

May 2022

Executive Budget Restores Some Organics Funding, But Not Expansion of Curbside Collection Service

While the Adams Administration restored some funding for the city’s organics recycling program in the Executive Budget—following major cuts to the program just months ago—this did not include resuming the expansion of the city’s curbside organics collection program. Instead, the Mayor added funds for more organics drop-off sites and school collections, as well as funding for fall leaf collection—a seasonal service required under local law. Overall, the Executive Budget added a total of \$53 million in funding from 2023 through 2026 for the city’s organics program, only a fraction of the \$92 million cut to the program made over the same period in the Preliminary Budget (all years are city fiscal years). Organics refers to food scraps and yard debris that can be broken down into compost, material that otherwise would be sent through the refuse stream to landfills.

In addition to restoring some of the funding for the organics program, the Executive Budget also funded a variety of smaller programs and other restored services at the Department of Sanitation (DSNY). This includes \$3 million to relocate a compost yard facility from Manhattan to Queens to make way for construction on the East Side Coastal Resiliency Project along the East River and \$8 million for DSNY to conduct a waste characterization study for the city, to examine what goes into the waste

stream and to better understand how much material going to landfills is compostable. Lastly, the Executive Budget included funds for DSNY to restore twice-weekly street sweeping, which had been halted and then restored to once weekly during the pandemic, and funds to increase bike lane sweeping,

Reimagining the Organics Program, Again

The Adams Administration cut organics recycling funding in the Preliminary Budget by \$9 million in 2022, \$18 million in 2023, and then \$21 million annually in 2024 through 2026, as part of a larger package of cost-saving actions. In doing so, the Mayor eliminated the planned expansion of the city’s curbside collection program. Under this program, DSNY trucks pick up organics in select neighborhoods where residents have demonstrated interest in the program. (This curbside collection is a year-round service, in contrast to the seasonal fall leaf collection.) The curbside program is currently operating in a total of seven of the city’s 59 community districts—none of which are in Queens or Staten Island. DSNY had previously announced plans to expand to other districts around the city, before the Mayor eliminated funding for this expansion in the Preliminary Budget.

Following this cut, the city’s total budget for organics recycling was reduced to \$12 million in 2023 and \$9 million

Executive Budget Adds Funding for Organics, But Does Not Fully Restore Preliminary Budget Cuts

Dollars in thousands

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Preliminary Budget Changes	(\$9,413)	(\$18,204)	(\$21,436)	(\$21,331)	(\$21,134)
Executive Budget Changes	0	17,886	11,525	11,550	11,591
Difference	(\$9,413)	(\$318)	(\$9,911)	(\$9,781)	(\$9,543)

SOURCE: Preliminary and Executive 2023 Financial Plans

New York City Independent Budget Office



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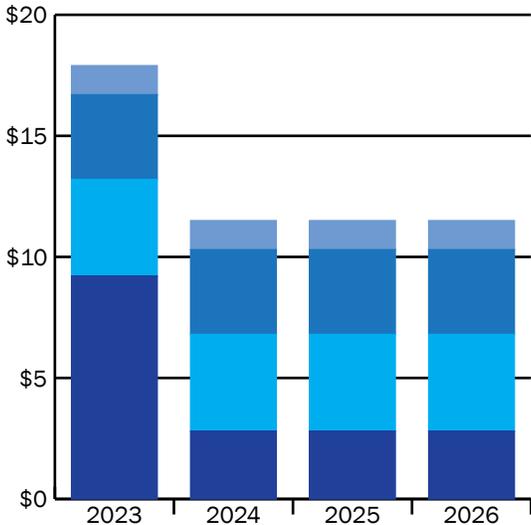
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Funding Boosts Organics Collection at Schools and Drop-Off Sites

- Expand Organics to Additional Schools
- Fall Leaf Collection
- Community Drop-Off Sites
- Program Management Staffing

Dollars in millions



SOURCE: Department of Sanitation; Mayor's Office of Management and Budget
New York City Independent Budget Office

annually in 2024 through 2026—sufficient funding to continue the curbside collection program in the seven community districts where it already was doing so and to pick up organics at 694 school buildings. After considerable push back from both the City Council and advocacy groups, however, the Mayor reversed course somewhat in the Executive Budget and added back \$18 million for 2023, nearly the total amount previously cut, and \$12 million annually beginning in 2024 for a net reduction of around \$10 million for 2024 through 2026 over the two budget proposals.

The funding added back in the Executive Budget largely pays for school and community drop-off sites, and baselines the fall leaf collection program, which is required under local law. In 2023, \$9 million was added to expand organics collection to 534 additional school buildings and establish public drop-off bins near 100 other schools. This includes the cost of installing “smart bins” and other set-up and equipment expenses. Smart bins are public drop off organics bins accessible at all times, unlocked via a key card interested participants can request from DSNY, or via an app. Ongoing funding for these initiatives is baselined at \$3 million annually beginning in 2024.

