

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams, DSNY Commissioner Jessica Tisch Announce Investments in Sanitation Services

June 27, 2022

Deputy Mayor Meera Joshi, Operations: ... this is what you see in front of you as the before. And this is direct evidence of what the Precision Cleaning Crew can do, and with the historic investment, part of which goes to increasing Precision Cleaning, you're going to see more of this before and after throughout the city. But the before gives you the graphic and disproportionate effect of what illegal dumping does to our neighborhoods and our communities. And the after tells us what we all deserve, which is clean streets, clean communities. And with the investment that's happening with this year's budget, DSNY's Strongest will get the job done because it is time to clean up this city.

Deputy Mayor Joshi: In a city where there's so many opinions, we're united on one thing, we are a mess and we need to clean up now. So thank you. Thank you for the contribution of the men and women who work for Sanitation. They now are going to have the resources that they need, but I do want to just point out one thing, they can't do it alone. We all make trash, so we all have the power to keep it off of our streets. That means feed the can, sweep your street, and property owners, for you that means the sidewalk in front of your property, as well as 18 inches out into the street, that also is your responsibility to keep clean. And continuously, and on a daily basis, shame others into doing the same. So that together, with the resources, our strong DSNY forces, and city partners and everyday men and women doing their part to take litter off the street, our city will be a cleaner and stronger one in the days and weeks to come.

Deputy Mayor Joshi: So with that, I'd like to turn it over to our mayor, Mayor Adams, who gets stuff done, and his top priority is keeping our streets clean and safe.

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, deputy mayor. And I'm happy to be joined here with both Commissioner Tisch and my good friend,

Councilman Salamanca, with my future mayor who's going to be elected pretty soon. We're talking about before and after, but there's also another before and after that the city is going to eventually realize: before my administration and after my administration. We're not only going to deal with those – look at when someone illegally dumps and clean it up because that's a waste of our time to keep cleaning up a mess that people intentionally create. We're going after the dumpers also. We're going to make sure, with a few little plans we have up our sleeves, we're going to identify those habitual dumpers. Trust me, it's a small number of people who believe that they can dump like this and get away with it. And we are going to target them and make it no longer a profitable experience to dump anywhere in our city.

Mayor Adams: Councilman Salamanca identified these locations. He was willing to put the resources in as a local Council member, and we're zeroing in on it. If we uplift Councilman Salamanca's district, we're going to see that uplifting our entire city, because many of the ills that we are facing, the denial, the neglect of the not listening to the local electors on the ground, it is really personified here in the South Bronx. And that's why I'm spending so much time here in the South Bronx, because I know that it is the answer to how we could really allow it to cascade throughout our entire city of the improvements that we deserve and we are looking for.

Mayor Adams: And this is just a great day for neighborhoods. The deputy mayor said it right, no matter where we go, people are talking about trash. Trash on our streets. Trash on our roadways. Just look at the difference of that cleanup from the photo near the George Washington Bridge. I didn't take this photo on my way to Jersey, by the way, I live in Brooklyn. [Laughter] But when you look at just the difference of our greenery. Dirty streets just really impact everything we do. And so we heard the complaints loud and clear, and we are responding to the complaints on the ground, because a clean city is a city that we are really concerned about.

Mayor Adams: For too long these areas have been ignored, we are not going to do that today. We are putting those conditions in the bins. These trash bins are going to be put in place in our city, and we're going to ensure the actual emptying of the trash bins. We're making investments in cleanliness in the city that has never before been carried out. When you look at the adopted budget, we're putting our money exactly where the concerns are. 22 million in funding for litter basket service, with baskets like these to be emptied 50,000 times more than pre-administration. 50,000 times more. You've all noticed it, baskets overrun of – We're realizing, people spill over. So we're telling the public, do your job, put it in the bin. They go to the bin, they put it in, but the bin is

overflowing. So we have to be consistent with our message, and that's why we are putting the money in to have these bins emptied more often.

