



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS  
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS  
MARCH 24, 2026**



Good morning, Chair Sanchez, Public Advocate Williams and esteemed members of the Committee on Housing and Buildings. My name is Ahmed Tigani, Commissioner for the New York City Department of Buildings (“the Department”) and I am joined today by Yegal Shamash, First Deputy Commissioner, Gina Ugarte, Deputy Commissioner for Finance, Guillermo Patino, Deputy Commissioner for Policy and Legal Affairs and other members of the Department’s leadership team. We are pleased to be here to discuss the fiscal year 2027 preliminary budget, as well as the Department’s performance and priority initiatives.

## **Introduction**

This Past Friday marked two months as Commissioner and it is a tremendous privilege to be back at the Department after serving New Yorkers for five years at the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (“HPD”) in various roles, where we focused on delivering for New Yorkers by preserving and creating housing.

While the Department’s scope is wider than housing, continuing that important work in a new capacity is a responsibility I take seriously. As part of the Housing and Planning portfolio under Deputy Mayor Leila Bozorg, the Department supports the construction sector, prepares for emergencies, serves communities that depend on our development and enforcement work, and partners with industries that deliver schools, grocery stores, and hospitals, just to name a few, but this shift reinforces our central role in preserving and creating housing at a moment of urgent need, while still maintaining our commitment across all workstreams.

In all of these areas of work, we will hold owners accountable for maintaining safe buildings and use every available tool when they fail to meet their legal obligations. At the same time, we are streamlining processes to remove bottlenecks that delay development, especially for affordable housing, and are working closely with the Mayor’s Office and partner agencies to advance the city’s housing plan and key initiatives outlined by Mayor Mamdani.

While we are excited to be at the table on all things housing, central to our mission is the safety of those who live, visit, or work in New York City. We will continue to monitor the existing building stock for compliance, to respond to complaints and

emergencies, and to make sure that construction sites are employing safe work practices, and where possible, using our data to identify efficient and effective strategies to tackle issues before they arise. As I will discuss later on in my testimony, we are moving forward with taking a proactive approach to building safety, which will complement our complaint-based strategies. Safety needs to be at the center of everything we do to maintain our buildings, whether we are discussing housing or storage facilities, and is key to making the process of growing this city's physical footprint viable to support the needs of New Yorkers across the five boroughs.

While I may be at the helm of this great agency, none of what I will discuss today would be possible without the talent and expertise of the 1,634 individuals that makeup the Department. I am blown away by the progress the agency has made since I was last here and I would like to specifically recognize a few of my colleagues here today, who are leading the charge on transforming the agency and keeping us safe.

**Olga Suto**, who has been with the agency for 13 years, is our Assistant Commissioner for Existing Buildings Compliance. In this role, Olga is key to keeping our buildings safe. Olga oversees a team dedicated to the structural integrity of the built environment, which includes overseeing the myriad maintenance requirements building owners must comply with, including those that relate to facades, parking structures, and retaining walls, responding to crisis, tackling the issue of longstanding sidewalk sheds, and moving the agency forward by utilizing predictive enforcement to keep buildings safe.

**Tarek Khalil**, who has been with the agency 9 years, is our Assistant Commissioner for Mechanical and Plumbing Inspections. Tarek's team is dedicated to building systems, including elevators, boilers, and mechanical systems, which are building systems that we rely on every day. They have been key to the implementation of Local Law 152 of 2016, which requires that a large portion of our building stock undergoes regular inspections of their gas piping systems, which has been a herculean effort. Tarek takes a thoughtful approach to the regulations that govern their work and constantly finds way to find efficiencies and to modernize.

Finally, I would like to take a moment to recognize **Chief Richard Bower**, who passed away last week. Chief Bower served the Department with dedication for 18 years in various roles, where they put safety first as they rose through our ranks, including as part of the Excavation, Interior Demolition, and Construction Safety Engineering teams. My condolences go out to their loved ones.

These are just some of the incredible people that help keep this city safe and moving forward.

### **Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget**

At this time, I'd like to move on to discuss the budget that supports this important work. The fiscal year 2027 preliminary budget allocates approximately \$214 million in expense funds to the Department. Of this funding, approximately \$181 million (85%) is for personal services, which supports 1,864 budgeted positions, and \$33 million (15%) is for other than personal services, which primarily supports contractual services, equipment, and supplies. This funding is critical to supporting the Department's mandates and priorities. Of note, the Department has received 23

additional positions to support the implementation of local laws passed by the City Council last year, which give the Department additional enforcement tools to get sidewalk sheds down faster and 13 additional positions to increase staffing associated with conducting background checks for the trades the Department licenses. These new positions will be funded by fees the Department is introducing or increasing by rule.

