

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**Department of Public Works**



Fiscal Year 2018 Performance 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

February 15, 2019  
11:00 a.m.  
Room 412  
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 programs and services provided by the Department and its accomplishments in Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18) and Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19) to date.

While I have only been at the helm of DPW for two weeks, the agency's staff has worked diligently to bring me up to speed on DPW's operations. Let me also say from the outset that I look forward to working with you, this Committee, and the rest of the Council to ensure that DPW meets and exceeds the expectations of the residents we serve.

As the former Director of the DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA), I partnered with DPW on three presidentially declared disasters and 20 national special security events. While at HSEMA, I witnessed the support DPW provides other District agencies to help them achieve their service mandates. Our work on major snowstorms, hurricanes, and the flooding episodes in Bloomingdale, Eckington and LeDroit Park allowed me to see the deep commitment and professionalism of DPW employees up close.

On any given day, more than 1,500 men and women of DPW serve our nation's capital by collecting trash and recyclables, enforcing our parking laws, maintaining our city's vehicle fleet, finding ways to reduce waste, removing graffiti, mowing lawns, and plowing our streets. While our city should take pride in these employees and their work every day, the recent federal government shutdown presented a challenge. As Mayor Bowser has said, leadership is about stepping up, not shutting down, and that is exactly what DPW did. In addition to the more than 6,700 public litter bins DPW empties on a daily basis, our crews emptied more than 600 cans located on federal properties. DC is our nation's capital, but more importantly, it is our home, and we always want it to look its best.

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 our engagement with the community.

### **Program Enhancements**

Since last year's performance hearing, there have been a number of program enhancements in each of DPW's core areas of operation: Solid Waste Management, Parking Enforcement, Fleet Management, and Waste Diversion. I would like to take the next few minutes to highlight some of these key improvements.

Following the 2017-2018 leaf collection season, DPW took a hard look at what was going well and, most importantly, what could be improved. Understanding that residents were rightfully frustrated when their leaves were not collected during their scheduled collection week, DPW built catch-up days into this past season's schedule. The catch-up days were added in two ways. First, as crews finished their sections in smaller wards, they were then dispatched to larger wards to help in areas that had fallen behind. A full gap week was also built into the schedule for the week of December 24, allowing crews to catch-up where needed.

Operationally, DPW utilized a new mobile application that gave supervisors the ability to schedule and re-schedule routes in real time and facilitated automatic communications with quality assurance/quality control inspectors. The leaf season management structure was also retooled so that each ward had its own leadership team responsible for performance. This streamlined our ability to address complaints and improved accountability.

This is not to say that some areas did not experience delays, including some areas where we are still finishing up. As noted in all of DPW's leaf collection communications, delays can be expected when there is inclement weather. Whenever the District Snow Team is deployed, the trucks used for leaf collections are called in to be outfitted with snow plows and salt spreaders. Once the weather improves, the trucks are cleaned and outfitted to resume leaf operations. Depending on the length and intensity of the storm, this process can take several days. Weather also causes delays when leaves become wet or frozen, and such conditions hamper our equipment's ability to function properly. Unfortunately, this past fall was particularly rainy, which along with four snow deployments in November and December, caused delays. Fortunately, these delays were minimized by the catch-up times built into the schedule.

Along with operational improvements, DPW also stepped up its communication with residents during leaf season. In addition to the pamphlet that was mailed to residents and a host of advertising and outreach, DPW rolled out a new leaf alerts system. Registered participants received reminders via email and text messages letting them know when to rake out their leaves, when crews would be arriving, and when delays in their ward could be expected. We also established a leaf hotline to ensure residents could speak directly with someone fully trained and knowledgeable about our leaf operations to answer any questions they might have.

These enhancements, and others, such as electronic dashboards that allowed leadership to track crews' progress with heightened specificity, contributed to a smoother leaf season. With that said, there is still room for growth, and I look forward to working with our team over the next several months to identify areas that can be further strengthened. Already, I am happy to share that 25 new leaf vacuums arrived this week, which will drastically reduce delays caused by equipment breakdowns next season.

Technology has been the basis for several of our program enhancements over the last year. For the snow program, this included an enhanced notification system that contacts every member of the Snow Team via email, text, and a personalized phone call to ensure that they know where and when to report for duty. It also includes our enhanced Automated Vehicle Locator (AVL) system, which allows us to track our plows in real time, ensuring that routes are being completed and issues can be spotted and addressed quicker than ever.

