

ORAL TESTIMONY
Jacquelyn Ottman

WHY NYC NEEDS TO CONDUCT A MASSIVE
MARKETING AND OUTREACH CAMPAIGN

City Council Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management
Zero Waste Oversight Budget Hearing
September 18, 2017

Good afternoon, Chairman Reynoso and the other members of the Sanitation and Solid Waste Management Committee. My name is Jacquie Ottman. I'm an expert in the area of green marketing. My 40 years of experience includes over a decade working at NYC advertising agencies.

The Department of Sanitation has in place many laudable programs to make it easy for residents to divert a host of recyclable items from the waste stream. However, infrastructure alone cannot guarantee compliance. And neither can the stick of enforcement. New York City's 8.5 million residents and millions of tourists and visitors must be **motivated** to recycle and take other steps to **reduce** our waste. Only a massive marketing and outreach campaign can reinforce the 'Why' and 'How' necessary to make 'reduce, reuse and recycle' a core value of our consumption culture.

Planning for such a campaign must begin with an updated understanding of what New Yorkers know and feel about the City's recycling program. Surprisingly, no large scale market research has been conducted since 2005 to track New Yorkers' recycling-related awareness, attitudes, understanding and habits. In the interim, much has changed. Many more items are now being collected for recycling, including organics. 400,000 NYCHA residents and employees of large firms have access to recycling but little relevant education. And a new generation of recyclers has grown up without the social force of a public campaign.

Meanwhile, attitudes have also changed, some with the potential to seriously undermine our efforts to get to zero waste. Recently published market research shows that skepticism runs high (33%), especially among Millennials, that whatever is collected for recycling will actually be recycled. Research also shows that recycling can actually encourage consumers to waste. Want to feel less guilty about buying bottled water? Easy! Just remind yourself "The bottle is recyclable!"

There's hope! We here in NYC have what it takes to develop a compelling marketing and outreach campaign — and for a fraction of the \$400 million we spend to export our waste each year. Our advertising and media community is capable of tapping into New Yorkers' pride that ours is the greatest city in the world. The long running "I Love New York" campaign is just one example. The creativity and environmental passions of today's Millennials can be enlisted to create cost-effective viral-bound videos, hashtags, images and more that can make the daily and sometimes unseemly aspects of sorting our waste, cool.

Who should be responsible? We believe the Mayor's Office of Sustainability GreeNYC group would be ideally suited to overseeing such a campaign. It can all start by convening a high level 'Zero Waste Marketing Advisory Board' including senior executives (both active and retired) of major firms capable of helping us tap into the best talent in the City.

For the record, I'm submitting this testimony with more details and ideas attached. Thanks for allowing me to submit this testimony today. I'd be happy to take any questions you may have.

Jacquelyn Ottman is a native New Yorker and author of five award-winning books on the subject of green marketing. Since 1989 she has advised Fortune 500 companies and the U.S. EPA (Energy Star label) and USDA (U.S. Certified Biobased label) on strategies for credible green marketing. She is certified as a Zero Waste Professional by the U.S. Zero Waste Business Council. She founded WeHateToWaste.com in 2012, a platform for exploring a new consumption culture based upon resource efficiency and zero waste.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT FOR ORAL TESTIMONY

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Premise

Without a massive outreach and education campaign targeted to NYC's 8.5 million residents, we will not be able to make "reduce, reuse and recycle" a core value of our consumption culture, and this core value is needed to make sure that we can make our NYC's 'zero waste by 2030' goal. Such an outreach and education campaign needs to create awareness of NYC's multi-faceted recycling and reuse infrastructure and must address residents' and visitors' motivations to recycle and reuse. This will require educating them on the correct ways to recycle. Planning for such a campaign must begin with an updated understanding of what New Yorkers know and feel about the City's recycling program and lead to fresh insights into why the City is not – and historically has not been capable of — achieving higher rates of diverting both mandatory and voluntary recyclables.

Discussion

74% of NYC's residential waste stream is recyclable, yet we are only diverting 17%. Of the recyclable tons collected, Sims estimates that 11% is contamination. Several efforts outlined in the Mayor's OneNYC 'Zero Waste x 2030' plan are underway to make it easier to divert a higher percentage of our waste stream, among them: voluntary collection programs for organics/ food scraps (30%), clothing/ textiles (15%), and electronics (1%). Plastic bags (2%) are being considered by Albany for a fee-based or other reduction system, and DSNY claims to be on track to converting the collection of mandatory recyclables to a 'single stream' system, with the potential to increase the collection by an estimated 18% (although contamination may increase by as much as 30%). In addition, DSNY is also exploring financial incentives for residents to recycle more. Meanwhile, current efforts are challenged by the City's great diversity, lax enforcement, and a preponderance of residents who live in multi-family buildings with their own specific challenges of limited space, lack of face-to-face communications, and resident anonymity.

Although the City's collection efforts are laudable, they represent 'infrastructure', and as such cannot lead to significant increases in the City recycling diversion rate on their own. The only way to move the needle — which has been stuck at 16% for years — is by conducting a massive education and outreach effort that, via its awareness building potential, frequency, and compelling (emotional) messaging can trigger new recycling and reuse habits among NYC's 8.5 million residents. Thanks to the cost efficiency of social media, the power of big ideas that NYC's advertising community is capable of, and the potential to stimulate policy and voluntary initiatives across sectors, an impactful, coordinated marketing and advertising effort can be run for a fraction of the \$400 million it costs the City to export our waste each year. Developing such a campaign must start with an in-depth assessment of New Yorkers attitudes, awareness, and perceptions of current recycling efforts.