As of today, the Department's budgeted headcount is 1,853 and our actual headcount as of January ending is 1,635. Our budgeted headcount includes additional staffing received in recent plans, which includes positions to establish a proactive enforcement program, to enforce Local Law 152 of 2016, which requires that buildings undergo periodic gas piping inspections, and to support increased development activity, which includes positions related to City of Yes for Housing Opportunity and basement legalization. While we have 218 actual vacancies, we have 55 candidates in the hiring pipeline, which includes 41 inspectors, which leaves us with 163 actual vacancies or a vacancy rate around 9%. We are actively recruiting to fill these vacancies, including the positions we received in the preliminary budget to support priority initiatives, such as reducing sidewalk sheds, and look forward to keeping you updated on our efforts.

### **Supporting and Streamlining Development**

In fiscal year 2025, the last full fiscal year, approximately 275,000 construction jobs were filed with the Department, and we issued approximately 169,000 initial and renewal construction permits combined, which is consistent with the activity we saw in the previous fiscal year. So far this fiscal year, we are seeing a slight increase in construction job filings and a slight decrease in permit issuance. As it relates to

service levels, I will focus on service levels concerning job filings submitted through DOB NOW, which represent about 95% of all job filings as we continue to transition to the DOB NOW system. On average, for all job filings submitted through DOB NOW, it is taking the Department about 5 days to complete its first review, which is an increase over 3.5 days during the same time period last fiscal year. Of note, during this time period, we received about 2,500 more resubmissions, including for more complex new building and demolition projects, which means the plans came back to us for review more than once, and in about 650 additional instances our customers opted to have us conduct full plan examination over professionally certifying their job filings. Combined, these factors account for the uptick in our service levels for plan examination.

The wait time between a construction inspection request and an inspection, which occurs after a construction project is completed by a contractor, has remained at 4 days for construction inspections, has remained at about 9 days for an electrical inspection, which is down from nearly 13 days from full fiscal year 2025, and has increased by about 2 days to 6 days for a plumbing inspection. With respect to electrical inspections, it should be noted that there has been an increased demand for electrical inspections, which could be attributed to electrification projects. At the end of last year, the City Council passed a law, sponsored by Chair Sanchez, Local Law 42 of 2026, which will allow for electrical inspections to be self-certified, which is allowed for other trades. These changes will help improve service levels as it relates to electrical inspections as the demand for an inspection from the Department will decrease. Overall, there has been an increased demand for development inspections and a reduction in the use of overtime to support such inspections. The Department reduced its overtime spending by \$5.6 million since fiscal year 2024, which is 60% reduction.

We will continue to identify ways to not only support, but also streamline development projects. We are investing in our most important resource, our people. We are working on establishing a plan examination training academy for the first time, with a comprehensive curriculum and ongoing training on changes to the vast regulatory landscape we are charged with enforcing, which will be similar to our existing inspector training academy. We are also looking to technology to help support our work. We continue to work with the Partnership Fund for New York City on the Buildings Tech Lab, a public-private initiative to find, evaluate, and test innovative technology solutions that will support our work, including to make plan reviews, permitting, and inspections more efficient. We will soon be starting pilot programs with five companies, which will come at no cost to the Department, and are in the process of identifying additional companies to work with in the near future. The Department is appreciative of the Partnership's support with this effort and looks forward to working with the companies that have been selected to incorporate innovative technologies into our work, with the goal of working more efficiently. Finally, we are working closely with the Mayor's Office and our partner agencies on an interagency task force, Streamlining Procedures to Expedite Equitable Development ("SPEED") to accelerate affordable housing production. The Mayor's Office will soon be releasing recommendations related to this effort.

### **Building and Construction Safety**

While the Department's enforcement has largely been driven by complaints in the past, we continue to conduct proactive inspections at larger construction sites and began conducting proactive inspections of existing buildings last fiscal year, work which was made possible by Local Law 79 of 2024, which was also sponsored by

Chair Sanchez, which tasked the Department with establishing a proactive enforcement program. While our efforts were focused on recruiting to fill the 60 positions we received to support this program, which includes inspectors, plan examiners, data analysts, and attorneys, we have now begun this work. Since we began conducting proactive inspections last March, we have conducted approximately 9,200 inspections that have resulted in the issuance of 7,000 summonses, which includes follow up inspections following the issuance of Class 1 summonses until such summonses are corrected and inspections of potentially at-risk buildings, which are identified and assigned a risk score through data analytics. Proactive inspections made up approximately 30% of the 190,000 enforcement inspections we conducted last fiscal year. From experience, we know that proactive inspections keep the public, including construction workers, safe. As it relates to construction sites, between fiscal year 2024 and fiscal year 2025, we continued to see a reduction in construction-related injuries, with construction-related injuries dropping by 42% from 625 to 363. We urge the industry to continue working safely and to ensure that workers are appropriately trained. We will soon be implementing a new local law, Local Law 10 of 2026, sponsored by Council Member Lee, that will add to the existing site safety training program, which will require that workers receive training on mental health awareness, which will cover suicide prevention and substance awareness. We look forward to keeping you updated on this important work.