Looking ahead to residential street sweeping season, which runs from March through October, I am pleased to announce that DPW will be rolling out a new alert system this month. The alert system will allow residents to input street locations of their choice and receive email and text message reminders about when to move their vehicles. The District's mechanical street sweeping program plays a critical role in keeping our city clean. Last year, DPW's street sweepers removed more than 4,300 tons of litter from DC's streets. Litter is unsightly and unsanitary, not to mention a food source for rodents. With this new alert system, we hope to lessen the burden

on those who park on residential streets and decrease the number of vehicles our street sweepers need to maneuver around.

Mayor Bowser has made Vision Zero a top priority, and I wholeheartedly share her commitment to pedestrian, cyclist, and motorist safety. This past fall, DPW created a group of 10 parking enforcement officers who volunteered to ride bicycles during their shifts, with the goal of gaining a better perspective of the challenges District cyclists face and addressing these challenges in real-time. These officers have contributed to a greater enforcement presence in our city's bike lanes, and will be joined by more officers who will be trained this spring. I have also asked for weekly reports on the number of bike lane and other pedestrian safety-related citations to ensure that this issue receives the attention it deserves.

As you know, DPW's Fleet Management Administration fuels all 6,000 District government vehicles, in addition to procuring and maintaining more than 3,000 government vehicles. Over the last year, DPW continued to maximize the District's use of biofuels by providing biodiesel for all diesel-powered vehicles and mandating the use of E85 in all flex fuel vehicles, which burns cleaner than pure gasoline. In FY18, DPW also continued to replace vehicles throughout the District fleet with fuel efficient or alternative fuel models in each vehicle class. As a result of these strategies, the District fleet's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are 22 percent lower than their 2010 peak.

### **Environmental Sustainability**

Moving now to our sustainability efforts, Mayor Bowser has committed to making DC a global sustainability leader, and the results are showing. Residents in the District are recycling more, and they're recycling more effectively, keeping items that are not recyclable out of their recycling bins. In the course of just one year, DC residents have increased the amount they recycle by 9.5 percent, which equates to an average monthly increase of 200 tons. Residue, the leftover material in the recycling stream that cannot be recycled, decreased by eight percentage points from 27 percent in 2017 to 19 percent in 2018.

These results and others are detailed in a recent study conducted by Resource Recycling Systems, a recycling consultancy commissioned by DPW to measure the District's residential recycling stream. The study included two largescale recycling sorts - one in July 2017 and the other in June 2018 - that examined the materials collected by DPW recycling crews from residents' homes throughout the District. This report will be released later this month and will be available for residents to review on our website.

The increase in recycling is largely attributed to three key initiatives undertaken by the District over the last year.

- First, Mayor Bowser's expansion of the number of items that can be recycled in the District, including items like pizza boxes and paper and plastic cups and plates;
- Second, operational changes at DPW, including optimizing recycling routes, establishing dedicated recycling crews and supervisors, and improved equipment availability; and
- Third, a comprehensive public education campaign, including extensive community outreach, mailings to residents, advertisements, and the new Zero Waste DC website.

Looking ahead, the District is working to decrease its residue rate even further. According to the study, plastic bags are a major source of contamination. Plastic bags are not accepted in DC recycling bins as they clog recycling machinery, creating delays and safety risks for employees at recycling sorting facilities. In September of 2018, DPW sent postcards to the District households we service reminding residents that recyclables should be placed in bins loose, or in paper bags.

As you know, along with increasing the amount of materials that the District recycles, composting is a crucial strategy for growing our waste diversion rate. I am pleased to share that DPW's food waste drop-off program has continued to thrive. Average weekly participation increased by 200 percent between FY17 and FY18, and the amount of food collected increased by 400 percent. There are now nine drop-off locations throughout the city, three of which are open year-round. The current fiscal year is also off to a good start, with the average weekly participation rate up 15 percent, and a projected increase of 45 percent for the amount of food collected in FY19. While we are very proud of the program's success, we are working to increase participation even more - especially in Wards 7 and 8, where participation growth has been slowest. As part of this effort, this spring we will be surveying drop-off participants to learn more about them, why they participate, and how we could better reach more residents.

As the popularity of the food waste drop-off program shows, DC has a growing appetite for composting. With this in mind, DPW has continued its progress toward curbside collections of food and yard waste. Planning efforts for a composting facility have included working with the Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) to identify environmental criteria and permitting requirements for a site in the District and working with the Office of Planning on identifying potential locations. Once a decision has been made on where the composting facility will be located, the focus will shift to assessing the personnel and equipment needed for curbside composting collections.

