

Progress on Recycling Makes \$ense

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By Corey Bearak, [The Public Ought To Know](#)

Queens, NY – This past weekend I participated in recycling in a new old way. After the 1989 enactment of Local Law 19, also known as “The New York City Recycling Law,” New Yorkers expected to experience a 25% reduction or recycling of all non-hazardous solid waste by tonnage by the December 31, 1993 (emphasis intended); four years later anticipated New York City achieving 40% recycling. New York City today recycles a bit more than one-third what we believed attainable one quarter century ago.

Unfortunately, the administrations that followed the one that agreed to and signed this then-landmark legislation (and for which the current Mayor worked), worked to scale back if not gut many of the law’s provisions. The result: today, according to the New York City Department of Sanitation website, the agency collects 10,500 tons of residential and institutional garbage and recycles 1,760 tons, totaling 12,260 tons; the math works to a 14.35% recycling rate.

The original law mandated a program to separately collect Yard Waste from March 1 through July 31 and September 1 through November 30. So news stories, department mailers and emails that the Sanitation Department would collect leaves one day each this month and next had me excited (Some communities got more collection dates.); I recalled earlier efforts when leaves got collected and opportunities for resident to freely obtain the resulting compost.

The Department Sanitation promotes an ambitious zero-waste pledge achieve zero waste to landfills by 2030. As my article in Hofstra Law School’s Environmental Law Digest one year after the landmark recycling law’ enactment posited, “A well run recycling program remains environmentally safe and more cost effective when compared to the marginal costs of alternative disposal technologies.” This certainly includes shipping trash to out of state landfills. Let’s hope to continue to see more progress. It’s good for the environment and our health and makes \$ense.

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