

**Testimony of
Commissioner Gregory P. Anderson
New York City Department of Sanitation**

**Hearing before the New York City Council
Committee on Sanitation & Solid Waste Management
Monday, April 6, 2026 at 10:00 A.M.**

Finalizing the City's Draft 2026-2036 Solid Waste Management Plan

Good morning, Chair Sanchez and members of the Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management. I am Gregory Anderson, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Sanitation, and I am joined by Jennifer McDonnell, Deputy Commissioner of Solid Waste Management and Katherine Kitchener, Executive Director of Resource Recovery. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in front of this committee today.

I can't tell you what a privilege it is to start my second tour with the Department of Sanitation, and to be before you as Commissioner of an agency that serves every New Yorker by collecting and processing 24 million pounds of waste each day.

As a young person coming to this Department at the start of my career, I thought I knew what that entailed. I thought I knew what it meant to pick up the trash, to sweep the streets, to fight snow – and, pursuant to the topic of today's hearing, I thought I knew what happened next.

But back then, I was like most New Yorkers; I had little idea just how much work, how much meticulous planning, how many late nights and early mornings go into every single part of this operation.

I quickly learned that "Strongest" is more than just a name, and that this Department includes many people whose strength goes beyond the physical. The people of DSNY are strongest in mind, in heart, and in care for their communities.

And the trash doesn't just disappear when they get it off the curb. Collection is only the beginning of a labyrinthine journey through transfer stations, through materials recovery facilities, on trains and barges, and on to final reuse, recycling, and disposal facilities.

I have often said that the parts of my career of which I am most proud are the times I've been able to stand shoulder to shoulder with Sanitation Workers, tradespeople, IT staff, and everyone else at this agency, but the fact is that we have so much more to do. New Yorkers depend on us, and they expect us to do more than just repeat what has worked "well enough" for decades. The City is changing, and we must change along with it, in both the parts of our work that they see and the parts that take place behind the scenes.

That is the goal of the solid waste management planning process, though 2026 is far different from 1992 and 2006.

Historical Context

In the past, solid waste management planning in New York City has been an exercise in crisis response.

From the 1970s into the 1990s, Mayors and Sanitation Commissioners tried to rapidly adapt to changing regulatory landscapes and public perceptions around outdated waste management approaches, including ocean dumping, unregulated incineration, and barely regulated urban landfills. These conditions led to the 1992 Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP), which included the City's then-novel curbside recycling program, several new materials recovery facilities (never built), and the construction or retrofit of several "modern" waste-to-energy facilities (also never built) across the five boroughs. This plan served a single purpose: to extend the life of Fresh Kills landfill into future generations, a goal that was quickly changed.

The 1996 mandate to close the Fresh Kills landfill by the end of 2001 created another, more significant crisis, one that led to the 2006 SWMP. The Fresh Kills landfill was the last option for in-city disposal of the millions and millions of pounds of waste generated in homes, schools, businesses, and elsewhere daily, and its closure was catastrophic for other parts of the city. This waste had nowhere else to go. In just a decade, over a hundred transfer stations opened in a handful of marginalized and disadvantaged communities in the South Bronx, North Brooklyn, and Southeast Queens that together saw thousands of new daily truck trips and the health and safety challenges that come along with them. The closure of the Fresh Kills landfill, a well-intentioned endeavor, to be sure, created one of New York City's most significant environmental injustices of the 20th century.

That 2006 SWMP was a groundbreaking attempt to correct this wrong and create a sustainable, reliable, and resilient residential waste management system in the post-Fresh Kills era. It called for the conversion of older, outdated marine transfer stations into modern facilities to containerize waste for long-haul transport by barge and rail. It called for several new enclosed rail-based transfer stations that would use the city's then-flagging freight rail network. It called for the construction of a state-of-the-art materials recovery facility (MRF) that would accept much of the city's recyclables by barge and export many sorted products by rail. These new facilities would stabilize a beleaguered recycling program, substantially reduce the number of trucks that travelled through overburdened neighborhoods, and create a reliable, though costly, forward-looking program for waste management.

Unlike the 1992 SWMP, the 2006 SWMP today has largely been implemented to plan. Its implementation required over \$1 billion in new capital investments and the siting of several very controversial new facilities. It took a decade and a half — three-quarters of the plan's planning horizon to realize. In my ten years with the Department previously, much of my time focused on

realizing the goals of the 2006 SWMP: building new, more modern facilities, despite intense opposition; reducing transfer station capacity in overburdened neighborhoods; and expanding recycling programs and driving diversion rates upward.

Today, our solid waste management system continues to face challenges, including rising costs, the existential threat of climate change, dwindling regional waste disposal capacity, and global forces that dictate trends in waste generation and markets for reclaimed materials. However, our waste management system today is sound. It is reliable. It is resilient. It is not perfect, but it is far more sustainable than those of the past.

We have one of the most inclusive curbside recycling programs in the country, and the Sunset Park MRF continues to innovate on sorting and reclamation technologies. We are among a handful of cities in the U.S. that can claim true circularity in our paper economy, as recyclable paper and cardboard is remanufactured into new cardboard on Staten Island. We have the largest mandatory curbside composting program in the nation, one with tremendous growth potential. We export the overwhelming majority of residential curbside trash collections not by truck but by rail or barge, the only major city in the country to do so. In sum, New York City has some of the most comprehensive and sustainable residential solid waste programming in the country. And we are implementing hard-fought comprehensive reform of our commercial waste industry, a process that will be completed next year.

