuts do not impact direct service delivery, and we did not lay off a single employee. DSNY worked with OMB to identify greater efficiencies, but we were partially relieved of our target to ensure that no direct services were impacted.

The PEG totals \$45.0 million in FY23 and \$23.5 million in FY24. These reductions include:

- \$45.0 million in FY23, \$0.9 million in FY24, and \$11.8 million in the out years to adjust the snow budget to reflect actual spending – I want to be very clear that this reduction will not tie our hands from responding quickly and forcefully to conditions in future snow seasons;
- \$6.7 million in FY24 and annually thereafter related to eliminating snow training on Sundays and reorienting training activities on straight time;

- \$7.5 million in additional revenue annually in recognition of increased issuance of ASP fines;
- \$2.1 million and 33 positions in FY24 for a reduction in uniformed staff assigned to solid waste management operations;
- \$1.7 million and 19 positions in FY24 for a reduction in uniformed staff assigned to non-frontline administrative units;
- \$1.1 million and 24 positions in FY24 for a reduction to precision cleaning crews;
- \$2.5 million in FY24 to reduce the scope of the waste characterization study from three seasons to two seasons;
- \$1 million in FY24, \$2 million in FY25, and \$3.5 million in the out years for a phased reduction of funding for food scrap drop-offs and community composting programs to align with the rollout of curbside composting; and
- \$2.3 million in FY26 for the relinquishment of DSNY property.

### **FY2024 Executive Budget**

The Executive Budget includes \$1.86 billion in expense funds in Fiscal Year 2024, reflecting an increase of \$33.4 million from the Preliminary Budget.

The Fiscal Year 2024 expense budget includes \$1.08 billion for personal services to support a total budgeted headcount of 9,816 full-time positions, including 7,878 uniformed positions and 1,938 civilian positions, and \$774 million for other than personal services.

DSNY's Fiscal Year 2024 Preliminary Budget includes \$4.24 billion in capital funding in the 10-year plan, including \$1.48 billion for garages and facilities, \$2.56 billion for equipment, \$72.6 million for IT, and \$135.3 million for solid waste management infrastructure.

The Capital Budget includes new funding of \$76 million to purchase 158 new dual-bin and rear-loader collection trucks this year for the expansion of curbside composting over the next 18 months.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My staff and I look forward to answering your questions.