

# Transcript: Mayor Adams Announces Significant Quality-Of-Life Improvements, New Affordable Homeownership Opportunities in Southeast Queens

March 9, 2022

**Mayor Eric Adams:** Thank you, and to the City Hall team for showing their emotional intelligence by making sure we had a tent for the reporters. We are a kinder, gentler administration. The former mayor would've kept you out in the rain, and we just think differently on how we do business here. And just want to really thank my law partner, Adams & Adams Associates. I was at Bayside yesterday.

[Laughter]

**Mayor Adams:** So this is an exciting day for us. And I just wanted to make sure we acknowledge everyone that's here. Of course, the Speaker of the City Council, Councilwoman Adrienne Adams; Queens Borough President, one of the best jobs in the country being a borough president, Borough President Donovan Richards; Councilwoman Nantasha Williams and Councilman Jim Gennaro. Good to see you all here and our electors. My good friend, we're going to do some good stuff together. Right?

**Mayor Adams:** Good to see Ydanis that's here as well. Karen Haycox, CEO of Habitat for Humanity, New York City and Westchester. Just the level of humanity that they've shown throughout the years – we've done some great projects together. Where are you? We've done some great projects together when we were in Brooklyn, and now we're going to continue to do so right now. And my amazing Deputy Mayor for Operations Meera Joshi – for her work here and just continuing to put pieces together has me excited.

**Mayor Adams:** We could not have a better time to be out here talking about inclement weather. Whenever there's a rainfall, even a drizzle, this community traditionally would just cross their fingers and hope that they did not have a flood, or did not see their property destroyed, and that is why we are here. This is a powerful moment. It's a powerful moment for this community. And it's probably part of Councilwoman Adams' pledge of really dealing with this continuation of flooding in this community. Did not have proper sewer systems, did not have proper support. Administration after administration – broken promises with broken drains that led to broken walls, and floors, and flooding in the basements of these apartments.

**Mayor Adams:** I know this community so well. Ten minutes from here is a place that I called home for many years. Southeast Queens is made up of hard-working homeowners, civil servants, middle class New Yorkers that really, they're the stabilizing force of our city. And we both understood, with our parents, brought us to this community to really build a stable life. Mom understood how important it was and how important it was to support hard work and determined men and women and families in this community. So here I am, almost 50 years later, not coming here as merely a resident, but as the mayor of the City of New York finally dealing with the issues that have impacted communities like these for so long.

**Mayor Adams:** I know for many years this community deserved better. And today we are acknowledging, we are on this pathway to make sure they get better. Parents and families should not have to struggle year after year just to make sure not only do they have a roof over their heads, but to make sure that their basements are not flooded. Year after year, storm after storm. They should not be afraid every time it rains. You shouldn't have to cross your fingers and hope you don't have human waste that has over-flooded in your basement, or that you're dealing with a dangerous environment. We're going to help families. This partnership and announcement that we're making today with Habitat for Humanity and my elected officials – how do we protect community and transform buildings for the future.

**Mayor Adams:** This house that we have here behind us is one of the ways that we're looking to build towards the future and ensure that we just get it right. First, we want to talk about and celebrate the completion of a \$50 million water infrastructure project. For too long the sewers have been a problem in this community. Parents sprinting to empty their gutters every time it rains. Families who cannot sleep during the storm, as I mentioned, worried about overflows in the area. Donovan and Adrienne, they know this so well, dealing and responding to these conditions.

**Mayor Adams:** Working people who cannot get to their jobs in the morning because of problems. Losing all of your property because of the flooding that you see and witness in your basements. And so we said no more to that, and I want the people of Queens to know when you look up and see rain clouds, things are going to be okay because we're going to make sure that water does not settle in your community and on your streets. This is six miles of new sewer and water mains to Rochdale. It's so important what this project was accomplished.

**Mayor Adams:** New catch basins, new curbs, and sidewalks, better roads. This is a total transformation from having to receive the complaints year after year. We're improving the quality of life and making this community more resilient in our fight against climate change. Let's go hand in hand. So I want to commend the DEP (Department of Environmental Protection), DDC (Department of Design and Construction), and DOT (Department of Transportation) for getting it right. Those guys in the yellow jackets, and ladies in the yellow jackets – a complete partnership of our community coming together. Second, right here in this area – and I know Jessica, wherever she is she's smiling, because she's always talking about housing. Housing, housing, housing.

