

**MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RESPONSE TO THE MAYOR'S PRELIMINARY  
BUDGET  
FISCAL YEAR 2025**

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## **Manhattan Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Priorities Report**

Section 245 of the New York City Charter requires the Borough President to submit to the Mayor and Council a response to the Mayor's preliminary budget. In accordance with this section, the Manhattan Borough President submits the following statement.

### ***Overview***

New York City's recovery from the devastating impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has been remarkable. By many metrics, including important economic indicators, New York City has returned to pre-pandemic strength. The resilience of New Yorkers has been on full display. I am enormously proud of the work that our neighbors, advocates, community board members, local stakeholders and New Yorkers citywide have done to make this possible.

However, longstanding issues that have long plagued our city -- an affordability crisis, the impacts of climate change, struggling small businesses, concerns about public safety, and more -- remain serious challenges that we must confront. The housing crisis is the worst we have seen in the city's history, making it harder for New Yorkers to stay in the neighborhoods they have long called home and contributing to an ever wider economic and social divide. Now more than ever, our budget priorities must ensure that our recovery works to prioritize equity and address those failures.

Across Manhattan, our office hears concerns from community members about the need to improve accessibility in our public transit system, food insecurity, public restrooms access, funding mental health services and NYCHA improvements, investing in climate resiliency projects, enforcement against illegal cannabis sales, support for older New Yorkers, and more. These issues are extremely important and must be taken seriously. However, I wish to draw the Mayor and Council's attention to a number of key priorities that I believe must be adequately funded to ensure that we are setting the borough on a path toward a brighter future.

### ***Tackling our housing crisis and funding tenant protections***

#### **I. Housing creation and preservation**

The Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) has been chronically underfunded and understaffed for years, resulting in constant delays in closing on critical affordable housing projects and beginning construction. At the same time, the NYC Housing Connect lottery presents myriad challenges to low-income New Yorkers applying for affordable housing. Given limited staff to process the astronomical number of applications HPD receives for affordable apartments and the fact that there simply aren't enough homes available, applicants are left uncertain about their application status or timeline to move into an apartment. Even after a prospective tenant is approved for an apartment, it might take a year or longer to be able to move in because of the administrative burden placed on applicants to prove that they meet the income requirements. In addition to dedicating funding toward HPD financed affordable housing construction, the City must make significant increases to the agency's headcount and staffing budget to ensure that affordable housing projects are completed and New Yorkers badly in need of the affordable housing these developments will provide are able to move in without delays.

## II. Funding NYC's Right to Counsel law and protecting tenants' rights

Passing and expanding the Right to Counsel Legislation has been one of my proudest achievements as a legislator. Ensuring low-income New Yorkers citywide can access legal representation in Housing Court for free and regardless of immigration status has transformed tenants' abilities to stay in their homes. In the years after, 84% of New York City tenants who had an attorney won their case and stayed in their homes. However, the pandemic and subsequent lifting of the eviction moratorium has sent the eviction filing rate skyrocketing. This has overwhelmed the system for tenant legal services, a vital profession that already struggles to recruit and retain housing attorneys struggling with the cost of living in New York while championing our city's most vulnerable tenants. As a result, thousands of tenants who would have otherwise qualified for the program have had to face the threat of eviction without their right to counsel being fulfilled.

Alongside boosting our new housing stock, expanding access to housing vouchers, and completing key supportive housing projects, our city's landmark Right to Counsel program must remain a core pillar of our work to house Manhattanites and New Yorkers at large. This requires significantly building on the \$20 million additional investment in right to counsel programming in last year's budget. The FY25 budget must include an additional \$50 million for tenant representation for the right to counsel program, baselined.

### *Safeguarding Education, Youth Services, and Libraries*

#### I. Education

A strong public school education is among the most powerful gifts we can give to a young New Yorker. I remain extremely proud of the work that our teachers, principals, school support staff, superintendents and district staff do every day. But with pandemic federal aid expiring in June 2024, over \$1 billion in core programs for New York City public students is set to expire with it, making our schools' jobs considerably harder. This includes hundreds of millions of dollars in school programming and workforce investments used to fund social workers, psychologists, family workers, nurses, shelter-based coordinators for unhoused students, bilingual staff, and translation and interpretation services to support students with a wide range of needs. The city must find ways to continue to fund these badly needed and crucial services.

