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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS, DEP HONOR FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF HURRICANE IDA, ANNOUNCE SUITE OF STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE INITIATIVES TO MAKE NYC MORE RESILIENT TO INTENSE RAINFALL

Kizzy Charles-Guzman, Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice: My name is Kizzy Charles-Guzman, the executive director of the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice. Thank you everyone again for joining us. A special thank you to our elected officials, our commissioners, and our team across so many agency partners who work tirelessly and care deeply as New Yorkers experience more frequent and disruptive climate events of all types. One year ago today, Hurricane Ida brought record breaking torrential rain to our city. Thousands of New Yorkers suffered flood damage in their homes and businesses. The most devastating impact was the tragic loss of 13 of our neighbors. Please join me in a moment of silence to remember those New Yorkers and express our deepest sympathies to their family members and friends.

Charles-Guzman: Thank you. Climate change presents public health, environmental and equity challenges to our city. While we remember and mourn the victims of extreme weather, we are here committed to transform, adapt and prepare our city. Investing to not only protect New Yorkers from climate hazards, but also to make our city cleaner, greener, and a more equitable place to live. Joining us today is the Honorable Mayor Eric Adams, who will kick us off as we present a new vision for storm water resilience in New York City — one that centers our neighbors, invites world class innovation, and charts a course for long-term investments. Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you. Thanks so much, Kizzy, and to our teams — anniversaries are not only celebrations, but there are moments of reflections on how we could do things better. I'm happy to be here with the team. The team consists of our speaker, Speaker Adrienne Adams; borough president, Borough President Donathan Richards; Council Member Ariola, 32nd Council district; Bob Holden, Council member of the 30th Council district; Assemblyman David Weprin, Assembly member from the 24th Assembly district; Assemblywoman Rozic, 25th Assembly district. All coming together because we all realize that this issue crosses all party lines or neighborhoods. We join with our amazing team of commissioners who are part of this initiative — from Parks to the Department of Environmental Protection, to, as we just mentioned, Kizzy Guzman, who is really doing an amazing job — and the chief climate officer,

in her our role as the chief climate officer, and really looking at how we are forward thinking around these climate issues.

Mayor Adams: So today, as we acknowledge Hurricane Ida, and it was the heaviest rainfall in our recorded history of flooding our streets and subways and basements in the city. It had a major impact on us. I'll never forget that day being out, looking through the streets and watching the Brooklyn Bridge flood. For the first time in my life, I experienced that the bridge had to be closed down because of the flooding. Our neighbors were victims of climate change. 13 New Yorkers died in their basement apartments due to flooding. This traumatized our city. But climate change is bringing longer droughts, stronger storms and heavier rainfalls to places all over the globe. We're witnessing right now what's happening in Pakistan as we see the heavy rainfalls. To what is happening in Europe with the dry row beds. This is real and it's no place of denial.

Mayor Adams: What is happening right here in our city, particularly in the borough of Queens and how it has impacted many of our coastal cities, we are not going to stand by. We are taking actions to protect our city and prevent future tragedies. That includes ramping up flood protections across the city, whether it's from heavy rains or storm surge. Ida was not from coastal areas. We thought we could build higher walls, but mother nature showed us it was more than just higher sea levels. This came from rain. Inwood, Crown Heights, and other parts of our city that historically did not deal with flooding was impacted by this rainfall. Climate change is not something we can fight on our own. As I stated, it's a team effort, and this team working across every city agency, every level of government, we are focused on one thing and that's GSD, get stuff done. We have to get it done in an expeditious, but thorough manner.

Mayor Adams: Over the past nine months of this administration, we have prioritized climate action at every level of government. Some of these solutions are massive infrastructure elements like the floodgates of the East Side Coastal Resiliency Project. Others will use green infrastructure and technology to help New York City become resilient to an Ida-level storm. That is what today's announcement is about. This plan would augment our existing sewer and stormwater systems with rain gardens up and other flood managerial solutions and help prepare our city for the next big storm.

Mayor Adams: New York City has thousands of rain gardens like this one here. People think that we were just creating another space for a tree. No, it had a significant point. These rain gardens are more than just plantings — they are a strong defense against flash flooding. Each rain garden has a capacity of holding upward to 2,500 gallons of water during a storm. Right over here, you can see how they work. Today, we are announcing the addition of 2,300 new curbside rain gardens bringing us up to a total of 11,000 citywide. These are strategically located in areas where we know historically we've had flooding and there's an attempt to mitigate the overburden of our sewer systems.