As it relates to our complaint-driven enforcement, we receive about 100,000 311 complaints each year. The most serious complaints, which are those that relate to conditions that may present an immediate threat to the public are classified as priority “A” and are responded to within hours. However, our service levels for other complaints have increased, including for priority “B” complaints, which capture

violating conditions that if occurring, while serious, do not present an immediate threat to the public. So far this fiscal year, we are responding to these complaints in 21 days, which is an increase over 15 days during the same time period last fiscal year. As with development inspections, this increase can be attributed to existing vacancies, which we are recruiting for, and to a reduction in overtime use. Of note, elevator-related complaints have driven this increase as well given the reduced capacity of the elevator unit that responds to such complaints. To address this issue, we have launched a pilot program that allows for third-party inspections following elevator work in a building, which frees up our inspectorial resources to respond to complaints from the public. The inspections must be conducted and witnessed by qualified individuals that are licensed by the Department. This program has been well received by the industry and we are closely monitoring it.

## **Sustainability**

As it relates to sustainability, the Department is responsible for implementing and enforcing a number of sustainable buildings laws. This includes Local Law 97 of 2019, which requires the city's largest buildings to increase energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions over several compliance periods, culminating in achieving net zero emissions by 2050. Our sustainability team has worked diligently to implement this important law, including promulgating rules, conducting outreach with our agency partners, and issuing guidance to inform property owners and the industry about how to comply with the law. We have also hired a dedicated team to focus on implementation and enforcement concerning the law. Last year, we achieved a major milestone as building owners were required to submit compliance reports to the Department for the first time. We saw very high engagement rates for the first compliance cycle, but know that building owners have a lot of work to do

to come into compliance with the 2030 emissions targets and are prepared to support them with that work. In addition, the Department enforces the Energy Code and existing laws that require certain buildings to report their energy and water use, post energy grades, upgrade lighting and install submetering, and perform energy audits and retro-commissioning. Concerning the Energy Code, we worked with the City Council on Local Law 47 of 2026 late last year, which was also sponsored by the Chair, and which resulted in the 2025 Energy Code. We will begin enforcing the new Energy Code later this month.

### **Improving Quality of Life for New Yorkers**

We are also taking steps to continue to improve quality of life for New Yorkers, which includes tenants, business owners, and other members of the public.

As it relates to tenants, we are proud to be participating in the Renter Ripoff hearings the Mayor's Office is hosting and look forward to working on new initiatives to support tenants that will come out of that effort. This builds on our work to protect tenants in occupied buildings under construction. We have multiple teams dedicated to tenant protection, including our Office of the Tenant Advocate, that intakes complaints and fields inquiries directly from members of the public, including addressing concerns related to required tenant protection plans, and our Real Time Enforcement Unit, which responds to complaints concerning unpermitted work in multiple dwellings expeditiously. Finally, we continue to participate in the Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force, which includes conducting regular multi-agency inspections with our partner agencies in the interest of protecting and improving conditions for tenants.

As it relates to business owners, we have a dedicated small business team that provides one-on-one guidance to businesses, including conducting plan reviews for job filings submitted in connection with their business. We encourage small businesses to contact the small business team to receive assistance before they begin a construction project or at any time during a project should they have any questions. We also took steps during the last administration to improve the regulatory environment for small businesses, including extending cure periods for all Class 2 and Class 3 violations to 60 days and doing away with the \$6,000 work without a permit penalty that was imposed by the Department on small businesses.

Finally, we are continuing to focus on reducing sidewalk sheds throughout the city, with a focus on sheds that are up at buildings where no active construction work is occurring. Since we began this effort in 2023, there has been about a 15% reduction in the number of sidewalk sheds citywide, which benefits the public, including businesses that are negatively impacted by sidewalk sheds. We recently implemented a 90-day permit duration for sidewalk shed permits, which will require that building owners renew their sidewalk shed permits more regularly and report their progress to repair façade conditions to the Department during such renewals. Where a building owner does not make progress, we will use every enforcement tool at our disposal to prompt repair work, which includes new enforcement tools we will be implementing later this year and taking legal action against the worst offenders. We have also made tremendous progress reviewing the Local Law 11 program, which requires certain buildings to undergo façade inspections periodically. We issued a report late last year, which includes recommendations made by our consultant, Thornton Tomasetti. Based on their recommendations and regulatory changes made by the City Council last year, we expect buildings to go longer without having their façades inspected, without sacrificing safety. Finally, we know there are

sidewalk sheds that will continue to be needed in conjunction with new building construction, demolition projects, and façade maintenance. Late last year we released six new shed designs, which are more aesthetically pleasing, which will improve the look and feel of the public realm. We expect to make these new designs available for use by the public through rulemaking later this year.

In closing, at the start of a new administration, we are building the foundation for a renewed vision for our city. The Department of Buildings will continue to evolve through community input and internal innovation, but our core commitments to customer service, accountability, safety, ingenuity, and inclusive growth will remain constant. These principles will guide and support everything we do moving forward. We look forward to working with the City Council and community leaders to bring this vision to life. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and we welcome your questions.