#### II. Youth Services

As we continue to work towards confronting our affordability crisis in New York City, we must also look towards supporting young families and young New Yorkers. The impact of the Pre-K and 3-K for All programs for New York City families cannot be understated, helping young parents navigate the complicated and often prohibitively expensive world of daycare while allowing them to work, increase family savings, and make a living. Further, access to high quality early childhood education narrows developmental gaps for children across income brackets, fosters cognitive and social-emotional skills, and helps kids stay interested in learning for the rest of their lives. Funding for these programs must be fully restored, including funds to cover expiring stimulus funds used to expand existing early childhood education programs. Further, the City must invest in targeted and linguistically appropriate outreach and education strategies to ensure parents and caregivers know about and can take advantage of these

important childcare resources. Finally, the City must invest in strategies to continue expanding these programs so that every New Yorker who wants a seat in Pre-K or 3-K can get one in their neighborhood.

Additionally, the SYEP program is a landmark program providing thousands of young New Yorkers with paid learning opportunities and job experience during the summer. Participation in SYEP has improved school attendance, lowered justice involvement rates, and helped keep young New Yorkers safe throughout the summer. SYEP Pathways works with local community-based organizations to provide similar opportunities to young undocumented New Yorkers. The city must continue funding both programs, and include investments to ensure these programs expand to more students and provide equitable pay. In addition, the City must continue to expand placements with both public and private sector employers in growing industries to help connect young New Yorkers with a wider range of career pathways.

### III. Libraries

Our libraries play an incredibly pivotal role in our communities, serving New Yorkers young and old. In addition to books, e-books, and audiobooks, our public libraries provide a range of cultural and educational supports: author talks, assistive technologies, books by mail, free seeds for users to grow from their own homes, technology classes, citizenship resources, free income tax services, and more. And they remain immensely popular – in just the four months prior to the November 2023 budget cuts, the New York Public Library system welcomed more than 2.6 million visitors and registered 195,000+ new library cards. This is up from 2.4 million visitors and 142,000+ new library card users in the same period in 2022. Reducing essential services that uplift all New Yorkers in their communities only weakens our city.

The proposed FY25 budget would end six day service at most branches, reduce programming, and indefinitely delay planned re-openings of several branches. A well-resourced library uplifts its communities – there is something in them for everyone, and an investment in libraries is an investment in its users. I urge the administration to restore the proposed and enacted \$58.3 million in cuts to bring our libraries back to their pre-November 2023 levels, and pursue every opportunity to keep building our libraries' futures.

#### ***Growing our Urban Forest***

Trees remain a key resource in the fights against heat, poor air quality, and other climate and public health challenges. We need more of them, and we need to ensure they grow. I've been glad to work with my fellow Borough Presidents on our Million More Trees campaign, to see the Council's investments in our Urban Canopy by passing legislation to invest in an Urban Forest Master Plan, and to see the Parks department continue to increase its tree planting efforts. These are important efforts toward achieving 30% tree canopy by 2035. Further, we must invest in green workforce development and community education programs, particularly by recruiting talent from heat-vulnerable neighborhoods and within our own Parks department. We must expand forestry recruitment and training programs and create opportunities for NYCHA residents to grow the green life in and around their complexes. Further, the city should invest funding for NYCHA to build out a tree stewardship program for residents – both protecting existing trees while providing residents with environmental education and opportunities to connect with green life.

In order to invest in our trees, we must also invest in our Parks Department. We must drastically increase the Department's budget and baseline it 1% of our Citywide budget. In addition to boosting city operational support for Parks, we need to ensure Parks has opportunities to pay for its own needs through its own revenues. The mayor and the city council should explore ways to allow parks to keep a portion of their revenues for park operations, maintenance, and expansion of green spaces. This includes allowing public parks in our city to keep 80% of the money brought in by their own concessions and events and making the remaining 20% being made available in a pool for smaller parks with limited concessions and events to draw revenues from. Further, the city should levy a fee for for-profit events hosted in public parks that can go towards park maintenance. Finally, I was glad to see the city announce \$15 million in new federal funding to invest in green jobs and urban forest restoration, especially in disadvantaged areas. With the state budget getting finalized in the next few months, we must continue to watch for and seize on further grant funding.

