

**Testimony of  
Javier Lojan, Acting Commissioner  
New York City Department of Sanitation**

**Hearing before the New York City Council  
Committee on Sanitation & Solid Waste Management  
Monday, March 16, 2026 10:30 A.M.**

**Preliminary Budget Hearing for Fiscal Year 2026-27**

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Good morning Chair Sanchez and members of the Committee on Sanitation & Solid Waste Management. I am Javier Lojan, Acting Commissioner of the New York City Department of Sanitation, and I am joined today by Joseph Antonelli, Deputy Commissioner, Management and Budget, and by Joshua Goodman, Deputy Commissioner, Public Affairs & Customer Experience.

I have worked at the Department of Sanitation for 27 years, and even with that level of experience, it can still be a challenge to grasp the enormity of our work. The 10,000 members of service at DSNY are responsible for three primary areas, which I will list and then explain in as much detail as time allows, with an emphasis on new innovations and strategic initiatives. Broadly speaking, our three core functions break down to collection, cleaning, and snow removal.

Beginning with collection, New Yorkers set out 24 million pounds of residential trash, recycling, and compostable material each day. That's 24 million pounds today, 24 million pounds tomorrow, 24 million pounds the next day, and so on. It is a job that by its nature can never be completed; at the end of our third shift of the day, the next day's material is already waiting at the curb. We run a massive house-to-house operation, traversing every part of the city each day to get this waste off the sidewalks.

While collection operations have been at the core of our work for over 140 years, there have been remarkable innovations in just the last few years. We bring trash to a network of transfer stations and processing facilities where increasing shares are put to beneficial reuse in the form of recycling, composting, and anaerobic digestion.

The export of waste out of the city accounts for roughly one quarter of the Department's budget, and this is a fixed cost that is extremely difficult to adjust. We are making long-term changes, though, by reducing the amount of waste that cannot be reclaimed, most notably with our citywide curbside composting program. The largest and easiest composting program in the country, this was long derided both inside and outside the Department as impossible. We got it done by making it simple: no sign-ups, no opt-ins, no special rules or bin restrictions, and this universalist approach has worked, with record-setting tonnage diverted from landfill multiple times last year. While outreach and education around this program will continue for years to come, it is now fully normalized in keeping with Local Law 89 of 2023, and failure to properly separate this material from trash can result in a fine, just like with traditional recycling. We have knocked on close to 800,000 doors to increase awareness about the program, and are giving more

of the finished compost back to New Yorkers than ever before, with millions of pounds provided free to the public and compost giveback events set to start in early April, much earlier than in past years.

There is one gap remaining in this program, and that is a universal requirement for commercial organics separation. DSNY does not collect waste from businesses, but we do regulate this industry. The expansion of Commercial Waste Zone reform, which I will speak about in more detail later, incentivizes businesses to compost by saving them money – but very few businesses are actually required to compost, unlike all residences. Local Law 146 of 2013, which regulates compostable material from businesses, is badly out of date and not aligned with the goals of the administration or this Council. We strongly urge you to set a single standard for both residential and commercial diversion by updating this law.

The other core collection innovation of recent years is, of course, containerization. For 50 years, New York was the only major city in the developed world where trash wasn't just allowed to be placed directly on the sidewalk, it was in fact required to be placed there. Visitors would come here from all over the world to gawk at our piles of trash, and New Yorkers were asked to defend this disgusting and outdated practice.

In October 2022, we began incentivizing containerization through new rules around waste set-out times, pairing this with major changes to DSNY operations and picking up more of the trash far earlier. In the Spring of 2024, container rules went into effect for all businesses of every type in New York City, requiring them to get their trash off the streets and into a secure bin. We wrote 70,000 warnings to businesses as this rule went into effect, and have written over 100,000 summonses since, gaining broad compliance and bringing bins to restaurants, delis, bodegas, drug stores, boutiques, and everywhere else on our commercial corridors.

