

August 2005

This is a special publication
of the NYC
Zero Waste Campaign

*“New York City needs to
recognize that waste is a
tremendous resource...”*

*-Laila Iskander Kamel,
1994 Goldman Prize*

NYC Zero Waste Campaign

RESPONSES FROM THE NYC MAYORAL CANDIDATES

Reaching for Zero— Getting Candidates on the Record

Reaching for Zero: The Citizens Plan for Zero Waste in NYC produced through the efforts of the NYC Zero Waste Campaign seeks to change the current unsustainable focus on disposal by NYC. *Reaching for Zero* proposes a plan for reducing New York City’s waste exports to very close to zero in 20 years, through a combination of waste prevention, reuse, recycling and composting. The plan will not only reduce and ultimately eliminate the crushing expense of waste exports from

the City, but it will also keep dollars spent on waste management circulating within the City’s economy, creating industry and jobs here rather than shipping our dollars along with our waste to out of state locations. The NYC Zero Waste Campaign, comprised of over 40 organizations committed to zero waste principles, decided to obtain the views of all viable candidates for Mayor on Zero Waste goals, planning and policy. We were not trying to test the knowledge of the candi-

dates. We provided informational questions that the ZW Campaign believes provide the right answers on Zero Waste and asked Candidates to offer some details to help us understand their thinking. All candidates were provided the questionnaires by email and hard copy. Every candidate’s campaign verbally committed to participating. We received responses from Bloomberg, Fields, Ferrer, Miller and Weiner.

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Evaluation of Candidate
Answers on Zero Waste

Asking the tough questions on Zero Waste: Results Summary

We evaluated and categorized the responses of the candidates in one of 4 ways. First the correct answers supportive of Zero Waste are YES. Second, if a response was only partially affirmative, we indicated it as a Partial YES. Third, if a response was evasive or non-responsive we indicated NR. Fourth was an absolute NO. In addition we selected 1-2 longer answers from each candidate which are shown below, highlighting positive answers in each case. Some material is quoted, while it is paraphrased in others. In general, the responses of C. Virginia Fields were supportive, thoughtful and comprehensive on zero waste issues. She made the most ambitious proposal for fundamental reform of current waste management by saying she would have a Dep-

uty Mayor for Zero Waste who could coordinate programs across many agencies. Michael Bloomberg has shown us by his Draft Solid Waste Management Plan that his first administration was focused primarily on disposal. However, running for a second term he had an opportunity with this questionnaire to present new ideas and initiatives. Instead Michael Bloomberg chose to emphasize events that have occurred under his watch: the cutbacks and reinstatement of the recycling program and limited composting initiatives as well as the new contract for a recycling processing facility. Michael Bloomberg deserves credit for the new Hugo Neu recycling contract; we had hoped he would have shown a greater commitment to

Zero Waste. Anthony Weiner was the only candidate to meet the original deadline for the questionnaire and he indicates support for Zero Waste by providing YES answers to all our questions. Unfortunately, his explanations were brief and lacked details on his support. Fernando Ferrer also indicates support for Zero Waste, but with surprisingly little detail given his work as Bronx Borough President where he promoted recycling industrial parks. Gifford Miller believes NYC can make the transition to a “zero waste city.” He supports major reorganization of the Dept. of Sanitation with a Deputy Commissioner of waste prevention, reuse, recycling and composting while also integrating economic development with zero waste programs.

Zero Waste Goals and Policy, Infrastructure and Programs

Q. The Mayor plays a key role in setting policy and ensuring that the policy is carried out. Zero waste goals and policy are important for coordinating the initiatives of a variety of different agencies in city government, in order to reverse the clearly unsustainable focus on trash disposal with its high economic and environmental costs, and to measure progress. At the same time, actual implementation is essential and can take years to develop; this includes adequate infrastructure (physical facilities) and the development of new programs. Do you agree that City government needs to emphasize goals and poli-

cies as well as infrastructure and programming for Zero Waste? Describe what Zero Waste initiatives you would like to implement if elected. **Fields** - *"Yes...I am committed to the goals and policies of the Zero Waste Plan of preventing, reducing, recycling and reusing waste, and most importantly, doing so in ways that promote sustainable economic activity, so that we continually create meaningful entry-level employment...The Zero Waste Plan is a comprehensive roadmap of the full range of infrastructure and programming, which I will use to inform the actions of my administration."*

I will establish a new Deputy Mayor's office dedicated to the plan and implementation of its policies with special emphasis on education and public accountability. I will emphasize interagency coordination, using government as a model by expanding public space and institutional recycling, and by setting sustainable City procurement policies as a first step toward producer responsibility. Government must also partner with residents in every community and those organizations that understand what can and needs to be done to shift the emphasis from waste disposal to zero waste.