### ***Sanitation and Composting***

#### **I. Keeping our streets clean**

There are few more fundamentally important tasks for municipal government to accomplish than ensuring our streets are clean and the trash is picked up. The incredible work that our unionized sanitation workers do every day is a service that contributes to public health, safety, and a good quality of life for every New Yorker, and we are enormously thankful. However, it is time that we baseline street basket collection in the New York City budget. Additionally, funding for key but easily overlooked services, including vacant lot cleanup, supplemental park cleanup, and the Targeted Neighborhood Taskforce, an initiative this administration announced just two years ago, must be restored.

#### **II. Composting**

Composting remains one of the most popular climate resiliency and circularity programs our city has to offer, and an important part of our city's sustainability infrastructure. But the November plan updates to the FY24 budget as well as ongoing concerns of funding for DSNY put vital composting programs at risk.

We must focus instead on resourcing the operational needs of DSNY to ensure completion of a successful rollout of curbside composting citywide. This program, combined with the smart bin rollout citywide, has been an exciting opportunity for residents everywhere to dispose of their organics in a manner that is sustainable. Further, DSNY cannot and should not have to bear the responsibility of composting operations alone. Community composting is a grassroots-led initiative where, in partnership with expert composters citywide, neighbors are able to spend the time and energy to educate each other on composting and find their own roles in the fight against climate change. We must restore funding for Community Composting and the Master Composter Certificate Course to support a community-led safety net for waste removal.

### ***Breaking the Cycle by investing in our Behavioral Health system***

Our city is failing New Yorkers with serious mental illness. Decades of disinvestment have left a behavioral health system with insufficient resources and inadequate capacity at almost every level, leaving our most vulnerable community members often unhoused on the streets and without necessary care or supportive housing. New York City has a moral responsibility to address our behavioral health

crisis and invest in proven strategies to ensure New Yorkers with serious mental illness have the supports they need.

### I. Extended Care Units

Health & Hospitals' Extended Care Units (ECUs) at Bellevue and Kings County hospitals are voluntary hospitalization programs that have shown great success in providing patients with psychopharmacological treatment, rehabilitative activities, and opportunities to strengthen interpersonal and communication skills. With only 60 beds currently available in the ECU program system wide, most H&H patients who would benefit from these extended-stay services cannot access them. The City should work with H&H to fund dramatic increases in the number of ECU beds available citywide.

### II. Investing in our behavioral workforce

Hospitals and behavioral health providers in New York City are facing significant challenges in recruiting and retaining behavioral health staff, including psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, psychiatric nurse practitioners, and more. These staff often carry large student loan debt and often lack the prospect of earning salaries as high as other specialties. I was glad to see the City announce a \$741 million investment in cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) for human services workers over the next three years. The city must work with providers to ensure these COLA adjustments are enforced and expanded upon over the next three years and beyond for all human services contracts, including behavioral health services.

Further, Health & Hospitals' Behavioral Health Loan Repayment Program provides student debt forgiveness support for participating clinicians who commit to work a minimum of three years full-time at H&H. The city must work with H&H to dramatically increase the funding for this program to ensure more providers are able to take advantage of loan forgiveness opportunities.

### III. IMT Team Funding

Intensive Mobile Treatment (IMT) teams are full service mental health treatment teams that offer clients, often unhoused on the streets of New York, long-term psychiatric care, medication management, and connections to supportive housing. I commend the City for continuing to invest in these teams over the years, resulting in 31 IMT Teams serving roughly 800 New Yorkers across four boroughs. The City should work to double the number of IMT Teams and vastly increase the number of New Yorkers connected to this important resource, as well as allow for more flexibility in the IMT accreditation process to help ensure these teams have adequate staffing to support New Yorkers in need.

### ***Helping Our Community Boards Succeed***

As the most grassroots form of local government, community boards are filled with dedicated New Yorkers of all backgrounds volunteering their time to shaping their unique neighborhoods. Our office works hard to ensure our community boards truly represent Manhattan in its diversity of backgrounds and perspectives, and have what they need to succeed. However, the City must provide targeted support to ensure Community Boards are well resourced as a vital partner in local governance.