DPW has also made significant progress on implementing a Home Composting Incentive Program that will provide rebates or vouchers to District residents who purchase home composting systems. This past summer and fall, a group of DPW employees joined with volunteer participants from DOEE and the Mayor's Office of the Clean City to take a composting training and then test out various composting systems at their homes. The participants in this pilot program kept a log of the weight of food scraps added, temperature and moisture level of their bins, and any issues with unwanted animal life. DPW's Office of Waste Diversion used this information to issue a Request for Information on October 12, 2018 to identify the best ways to use contractor support to teach the training workshops and administer the rebate program. This information is now being used to develop a Request for Proposal, and we anticipate launching the program later this spring or early summer.

Over the past year, DPW played a key role in the development of the Sustainable DC 2.0 plan that will be issued this spring. The plan's priorities include recycling, composting, and clean, litter-free streets, which are areas that DPW will play a leading role in implementing. Looking ahead, later this year DPW will complete its waste characterization study, which will serve as a guide for our agency and the District as a whole as we develop a comprehensive waste management and zero waste plan. I also want to note that I am aware there are several

outstanding reports and studies that are currently being worked on or are under review. I will be working with our team to get those completed as soon as possible, and where necessary, suggest revised deadlines to better align with other reporting cycles.

### **Community Engagement**

Over the last year, DPW has continued its robust community engagement efforts, connecting with the residents we serve in a multitude of ways. During FY18, staff from the Office of the Director attended 65 community meetings, and our Solid Waste Education and Enforcement Program (SWEEP) division participated more than 500 community events, including everything from ANC meetings to tabling at community festivals. More than 43,000 residents are signed up to receive DPW's quarterly newsletter, and our communications team regularly posts relevant updates on neighborhood list-servs, in addition to press releases and a robust social media presence. DPW's website is also a popular source of information for residents, garnering 1.2 million pageviews during the last fiscal year, in addition to hundreds of thousands of additional pageviews on the zerowaste.dc.gov and snow.dc.gov websites that DPW maintains.

This past year was the eleventh anniversary of Truck Touch, a community event I have attended with my family and understand to be something DPW employees very much look forward to each year. For those who may not be familiar, Truck Touch gives residents - particularly children - the chance to see everything from fire trucks to trash trucks up close, and even climb up into the cab and honk the horn. For DPW and our partner agencies, Truck Touch is a fun way to connect with the community.

Last year, DPW completed another successful season of its unique graffiti prevention project, MuralsDC, which continues to play an important role in reducing the number of repeat tags on vandalized buildings. In FY18, DPW - in partnership with the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities and working almost exclusively with local artists - added seven additional murals to DC's landscape. This brings the total number of original standalone murals installed since 2007 to 81.

Along with preventing graffiti, on May 24, 2018, DPW kicked off Mayor Bowser's third annual "Great Graffiti Wipeout." Working throughout all eight wards, DPW crews cleaned more than 900 graffiti markings and removed upwards of 3,000 posters and stickers from public places. The graffiti removal blitz is in addition to the more than 5,550 311 requests DPW responds to each year to remove graffiti and posters.

As you may have seen, several of DPW's recycling trucks underwent makeovers this past September. In partnership with the Commission on the Arts and Humanities, DPW unveiled 15 recycling trucks decorated with designs from local artists aimed at promoting recycling in the District. Along with looking great, the trucks have proved to be a conversation starter, connecting residents with our crews. As Sanders Wright, who drives one of the art-covered recycling trucks told *Recycling Today* magazine, ***"We get so many positive responses. It makes you enjoy coming to work. The children love the truck, and the parents will come out and speak with us."***

This past year, DPW's community engagement also included a spring and summer education campaign aimed at ensuring residents know how to properly dispose of waste and recycle in the District. The campaign focused on reducing contamination in recycling, reducing rodents and keeping the city clean, and making sure residents are aware of key trash and recycling requirements. Along with advertising in both English and Spanish, the campaign included a contest at John Burroughs Elementary School where third graders created posters highlighting the benefits of recycling. The three winners each won the chance to ride in one of DPW's recycling trucks with their parents. The campaign also included the creation of "oops tags" that DPW's collection crews and SWEEP inspectors could leave on residents' trash and recycling bins letting them know when they've made common mistakes, such as putting trash items in recycling bins. There are three sets of oops tags, one for recyclables, one for trash, and one for bulk collections.

### **Conclusion**

DPW has clearly accomplished a lot over the last year, and I am excited about building on this progress in the year ahead. As a DC resident, I am thankful for the men and women of DPW who keep our city clean, green, and moving every day. I would also like to thank you, Chairperson Cheh, and the rest of the Committee, for the leadership and support I know you provide. With that, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. As there may be some areas that I'm not yet fully briefed on, I may call on members of the DPW senior team to help answer some questions.