

NYC mayor unveils sweeping environmental plan on Earth Day

April 22 2015, by Jonathan Lemire



New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio holds up a copy of the "One New York" plan during a news conference in the Bronx in New York, Wednesday, April 22, 2015. New York City, in a far-reaching effort to limit its impact on the environment, marked Earth Day on Wednesday by announcing a plan to reduce its waste output by 90 percent by 2030. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

The nation's biggest city, under the direction of Mayor Bill de Blasio, marked Earth Day on Wednesday by linking a sweeping effort to limit its impact on the environment with its fight against income inequality by pledging to lift more than 800,000 people out of poverty.

De Blasio unveiled his ambitious OneNYC plan as a comprehensive strategy to improve New Yorkers' lives by providing affordable housing, shortening commute times and preserving the environment.

"The way forward is to create a vision for one city where there's opportunity for all, sustainability for all and fairness for all," de Blasio said. "So many people who have fought for economic justice have also fought for environmental justice because these challenges go hand in hand."

The waste reduction proposal—first reported Tuesday by The Associated Press—is central to the plan. New York, home to about 8.5 million residents, aims to reduce its waste output by 90 percent by 2030 from its 2005 level. The plan, the biggest undertaken by a city in the Western Hemisphere, would eliminate more than 3 million tons of garbage by overhauling the city's recycling program, offering incentives to reduce waste and embracing the City Council's plan to dramatically reduce the use of plastic shopping bags.

The waste reduction plan is part of an update to the sustainability project created by de Blasio's predecessor, Michael Bloomberg. But even changing its name from PlaNYC to the loftier OneNYC: The Plan for a Strong and Just City, which invokes de Blasio's campaign promise to combat the "tale of two cities" created by income inequality, makes clear that the updated plan would grow in scope.



Surrounded by community members and staff, New York City mayor Bill de Blasio, center, speaks during a news conference in the Bronx in New York, Wednesday, April 22, 2015. New York City, in a far-reaching effort to limit its impact on the environment, marked Earth Day on Wednesday by announcing a plan to reduce its waste output by 90 percent by 2030. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

The mayor pledged to lift 800,000 New Yorkers out of poverty or near poverty in the next decade, one of the largest anti-poverty efforts in the nation's history. De Blasio said it would "change the reality of this city."

He also reiterated his lofty housing goals—he aims to create 500,000 units of affordable housing by 2040—and said he wants to end racial and ethnic disparities in premature mortality. He pledged to explore new capital expenditures—including the feasibility of a new subway line to serve central Brooklyn—to improve the city's aging infrastructure and to reduce the average New Yorker's commuting time to 45 minutes.

But de Blasio declined to discuss the cost—or source of funding—for the projects, saying much of that would be revealed in next month's budget presentation.

Some resiliency advocates applauded the lofty goals, but others, including Jordan Levine of the New York League of Conservation Voters, chided the plan for not providing specifics on funding and warned that "implementation is where rubber meets the road."



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For decades, the city's trash has been exported to South Carolina, Virginia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania or upstate New York. The amount of waste produced by the city has fallen 14 percent since 2005 because of an increase in recycling, and a key component of the plan is to bolster that output by simplifying the process and consolidating all recycling into one bin by 2020.

Organics—such as food scraps and yard waste—make up nearly a third of the city's residential waste stream. A program to collect that material directly from residents' homes is expanding to nearly 200,000 residents by year's end, and city officials want to serve every home by the end of 2018. The city also will offer economic incentives to participate, including potentially a property tax rebate for homeowners.

The city also aims to reduce commercial waste by 90 percent by 2030 by adopting a program that could mean tax incentives for participating businesses and fines for nonparticipants.

The de Blasio administration stopped short of endorsing a City Council bill that proposes a 10-cent fee on plastic bags, but officials said that reducing their use is a priority and that they would coordinate efforts with the council.

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