Community boards rely on district managers and staff as partners in responding to constituent service requests, reviewing building and zoning plans, connecting residents to services, and more. The City must provide more funding for Community Boards to allow them to recruit and retain more staff, ensure that every meeting is accessible, and procure and update the technology and resources they need to serve their districts. Further, remote meeting options have opened up access to the community boards for many New Yorkers and we continue to advocate to make these options permanent. However, the City must not let this fall on the shoulders of community boards alone. We must ensure adequate funding supports and training for Community Boards to effectively and efficiently conduct remote or hybrid meetings.

### *Capital priorities*

#### I. Transportation and the public realm

The Department of Transportation has a long list of streetscape improvement projects in need of funding to get them over the finish line, many of which are in Manhattan. Streetscape design improvements create safer, more inviting environments for outdoor activity, reduce injury risks for pedestrians and cyclists, and ensures our public realm accommodates the needs of all its users. It is critical we ensure streetscape improvement initiatives currently in the pipeline are completed. Priority projects in Manhattan include but are not limited to:

- Completion of Broadway Vision to permanently transform Broadway between Union Square and Times Square
- Union Square Next, to renovate Union Square Park and build on the success of the 14<sup>th</sup> Street Busway by transforming 14<sup>th</sup> Street into a pedestrian and transit centered boulevard.
- Future of Fifth, to redesign Fifth Avenue from Bryant Park to Central Park.
- Wall and Broad, to redesign the street and sidewalk around the intersection of Wall and Broad Streets to create shared curbsless streets, seating, and dedicated loading zones.
- Western Gateway Public Realm, to redesign the Tenth Ave corridor in the Meatpacking District.
- Central Harlem Bikeway, to build a protected bike lane on Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd between 110<sup>th</sup> and 155<sup>th</sup> Streets.

Additionally, the Parks Department and EDC must finalize and begin construction on their plan to complete the Harlem River Greenway, which will provide dedicated pathways for pedestrians and bikes, a reconstructed seawall, and a new park. A preliminary plan was released for a connected greenway along the Harlem River above 125<sup>th</sup> Street in Fall 2023; it is now time to act on this plan and secure the needed \$309M to build a critical phase of a future Manhattan Waterfront Greenway.

#### II. Borough President Capital Funding Allocations

Per the City's Charter, the five Borough Presidents are allocated five percent of each fiscal year's executive capital budget. While the formula that is used to divide these funds is intended to ensure that capital allocations are as equitable as possible, it fails to properly take into account the density of cultural and healthcare institutions in Manhattan.

Every year, Borough Presidents and their staff work with local institutions and the Council to determine capital priorities in their Boroughs. These funds are used to fund various important capital needs in each borough – theater restorations, library technology upgrades, School Reso A projects, park lighting,

playground accessibility, medical technology enhancements, and far more. Section 211 of the New York City Charter provides that when there is no local law established determining distribution, the division of these funds has long been determined by an average of “each borough’s share of the total population of the city and each borough’s share of the total land area of the city.” In our experience, this results in Manhattan receiving the second lowest allocation of funding each year.

However, this formula does not take into account the unique concentration of major institutions based in Manhattan that contribute to New York City’s strength as a city overall. Manhattan is a proud home to world-renowned academic medical centers and cultural organizations that draw tourists from around the world, including 11 of the 34 members of the Cultural Institutions Group. These institutions rely extensively on the availability of public dollars for the capital projects necessary to ensure they thrive. However, the formula should be reconsidered due to the disproportionately low allocations of capital funds that have been available for allocation to Manhattan-based institutions. Basing fund allocations on a formula that relies in large part on land mass is unfair and inappropriate given that Manhattan is a small island with a high concentration of major cultural institutions, healthcare centers and other nonprofits relative to other boroughs.

The New York City Charter allows the formula for Borough President allocation to be established by local law. Rather than continuing to rely on the current system, the Administration and the Council must work together to ensure the funding formula for Borough President capital budgets provides adequate funding commensurate with the density of capital funding applicants.