Management Structure for Recycling

Q. As you know, NYC enacted a landmark recycling law in 1989. Since the passage of this statute, the city's overall residential recycling rate has climbed from less than 1% to roughly 20%, with some districts achieving diversion rates of over 30%. By diverting paper, bottles, cans and other recyclables away from landfills and incinerators, this program helps reduce pollution of our air, land and water. Further, especially with escalating export costs, recycling has become an increasingly cost-effective approach for New York City. Recycling has achieved this success despite the lack of an appropriate manage-

ment structure within the Department of Sanitation (DSNY). The Department has neither assembled the staff nor the resources necessary to make the program a full success. One big problem is that the city's small recycling office does not have sufficient clout within city government to expand the programs or to develop a comprehensive market-development plan. Indeed, the head of the program is not even at the level of assistant commissioner (where the position used to reside) at the Sanitation Department. Other diversion programs—waste prevention, reuse and composting--have fared even worse than recycling. If

you were elected Mayor, would you support creating a more powerful office at the Deputy Commissioner level to focus exclusively on recycling, waste prevention, composting and reuse either outside or within the Sanitation Department? Please explain your plan to accomplish the restructuring or your rationale for not addressing this management problem.

Miller— *"Yes, I will elevate the standing of my top recycling and waste prevention official within the bureaucracy. That official and I will focus on the interdependency between economic development and waste management."*

Waste Prevention

Q. Longstanding Federal and New York State solid waste policy clearly stipulates that reducing waste generation at the source and promoting repair and reuse of consumer products is at the top of the hierarchy of preferred solutions to our burgeoning solid waste problems. The Department of Sanitation more than ten years ago identified waste reduction as the cheapest solid waste management option available in the 1992 Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP), stating that more than \$130 dollars per ton

could be spent on waste prevention and the City would still be saving money. And yet, the City's Sanitation Department devotes the vast majority of its fiscal resources to collection and export for disposal of materials that could have been prevented or diverted for reuse here in the City. Currently the City's waste prevention staff is non-existent. To realize the benefits of waste prevention we need a full staff to provide waste audits, technical assistance and adequate funding for implementation of specific projects in City

agencies, schools and elsewhere. As Mayor, would you make waste prevention a priority? Describe the waste prevention programs and level of funding you would put in place. **Bloomberg** — *"I believe that the City should adopt aggressive waste prevention strategies." We have restored funding for backyard composting and "Leave it on the Lawn" education programs. I am currently negotiating the SWMP with the City Council and "I look forward to working with them on adopting a final plan that includes waste prevention strategies."*

Reuse

Q. The current SWMP inadequately supports reuse – a sustainable waste management strategy second only to waste prevention. Reuse diverts still valuable goods from the waste stream —by just putting them in someone else's hands. Each year there are more than 700,000 tons of reusables in NYC's waste stream. Exporting valuable goods at large cost to the City makes no sense, when those goods can alleviate poverty, aid our cash

strapped schools and non-profit organizations, while also creating jobs. The City needs to increase its reuse capacity by supporting existing and emerging reuse programs with funding and technical assistance. Other communities have effective municipally supported reuse centers - the City should develop similar facilities. As Mayor would you seek to develop reuse for NYC? Be specific as to how you

would establish a robust reuse infrastructure that is comparable to that of recycling or why you wouldn't support such a system.

Weiner— *"Yes, I am supportive of efforts to establish places where New Yorkers can exchange reusable goods. I will ensure that opportunities to trade and or donate usable goods are ample for residents of all five boroughs."*

Organics/Composting

Q. Organics make up about one quarter of the City-collected waste stream and a similar percentage of the commercial putrescible waste stream. This is more than 6,000 tons per day of material while current organics programs (existing leaf and Christmas tree collections, etc.) only divert about 135 tons per day. There is therefore large untapped potential to increase our recycling rates and save millions of dollars in export costs. Other communities have seen their recycling rates jump with the addition of organics collection and composting. Do you support developing

additional facilities and programs to divert this material from landfilling/incineration and would you be willing to take on the challenge of finding suitable sites to manage this material in and/or near the City? If so, please describe what strategy you might use for the development and siting of compost facilities over the next four years.

Bloomberg— *“I believe that reducing the volume of the City’s waste stream is important and that this goal can be achieved in part through diverting organic waste from landfills.” To this end we plan to evaluate and potentially pursue anaerobic digestion*

technologies that have are able to separate materials at the front-end and to be net generators of energy. “We are currently evaluating the feasibility of this technology and its potential for use and expect the study to be complete in the fall.” (Reaching for Zero included anaerobic digestion as a form of composting.) Concerning leaf collection we are planning to require that leaves be set out in paper bags because of greater ease for later composting, with less plastic bag contamination and lower composting costs.

Community-Based Planning & Initiatives

Q. Many city agencies have responded to calls to be more inclusive in their planning efforts and to involve citizens as plans are being created, as opposed to simply notifying citizens once plans have been adopted. In addition, other cities and counties tap into the wealth of community-based knowledge and experience by actively engaging the public in the design and implementation of programs. In some cases the government even contracts with non-profit groups to carry out programs. Do you see a role for the public in planning for waste management, including zero waste programs? Please describe how you would support community-based planning as well as engage communities in zero waste programs.