Mayor Adams: We're beginning construction of 1,000 more rain gardens by the end of this year. Rain gardens are just part of the plan we are releasing today. We're also building out our own cloudburst infrastructure and expanding other flood mitigation options, including bluebelt drainage systems that naturally handle runoff. In addition to managing storms, we are using

technology, which is crucial to anticipate monitoring the impacts. I'm a big believer in technology to run our city smarter. We've installed flood sensors like this one in key areas across the city. These sensors are early detecting using technology, not only to identify areas of flooding, but to use the data for future information and flow. That provides our city with critical infrastructure in order to advise evacuations, travel bans, or road closures.

Mayor Adams: It is so important to have this full frontal effect of prevention and intervention and this sensor is a tool that we can use. On this chart you can see the flood data recorded at this location a year ago. The storm dumped rainfall on our city at a record breaking 3.75 inches an hour — nearly doubling the city's previous records. These sensors recorded it all for future storm management. Now we have this data. We're able to understand, when we partner with the Office of Emergency Management and our other operations at DEP, we can use this data to predict the behavior of the storms. The city has already installed 29 sensors and we'll install up to 50 more this year, with a total of 500 more planned for the next five years, again, strategically located to gather the information using historical data, compared with how we will respond to upcoming storms.

Mayor Adams: This is more than just infrastructure. This is how we're going to protect our city and people from rising sea levels and stronger storms. This is how we can create good jobs because it's about also using one solution to address a multitude of problems. These are good paying jobs right here, investing billions that would have a direct impact and benefit for our communities. It is how we're going to lead. Everyone takes notice of what happens here in New York and what happens here in New York cascades throughout the entire country. The city has been here for 400 years, and we are clear on this. We're going nowhere. We're going to continue to be prepared for whatever challenges that we have to face. We will pivot and shift and adjust. We're adapting in real time to the realities of climate change and doing everything we can to keep New Yorkers safe.

Mayor Adams: So I want to thank all of my agencies, especially the Department of Environmental Protection and the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice. So now I'm going to turn it back over to Kizzy so she can allow the other speakers to come forward. I want to thank them for their partnership, particularly with the initiatives that are coming out of the city council and the coordination of all of our agencies and elected officials on the state and city level. Thank you very much.

Charles-Guzman: Thank you, Mayor Adams. You are so right, fighting climate change is a citywide effort requiring all hands on deck, including every New Yorker. To share more of our plan, I would like to welcome another member of our climate team to the podium commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection and our chief climate officer for the city, Rohit Aggarwala.

Commissioner Rohit Aggarwala, Department of Environmental Protection: Thank you, Kizzy. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Good morning everybody. Madam speaker. And thank you for joining us here in South Ozone Park. My name's Rohit Aggarwala and I am the city's chief climate officer and the commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection. As Kizzy and the mayor mentioned, we stand here mindful of the fact that 13 New Yorkers lost their lives

to climate change a year ago today. And we are here to commit ourselves to making New York City resilient to handle the storms like Ida that we know climate change is bringing. For more than a century our sewer system handled most every storm pretty well. It's a massive system with 150,000 catch basins and 7,500 miles of sewers. They aren't perfect. They require ongoing maintenance. Some of our sewers due to the decisions of borough presidents long ago are substandard in some parts of the city. Like parts of Southeast Queens nearby, there are no storm sewers.

Commissioner Aggarwala: But in general, our storm sewers are designed to handle rain that falls at a rate of 1.75 inches per hour. Until last summer, that was the most intense rain that New York had ever seen. Then Hurricane Henri gave us 1.94 inches. And then a year ago today, Hurricane Ida gave us the 3.75 the mayor mentioned. Even though DEP crews had done their job, especially through cleaning catch basins before the storm, that level of unprecedented rain overwhelmed our system. Now we know that we need a very different stormwater management system from the one that we've inherited. We have work to do on our sewers, and we are doing it. This summer we've implemented a new schedule for routine catch basin and cleaning. We're exploring ways that technology might help us predict where sinkholes and collapses might occur.