**Mayor Adams:** Right here, you are seeing the start of an affordable housing revolution all over the city. We're beginning construction on a new project, Habitat Net Zero. We are beginning – this project is 16 passive houses. You'll walk past this house here and you'll say, "Well, it's just one home that's blighted." But that is just not true. These houses that are blighted, that are empty, maybe a fire, no one repairs them. It attracts rodents. It attracts people hanging out. It attracts loitering. It just attracts a level of bringing down the property value of a community. And Habitat for Humanity, they're doing something extremely humane. They're going to build 16 passive houses that are affordable for families here in our community.

**Mayor Adams:** The first new construction on land will be transferred to the Interboro Community Land Trust. We've been talking about this for a long time. We're finally making it happen. So what does this mean, in essence? It stays affordable. It does not leave the affordable pool, and this is going to be affordable for generations to come. So, I am not a good singer, but I'll be clear – this land is your land, this land is my land. This land is made for, who?

**Jessica Katz, Chief Housing Officer:** You and me!

[Laughter]

**Mayor Adams:** So we are really excited, Habitat for Humanity, for what you're doing. And this is just the beginning. All over the city, we're going to see this. We're going to build affordable housing that's going to last. And I was just really happy when we were finally able to land our major anchor for our housing plan, Jessica Katz, our Chief Housing Officer, as well as HPD (Department of Housing Preservation and Development), NYCHA (New York City Housing Authority), and others who are onboard to make this happen with Interboro Community Land Trust.

**Mayor Adams:** It's about putting the right team together. And part of that team is, just my partner over at HPD, my brother Adolfo Carrión. I know Adolfo's around.

**Commissioner Adolfo Carrión, Department of Housing Preservation and Development:** Yes, sir. I'm right here.

**Mayor Adams:** You know what? Bald-head guys got to stand up for each other.

**Commissioner Carrión:** That's right.

[Laughter]

**Mayor Adams:** Adolfo, bringing that vision for so many years. We want to continue to make it happen. So let me just turn it over to the other half of the law firm, Adams & Adams Associates. And just thank her for just being really a strong leader for our city. I'm so excited about the things we're going to do together and the leadership that this city deserves. We understand what people are going through. Because we went through what they are going through. So Councilwoman Adrienne Adams, the Speaker of the City Council.

[...]

**Deputy Mayor Meera Joshi, Operations:** Thank you, everyone. Thank you, Mayor Adams and Speaker Adams, and thank you Borough President Donovan Richards. Thank you to all of our electeds here today, all of our advocates, and all of our residents who wholeheartedly support and create moments like this. It starts with the community.

It's your commitment to making a more livable city. And it starts with Southeast Queens, a more livable neighborhood.

**Deputy Mayor Joshi:** I'm Meera Joshi, Deputy Mayor for Operations. I oversee the city's infrastructure. Most importantly, my number one responsibility is to make sure that our infrastructure works for the people of New York. That's maintained streets, sidewalks, safe buildings, energy, and as we can see today, clean running water that's running the right direction. Too often, it's running the wrong direction in Southeast Queens.

**Deputy Mayor Joshi:** Today marks the completion of long, long overdue upgrades to the Southeast Queens underground water systems. For far too long, this neighborhood's sewer systems have been nonexistent or outdated. As Mayor Adams reminds us, today marks work where we did not work in silos, we worked together. This is the work of DDC, DEP and DOT working together to improve over 70 blocks, to vastly improve drainage from storm water with miles of new storm sewers and miles of replaced storm sewers.

**Deputy Mayor Joshi:** I recognize that all too many of you know the sheer horror of sewage backup as well. So to mitigate this, 9,200 feet of sanitary sewers were replaced and 600 feet of new sewer were added. Over three miles of water mains were replaced. That's insurance that the water will flow when needed. And to finish the job nearly 500,000 square feet of roadway and 60,000 square feet of sidewalk and nearly 20,000 feet of curb were reconstructed, and over 900 square feet of new sidewalk and a thousand new curbs.

**Deputy Mayor Joshi:** But our water lines are not our only tool here in Southeast Queens. In addition, just north of this site, DEP has retrofitted Baisley Pond so that it can safely receive rainwater runoff during a storm. This approach is called bluebelts. We have to use every tool possible to mitigate against climate change, and we're not done. There are 24 more Southeast Queens projects currently in design and construction, totaling \$1.7 billion. This is an extension of four trunk sewer lines and the expansion of our local neighborhood sewer systems.

**Deputy Mayor Joshi:** So again, I want to thank everybody whose commitment and drive and voices make today reality. I appreciate your patience as well. Living through construction is not easy but the resiliency benefits are critical for your neighborhood and

for the vitality of the city, which you are a critical part of, so thank you very much. Next, I'd like to introduce our wonderful chief housing officer, Jessica Katz.