Mayor Adams: In this case, more means less. Less on our streets, less on our curbs, less in our community. So overflowing smelly trash on the sidewalk, it would help us eradicate or alleviate this problem to the point of eradication. We're also funding \$7.5 million – and I love this – Precision Cleaning Initiative to erase illegal dumping. Precision policing, precision cleanliness, precision dumping, we have to use taxpayers dollars more, and precision – attacking the problem is utilizing the tax dollars better. And 4.5 million for cleaning of vacant lots, allowing a return to pre-pandemic staffing levels at the Department of Sanitation's Lot Cleaning Unit. These lots, for the most part, are in underserved communities. We're zeroing in. We are going to allow the Lot Cleaning Unit to go in and do the cleanup that's necessary. And so this funding would stop the vacant lots across the city that are largely located in traditional low-income communities. They become dumping grounds. And we want to just use our precision approach to look at these lots.

Mayor Adams: So we know clean streets are vital to the vibrant neighborhoods and to the city's economic recovery, they go hand in hand. People don't want a dirty city, don't want a dirty place to live. We want to make it easier, safer, and healthier for our entire city. So we put our money behind the Strongest. Through our budget, Commissioner Tisch has been clear of – she wants to do it in a precise and precisioned way to make sure that we can reach the goals that we want. Summer's here, we want our streets to be as clean as the New Yorkers who walk on the streets. And I'm really excited about this announcement. This is not a sexy project, but it is a clear project that impacts the quality of life of New Yorkers. Job well done. I want to thank the Strongest who are here for the job that they're doing. I'm continuously encouraged by their commitment and dedication. Sometimes we don't see you guys, but I'll tell you something, we'll miss you if you are not there. And so we thank you for the job well done. Commissioner.

Deputy Mayor Joshi: Next, we're going to hear from Commissioner Jessie Tisch, one of the most excited people in the entire city about trash.

Commissioner Jessica Tisch, Department of Sanitation: Thank you, Mayor Adams and Deputy Mayor Joshi. As most of you know, historically the Sanitation Department has had three core functions: curbside collection, snow removal, and cleaning. But at the beginning of the pandemic, the budget for one of those functions, cleaning, was

completely decimated through cuts and anyone who looked outside could see the difference immediately. The numbers don't lie, February of 2020, before the cuts, there were 58 311 complaints citywide for overflowing litter baskets. By July of that year, only one month after the budget cuts, that number... By July of that year, only one month after the budget cuts, that number ballooned to 790 complaints about overflowing litter baskets, in a single month. I am a data driven person, and the numbers tell a shocking story. But they also show that our cleaning strategies work when we have the resources at our disposal to deploy them.

Commissioner Tisch: And now we will effective July 1st. In the adopted budget, Mayor Adams and the City Council made an unprecedented investment in restoring the cleanliness of our streets. They have given us the resources that we need to clean up our city, the way our neighbors deserve, to the tune of \$40.6 million. Over the past few weeks, we have been busy developing operational plans to put this funding to its best and highest and certainly its most equitable use. And I will describe those plans briefly now.

Commissioner Tisch: First is litter basket service. As the mayor said, \$22 million will go to providing the highest amount of litter basket service ever run in the City of New York. That is 50,000 more basket collections on an average week, which will translate to significantly fewer overflowing litter baskets and meaningfully less trash on the streets.

Commissioner Tisch: To be clear, every litter basket citywide will be serviced more frequently, with the largest increases in commercial corridors in all five boroughs. After July 1st, if you see an overflowing litter basket, it will be much more likely to be caused by basket misuse, i.e. someone improperly putting residential or commercial trash in the basket, rather than lack of service.

Commissioner Tisch: Second is our Precision Cleaning. As the mayor also mentioned, \$7.5 million will go to more than tripling our Precision Cleaning efforts, adding guaranteed daily special cleaning service to the neighborhoods with the greatest need.