That is the context in which we started four years ago to create the next iteration of New York City's Solid Waste Management Plan, SWMP26, the very plan that we are here to discuss today.

Regulatory Context

State laws and regulations lay out a regulatory framework that governs the creation of a new SWMP. The document has been carefully tailored to these requirements and guidance from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

It has been close to 20 years since the City of New York last submitted a solid waste management plan. In that time, the waste stream and waste management industry have noticeably evolved, and the State has clarified and updated the requirements for solid waste management plans.

Before we discuss the details of the draft SWMP, I would like to emphasize two points: first, state DEC regulatory requirements have evolved significantly since 2006, notably requiring a 10-year planning period rather than a 20-year planning period, and secondly, that while the SWMP provides a framework for diversion and efficient waste management systems, the City can and must pursue specific programs that are not contemplated in this document. This is, by design, a beginning rather than an end. Our record here speaks for itself: neither universal curbside organics nor commercial waste reform were laid out in the 2006 SWMP, and yet, the City took

historic action to move both policies forward in partnership with the City Council. This is particularly relevant to keep in mind as we discuss SWMP26.

Our Future: SWMP26

DSNY's rich history of evolution, continuous improvement, and innovation lays the foundation for this next solid waste management plan that we are proud to put forth to guide future progress in waste reduction and resource recovery over the next decade. With over 24 billion pounds of waste generated by hundreds of thousands of businesses and millions of residents across the five boroughs every year, the 2026 solid waste management plan is a flexible framework focused on the areas with the greatest potential impact.

This SWMP is built upon an extensive analysis of the current conditions, the first chapters documenting in detail who generates how much of what materials, where they go, and what the end-of-life options are for managing them. From that foundation, coupled with DEC's alternative analysis requirements, the SWMP identifies eight key program areas to achieve continued progress in waste reduction, increased recycling and a path towards zero waste. Of the progressive and ambitious commitments, organics diversion remains a top priority, most importantly continuing to increase participation and recovery rates across generators citywide. We will investigate how we can leverage new equipment to better separate contamination from collected organics, encourage the donation of edible food, and plan strategically for future processing capacity.

In addition to the full implementation of the Commercial Waste Zones Program by the end of next year, this SWMP dedicates an entire program to the reduction, diversion, and recovery of construction and demolition debris, a first for this waste stream. Most importantly, Waste Reduction is the leading program, the area with the most potential to truly reduce the amount of material discarded, and the associated costs and logistics of managing it. Finally, underpinning these future-focused goals is an unwavering commitment to the robust and resilient system in place today. The future DSNY envisions with this SWMP is one where all the resources in the city are managed responsibly and to the best value. Whether it's advancing textile-to-textile recovery, turning food scraps from our diverse cuisine into biogas to support a clean energy transition, or developing new ways to reuse materials in future manufacturing industries, this solid waste management plan is designed to facilitate the steady transformation of materials management citywide.

Public Engagement and Feedback

We began formal outreach for this SWMP in 2024, starting with City agencies that, in partnership with DSNY, make up the planning unit responsible for implementing SWMP26. DSNY has conducted outreach with elected officials, including with current and former members of this Committee and Borough Presidents, and engaged with dozens of interested parties and

stakeholders, including the borough Solid Waste Advisory Boards (SWABs), the NYC Climate Leadership Group, the EJ Advisory Board, and the “Transform Don’t Trash NYC” Coalition, among many others. In response to requests from stakeholders and members of the Council, DSNY extended the public comment period to 105 days, 60 days beyond the 45-day review period required by DEC. The public comment period ended in January 2026.

Through the public comment process, DSNY received more than 800 individual comments in 62 submissions that cover around 300 topic areas. DSNY has made multiple updates to the draft plan based on these comments, additional input from collaborating agencies, and corrections and clarifications identified internally. Following these updates, DSNY submitted a revised draft to DEC for review last month, and DSNY is working with our agency partners to provide written responses to all comments received, which will be included as a further attachment to the plan later in April.

Looking ahead, we will make another round of edits to the draft Plan based on DEC feedback, which we expect to receive by July of this year. We plan to submit the final plan to DEC this fall before moving on to the real work — implementation.

The work of implementing this plan will double down on the collaborative approach DSNY has taken in creating it. The 124 initiatives identified in the draft SWMP require the creation of at least six standalone stakeholder committees or working groups that will persist well beyond the approval of the final SWMP. Moreover, I personally commit to an inclusive, responsive, and adaptive approach to the implementation of this plan, and my door is open to any and all parties with interest, ideas, and criticisms related to planning for waste management in New York City.

Introduction 355

Turning to Intro. 355 sponsored by Council Member Nurse, which would expand composting by requiring DSNY to adopt a rule to require City agencies to source separate organic waste produced through meal service or institutional feeding. DSNY strongly supports this bill and continuing to increase the amount of organics separation happening throughout the city.

Thank you for your interest in the Solid Waste Management Plan. I am thrilled to be back in front of a much-changed Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management, and I look forward to answering your questions.