

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Department of Public Works



Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Christopher Geldart
Acting Director, Department of Public Works

Before the
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
Mary Cheh, Chairperson
Council of the District of Columbia

March 28, 2019
11:00 a.m.
Room 500
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Good morning, Chairperson Cheh and members and staff of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment. I am Christopher Geldart, Acting Director of the Department of Public Works (DPW). With me today are DPW's General Counsel, 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) 2020 proposed budget for the Department.

Earlier this month, Mayor Bowser presented her FY 2020 budget entitled, "A Fair Shot," which as its name suggests, advances our DC values, ensures more residents can participate in our city's prosperity, and allows us to tackle our most pressing challenges.

I want to thank Mayor Bowser and City Administrator Rashad Young for allocating increased funding to meet the needs of DPW's employees and the residents we serve. I would also like to express my gratitude to our employees—most of whom are District residents themselves—who do the hard work of keeping our city clean, green, and moving every day.

The Mayor's FY 2020 budget provides DPW with an operating budget of \$187,686,797, an increase of 6.7 percent from our FY 2019 approved budget.

Part of the budget enhancement will be used to right-size DPW's operational budget to accurately reflect DPW's historic spending amounts. This includes:

- \$2,351,000 for snow removal;
- \$1,900,000 for employee overtime; and
- \$1,478,000 for refuse hauling.

With respect to the increased funding for refuse hauling, this reflects the greater amount of waste generated by our growing city and the higher per ton costs included in the hauling contract that was awarded in FY 2019.

My testimony today is organized into three parts. I will begin with an overview of our program enhancements, followed by a series of updates related to our commitment to environmental sustainability, then discuss parking enforcement.

Program Enhancements

Starting with program enhancements, there are several major items included in the Mayor's capital budget. Aging infrastructure and equipment are challenges faced by every state and municipality in the country. Thankfully, we have a Mayor who understands that our employees need facilities and tools that work.

The FY20 budget includes more than \$24 million to replace old and often unreliable vehicles and equipment, reducing repair costs and increasing productivity. The new vehicles will be used across DPW's operations, including new heavy and light snow plows, packers, and parking enforcement sedans.

Switching now to facilities, our FY 2020 capital budget includes \$2.9 million for upgrades and repairs at the Benning Road Transfer Station. As you may know, the Benning Road facility was formerly used to incinerate trash before it was retrofitted to perform its current transfer station

functions. The construction project will include replacing the tipping floor, exterior siding and sump pumps, as well as repairing the foundation. Together, these upgrades and repairs will enhance workplace safety and optimize our ability to process incoming trash and recyclables.

Along with the Benning Road Transfer Station upgrades and the construction already underway at the Fort Totten Transfer Station, the Mayor's budget also includes funding for new grapplers. Grapplers are the machines used to move trash and recyclables at our transfer stations, loading the materials onto trucks to be hauled outside of the District. Of the six grapplers currently used at both transfer stations, no more than four were operational at any given moment during the last year. New grapplers will cut down on mechanical breakdowns and help ensure that our contracted haulers are able to haul away the maximum available tonnage of waste each day.

The Mayor's FY 2020 capital budget also includes funding for a new truck washing station. While washing smaller vehicles is fairly straightforward, larger vehicles are a bit more challenging. With this new truck washing station, we will be able to wash our larger vehicles, including heavy plows and salt trucks. Washing vehicles not only makes them presentable, it also extends the life of vehicles and reduces breakdowns. Washing these vehicles has largely been contracted out in the past.

Environmental Sustainability

DPW continues to play an integral role in the District's environmental sustainability. As you know, DPW's Office of Waste Diversion (OWD) works hard every day toward the goal of diverting 80 percent of the waste our city generates. Recognizing OWD's important work, two FTE's have been transferred to our waste diversion team. One of these positions will focus on youth education, while the other, a recycling program officer, will focus on managing our recycling and e-waste contracts.

In addition to our commitment to zero waste, DPW's sustainability efforts extend to our Fleet Administration, where we continue to increase the District's electric, hybrid, natural gas, flex fuel, and biodiesel vehicles. In FY18, DPW provided biodiesel for all diesel-powered vehicles and mandated the use of E85 in all flex fuel vehicles.

As we look ahead, we want to pave the way for expanding the number of electric and natural gas vehicles in our fleet, the Mayor's capital budget provides funding to upgrade and expand our existing infrastructure. Next year's capital budget includes \$1.5 million to expand the Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) fueling station at our West Virginia Avenue facility, which will enable us to purchase more CNG packers and dump trucks. On the electric side, \$500,000 has been budgeted every year for the next six years to add more electric charging stations throughout the city. This in turn will allow us to acquire more electric sedans and pick-up trucks. Both infrastructure enhancements are down payments toward a cleaner, greener fleet.

Looking ahead, the Mayor's capital budget continues to include \$8 million for a composting facility, with the first \$4 million becoming available in FY 2022. As mentioned at our performance oversight hearing, planning efforts remain underway to identify a site. With respect to the home composting program that you, Chairperson Cheh, championed, a Request for

Proposal (RFP) was sent out earlier this month, and we will work hard to launch the program as soon as possible this year.

Parking Enforcement

Transitioning to parking enforcement, on any given day, the women and men of DPW's Parking Enforcement Management Administration (PEMA) can be found on our city's streets, ensuring parking laws are enforced and that our roadways are safe. With this in mind, I am pleased to share that the Mayor has added \$2.7 million to our FY 2020 operating budget for two of our top parking enforcement priorities.

The first is the safety of District cyclists. Mayor Bowser and I are fully committed to Vision Zero, and ensuring that pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists are as safe as possible when they commute to work, school, or wherever they need to go. My team and I have heard from cyclists at community meetings and on social media that a higher level of enforcement is needed when it comes to preventing vehicles from obstructing bike lanes. While all our officers will continue to enforce bike lane regulations, beginning this fall, the Mayor has funded the addition of 20 parking enforcement officers who will focus exclusively on ensuring that our bike lanes are safe and free of obstructions.

The addition of these dedicated parking enforcement officers is strengthened by Mayor Bowser's inclusion of a budget provision that will allow for bike lane citations to be mailed in cases where the driver speeds away before our officers can issue a ticket. Previously, because our officers were required to print the ticket and put it on the offender's windshield, many violators simply drove off.

I would also note that the fine for blocking a bike lane was raised earlier this year in January to \$150, up from the previous \$65. These three recent changes are not catchall solutions, but together, I believe they will have a significant impact.

The Mayor's budget also provides funding for 20 tow truck drivers who will focus on clearing the District's rush hour and bus lanes. The addition of these FTE's will have two major benefits. The first is an enhanced capacity to remove vehicles blocking rush hour and bus lanes, which in turn reduces congestion. In addition, this enhanced capacity will also free up some of our other tow trucks to focus on towing scofflaw, abandoned, and other vehicles that do not belong on our city's streets. The ability to tow these vehicles is in direct proportion to the number of tow trucks and operators we are funded to operate at any given moment. We expect this funding increase to yield a needed increase in the number of vehicles we are able to tow.

Conclusion

With that, I will conclude my formal remarks. Thank you, Chairperson Cheh, for the opportunity to testify today and for your continued support of DPW's mission. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.