The first containerization requirement for residential buildings in more than 50 years went into effect November 12, 2024, requiring all buildings with 1-9 residential units to use bins. This can be either their own, or the official NYC Bin, the cheapest high-quality bin available. Starting June 2026, the NYC Bin will be the only bin that 1-9 unit properties are permitted to use for trash, to facilitate safer, cleaner mechanized collection.

This program was designed thoughtfully so that these bins would be by far the cheapest of their quality on the market at around \$50, a reasonable responsibility for most New York City property owners, and New Yorkers have purchased around one million of these bins at [www.bins.nyc](http://www.bins.nyc) or at NYC Home Depot locations. Still, in order to meet the needs of certain property owners, DSNY in partnership with the City Council created a bin reimbursement program for owners of one- and two-family homes who qualify for the state STAR or E-STAR tax exemption. To date, approximately \$9.1 million has been spent on these reimbursements.

These bins have fundamentally altered the look and feel of our streets, replacing piles of black trash bags that attracted the rats, impeded pedestrians, and generally made New Yorkers feel that no one cared about their neighborhoods. These bins may look like simple pieces of plastic, but they have led to fifteen straight months of declining rat sightings citywide.

About 10 months ago, we took a giant leap forward in waste collection strategies with the start of the Empire Bins stationary on-street container program in Manhattan Community District 9. Serviced by new automated side-loading trucks, this is the first European-style on-street container program in North America, taking those huge piles of trash bags that are generated by the largest buildings off the streets and, instead, storing them in secure containers. West Harlem is home to approximately 1100 Empire Bins, covering more than 80% of their apartment units. Unlike in other parts of the world, the bins are not shared by the entire block. Bins are assigned to a single large building, using our density, which had long been thought of as the Achilles' Heel of containerization, to our advantage, by allowing for greater oversight.

Property owners and residents have responded extremely well to this program, and the second district has already been announced, with planning underway to have Brooklyn Community District 2 fully containerized later this year. Funding to continue this program appeared in last year's November plan, and we are currently working to estimate costs and timelines for a citywide expansion plan.

Collection may seem like a solved problem, particularly considering how much of it happens outside of public view, but it is something we are refining and reinventing each day.

Turning to our second core function, cleaning public spaces, we are also continuously expanding our approach. When I began my career, no one was sure which agency was responsible for cleaning medians, step streets, underpasses, and other areas of public property in a sustained and ongoing way, a result of a Koch-era interagency memo that has long created confusion about agency roles around cleaning. As a result, DSNY was not then resourced to clean these areas.

That began to change a few years ago with the formal recognition of DSNY as the only agency with a dedicated competency around cleaning, and program design and funding to match that skill set. Since the creation of the first-ever DSNY Highway Unit in 2023, we have added specialized highway cleaning equipment and implemented important highway safety trainings. We now clean every single highway, the areas that visitors to our city often see first, on a regular basis.

Another new unit, our Targeted Neighborhood Taskforce, provides regular cleaning to over 1700 areas that had been left out of prior plans. There are most certainly several in every one of your districts – areas where your constituents are finally seeing results, from Snake Road to the West 230th Street steps to Conduit Boulevard.

We additionally took management of the City's graffiti removal program, increasing the number of 311 Service Requests closed by 80%.

We are also using new technology and tactics to streamline public space cleaning. While this has always been a data-driven agency, for decades, cleaning condition logs were maintained manually and locally. We have removed barriers between districts and created one single digital log that is used across the agency. This allows for far greater pre-planning around chronic conditions, and the valuable data produces an ongoing analysis that means more areas of your district serviced in an even more timely manner.

And we have heard concerns from members of this Council on two major cleanliness issues: median cleaning and – of course – dog waste.

Pedestrian malls, or medians, that are not properly weeded and maintained can attract and catch litter. To address this, we are working with a new mall-spraying contract to ensure in a cost-effective way that the grass in these areas does not become overgrown. We expect to spray across the City this spring to avoid summer overgrowth, and will notify your offices and Community Boards as we do so.