We're collaborating with the MTA to identify causes of flooding in specific subway stations.

Commissioner Aggarwala: We're even more committed than ever to ensure that we finish providing sewers to Southeast Queens. But the reality is that we will never be able to accommodate an Ida level event in sewers. Sewers that large would require us to tear down homes and businesses to make way for wider streets and wider sewers. But we are not helpless. Today we are here to share the vision for how we will make New York City resilient to the Ida level storms of the future. Our path to resilience requires us to look to nature, to augment our sewer system, to build green infrastructure that will compliment our gray concrete infrastructure. Separately, neither would do the job, but the combination of well-maintained sewers and extensive green infrastructure can make New York City resilient in the face of the storms to come. We use green infrastructure to handle storm water outside of the sewer system, to absorb it into the ground or to store it until a storm passes.

Commissioner Aggarwala: As the mayor just mentioned, we have already the largest green infrastructure program in the country with more than 11,000 rain gardens, green roofs, and green playgrounds built today. And as the mayor said, we're making progress now. And you're going to see a lot more of it in the coming months and years. Rain gardens are only one aspect of our green infrastructure approach. Since the 1990s, we've taken existing streams and wetlands on Staten Island and turned them into what we call bluebelts, natural features designed to capture and naturally filter stormwater from the streets. The bluebelts have been so successful that we now have 83 of them on Staten island and a handful in Queens in the Bronx. And so we have now begun to think about how we develop a citywide network of bluebelts.

Commissioner Aggarwala: I'm pleased to announce that we have engaged Dr. Eric Sanderson of the Wildlife Conservation Society, the author of Mannahatta, who has written extensively on historic streams in wetlands across the city as a consultant. As Eric's work tells us water has memory and many of the hardest hit locations in the city were the site of ancient streams that

developers merely filled in. Eric is helping us take a look at historic waterways and wetlands and compare them with current flood maps and 311 data to develop a map of where we ought to have bluebelts across the city. We're also looking at storing stormwater in public spaces. Cities such as Rotterdam, Amsterdam and Copenhagen have pioneered designs for playgrounds, highway medians and public plazas that are designed to become retention ponds in extreme storms. DEP has been partnering for several years with the city of Copenhagen on this topic. And thanks to their help, next year, we will break ground on a pilot project here in Queens.

Commissioner Aggarwala: We call these cloudburst designs and the first one will be built at NYCHA's South Jamaica Houses, not too far from here. There, we will redesign some of their open spaces, most notably a basketball court, to store storm water during the most extreme storms. Finally, private property has a significant role to play. Earlier this year, DEP released a new stormwater rule that requires all newly developed or redeveloped large properties to manage stormwater on site with green infrastructure or storage facilities. So properties cannot simply shed their storm water onto the sidewalks and streets where it can overwhelm our sewers. All told, we are confident that the combination of gray and green infrastructure can handle storms like Ida. It will not be easy or immediate. We have a lot of work to do, especially in finding more locations for rain gardens and bluebelts that we need. And this will take years to finish.

Commissioner Aggarwala: We are now working with partner agencies, such as Parks, NYCHA, DDC, DOT, and many others to turn this vision into a concrete strategy with timelines, budgets, and locations. I'd like to recognize my colleagues here today. Chief Housing Officer Katz, Parks Commissioner Donoghue, DDC Commissioner Foley, NYCEM Commissioner Iscol, NYCHA Chief Sustainability Officer Kenneth, and of course, Executive Director Charles-Guzman for all of their good work, as well as HRO Director Giuliani who's here somewhere. And of course, as the mayor said, our elected officials who are such great colleagues. Together, we intend to release a detailed plan in April as part of Mayor Adam's comprehensive sustainability plan that is due then. But our planning work does not mean we are not doing real work right now. As the mayor said, we'll continue making investments in our sewers and rain gardens and ongoing bluebelt projects this year.

Commissioner Aggarwala: And just as we will make progress also on our other climate priorities, addressing extreme heat, coastal inundation and drought, and reducing our carbon emissions. So we stop this terrible scourge of climate change that costs 13 New Yorkers their lives. Before I close, I'd like to take just a moment to recognize a few folks on the DEP team who have been instrumental as we build out this vision. Deputy Commissioners Angela Licata and Tasios Georgelis. Assistant Commissioner Pinar Balci, Melissa Enoch, Adriana Kocovic on our green infrastructure team, and especially our Chief of Staff Kim Cipriano. Thank you all for the work you are doing to make New York resilient. And thank you all once again for joining us here today, back to you Kizzy.

