

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Announces the Opening of a Rooftop Farm on Staten Island

April 19, 2022

Commissioner Rit Aggarwala, Department of Environmental Protection and Chief Climate Officer: I'd like to recognize our hosts today, Lois and Richard Nicotra. Thanks so much for having us and for the wonderful work you've done here. And the designer of this rooftop farm, Anastasia Cole Plakias, with the Brooklyn Grange. And with that, let me of course, welcome Mayor Eric Adams, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you. Thank you. So much red and just a beautiful building and my partners in government for being in here. It's amazing, both the councilwoman and senator, they often talk about the great things out here in Staten Island. We continue to watch it grow, both council persons as well. And we're excited about this and we had some of the great things from this great organization in Brooklyn.

Mayor Adams: We partnered before in Brooklyn, and we saw the beauty of Brooklyn Grange in many areas, Navy Yard, and I believe in Sunset Park also. So this is just a continuing expansion of how we use our roof space. We can't grow more land, but we do have more rooftops that we can utilize. And it's great to be here on Staten Island during earth week, as we continue to look at the great things we're doing around earth week.

Mayor Adams: Every New Yorker and every community deserves open green space and access to sustainable, healthy, nutritional foods. You know that's the cornerstone of what I talk about all the time. The power of access to healthy food and the partnership here really personifies that. And this rooftop farm provides exactly the food that we want to see on our tables and we want our children and families consuming.

Mayor Adams: The roof of this building has been transformed into a place for fresh organic vegetables to grow. That's the key and part of our environmental justice. And

we are creating a more sustainable living, eating city. And by being creative like this, this gives us an opportunity to create the partnership that we want.

Mayor Adams: I've said it before, and we often ignore the role that food plays in the destruction of our environment. Oftentimes we talk about carbon emission. We talk about burning, the use of cars and others, but we don't engage in what food plays in the role. No one wants to talk about the negative impacts that our over consumption of meat and dairy is doing to our environment.

Mayor Adams: And it's time for us to put this conversation front and center, shift into a more sustainable plant-based diet and growing fresh vegetables are a key to building a city that supports both human and planetary health. It is crucial if we want to get it right.

Mayor Adams: And the rooftop farm does more than just grow vegetables, it absorbs storm weather. I recall during the storm, Senator Savino and I were walking these streets and watching the flooding that has impacted this community. And we need to think differently on how we deal with the ever-changing environment that we are experiencing, and we need to protect New York harbors in the process.

Mayor Adams: So this amazing creation here, more than 32,000 square feet of hard roof that have been covered with soil, strong and sturdy. I did a little picking earlier. This project has been funded by DEP's Green Infrastructure Grant program, \$670,000 to build this farm and deliver healthy and greener food for Staten Islanders.

Mayor Adams: Produce from the rooftop will be delivered to the Commons Cafe just down the road. 100% of the cafe's profits are donated to scholarships for schools, street beautification and other projects in the community. Food that isn't delivered will be donated to local pantries. This is just a win-win all the way around, and we're expanding these green roof programs across the entire city.

Mayor Adams: The partnership is amazing, what we're doing with our school, what we're doing in the food pantries. It's about how do we recycle and have zero waste with food, so not for profits, private property owners, and businesses can apply to the DEP year round program. This is what climate and food innovation looks like. This is environmental justice for everyone. And I want to thank all of my partners involved. This is the direction we want to move our city. And so again, thank you so much. Great job.

Commissioner Aggarwala: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Of course, we're all looking forward to seeing and tasting the terrific produce that this farm will generate. And as the mayor mentioned, what makes me and my colleagues at DEP excited is that this roof will now manage three and a half million gallons of storm water each year.

Commissioner Aggarwala: At DEP, we try to capture as much storm water as possible, before it can enter our sewer system so that it doesn't overtax and cause flooding and it doesn't lead to combined sewer overflows that pollute our harbor. And to do that, as the mayor said, we've been installing green infrastructure throughout the city, incorporating it on sidewalks at NYCHA facilities and parks and in playgrounds.

Commissioner Aggarwala: And we've taken that as this facility demonstrates a step farther by partnering with private and non-profit organizations like the Nicotra Group to install green infrastructure on private property through this Green Infrastructure Grant program. Since the program has begun, we've committed more than \$14 million, to more than 34 private property owners and local organizations interested in being part of the solution.

Commissioner Aggarwala: And this is just one aspect of the great progress that we're making, which I think is obvious to all New Yorkers, when we realize that New York Harbor today is cleaner than it's been at any time since the Civil War. In 150 years, it's not been as clean as it is today. We still have a lot more work to do on stormwater management, but we have more funding available. So if we have more projects, we're always looking for partners in the private sector and that information is available.

Commissioner Aggarwala: And I'd like particularly to thank Lois and Richard for creating a great sustainability business model and sticking to it, even through the pandemic when time got tough. You didn't waiver at all, and thank you for that kind of leadership. And as the mayor said, I'd like to recognize the work of Brooklyn Grange, which designed this project and has been a great partner to DEP and to the city for so many years.

Commissioner Aggarwala: I'd like to introduce quickly and acknowledge a couple of colleagues from the city. First, I did not mention Gus, the Acting Commissioner of Buildings. Thank you so much for being here, a key partner. Gus Sirakis, I'm sorry, on so many initiatives related to sustainability. Our Deputy Commissioner Angela Licata who oversees our green infrastructure program, our Assistant Commissioner Pinar

Balci, our Program Director Melissa Enoch, and our Project Manager Nylene [inaudible]. Thank you all for going above and beyond in creating a greener and cleaner New York. And now let me introduce our local Council Member David Carr for a few remarks.

