

Benjamin Miller, **Center for Zero Waste Design**
ben@centerforzerowastedesign.org

Testimony on Intro. 1574 to the
Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management
New York City Council
Hon. Antonio Reynoso, Chair
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There has never been a rational system for collecting commercial waste in New York City, or any plan for its overall management. Private carting, as practiced in the past and at present, is an unintended consequence of failures to examine the big picture to see how the parts fit together. We are therefore pleased to offer our support for Intro. 1574, which for the first time in the City's history offers a framework for developing a thoughtfully designed integrated system.

In 1915, New York stopped picking up waste from commercial buildings. Not because it had intended to. But because its attempt to begin charging businesses—who had previously received free service—backfired. The disposal contractor, who dumped the stuff in the ocean, would no longer allow refuse from non-residential buildings in his barges unless he got some of this new revenue himself. The Sanitation commissioner's response: screw that. Overnight, Sanitation stopped picking up business waste and private carters, who until then had only removed waste from large hotels and factories, became the only collection option for tens of thousands of new customers.¹

In 1956, the private carting world was jolted again by the unintentional consequences of another attempt to save money. 50,000 companies on the ground floors of residential buildings were still getting free collection. City Hall's brain trust urged Sanitation to charge them. And warned the mayor not to allow these businesses to fall into the hands of the carting industry, which had recently changed its business model. The boss of Murder Inc. and his crew had moved into the Teamsters' local and trade waste associations. But Mayor Wagner—for whatever reason—handed these new customers to the carters.² The consequences lingered to the end of the century, when remedial control measures were finally introduced.

In 1982, another pricing change and another set of unintended consequences. Wanting the price to more accurately reflect the depletion cost of using our finite landfill space, the City doubled its tip fee at marine transfer stations.³ In a handful of neighborhoods, dozens of private transfer stations suddenly appeared.

Since our history suggests that changes to this complex system occur only a few times a century, we should take full advantage of the current opportunity to address its critical problems and rectify some of the unintended consequences of past well-intentioned but muddled interventions.

The design for a rational commercial-waste system should do much more than just reduce unnecessary truck miles and improve performance and safety standards. As the mob bosses well-

understood, assuming long-term control over large customer routes offers powerful advantages. These are some of the problems these advantages could solve.

First, the transfer station problem. To remedy the problems of neighborhoods where private facilities are clustered, the City's network of marine stations was designed to accommodate both residential and commercial waste. But private carters won't abandon their own facilities and use the City's without some significant inducement or requirement. Franchise awards, in which specific waste sheds are linked to specific first-dump sites are the most efficient way to accomplish this end while also minimizing truck miles. This logic should be extended to garages and processing facilities, which should also be linked to specific zones. When optimally located sites are not available, the City should take all reasonable steps to facilitate such private developments or to offer public sites for this purpose. And where appropriate, these sites should allow shared access between different carters or between carters and DSNY.

Second, satisfying demand for processing capacity. Supply-side guarantees at predictable prices (which long-term exclusive franchises offer) are the necessary and sufficient pre-requisite for facility financing. There is a huge gap between the supply of local processing and disposal capacity and the latent demand. Which is why the most of our waste is sent to distant landfills at great environmental, social, and economic cost. If we don't develop this capacity we have zero chance of delivering zero waste to landfills by 2030—or any other wishful date. Financing and developing anaerobic digestion, waste-to-energy, and other forms of materials and energy-recovery facilities either within the city or nearby, should also be a requirement of franchise awards. Again, the City should assist in this effort to the maximum extent possible, including through facilitating access to sites and through access to institutional financing structures.

Third, collection infrastructure. Piling bags on the street to be picked at by rats, picked up by humans, and packed into trucks idling in front of every building is a barbaric way to collect waste. Where better systems are or could be made available, their development and use should also be a franchise condition.

I'm out of time. My written testimony suggests additional problems that could be addressed, and the system-design components needed to achieve them, and proposes amendments to Intro. 1574.

Thank you.

¹ E.g., *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, "City Won't Dispose of Private Rubbish;" *New York Times*, "Stop Free Removal of Business Waste;" *Standard Union*, "To Stop Taking Up Trade Waste," 8-1-1915.

² E.g., *Daily News*, "Says Refuse is Drain on City," 7-26-1954; "City Probes Private-Trash Gouge," 6-1-1955; "Monopoly Cry in Removal of Rubbish Sifted," 8-7-1955; "Urge City End Free Hauling of Private Refuse," 2-8-1956; "Approve Garbage Move," 2-10-1956. Bob Greene, "Murder of Anastasia Speeds Carting Probe," *Newsday*, 10-31-1957.

³ Paul L. Montgomery, "Angry Carting Concerns to Act on 'Unfair' Rates," *New York Times*, 2-13-1982.