Charles-Guzman: Thank you, Rohit. This vision gives us all the charge that we need and your leadership gives us the charge and energy that we need as we develop our climate goals for plan YC. So next, please join me in welcoming Speaker Adrienne Adams to the podium.

[...]

Charles-Guzman: Yes. Thank you, Speaker Adams. And I look forward to your partnership in City Council as we continue to address the climate resiliency of New Yorkers. And so finally, the man who needs no introduction, please join me in welcoming Borough President Richards to the podium.

[...]

Charles-Guzman: Mayor Adams, for the last words.

Mayor Adams: We'll take a few on-topics that you have for me?

[Crosstalk]

Question: Mr. Mayor. Good morning.

Mayor Adams: Morning.

Question: I wanted to ask a fairly straightforward question here. What has changed in the last year to see that this does not happen again?

Mayor Adams: Well, first, I think, as the Queens borough president stated and we're all stating, this is not a one year change. This is a sustained change that we have to do. What has changed last year to this year is building out more sensors. It's building out more of these gardens. It is putting in the systems with better communication to zero in on those who live in basement apartments. It is our continued advocacy that we do need Albany's help to legalize these apartments so that we can do our role. And so this is a continuation. We did not get here — one year. The constant abuse of our environment created this problem. And now the constant nurturing of our infrastructure is going to ensure that we correct this problem. When you look at the contributions — and we're going to do a complete list. I like your question. I'm going to make sure DEP give a complete list of all the things we have done and what we're going to do so all New Yorkers can see the progress we're making.

Question: And just a follow up, real quick. What's the status of the census of basement apartments that your predecessor announced?

Mayor Adams: The census?

Question: The basement apartments, looking at all the basement apartments across the city.

Mayor Adams: Yeah, no. Our goal is to do, one, communication, to do information, to make sure that we can look at those flooded areas and have the public become aware of what those areas are. And to continue evolve on how do we legalize those basement apartments. That's the number one thing we can do. Legalization of basement apartments. That is what our focus is on right now.

Charles-Guzman: And we got the water flowing. So we'll go to questions in a second...

[Crosstalk]

Question: A follow-up question to the basement apartment...

Crowd: [Inaudible.]

Mayor Adams: Continue to pray. Pray with us all. We all need prayer.

Question: Okay. I had a follow up to the basement apartment questions.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Question: Brad Lander, the comptroller, mentioned that it's a state level bill that has to get passed. Are you personally talking to state lawmakers about this and how it's important to get this all passed going forward?

Mayor Adams: How we get the... Say that again, one more time?

Question: Comptroller Brand Lander mentioned that it's a state bill that has to pass in order for basement apartments to be legalized. Are you personally talking to state lawmakers about getting this bill through and making sure that these basement apartments get regulated?

Mayor Adams: Yeah. And that's what we want to do. We want to — we need help from all of our electeds on how to go about getting that legislation passed. That's the heart of what we need to do with basement apartments is to get that bill passed. And we could use the help from the comptroller and whomever else wants to be part of that team.

Question: I have a quick follow up. It's a year later. What is your message to the residents that were hardest hit by Ida? Now that it's a year later, you're making all these changes, but what's your message to them after they've been through so much from that storm, and continue to deal with the repercussions of the consequences, all that flooding?

Mayor Adams: Well, what we must do is to ensure number one, we — information to our people. And that is why we are crucial that we are going to list what we're doing. Because people need to know that we are not just sitting on our hands and saying that it is going to just pass by. These are real storms. These are storms that are going to be here a long time. And our goal is to show how we are making those progress. Each time they see these rain gardens, they're going to understand that this is a new step in the right direction. Each time we continue to show these sensors, we're moving in the right direction. And it's about people know we are moving in the right direction, and that's what New Yorkers want to know.

[...]

Question: I have a two part question.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Question: One is there were a lot of homeowners after Ida, calling for a buyout. And I looked at the plan with the HUD grid, and there's no money set aside for possibly buying homeowners out. Can you speak to that?

