

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DC Department of Public Works



Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
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Before the
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
Councilmember Mary M. Cheh, Chairperson
Council of the District of Columbia

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1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
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Good morning, Chairperson Cheh and members and staff of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment. I am Christopher Shorter, Director of the Department of Public Works (DPW). With me today are DPW's Interim Chief of Staff, Christine Davis, and Agency Fiscal Officer, Perry Fitzpatrick. On behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the Mayor's Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 proposed budget for the Department.

In March, Mayor Bowser presented her FY 2019 budget entitled, "A Fair Shot," which as its name implies, is aimed at giving Washingtonians of all backgrounds and at all stages of life the chance to live and thrive in our great city. The \$14.5 billion budget proposal includes investments in infrastructure, education, affordable housing, health and human services, economic opportunity, seniors, and public safety.

I want to thank Mayor Bowser and City Administrator Rashad Young for continuing to allocate increased funding to meet the needs of DPW's employees and the residents we serve. I would also like to thank all the men and women who show their commitment to the District of Columbia every day when they put on their uniforms and work tirelessly to keep our city clean, ensure parking opportunities for motorists, and service our city's fleet of government vehicles.

As I say often, we are a people-driven operation and we would accomplish nothing without our employees who brave all types of weather to deliver the services our residents depend on. These men and women are the lifeblood of our agency and work every day to deliver on our mission.

The Mayor's FY 2019 budget provides DPW with an operating budget of \$177,621,844, an increase of almost \$2 million from the previous fiscal year.

Additionally, in our capital budget, Mayor Bowser has funded several of our top priorities, including:

- \$64.1 million for vehicle and equipment replacements;
- \$8 million for a District composting facility; and
- \$642,517 for new lifts in DPW's Fleet Management Administration.

Mayor Bowser's vision to give all residents a fair shot is captured in the DPW budget for FY 2019. Throughout my testimony today, I will focus on the following programs, services and initiatives:

- Replacements we plan to make to the DPW and partner government agency fleets;
- Infrastructure improvements, including a new tipping floor at our Fort Totten Transfer Station;
- Workforce development initiatives, including multiple programs aimed at training skilled workers for good, well-paying jobs;
- Our commitment to environmental sustainability, including the planning underway for an in-District composting facility;



- Organizational and technological improvements aimed at making our agency more efficient and effective; and
- What we are planning for our leaf collection and snow operations in the next fiscal year.

Fleet Vehicle Improvements

As you know, DPW is responsible for some of the District's most visible municipal services. Performing these services requires the use of costly heavy-duty vehicles and equipment, much of which is used cross-functionally to support our agency's around-the-clock operations. A significant portion of our fleet is now approaching, or past, its recommended service life. This has increased our maintenance and repair costs, which in many cases are double the cost of a new vehicle. In addition to the expense, these aging vehicles lead to repeated equipment break downs and malfunctions which can slow down our operation.

In examining the DPW-owned fleet, we also surveyed the equipment our agency manages for the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), Department of General Services (DGS) and other partner agencies. Our analysis determined that 36 percent (1,086) of the 3,019 units have exceeded their recommended service life.

Recognizing the advanced age of the city's fleet, DPW has devised a six-year replacement plan to update all of our heavy and light equipment assets for an approximate cost of \$133.6 million. In FY 2019, DPW expects to replace 200 vehicles for a cost of just under \$31 million. The oldest and most mission critical vehicles will be replaced first, such as three and four-wheel street sweepers, refuse trucks, six-wheel dump trucks with plows and salt spreaders, leaf vacuum trailers, front-end loaders, and grass-cutting tractors.

Having new and reliable vehicles will have a direct and positive impact on our operations; increasing the speed with which we are able to deliver our services. And, of course, we will continue to be good stewards of the vehicles and equipment in our care, ensuring that they are maintained and kept in good working condition for as long as possible.

Capital Improvements

Looking ahead over the next year, we are excited to get moving on a number of key capital improvement projects. At our Fleet Management Administration's main garage we will replace the HVAC system that is now more than 20 years old. The replacement will improve the air quality for our employees in the garage, parts shop, and staff offices. The design for the new system has been completed, was bid upon this past fall, and we hope to award the contract and begin work shortly.

The design for a new tipping floor at the Fort Totten Transfer Station is almost complete, after which we will be putting the plan out for bid. In total, \$3.8 million has been allocated for this project, including \$1.1 million in grant funds from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to incorporate best practices in storm water pollution prevention. As you know, the Fort Totten Transfer Station is critical to the District's system of solid waste management, as this is one of two sites where trash and recyclables collected by DPW's crews are transferred and taken



out of the city for disposal. Fort Totten also receives trash and recycling collected by private haulers.

As mentioned, our capital budget includes funding for new lifts in our Fleet Management shop. There are currently 16 sets of lifts throughout the Fleet Administration maintenance facility that are used daily throughout our four repair shops. The average useful life of a vehicle lift is 15 years, depending on use and maintenance. The lifts in our maintenance shops are more than 16 years old, with some beyond repair. The funding provided in the Mayor's capital budget will ensure our lifts will be replaced, thus returning our repair shops to full capacity.

