

**MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S REPOSE TO THE MAYOR'S EXECUTIVE  
BUDGET  
FISCAL YEAR 2024**

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## **Manhattan Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Priorities Report**

Section 251 of the New York City Charter requires the Borough President to submit to the Mayor and Council a response to the Mayor's executive 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 COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, with all signs pointed toward a future where Manhattan is stronger than ever before. However, longstanding issues such as biases in our healthcare infrastructure, the high cost of living, the impacts of climate change, and high unemployment have slowed our recovery and are contributing to inequity across the borough. The city's housing crisis has reached new heights, making it harder for even more New Yorkers to have their most fundamental needs met. Now more than ever before, the City's budget priorities must ensure that our recovery works to finally address these systemic and fundamental failures.

For Manhattan to continue along the path of a strong recovery, we must continue to prioritize equity, resiliency and public health in our community development and planning work. This must include adequately funding NYCHA so that elevators and boilers are working and repairs are completed quickly; funding to address public safety concerns across the city, including emphasizing local community-centered approaches to public safety and violence interruption, as well as job programs, high quality education, and youth programs that help ensure that New Yorkers have the opportunities they need to thrive; adequately funding our support for newly arrived asylum seekers, including providing access to legal assistance, housing support, and supports in local public schools; funding for our schools so that we can expand early childhood programs, dual language and science programs, after school programs, as well as healthcare staff and social workers in every school; among many other priorities laid out by the Manhattan Borough Board on February 16<sup>th</sup> in accordance with Section 241 of the New York City Charter.

In addition to these priorities, 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.

### ***Affordability crisis - housing and tenant protections***

We are in the midst of a housing affordability crisis in New York City – arguably worse than any point in our history. As market-rate apartments have soared as high as an astonishing average of \$5,100 per month in Manhattan, thousands of individuals and families have been forced into an already overburdened and under-resourced shelter system or are turning to the streets to survive.

Continuing this trend is not an option. We must take bold steps to create more housing, using every opportunity available. Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) should be funded to finance very-low, low, and moderate income housing, and the City should work aggressively to create more supportive housing throughout the Borough. We must also ensure that we aren't asking communities of color to shoulder undue burden in solving our affordability crisis. It must be a shared responsibility for every community district and every neighborhood. We strongly encourage the City to aggressively invest in developments that will create affordable housing in neighborhoods that badly need it, and ask the Mayor to fund HPD at levels that will allow for additional staff at HPD to achieve these goals.

Additionally, the City must better fund protecting tenants from eviction and increase baseline funding for tenant representation. The demand for representation in Housing Court far outpaces the availability of those qualified to represent tenants facing eviction. While the Department of Social Services can and should work closely with the Office of Court Administration to identify cases that qualify for grant and assistance eligibility, the City must also better fund indignant defense in housing court, a priority that the Council has rightly highlighted in the Council's Preliminary Response. The City currently reimburses

housing court cases at approximately 70% of the cost of representing New Yorkers. That rate should be increased to 100% so that tenant representatives can afford to do this essential work and ensure that they can retain legal, social worker and administrative talent.

We also urge the City to double-down on investments in homelessness outreach, mental health services, and other supportive services for the unhoused. Breaking the chronic cycle of homelessness will require creating significantly more permanent housing opportunities alongside making meaningful investments in social service outreach to meet the needs of our vulnerable neighbors.

### ***Investing in climate resiliency***

Climate change is a preeminent threat facing New York City today. The City must be acting now to address the multiple climate hazards facing the city, including rising sea levels, deadly heatwaves and more frequent and severe storms.

As Hurricanes Ida and Sandy demonstrated, New York City is vulnerable to powerful storms developing in the wake of a warming planet. Government at all levels is investing billions of dollars in coastal protection projects across the city with six major projects in Manhattan alone. These projects, and others that are still in the early planning phases, need a strong City presence to ensure budget accountability and the ability to operate and maintain this new infrastructure. This should include the creation of a new city agency with jurisdiction and governance responsibility for the City's waterfront assets. This would require amending the NYC Charter, as well as identifying resources and funds for staffing this agency. This agency is badly needed to avoid jurisdictional disputes between existing agencies, which inevitably leads to obstruction and delays to these critical life-safety projects.

Investments in climate resiliency cannot stop at the coastline. The City must also ensure that its stormwater management systems, in some cases over 100-years old, is prepared for the impacts of extreme rain events. Without these investments, Manhattan residents will experience increasing damage to private property, disruptions of surface and below ground transportation, and impacts to our local waterbodies.