Mayor Adams: Yeah, we want to continue to look at those voluntarily housing mobility, those who want to buy out or to sell their houses in those high flood zone areas. And we're going to continue to factor that into the equation, as well.

Question: The other part of my question is for the borough president. We had spoken last year about the city creating a building [inaudible]. A lot of homeowners are still doing their repairs. They're in crazy debt, and there's people that have not found homes after theirs got destroyed.

[...]

[Crosstalk]

Question: Mayor, your social services commissioner, Gary Jenkins, has come under a lot of scrutiny recently. Right now he's on vacation. There are questions about a promotion his wife was given. What are your thoughts about the job he's doing right now? Any considerations about his future?

Mayor Adams: I'm just blown away when people talk about live/work balance. And here is a man that has been inundated housing thousands of people that came to our city of... I see Gary out with me, 1:00, 2:00 AM in the morning. I see him up 5:00 AM in the morning, meeting buses. And he did the cardinal sin, he went on vacation with his family. I mean, that is just so unbelievable that in the time that all of us are dealing with the impact of the stress of our daily lives. I commend him for renewing himself and coming back and doing those 12, 13 hour days that he's doing. I have the utmost confidence in Gary, and Gary's going nowhere. When I chose him, I chose him because he lived in a homeless shelter as a child. I chose him because of his dedication and commitment. And I think this city is — we're at a better place because we have a compassionate leader like him. And one thing my team knows about me. If you do something wrong, we have to correct it, but I'm not the leader that abandons you because people are yelling at you. That's just not who I am. These are great committed public servants, and I'm there for them, and I appreciate him.

Question: Two more questions. A 25 year old woman shot in the head, do you have any comment on that? And also there was a video showing an officer punching a woman in the head, do you have a comment on that?

Mayor Adams: First, what I learned, and I was briefed this morning, it appears as though the young lady was an intended target. We are unclear yet, but we are going to continue. The investigation is still new. We don't have much more than that at this time. But again, it really highlights what the governor and I talked about yesterday, and what we'll continue to talk about.

The overproliferation of guns on our streets, and people using them for violent means. And then it segues into what happened in the 32 precinct, with the incident yesterday. We need to be clear on what happened there. We had a person that was wanted for attempted murder, attempted murder. Police officers found him. He was armed with a ghost gun in his belt. Those officers showed great restraint. They didn't discharge their weapons, they subdued him.

Mayor Adams: While they were subduing him, a crowd came and attempted to disrupt the arrest. The young lady came, smacked the police officer, the police officer responded. I think those officers on the scene showed great restraint. They did what the system called for. They didn't turn off their body cameras, that's why we have footage of what happened. I am not going to tell police officers to go out, apprehend dangerous people, and then come later when they did what they were supposed to do and not say you protected the people of this city. Now, we're going to do an investigation. We're going to look at the video. If there's a need to retrain, if there's need to do other things, we're going to do that. But let's be clear. They were arresting a person who was being pursued for attempted murder. He was armed with a ghost gun in his belt, and people got in and interrupted while police were taking action.

Mayor Adams: That just can't happen. I tell New Yorkers all the time, don't endanger yourself, and don't endanger other officers, and don't endanger the public. At a safe distance, you can video what the officers are doing, but you should never go inside a scene of apprehension. And if you look at the video, the young lady was inches away from the person who was armed with that gun. That action endangered those police officers, and you can't do that as a civilian. And I take my hat off to those who apprehended the suspect, who showed great restraint to do so without discharging their weapons, who followed the rules and kept their video cameras on. That's why we know what happened there.

Question: There are a number of teachers that have been excessed from our school system. Because of the excess, [inaudible] where teachers are complaining about larger class sizes. How do we deal with the issue of larger class sizes, even though they're excessing teachers who are losing their jobs and not being able to handle those extra classes and [inaudible]?

Mayor Adams: Our class sizes are down to 21 or 22.5. That's lower than the UFT contract negotiation. We're going to open our school system. Our children are going to receive a quality education. We're going to shift the resources where they're needed. I'm a child of public school. I'm a child of public school, I'm a child that received a quality education, and because of that I'm the mayor. And so, one thing you know about me is that I'm focused, I'm disciplined, and I'm committed to our children. And we're going to do a good job. I'm excited about the upcoming school year with our chancellor... Thank you.

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