Fields— *“Yes—This question goes to the heart of my vision of governance for the City. Many of the difficulties the current administration has encountered with the implementation of policies and plans have been a result of the failure to engage those affected early on and during ongoing development and implementation. The restructuring of the education system is an example. As Manhattan borough president, I have seen first-hand the role of the community boards as the grassroots arm of City government. The community’s interests are also often represented by issue-oriented associations and organizations, all of whom deserve a seat at the table when programs and initiatives are being developed... Time spent in planning avoids time and resources*

wasted later on litigation and other forms of resistant delay. As mayor, I will convene task forces for various aspects of zero waste initiatives, and members will sit at the same table as agency heads and representatives as well as engineers. I have found a wealth of technical expertise in the community... The deputy mayor for zero waste will bring the agencies together with community-based organizations to confer on existing problems and solicit input on solutions, to which agencies could bring to bear expertise and an understanding of feasibility in the context of City government. This will help replace resistance and obstacles with coalition building and the exercise of political will.”

Jobs/Economic Development

Q. More than simply a program for managing waste, zero waste can also be a powerful driver for private-sector job creation and local economic development. According to the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, collection of recyclables, manufacturing of goods from recyclables, and reuse create anywhere from ten to several hundred more jobs for every one job at a transfer station, landfill or incinerator. These “green-collar” jobs are an untapped opportunity for the City to revitalize its manufacturing sector, create better-than-living-wage jobs, reduce

the high rates of joblessness in low-income communities throughout the city, and transition workers from declining industries. Increasingly around the globe, and in various cities and counties throughout the country, governments have set aside land (in the form of Recycling Industrial Parks) or provided resources and technical assistance to support the growth of recycling, remanufacturing and reuse businesses. NYC has the choice to continue to send dollars out of the City when it pays to export garbage or to invest dollars locally in zero waste pro-

grams. As Mayor, would you provide funding and technical assistance to zero waste businesses, seek to establish Recycling Industrial Parks in New York City and support other initiatives to spur the growth of zero waste industries? Please explain your answer. **Weiner**— *“Yes, I will work to establish Recycling Industrial Parks. And I will support every effort to reduce waste that makes economic and environmental sense for hardworking New Yorkers.”*

City Procurement

Q. The City purchases millions of dollars worth of goods and services every year. Its purchasing power is a powerful motivator for companies and contractors to improve the environmental performance and features of the products and services they offer. The federal government, cities and states around the country have passed strong environmental procurement legislation specifically to close the recycling

loop and to encourage waste reduction, reuse and composting, sending the right signals to the market and ultimately reducing the waste stream. Environmental purchasing can also enable the City to purchase the least-toxic products, thus protecting workers and the public from the use of toxic substances. Strong City procurement legislation has been stalled for many years in the City Council with

little support from administrative agencies and the Mayor. Would you seek to pass a strong environmental procurement bill as Mayor? Please explain your answer.

Ferrer— *“I believe environmental procurement legislation is important. As Mayor, I will support cost effective, reasonable steps to effect sensible change in our city’s procurement policies.”*

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If you're not for Zero Waste, how much Waste are you for?.

Find **Reaching for Zero** on the web at:

www.consumersunion.org/other/zero-waste/

Action Item: Reach out to the Candidates...

If a Mayoral Candidate in NYC isn't for Zero Waste, how much Waste is s/he for?

- Contact all the Campaigns and tell them, "I'm for **Zero Waste** and my **vote** will be too!"
- Let Mayoral Candidates know, if they want your **vote** they'll have to stand up in favor of **Zero Waste**.
- The **NYC Zero Waste Campaign** encourages you to attend Mayoral Candidates debates/forums and ask about **Zero Waste**.

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Over 40 organizations participate in the NYC Zero Waste Campaign. Contributors to this candidate questionnaire included: Consumers Union, Green Worker Cooperatives, Lower Eastside Ecology Center, Municipal Art Society, Natural Resources Defense Council, NYC Waste Prevention Coalition, Reuse Alliance, Sierra Club-NYC Group.

Complete Questionnaire and Responses from Mayoral Candidates may be found online at:

www.whywasteny.org

Evaluation of Candidate Answers on Zero Waste

Do the Mayoral Candidates support Zero Waste?	Bloomberg	Ferrer	Fields	Miller	Weiner
Zero Waste Goals and Policy, Infrastructure and Programs	Partial YES	YES	YES	YES	Partial YES
Management Structure for Recycling	NR	Partial YES	YES	YES	Partial YES
Waste Prevention	YES	Partial YES	YES	YES	YES
Reuse	Partial YES	Partial YES	Partial YES	Partial YES	YES
Organics/Composting	YES	YES	YES	YES	Partial YES
Community-Based Planning & Initiatives	Partial YES	Partial YES	YES	YES	Partial YES
Jobs/Economic Development	Partial YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
City Procurement	NR	Partial YES	YES	Partial YES	Partial YES