Commissioner Tisch: As part of this initiative, all 13 of the lowest scoring districts on the cleanliness scorecard, will get a Daily Litter Patrol Team. And we will still have room to deploy an additional 16 teams a day to address street conditions in neighborhoods in all five boroughs, as required. Third is lot cleaning. \$4.9 million will go to lot cleaning

where it will be used to clean eyesore properties across the city, especially those impacted by the scourge of illegal dumping.

Commissioner Tisch: Two messages about illegal dumping. First, to our communities: we got you. We will come clean it up. And with this budget, we will clean it up better and faster than ever before. Next, to the illegal dumpers out there: just last week, I was testing out a new camera we had deployed and easily found a commercial dumper leaving his waste in a lot in Brooklyn. Our Sanitation Enforcement Division tracked him down. And now, he's got a \$4,000 summons to deal with. If you dump on our communities, we will come after you just like we came after him. Not because we want to – we certainly don't – but because we have to protect our neighbors and our neighborhoods.

Commissioner Tisch: Fourth is rat mitigation. \$4.8 million will go toward rat mitigation in New York City, which includes deploying new rat-proof litter baskets, as well as doing the design and engineering work to frame a unified city approach to containerization.

Commissioner Tisch: Earlier this year, we announced a five-borough pilot to test out containerization. These containers are in place in Manhattan and will soon be in Brooklyn and Staten Island and then Queens and the Bronx.

Commissioner Tisch: And let's not forget that all of this is on top of the restoration of full street sweeping and the brand new sweeping of bike lanes, which goes into effect on July 5th. So after the July 4th holiday, whatever it says on the signs goes. I am very confident that all of this will make a real noticeable difference in every borough and every neighborhood in our city.

Commissioner Tisch: This summer, our neighborhoods are poised to come back cleaner, and our city stronger. Thank you so much to Mayor Adams, to Council Member Salamanca and the entire City Council for such a bold investment in this essential service.

Deputy Mayor Joshi: Thank you, Commissioner Tisch. Next, we'll hear from Council Member Salamanca, who is the catalyst behind the eyes on the lot, which is, coupled with the sign you see behind you, is part of our multi-prong enforcement tool to get after illegal dumpers.

[...]

Mayor Adams: Open here for any questions. There was something I was thinking about, which is a good point that the commissioner made about going after those who illegally dump repeatedly. That is our focus. We want to focus on those who are repeated dumpers to make sure we send the right message. We're open to any questions, on-topic.

Question: This is probably for the commissioner on the Precision Cleaning Teams. Where? You said 13 neighborhoods, is that right? Do you have an example of some of those?

Commissioner Tisch: Yeah. We can get you a list of the 13 neighborhoods that scored the worst on the cleanliness scorecards. The scorecards are updated quarterly and it's consistently the same neighborhoods that are the lowest scores, but we'll provide you a full list right after this.

Question: Also, on-topic for the commissioner, I did hear you say you'd be significantly increasing the litter basket collection. Did you also mention more baskets themselves? Because what we hear from people is, "Yeah, I'd love to dispose of my trash, but there's no can on the corner." We hear it all the time.

Commissioner Tisch: Yep. So two things on that. The first is we are developing a brand new litter basket for New York City. These baskets, the mesh ones that you see have been around since like the '60s or the '70s, they've been around a really long time and notably they are not rat proof. They have holes all over them. That is a fundamental part of the design. And we are developing a rat proof litter basket, and some of the funding for rat mitigation is going to go to replacing the mesh litter baskets with a new rat proof litter basket of the future. That's the first thing.

Commissioner Tisch: The second thing is historically, the city has had about 23,000 litter baskets citywide. And that number hasn't changed – doesn't change very often because of the collection costs associated with servicing them. What I have asked my staff to do, because we get requests for new litter baskets all the time. What I have asked my staff to do is take a new, fresh look at what the optimal number of litter baskets are and where they should be placed. So I am very open to adding to the number of litter baskets in the city because I have been on tours with Council members

and walked through neighborhoods where – you're 100% right – there should be a litter basket in a location. That doesn't mean we'll agree on every location, but certainly we are open to adding litter baskets in the city.