No large scale advertising and outreach campaign and accompanying market research has been run on behalf of NYC's recycling program since 2005, the year the popular long-running "blue and green recycling bins" campaign ended. At that time, New Yorkers expressed interest in recycling, felt good about its potential to help the environment, and expressed confidence that they knew *what* to recycle while noting confusion about what specific items *not* to recycle. As is still the case today, they also expressed more confidence in the power of recycling over waste reduction as a

sustainable waste management strategy.

Since then, much has changed in the marketplace:

- recycling collection was stopped and started again with a broader array of items that are collected for recycling, including organics (what may be the most challenging new 'recyclable' of all); and

- the portion of the waste stream that is not recyclable (26% as of 2013 – DSNY Waste Characterization Study) appears to be growing, reflecting an aging population (disposable diapers) and the introduction and growth of high tech, multi-material packages (e.g., pouches, squeeze tubes).

- Demographically, NYC's population has grown, 400,000 NYCHA residents have been given access to recycling but very little education, employees of major firms are now required to recycle but likely don't have any relevant training, Air BnB and other 'sharing' platforms are bringing new visitors into the City who either don't care or are confused about what to recycle; and a new generation of recyclers has grown up without public 'pressure' / positive attitudes about what and why to recycle.

- Attitudes have changed: Research indicates that skepticism runs high (33%) especially among Millennials, that whatever is collected for recycling will actually be recycled, and not wind up in the trash <https://resource-recycling.com/plastics/2016/11/16/surveys-show-recycling-skepticism-in-younger-generation/> Research also shows that recycling can lead consumers to waste more—"It's recyclable!" (<http://www.npr.org/2017/06/02/531173499/why-recycling-options-lead-people-to-waste-more>)

- Finally, the U.S. EPA has found that 42% of climate change emissions trace to the production, consumption and disposal of consumer goods and food (https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/climatechange/climate-change-and-waste_.html), underscoring the importance of making this linkage for consumers and policymakers and other leaders alike.

Meanwhile, among other things, social media are now able to reach the majority of residents in a short space of time. Digital platforms allow all consumers to share, swap and borrow as a form of reuse; and Millennials, the demographic component with the strongest digital skills, have emerged as a vigorous force for social change.

Data Needed On Residential Attitudes Towards Mandatory Recycling Programs

- Resident motivations (and de-motivations) to recycle); how do these differ by different cultural and demographic groups?
- What portion of residents believe it is important (even mandatory) to recycle? That what they put out for recycling actually gets recycled? What portion understands the role of recycling in preserving resources, or that economically, markets need to be created including the purchase by residents, businesses and governments, of goods made from recycled content?
- What portion of residents know how to sort recyclables correctly? Know what not to drop into the recycling bin as well as what is actually collected for recycling?
- Among those who have access to voluntary collection programs, what are attitudes and program usage? Which attitudes in particular have to be changed?
- How do New Yorkers get their information on recycling? How do they determine what is recyclable? Made from recycled content?
- What are best practices for engaging residents within multi-family buildings (where the majority of NYC residents live) in mandatory and voluntary recycling programs? What portion of residents believe it is easy to recycle in their building?

- What portion of the population makes linkages between recycling and climate change? What is the role of empowering consumers to affect climate change play in their decisions to reduce and recycle?

Specific Opportunities Exist to Enlist Residents, Businesses, Schools in a Concerted Waste Reduction Effort

- Tap into the Power of Madison Avenue. History has shown that consumer behavior can be changed with a high impact advertising campaign that taps into consumer motivations in a compelling, memorable way. Behavior surrounding seat belts, forest fires, contraceptive use, smoking, and litter (“Don’t Mess with Texas”) all have been transformed with high impact campaigns – all likely developed by NYC’s own advertising agencies. In developing such a campaign much can be learned from major cities with zero waste plans — Sydney, Austin, SF, Minneapolis, Boulder, Seattle, among them, as well as from NYC’s own past successful recycling campaign.

Taking a lesson from the successful and long-running ‘I Love New York’ campaign, opportunities exist to tap into regional chauvinism and New Yorkers’ belief that their city is the greatest in the world, with waste reduction being connected to an enhanced resident quality of life and visitor experience.

It would appear that the Mayor’s Office of Sustainability GreenNYC would be the ideal group to take this on, or perhaps a special public/private partnership developed with a major NYC advertising agency. Relatedly, to help tap into the best marketing and communications talent in NYC, an opportunity exists to convene a high level ‘Zero Waste Marketing and Advertising Advisory Board’ composed of senior executives (active and retired) of major advertising and branding firms.

- Social Media and Digital Platforms: The bulk of today’s young communications talent are Millennials whose creativity and environmental passions can be tapped to create cost-effective viral videos, hashtags, images and more that can make the daily, and sometimes unseemly aspects of sorting our waste, cool. Opportunities also exist to tap into the existing digital platforms that Millennials frequent including ebay, CraigsList, Freecycle, numerous apps, and the new NextDoor.com platform that unites neighbors, to encourage more explicit understanding of the environmental benefits of peer-to-peer sharing, swapping, borrowing, donating, gifting, and other forms of reuse, repair and extended product life.

- Local Businesses: Thanks to changes in commercial recycling laws, local employers have a new role to play in engaging their employees in proper recycling and waste reduction practices. Opportunities may exist to leverage their training budgets to require compulsory recycling education for large NYC employers, with resultant learning transported into homes and families.

- Local Schools: Waste education could be integrated into STEM education with the goal of instilling in children a sense for the issues involved in wasting food, as well as other resources including water. Waste reduction and recycling and reuse should be explicitly linked to carbon balance and climate change lessons.

- Real Estate Sector: With 80% of New Yorkers renting their apartments, lease agreements requiring acknowledgement of recycling laws could become mandatory. An opportunity may also exist to make recycling education mandatory for landlords, coop boards and building superintendents.

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