Before I discuss our dog waste strategy, let me be clear about the issue here: Dog owners know they have a legal responsibility to pick up dog waste, regardless of the weather or conditions on the ground. It is irresponsible and just gross to leave this behind anywhere, whether it's a sidewalk, a patch of grass or a snow pile.

At the same time, all property owners are legally required to keep their sidewalks clean, as well as 18 inches into the roadway, and this would include removing dog waste from their sidewalks. All 311 complaints related to dog waste are investigated daily. And we do issue summonses to property owners for dirty sidewalks and surrounding areas – 8,999 this calendar year alone, although that was for any kind of dirty sidewalk area, not just dog waste.

Summonses for dog owners are much, much more difficult to issue, because our enforcement officer would have to catch the owner in the act of leaving a pile behind. We have done many special patrols in areas with high rates of 311 service requests for dog waste, and they have yielded almost zero summonses. In 2024, we did a 3-day stakeout in Mott Haven that yielded just one summons. Then, in 2025, we did special weeklong patrols in Washington Heights, Harlem, Morningside Heights and Flatbush – all in response to 311 service requests – and none of them yielded any summonses.

The chances of someone not picking up after their dog while an enforcement officer is watching is very, very slim. So slim, that we issued just two summonses for failure to remove canine waste in 2025. It is clear that people only leave piles behind when they know no one is watching. We have also done – and continue to do – several ad campaigns and educational outreach on the issue of dog waste. But really, every dog owner knows what they are supposed to do. In consideration of their neighbors, they should do the right thing and pick up after their dogs.

That said, we are working with members of this Council to add dog waste bag dispensers to some of our litter baskets. This dispenser pilot is now underway, with dispensers affixed to our new BetterBin corner litter baskets.

Unlike the old green wire baskets, which forced New Yorkers to look at trash all day and leaked garbage juice onto our corners, the new baskets have no holes for the first eight (8) inches, and much smaller openings throughout. They are harder to misuse, take longer to fill up, and are far easier for Sanitation Workers to service. This is in addition to a modular design that means only the least expensive part ever needs to be replaced. We appreciate our Council partners who have purchased BetterBins over the past two fiscal years with their discretionary funds. We are excited

to work with your offices in the next year to keep BetterBins rolling out, and are proud to today be servicing baskets at the highest level ever. Whereas for decades litter basket service was the subject of political negotiations, the highest level is now baselined, yet another innovation in cleaning.

Last among our three core functions is something that all new Council Members have already learned a great deal about: snow removal. We train year-round for snow, and as discussed at last month's snow oversight hearing, this was a challenging winter, with the most snow in a decade and a top-ten blizzard, but it was also a winter that has bred innovation at the Department. Heading into next year, we will continue to look to improve, including by expanding our fleet of brine flushing trucks, by refining the brand-new geocoding of pedestrian infrastructure, and by formalizing successful pilot expansions of the Emergency Snow Shoveler program

Given that we spoke about snow at great length at a recent oversight hearing, I will leave this topic there for now, except as it relates to budget. The City's snow budget is unusual among municipal budget lines, in that the formula for determining it is set by the City Charter, outside the bounds of political negotiations. That formula calls for budgeting an average of the actual amount spent on snow removal the last 5 years, and given low snow totals over the last several seasons, the budget has generally been in the \$80-100 million range for the last several years. This winter required an adjustment of approximately \$100 million to reflect spending thus far, made in the January plan.

### **Commercial Waste Zones**

Earlier, I mentioned Commercial Waste Zones, the program being implemented under Local Law 199 of 2019 to reform the commercial waste hauling system by establishing new safety standards for workers in the commercial carting industry, improving service for businesses, increasing diversion rates, and reducing vehicle miles traveled as well as harmful emissions from waste hauling vehicles.