[Applause]

**Jessica Katz, Chief Housing Officer:** Thank you, everyone. Thanks for having me today. I want to thank Meera. Good afternoon. Thank you to Mayor Adams and Speaker Adams and Borough President Richards and all the other elected officials who are here today. I really enjoy getting to spend a day in your backyard. It's really something to be able to tell a family that they will soon be first time homeowners. A lot of people have given up on the idea of home ownership in the city, especially here. We see the headlines every day about how expensive the city has become. Each week, we hear more and more about parents choosing to raise their children someplace else. That shouldn't be the case. New York City is the best place to live and raise a family. And with investments in programs like today's community land trust, we can turn the tide. We can house everyone. We can make homes affordable for New Yorkers.

**Katz:** I want to thank the NYCHA and HPD teams for their work on these sites and pulling the financing together to make these programs feasible. Could we have a round of applause for the HPD and the NYCHA staff, please?

[Applause]

**Katz:** Thank you. Some of them are here and we've known them a very long time. To the team at the Interborough CLT, who is fighting to make home ownership a reality in our city, thank you for letting us be part of this program. And Karen Haycox is here from Habitat for Humanity. In houser language, we just call it Habitat for short. But I've never really thought too much about that second part of their name, Habitat for Humanity, and we're really focusing on the humanity part here today.

**Katz:** It's no secret that we have a serious housing shortage in the city and that's why today's announcement really matters. It's these 16 homes. There are 16 families that will soon be building equity, putting down permanent roots in this neighborhood. And they'll know that they have a future in New York City, for them and for future generations. That's what it'll take to house all of our neighbors. We'll have to utilize every type of development, every tool, every type of housing finance, and every program there is. We'll only solve this problem with creative solutions like today's, so

this is hopefully just the beginning. I look forward to coming back here in a couple years, maybe in nicer weather, and welcoming those 16 families to their homes. So thank you so much and congratulations to the whole team. Thanks.

**Deputy Mayor Joshi:** Thank you, Jessica. Next, we have the pleasure of hearing from William West. Come on up.

[...]

**Deputy Mayor Joshi:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. West, who are now, I think, engineers after all of that. Next, we have Karen Haycox, CEO of Habitat for Humanity.

[...]

[Applause]

**Mayor Adams:** To a few on-topics.

**Question:** Mr. Mayor. We're talking about 16 houses, passive and net zero. But when it comes to meeting our really ambitious net zero goals with climate control, how are you planning on taking this formula to a massive scale in the city?

**Mayor Adams:** I will give you two words, Jessica Katz. She'll roll that out for you.

[...]

**Question:** Could you talk a little bit about your chocolate milk ban. You are getting some pushback from Democrats and Republicans about your plan to ban chocolate milk in schools.

**Mayor Adams:** Well, I did not make an announcement of banning chocolate milk in schools. People are getting ahead of the conversation. As many of you know, we are going to look at nutritional values in school food. As we roll out how we're going to do it, we make those announcements. What I'm not going to allow to happen is for the rumor mill to be my policies. When that determination is made, I will roll it out, when I'm going

to do it and how I'm going to do it. The goal is to stop feeding the healthcare crisis. And so Democrats and Republicans supported smoking. We found that was wrong. So, we're going to make the right decisions and we will roll them out officially, and not through the rumor mill.

**Question:** Mayor, it's somewhat early, but what's your assessment right now of the subway station plan? [Inaudible] scene of the latest incident on the subway at 14th street. The people there said, they're still going to ride the subway. They said they feel okay overall, but still feel a need for a greater guarantee from the city that they can be safer going forward. What would you say to that?

**Mayor Adams:** Well, the crisis we're witnessing in our subways, I'm going to say this over and over again, are generational in the making. Generational neglect of those who did not have proper housing. Generational of ignoring some of the common problems. Generational of feeding the crises in the subway. So, to expect, in two weeks, that all of a sudden you're going to turn around a generational issue is just not realistic.

**Mayor Adams:** But what we are doing – we're doing 500 end of the line interactions with people who are homeless on our subway system. 150 connections a day with our team. Ejecting those who are breaking the laws. Dismantling all of the encampment that was ignored. Think about that for a moment. We have ignored encampments on our system. We're not doing that anymore. We're ignoring people being on the subway system that can't take care of themselves. So, the ways that we are moving forward, of identifying the problems, dismantling those problems, you are going to see a different subway system. What I'm saying to New York is we are not going to have generational failures anymore. It's going to start under this administration, and I'm taking full responsibility of having a safe subway system, because I'm a user of that subway system.