Additionally, New York continues to confront increasing temperatures, with approximately 370 New Yorkers dying from heat-related causes every year. These figures will inevitably grow without intervention as the city continues to get hotter. To address heat and other climate risks, the City budget should commit to the Million More Trees initiative. Street trees are a noticeable and critical Green Infrastructure tool that produce a number of co-benefits. In addition to reducing the urban heat island effect, street trees mitigate other impacts of climate change by helping to manage stormwater, reducing airborne particulate matter, and sequestering carbon all while making residents who live among them happier on average.

The federal government has pledged to invest billions of dollars to help local governments adapt to climate change with the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. New York State is also committing to investing in climate resiliency with the passage of the Environmental Bond Act. The City must be ready to leverage these resources as they come online to maximize the benefits to New Yorkers.

### ***Transportation and the public realm***

The City should prioritize infrastructure investments on our streets that create more space for New Yorkers, harden our bike lane infrastructure, and expand our bus lanes so that buses can be faster and more efficient for New Yorkers. This is particularly important for the City as we continue to approach the

gradual implementation of congestion pricing and as conversations around the Pennsylvania Station Area Civic and Land Use Improvement Project progresses.

The City must fully fund the Streets Master Plan to ensure that DOT is able to achieve important milestones relating to bike and pedestrian safety, bus improvements, expanded public space, and accessibility. Furthermore, the Streets Master Plan must take into account the implementation of congestion pricing. As we encourage more New Yorkers to ditch their private cars in favor of more sustainable modes of transit, we must ensure that our sidewalks are wide, our bike lanes are robust and protected, and our buses are fast and efficient. There are multiple capital projects for streetscape improvements that have been designed and have secured varying degrees of community support, including the pedestrianization of Rockefeller Center, the permanent pedestrianization of Broadway between Union Square and Columbus Circle, the pedestrianization of Downtown Manhattan, and capital improvements around Union Square, among others. These projects must be carefully examined by NYC DOT.

### ***Health care access***

As we continue to work towards recovering from the pandemic, we must ensure that we focus on those New Yorkers struggling with mental health challenges and substance use disorder. Our broken mental health system is failing New Yorkers confronting serious mental illness and mental health challenges. While the City and State have committed to reopening badly needed psychiatric beds that closed during the pandemic, the City must ensure New Yorkers get connected to services and supports at well-funded, peer-led mental health programs. The Mayor's recently announced mental health agenda is an extremely positive step, but initiatives such as the expansion of clubhouse model programs, access to mental health supports for young people, creation of more supportive housing, and additional connections for New Yorkers experiencing severe mental illness must be adequately funded.

### ***Sanitation***

While we applaud the City's announcement of city-wide composting, we urge the City to accelerate the proposed timeline and enact universal composting in Manhattan as soon as possible. Additionally, the new Smart Composting bins are a positive step forward and should be deployed equitably across the borough.

The City must also better fund the fundamental operations of DSNY. This must include enough funding to adequately staff DSNY so that we can ensure that every bus stop and every intersection is expeditiously cleared of snow following snowstorms. It should baseline street wastebasket collection. Wastebasket collection is a fundamental responsibility of the City, and a full recovery from the pandemic must include serious investment in waste collection and quality of life issues that were exasperated by the pandemic. Small businesses, residents, workers and tourists alike all expect our streets to be clean, and this service should not need to be negotiated every year by DSNY, the Mayor and the Council.

### ***Community Board Support***

Community Boards are an essential part of local government and have provided an important avenue for local community input into decision-making during the height of the pandemic. The City must provide more funding for Community Boards to allow them to hire additional staff, as well as procure the technology and resources they need to serve their districts. The Manhattan Borough President's Office is hard at work to make remote meeting options permanent, but that effort must be made hand-in-hand with funding that will allow Community Boards to effectively and efficiently conduct remote or hybrid meetings. The City must not allow this to become an unfunded mandate for local boards.

Additionally, in order to achieve our goals of ensuring our Community Boards are reflective of the diversity and vitality of the communities they represent, the City must take a stronger hand in supporting language access for all New Yorkers. This includes funding to provide access to translation, as well as interpretation services. While we recognize the Civic Engagement Commission's language access hotline

is a resource, it is alarming underutilized, largely due to the lack of familiarity and awareness among board members and the general public. Additionally, boards need to be resourced to allow them to provide appropriate service to members and public participants who speak English as a second language or do not speak English at all.

***Public restrooms***

The fact that public restrooms continue to be a rare commodity in New York City is both an embarrassment and bad public health policy. The City must resource agencies to ensure that they are able to identify possible locations for public restrooms in every zip code, fund the repair and maintenance of comfort stations across the borough, and work with local communities and stakeholders to get new public bathrooms built and open.