



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR
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JEFFREY LEFRANCOIS
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

March 10, 2022

Hon. Eric Adams
Mayor, City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Edward Grayson
Commissioner
NYC Department of Sanitation
125 Worth Street
New York, NY 10013

Re: Organics Collection & Composting Program

Dear Mayor Adams & Commissioner Grayson,

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) strongly urges you to reconsider the decision to suspend full reinstatement of the Organics Collections program, as indicated in the City's recent Program to Eliminate the Gap Budget Report for fiscal year 2023. By a Full Board vote of 40 in favor, 0 against, 0 abstentions and 0 present not eligible, MCB4 urges the composting program be fully reinstated and community composting locations be reopened and maintained.

Background

The City's lack of a comprehensive composting program has long been a costly and environmentally unsound burden for the City of New York. Our current makeshift program for disposing organic waste is neither accessible nor efficient and most importantly, does not effectively aid in hitting the City's sustainable targets.

New York City's household organics (food scraps, yard waste and food soiled paper) make up one third of our trash. The overwhelming majority of these compostable materials are now sent to incinerators or landfills, and when buried, release methane gas, which is six times more potent than carbon dioxide. When burned they release carbon dioxide.

Due to COVID budget cuts, on April 17, 2020, the New York City Department of Sanitation (DSNY) announced total suspension of its composting program.

In October 2021, MCB4 was happy to see the City started a partial reinstatement of the program. Unfortunately, the service was limited to certain neighborhoods. We were dismayed our district was not included. We have long advocated for a healthy organics program noted in both our yearly statement of district needs and in previous MCB4 letters.¹

Board Comments

MCB4 encourages the City to provide a healthy and comprehensive organics collection service for its residents. Right now, the insubstantial program relies on “opt-in” volunteer requests which is not an effective model for a robust and successful collection system. There is strong interest in our neighborhoods and currently, when requesting composting pick up from DSNY the inaccurate response is, “There is not enough interest in your neighborhood.” We request the City take the necessary steps to encourage greener waste disposal, not discourage it.

The Department of Sanitation attended the Waterfront, Parks & Environment Committee meeting on February 10, 2022, and, after healthy conversations, MCB4 recommends the following steps to revitalize the NYC Organics Collection & Composting Program:

- Make participation mandatory.
Recently, the Mayor said the composting program’s participation is too low to justify expansion. An opt-in program is not conducive for robust participation. Building a system for mandated waste removal is a worthy investment and will result in a viable, sustainable program.
- DSNY outreach to residential buildings and complexes.
Connecting with management and maintenance teams to provide education and aid will encourage building-wide habits and lead to a structured arrangement for organics collection, which is currently absent.
- All NYC parks should be organic waste drop-off points.
Currently, only one District 4 city park is a designated food scrap drop-off site (Matthews-Palmer Park on 45th Street between Eighth & Ninth Avenues). Universal park compost bins will give much needed access to residents, provide convenience, and encourage greater participation.

Conclusion

We have been promised, over and over again, a sustainable way to handle our organics.

In 2013, then Mayor Michael Bloomberg sought to facilitate citywide food waste collections. In 2014, then Mayor Bill de Blasio proposed to rollout composting collections across the city with the goal of expanding the city’s fledging compost collection program “to serve all New Yorkers by the end of 2018.”

¹ <https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb4/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/06/07-Letter-to-Mayor-re-Composting-Programs.pdf>;
<https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb4/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2022/01/12-ACES-Letter-to-DOHMH-re-Rat-Conditions-in-Community-District-4.pdf>

And in 2020, then-Speaker Corey Johnson released a comprehensive City Council plan to combat climate change. That plan recognized that a key strategy for the city was to "mandate citywide curbside organics separation and collection."

There is precedent for a big-city successful food waste program. We urge the City to look at the San Francisco model as an example, which implemented a mandatory, three-stream citywide residential and commercial collection program, including all compostables.

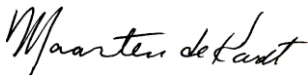
Since 2012, San Francisco has diverted more than 80 percent of all discarded waste from landfills. The city's advanced waste legislation, financial incentives, three-bin system, and extensive multilingual outreach to residents and businesses have all helped San Francisco achieve its high diversion rate.²

The City's Organics Collection and Composting Program is not "symbolic," as the Mayor has recently stated. We believe an effective composting program is a healthy step towards a zero-waste long-term goal. The insubstantial program, as it stands now, is not a true metric of potential success. We encourage the City to move forward and create a comprehensive collection plan and not sail in the opposite direction.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey LeFrancois
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



Maarten deKadt
Co-chair
Waterfront, Parks & Environment Committee



Leslie Boghosian Murphy
Co-chair
Waterfront, Parks & Environment Committee

²<https://www.nrdc.org/resources/san-francisco-composting>