Question: Mr. Mayor, somebody from your staff said earlier that the graffiti up there, this is the MTAs responsibility up on the trellises. Has the city talked to them about trying to kind of get cleaned up, up there. I mean, you guys got this whole area. I was also wondering when the photos were taken.

Mayor Adams: Yeah. Two things. Number one, going back to what the commissioner said about these baskets, these little prongs here, these little holes here that they design, these are rat steps. I watch these rats climb up these baskets, so we've assisted them in this design. So we have to get a new model. Let's see. We're going to roll out a complete graffiti initiative. We want to partner with the City Council. Too much graffiti, it's out of control. We saw it on the subway system during the 80s and we took an immediate cleanup approach.

Mayor Adams: You allow one tag, it continues to grow to another tag. And so when you look going down Atlantic Avenue, parts of the Bronx, there's just too much graffiti in our city and we want a comprehensive approach on how to go after it. Partner with the MTA, partner with local store owners. This is unacceptable. This adds to the uncleanliness of our city.

Question: Just a point of clarification on the new litter baskets. They're not designed yet, right? They're like [inaudible].

Commissioner Tisch: They are designed and we are working now to have them manufactured, and so you will see them start to come on the streets of the city this year.

Mayor Adams: And we're looking at the containers for garbage. We have to change the way we handle garbage in our city. Other countries are doing a better job. Plastic bags, even if there's mint-smelling plastic bags, don't stop rats. Those rats use it as perfume. So we got to be more thoughtful on how we store and pick up garbage and those are some of the things we're looking at.

Question: I know you're trying to further the messaging to storage [inaudible] a big part of the reason there's a lot of garbage on the streets. But also, there are individuals who litter and it's not necessarily for a lack of litter baskets. You see people littering, even when there's a litter basket nearby or tossing garbage out of their car windows. I see that all the time on city streets and it really accumulates. Should there be more messaging to discourage that?

Mayor Adams: Yeah. No. No. You're right. Because if you look here, this is not illegal dumping. This is people driving onto the G.W. or coming across and just throwing their stuff out. So we believe if we start doing our job, sending the right message and going back to not heavy handed, but really engaging in interaction with people about littering. You're not supposed to litter. And so it's about a mindset as you just stated of everyday New Yorkers. This is our city, sweep up in front of your house, do all the small things to make sure that we are doing the right thing to match what government is doing.

[Crosstalk]

Question: Mayor Adams, you went to a women's clinic, I believe, today. What did you hear and what is the city going to roll out the welcome mat the way the state is talking about doing for women in states where they cannot get abortions?

Mayor Adams: Yes. We went to an H + H facility and to be honest, I was pleasantly surprised to see how H + H is playing a real role. People often think that it's the other clinics outside like Planned Parenthood, but H + H is doing a real good job. Certain things jumped off at me right away. Number one, we have to do a better job of broadcasting that you can come to H + H. You can come to a hospital with privacy because since it's a hospital, people don't know why you're going and you'll have the privacy that you want. Same day care is given. Someone can walk in and receive the necessary care and counseling.

Mayor Adams: It was extremely impressive. And what I really enjoyed seeing was the number of women who were assigned there. We're taking a real look at... there's certain places that it is imperative to have a person there that understands through language, through gender. And I saw there the level of comfort that other women were receiving from the women staff there. It was overwhelmingly women, and they just brought an extra care that sometimes is ignored. And I was excited about what I saw

today. And they're prepared. They've been preparing for five years on this Supreme Court ruling.

Mayor Adams: For five years, they've been preparing on how do we build the infrastructure so we are here for those women who come into the city looking for services. The women here know they can have the services and those who are coming into our city.

Question: Mayor, will you be able to designate public areas such as the subway system, buses, trains, and parks as sensitive areas where the concealed carry ban will remain intact? And if so, what sort of legal challenges does the city anticipate?