Workforce Development Initiatives

At DPW, as is true throughout District government, our biggest asset is our employees. To properly train and prepare our workforce for the ever-changing needs of our city, we must invest in our employees and equip them with the tools necessary to grow and thrive.

In this spirit, we have reestablished our U.S Department of Labor certified apprenticeship program to train nine mechanics starting this spring, with more expected next year. This comprehensive program, run by capable and experienced technicians, provides on-the-job experience coupled with classroom training. The apprenticeship program includes employment for one year, with the potential to be renewed for a second year. Through the DC Infrastructure Academy, DPW is also offering a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) training program that will train approximately 140 DC residents in FY 2018 and 300 in FY 2019. These programs achieve two top priorities for our city: they produce the type of skilled workers whom we at DPW and our sister agencies like DDOT need, and they offer pathways to the middle class for our residents.

DPW will also continue to work closely with the Mayor's Office on Returning Citizen Affairs to provide comprehensive CDL training, including classroom and road skills preparation leading up to road tests. We are proud to play a role in helping returning citizens rebuild their lives after they have paid their debt to society and step forward on a path to a stable career.

I am also happy to share that we will continue, and hopefully even expand, the partnership we began last fall with DC Public Library to train our employees on various computer skills, including Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. The classes are offered on Wednesdays at rotating times to accommodate our employees' various schedules. To date, 111 DPW employees have participated in the classes, and 76 have been awarded nationally recognized certificates. Given the success of the program, we are now examining expanding the program to offer classes on multiple weekdays and weeknights.

We will also be continuing our partnership with Southern New Hampshire University, which provides DPW employees and their immediate family members with the chance to earn a college degree while still working. The online degree program costs just \$3,000 per year—not including financial aid or scholarships—and includes two associate degree options and three bachelor's degree options.



Environmental Sustainability

Our FY 2019 budget continues the funding to advance our sustainability initiatives led by our Solid Waste Education and Enforcement Program (SWEEP) and Office of Waste Diversion. This year, I am pleased to share that the capital budget provides \$8 million in FY 2023 for the construction of an in-District composting facility. The construction of this facility will support DPW in launching a new curbside compost collection program for DPW-serviced residents as well as support the growth of composting in the commercial sector. In addition to helping the District reach our zero waste goals, an in-District composting facility will provide soil that the District needs for a variety of construction, remediation, beautification, and food-growing projects. These enhanced composting services will also have the added benefit of creating a number of good-paying green jobs for District residents.

To plan for a composting facility, DPW has begun developing design criteria for a composting site. The plan, which is anticipated to be completed by the end of the year, will include:

- Identifying how the compost generated by the site would be best utilized;
- Identifying and addressing environmental, health, aesthetic, noise, traffic, and other issues that would be of interest to neighbors of a potential site; and
- Identifying site permitting and zoning requirements.

As you know, last Earth Day Mayor Bowser kicked off DPW's first citywide Food Waste Drop-Off program. Through the free service, residents are able to drop-off food waste at designated farmers markets in all eight wards. The food waste collected at these drop-off locations is composted locally at District community composting sites and at the Prince George's County Organics Compost facility. This Saturday, in honor of Earth Day, the first 50 visitors at each location will receive a kitchen caddy—like the one I have here with me on the table—to help support their composting efforts.

As of April 1, the Food Waste Drop-Off program had collected nearly 150,000 pounds of organics from more than 20,000 participants over the last year. Participation has continued to grow since the program's launch, even during the cold winter months. We will have nine food waste drop-off locations this farmer's market season, and will continue to make every effort to expand winter drop-off locations for next year. There are currently three drop-off locations that are open year-round.

To enhance our knowledge of composting, this May, during international composting awareness week, five to 10 members of the DPW staff and members of the interagency working group—including myself—will be trained by the Institute for Local Self Reliance in backyard composting. Those trained will then test different types of composting bins for their ease of use, and provide feedback on the training curriculum that will eventually be used for District residents more broadly.

DPW's Solid Waste Education and Enforcement Program and Office of Waste Diversion is also poised to carry out a number of other current and future initiatives, including:



- Implementing solid waste collector registration and reporting to increase transparency and establish a District-wide baseline waste diversion rate;
- Increasing our focus on enforcing residential and commercial regulations related to recycling, such as failure to separate recycling from other solid waste, failure to have a sufficient number of containers for separated recyclables, and illegal use of plastic bags;
- Building a stronger, daily communication link between our trash and recycling crews and SWEEP inspectors;
- Revising existing food waste regulations that currently impede source separation and recycling of organic waste;
- Submitting the annual solid waste diversion report to communicate progress made toward the city's 80 percent diversion goal, which for the first time incorporates both waste and recycling data from the commercial sector;
- Evaluating how a "Save as You Throw" program could be equitably implemented; and
- Initiating a browns sharing program to support community and residential composting endeavors.

I think you will also be pleased to hear that this spring, our department, working in coordination with the Mayor's Office of the Clean City, is embarking on a public education campaign focused on proper trash and recycling practices. The campaign, which will include a postcard mailing to District residents serviced by DPW, advertisements, and significant community engagement, will include reminders about important regulations such as not bagging recyclables, and when trash and recycling bins must be removed from public space. Our viewing audience should be on the lookout for a postcard in the mail very soon.