When fully implemented, we are looking at about 12 million fewer miles traveled by commercial carting vehicles. And, making good on a promise from when this program was created, businesses will pay less for the collection of recyclables and compostable material than they do for trash at a citywide average of 32% less for recycling and 18% less for compostable material. That means businesses will have a meaningful financial incentive to separate their waste properly.

This program is a major change for every one of the city's 200,000 businesses, and we are committed to rolling it out thoughtfully, with detailed and culturally-competent outreach. The program is now fully operational in five of the City's 20 zones, and we will complete full citywide implementation by the end of 2027. Staffing for the DSNY Bureau of Commercial Waste will continue to expand to meet the needs of this program over the next 20 months.

### **Special Enforcement Programs**

The expansion of DSNY regulatory and enforcement authority is not restricted to Commercial Waste Zones; since April 2023, Sanitation has been the lead agency on enforcement of the City's laws around street vending. Our Sanitation Police Officers enforce these laws with a focus on cleanliness and pedestrian access, and they conduct routine enforcement operations rooted in the belief that all New Yorkers, across every neighborhood, in every borough, deserve clean, safe sidewalks.

I have mentioned different forms of camera technology multiple times today, and one of the most successful recent deployments of camera technology by the Department of Sanitation is our illegal dumping program. With a network of 334 cameras citywide, set in places that illegal dumpers consider "out of the way," we are now busting people for this crime hundreds of times every year, impounding their vehicles and issuing summonses that start at \$4,000.

New Yorkers can even send a video to [IllegalDumpingTips@dsny.nyc.gov](mailto:IllegalDumpingTips@dsny.nyc.gov) and potentially get paid. We have issued about a dozen summonses to people brought to our attention via this tip line in the last year.

We also continue to seek authority up in Albany to operate cameras on our mechanical brooms to encourage compliance with Alternate Side Parking regulations. We thank the Council for your partnership in passing a home rule message in support.

I know this was a tremendous amount of information – after more than a quarter century at DSNY, I am still amazed by the breadth and depth of our work. We are in every community, every day, and if the time ever came that we didn't show up, people would notice immediately.

Fortunately, thanks to the work the Council and the administration do to keep this agency running, that day will never come.

### **FY2027 Preliminary Budget and Recent Budget Plans**

I will now provide a more detailed budgetary update. The Preliminary Budget includes \$2.25 billion in expense funds in Fiscal Year 2026 and \$2.08 billion in Fiscal Year 2027, reflecting increases of \$261 million and \$38 million, respectively, from the budget adopted last June.

The Fiscal Year 2026 budget includes \$1.33 billion for personal services to support a total budgeted headcount of 9,625 full-time positions, including 7,957 uniformed positions and 1,668 civilian positions, and \$905.4 million for other than personal services, or OTPS.

DSNY's Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Capital Budget includes \$3.26 billion in capital funding in the 10-year plan, \$1.09 billion of which is for garages and facilities, \$2.04 billion for equipment, \$59.28 million for IT, and \$70.22 million for solid waste management infrastructure.

The Capital Budget includes funding for several major facilities projects, including:

- \$488 million in funding for the construction of a new garage for Bronx Districts 9, 10, and 11, with demolition;
- \$284 million in funding for the construction of a new garage for Queens District 1, which is slated to begin design later this year;
- Upgrades to the facility that serves as the home for the Bronx District 12 Garage, which has an overall budget of \$52.5 million and began construction this year;
- And the \$10 million finishing touches on the \$223 million build out for the brand-new home for Staten Island District 1 and 3, which is slated to be completed this year.
  - That project, along with the new BK3, means we will be opening three new districts at two buildings this calendar year, a rare milestone for this Department and a sign of this administration's serious investment in the safety and well-being of Sanitation Workers and the neighborhoods they serve.

Thank you for your advocacy of a cleaner, more sustainable New York City, and we look forward to taking your questions.