Mayor Adams: The governor, we've asked her to call for a special session to go back and look at the legislation. And we have to do this as a partnership. Because if we do it incorrectly, we're going to open ourselves up for another ruling. We'll open ourselves up for a pause in what we're doing. So we want to coordinate with the cities, coordinate with our City Council, our local law making bodies, and have the governor lead the charge on what the new definition of sensitive locations should be. Because we have to get it right. If we get it wrong and try to go outside our scope, we can put ourselves in a bad place.

Mayor Adams: And so, this is going to increase our labor. It's going to make it more challenging for police officers, court officers, non-sensitive locations. We're looking at how we can effectively minimize the damage that the Supreme Court has handed down.

Question: Those sensitive areas, do you hope that – to apply them to subway systems, buses, parks, trains, those sorts of areas? Are they what you want deemed sensitive areas?

Mayor Adams: Our legal team is going to make that determination because we can't just classify something as a sensitive location. It must fit within the parameters of the ruling. So our legal teams are looking at that to come up with the appropriate way to define what a sensitive location is. We can now do governmental buildings and certain things we can do, but trying to do an expanded definition is going to have to fall within the legal team's understanding of the ruling.

Question: Mr. Mayor, on that same page regarding the labor you mentioned that's going to be a product of this Supreme Court ruling and the additional rules. What kind of policing strategies do you foresee are going to be needed here to enforce something like a sensitive area? It seems like it could be very antagonistic to try and go after that kind of thing.

Mayor Adams: I said before that this was keeping me up at nights. Cause you could only imagine... Nothing changes now and probably for the next... until it comes back down to the local court. But when it gets in full stride a year from now, a year and a half from now, and you start to see a substantial uptick in guns and people carrying guns, it's going to be hard.

Mayor Adams: We have to figure this out and I spoke with the commissioner knowing that you can be in Times Square and hundreds, thousands of people can carry a weapon. How do you police that? How do you police it in places that are not sensitive locations? We are figuring out... We're going to get it right. But I am not going to try to downplay how this is going to really put us in a place that we have to use methods of policing.

Mayor Adams: Because historically, if someone had a gun, approaching them and determining if they're carrying that gun legally... Because we have very little carry permits. We may have had pistol, I mean target permits, but we had very little carry permits. So now, everybody's carrying. Everyone will have the opportunity to carry. So the commissioner, her team, we're looking at how do we change our policing strategies to this new norm in our city?

Mayor Adams: Listen, let me tell you something. The Supreme Court really made America a very dangerous place, particularly in New York City. I just don't know what they were thinking about to allow this to happen. One thing's for sure, they were not thinking about New York.

Question: Mayor, tomorrow, New York City pools open. You talked, one of the last times you were in the Bronx, about talking to the Parks commissioner, coming up with creative solutions. Supposed to be hot this week. How concerned are you that there might be a heightened risk of drownings without enough lifeguards, without enough pools open. What's going to be done?

Mayor Adams: We are still leaving no stone unturned. We have a couple of creative ideas we're going to put in place to deal with this national problem. I want to always emphasize that this is a national problem that we're facing. So the Parks commissioner and her team, we want to roll out and make sure that we can keep our beaches safe because we don't want to lose loved ones to drowning. That is something we don't want.

Mayor Adams: So even if it's water safety, really instructing young people, doing a public relation campaign on our beaches of handing out information, engaging with parents to keep a close eye on their children. We're going to have to constantly have a partnership between the city, parental oversight, peer groups, buddy systems.

Mayor Adams: We want to address this national problem locally and we listened to one of our reporters that shared with us the other day – she's busy texting – but we took some of your ideas that you shared with us about using the radios. Getting EMS, engage with FDNY and our lifeguards. So we got to do more, but this is a real shortage.

Question: Will there be enough pools open to accommodate kids this week?

Mayor Adams: Parks is going to do an analysis of exactly what pools should be open. I think we're going to do an opening of a pool. Our public pools, they are considered to be the French Riviera for those communities that have to stay home. So we want to open as many as possible, but it is a challenge. Okay.

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