Drop-off sites hosted by community composting organizations received \$3.5 million in additional funding

each year from 2023 forward and fall leaf collection was funded annually at \$4 million. Lastly, \$1 million was added to each year of the financial plan to support 15 civilian organics program management staff at DSNY.

Organics Program Already Faced Stop and Restart Under de Blasio Administration.

New York City grew its organics programs from small-scale composting demonstration projects and yard waste collection in the 1990s to a network of drop-off community-based collection sites and school-based collections by 2012, followed closely by the start of a voluntary curbside organics collection program in 2013. Curbside organics service—“brown bin collection”—was offered at its peak in 2020 to about 3.5 million residents in certain neighborhoods, but due to low participation rates at even this peak, further service expansion was put on hold in 2018. At its best, the city has managed to divert only about 1.4 percent of its waste from landfills to organics composting. This is partially because service was only ever offered in select neighborhoods, but even within neighborhoods with service, the program faced hurdles for participation. Brown bins were only distributed to single-family houses and apartment buildings with nine or fewer units; apartment buildings with 10 or more units could participate only if building management opted into the program, regardless of resident interest.

With the onset of the pandemic in 2020, the de Blasio Administration suspended organics collection completely, citing budget constraints, reducing the budget by \$21 million in 2021 and \$19 million in 2022. (For context, DSNY has a total budget of \$1.8 billion for 2023.) Last spring however, the de Blasio Administration restored his cuts to the program following the influx of federal pandemic relief aid and higher than previously expected tax collections. And by last fall, community-based drop off locations, school collection, and limited curbside collection had resumed, with the expectation the curbside program would continue to expand to new neighborhoods in coming years.

Low Curbside Participation and Associated High Collection Costs Remain Unaddressed.

Since curbside organics began in 2013, low participation and high costs have made DSNY’s organics program an easy target for budget cuts. Using a pre-pandemic basis of comparison, in 2019 the cost to collect and process organics was \$734 per ton, more than three times the \$216 per-ton and \$206 per-ton price tags for refuse and recycling, respectively. Most of this differential is driven by the collection side—truck pickup—and IBO cost modelling has found that increasing the organics tonnage collected would help

spread out the fixed costs of collections personnel time and equipment, helping erase this differential. (For more information on the relationship between low participation and high costs, see IBO's [report](#) on how different levels of organics collection shift the DSNY's total waste budget.)

The funding added by the Adams Administration in the Executive Budget sidesteps the issue of high collection costs by relying more heavily on New Yorkers making the effort to bring their organics to [drop-off sites](#) rather than the plan to expand curbside service to additional areas and prioritize efforts to increase participation where curbside service is currently available.

Relocating Lower East Side Composting Yard. Organics collected by the city then gets broken down, largely through partnerships with community-based composting facilities. The Lower East Side Ecology Center Compost Yard, situated in Manhattan's Seward Park, is now being relocated to Queens. The relocation is predicated on the city's need to start construction in the area for the East Side Coastal Resiliency Project, a joint city and federal project designed to help protect Manhattan neighborhoods and parks from the effects of climate change and storm surges. The Executive Budget includes \$500,000 this year and \$2 million next year to help build out a temporary compost yard on Rockaway Avenue. The relocation is estimated to be for a five-year period, and under the de Blasio Administration, the city had committed to allowing the Lower East Side Ecology Center to return to their original location after the park construction work is completed.

Waste Characterization Study Will Report on What is Compostable, Recyclable, But Thrown Out as Trash. One of the main sources of benchmarking the city's progress on waste stream goals—improving recycling and organics collection and reducing electronic waste in the trash—are its waste characterization studies. Last conducted in 2017, the Executive Budget adds \$8 million for a new study from 2022 through 2024. Representative samples of waste are pulled

from DSNY collection trucks and inspected to estimate the makeup of the city's waste stream as a whole—how much material is recyclable, compostable, or must go to landfills—and how well the city is sorting its waste into the correct collection streams where available. In 2017, 46 percent of what the city sent to landfills in the refuse stream was organic material that could be composted, and an additional 23 percent was recyclable metal, glass, plastic, and paper material—indicating room for improvement to meet the city's goal of reducing what it sends to landfills. The results of this upcoming waste characterization study are expected to help inform DSNY's decisions for waste stream collection and processing going forward.

Street Sweeping to Return Twice Weekly

After the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic alternate side parking was first completely suspended and then restored to once per week to encourage physical isolation and due to staffing shortages in the department. The Executive Budget adds \$2 million annually from 2023 through 2025 and \$4 million in 2026 to bring street sweeping up to the pre-pandemic levels of twice per week, with full alternate side parking schedules in effect starting July 5, 2022. Although this increase in street sweeping service is reflected as an expense increase, tickets from parked cars on street cleaning days will offset this increase. Also slated for more sweeping are bike lanes—the Executive Budget added \$3 million in 2023 and a total of \$7 million from 2024 through 2026 to sweep 133 additional miles of bike lanes, in consultation with the Department of Transportation. To fit in narrower protected bike lane spaces, the agency has recently started retrofitting its small snowplows (which clear snow from bike lanes in the winter) with mechanical brooms.

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