Organizational and Technological Improvements

DPW remains committed to continuous improvement and enhancing our ability to service District residents and visitors. Becoming a more efficient and high-performing agency requires harnessing the power of technology and overhauling outdated processes and procedures.

In FY 2019, DPW's Office of Strategic Planning and Performance Management, formerly known as the Office of Organizational Effectiveness and Change Management, will continue to lead DPW's effort to address barriers to achieving the highest levels of efficiency, effectiveness and reliability in service delivery. Soon, we will launch monthly performance improvement forums with agency senior leadership and relevant stakeholders. The goal of these forums is to identify needed improvements, lessons learned and successes at all stages of a program, including pre and mid-season planning, and post-season after actions. Forum topics will include reviewing our standard city services and those we operate seasonally, like leaf collections, grounds maintenance, and snow removal operations.

During DPW's budget hearing last year, I discussed how we were modernizing the District's snow program by installing a new automated vehicle location (AVL) system to track our plows in near real-time. This has been incredibly beneficial internally, and through the snow.dc.gov website, has given residents a bird's-eye view of our plowing operations during winter weather events. Recognizing the value this has provided, we are now expanding the use of AVL



technology to our street sweeper vehicles. As a result, our supervisors will soon have access to route completion information in real-time, which will ultimately lead to cleaner District streets.

Along with improving internal processes, the new street sweeper AVL system will provide the foundation for a new alert system that will remind residents when to move vehicles for street sweeping in their neighborhood, and when it is safe to return their vehicles to obey parking regulations and avoid a citation. I am excited to announce that this new alert will ultimately be packaged into one easy-to-use portal called: “MyDPW.” Our aim is make it simple for residents to create an account and then choose which email and text alerts they would like to receive about the services we provide. In the future, it is my hope that residents will be able to sign up for alerts related to leaf collection, bulk trash collection, emergency snow route towing, and others.

Technology is also helping us improve our quality assurance/quality control (QA/QC) measures. With a new Salesforce application, our grounds maintenance crews will use their smartphones to electronically record and notify supervisors and managers of task completion with before and after photos. When the jobs have been completed, the system will send out notifications to supervisors and QA/QC monitors to come check the site in-person. Upon their verification, the jobs will be closed out until the site needs to be mowed again. This real-time information will allow managers to make more informed decisions that will translate into efficiencies and future improvements in service delivery.

Seasonal Operations

With temperatures now a bit higher, I think it is fairly safe to say that the 2017/2018 snow season has come to an end. This past season the DC Snow Team ramped up our use of liquid brine as an anti-icing treatment when snow and ice, unimpeded by rain, were forecasted for the area. Looking ahead to next winter, we plan to build on what we learned this year and continue to pursue a more forward-leaning deployment of assets strategy, by which I mean treating roads in advance of forecasted snow and ice to prevent them from bonding with pavement. The nature of this strategy requires more advance monitoring and planning, but allows our operation to keep streets clear throughout minor events, and return our roadways to bare pavement sooner following a moderate to light inclement weather event.

The DC Snow Team will also continue to focus on our operation’s environmental impact, working to reduce our salt use where possible, and looking for more environmentally friendly deicing alternatives. As you are aware, we have been using beet juice as an organic additive, which when mixed with a salt brine solution, improves the performance of the liquid applications.

Switching now to leaf collection, as I discussed at the public oversight roundtable on leaf collection in January, there are a number of changes we are evaluating aimed at improving our fall operation. These changes include, but are not limited to:

- Adding strategic catch-up days and other scheduling enhancements to reduce extended delays;



- Creating a hotline specifically for leaf collection that would be connected with a tracking system linking customer service representatives and front-line supervisors;
- Further integrating AVL into our operations for a more complete picture of real-time progress; and
- Moving to a ward-based operations plan that would give front-line managers more control over their assigned resources and require greater accountability of individual crews.

Again, these are just some of the changes that we are actively evaluating at the senior level, and discussing with our employees and supervisors through a series of leaf-specific forums that have brought together front-line managers, supervisors, and senior leadership to ensure that each change is being considered from all perspectives.

Conclusion

On any given day, anyone who lives in or visits the District of Columbia is bound to be touched by the work of the nearly 1,600 men and women who make up DPW. Whether it is our trash and recycling crews who keep the District clean, or our parking enforcement officers who keep our rush-hour lanes clear for traffic, our fleet mechanics who keep our government vehicles in the best shape possible, or the employees behind the scenes who make sure the administrative operation of the agency supports our mission, I want to salute all the men and women of DPW on whom all of us in the District depend.

In closing, the resources allocated to DPW will play a critical role in supporting residents' efforts to reach and remain on the pathway to the middle class. I am pleased to report that the Mayor's budget for the Department of Public Works demonstrates her leadership and commitment to our shared DC values, and ensures that all District residents are entitled to a fair shot. The Council and this Committee are critical allies in this effort, and I appreciate your work to ensure we operate efficiently and effectively.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions at this time.