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Commissioner Aggarwala: Now I'd like to invite Lois and Richard Nicotra, our hosts, to say a few words.

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Commissioner Aggarwala: We'll invite some of our other elected officials who are here up to speak. Council Member Kamillah Hanks.

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Commissioner Aggarwala: Thank you, council member. Now, Chairman Genarro.

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Commissioner Aggarwala: Thank you, council member. Now, I'd like to recognize state Senator Diane Savino.

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Commissioner Aggarwala: Thank you, senator. And now Assembly Member Michael Cusick.

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Commissioner Aggarwala: Thank you, assembly member. And then finally, but by no means least, are you going to say a few words, Anastasia Cole Plakias from Brooklyn Grange?

[...]

Mayor Adams: We'll take some on-topic, and then off-topic.

Question: So, Mr. Mayor, how many roofs like this one do we have already in the city? And do you have a target for your administration on the number of them?

Mayor Adams: Yep. And we're going to look at that. That is Rit's job to make sure we can get it right. I know as the borough president, we partnered with several greenhouse as well as rooftop gardens. We want to look at our schools, the potentiality of our children growing food, and serving it in the cafeteria. So we are really going to explore how do we use urban farming to have a job build out, healthy food on our plate, and be environmentally-friendly. I think Councilwoman Hank said it best. This is real economics. If we could expand this project, and that is one of the jobs that Rit has in front of him. And so we want to continue to expand it and grow.

Question: Regarding the weapons detection system, how much is the city willing to put into that? And where is it at right now in terms of selecting an actual [inaudible]?

Mayor Adams: They'll start collecting any data, still in exploration, the dollar amount, Deputy Mayor Banks is looking into that. Once we have a full rollout, we'll let everyone know, and this way you can get an opportunity to observe it.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, I hate to bring this up again, but your taxes. You know, mayors back to Giuliani, before him, have released their taxes every year. What is your general hesitation to release your taxes? What do you think about it?

Mayor Adams: We're going to release tax information. No hesitation. Next.

Question: Tax information. Does that mean your full return?

Mayor Adams: Tax information. We're going to release the tax information. Now, remember, I'm not required. We know that, right? So let's be clear on that. So let's not give the impression that I'm required. I'm not required, but we'll release tax information.

Question: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I was going to ask something about the tax return as well. The Manhattan U.S. attorney's office earlier today released a letter to court as part of the Rikers monitor case, where they're threatening to install new federal leadership at the jail, unless you and the commissioner roll out a plan that rapidly addresses the crisis that they say exists in the jail. What do you make of this letter? And would you be open to installing federal leadership at the jail?

Mayor Adams: First of all, this is the first I'm learning of the letter. I would look over the letter and find out exactly what's taking place. We could run our jails. We could run a jail system that has been a mess for decades. And so, Eric Adams, I know it's hard to believe, but I've been the mayor for four months now. And I believe that we are going to do a far better job than a generational problem at Rikers Island. The Rikers Island crises did not start on January 2022. And so, we're going to look over the letter and find out what are the concerns. And I think Commissioner Melina is moving in the right direction. I'm really proud of what he's doing. He's the best person to be there. Rikers was a mess. And we need to be clear on that. It did not start in January, and we're going to move forward to make it a humane place for people to serve their time. They should not be treated in an inhumane fashion.

Question: I have a separate question, but I do want to clarify the tax information. What is the information? Are you talking about your actual returns?

Mayor Adams: No, listen. I'm going to release tax information. I'm going to release tax information. Okay.

Question: So there was a ruling striking down the federal mask mandate for transportation. There's been some confusion. Different authorities in the city are keeping it or getting rid of it. I wonder what's your reaction to the ruling? And do you think masks should still be required for the MTA, which I know you don't control? And then, you know, the TLC is keeping them. Would you do ...

Mayor Adams: Yes, it should. We should still have masks on the subway system. New York is unique. We are densely-populated. We see these slight spikes. I think New Yorkers did the right thing about wearing a mask, and we continue to encourage New Yorkers to wear a mask if they're in an environment with unknown status of the persons or individuals they are around. And so we need to continue to do that. In addition to that, I believe, and I spoke with the governor yesterday and my deputy mayor, I mean, my

commissioner of the Department Of Health and Mental Hygiene is speaking with the Department of Health. We are going to continue to encourage New Yorkers to wear masks on the subway, and we believe that we have the authorization to do so.

Question: Hi, thank you, Mr. Mayor. You recently spoke about an idea to have houses with cannabis, growing cannabis on top of NYCHA properties. Would you speak more to that, and the likelihood of that happening?

Mayor Adams: What we have to do, we have to get over the federal hurdle, because right now the federal government does not recognize legalization in this state. So we have to get over the federal hurdle. I believe there's a great opportunity for cannabis to be grown on NYCHA rooftops with an employment aspect of it, and using the medical cannabis aspect of it. But there's many layers to getting it done. And we're going to sit down with the federal government, the federal agency, see if there's a possibility to get a waiver, how we can get it done. We have to think differently about employment opportunities and using our rooftops better. And so, we are willing to try everything that's possible to get those goals in mind and in alignment. And so if we can use it, if the federal government cooperates with us, and allows us to use it. We're straight ahead to make it happen. Okay. Thank you.

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