COMMUNITY BOARD #14
CITY OF NEW YORK - BOROUGH OF QUEENS

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To: New York City Department of Sanitation (DSNY)

From: District Manager, Queens Community Board #14

Subject: Public Comment on Proposed Rule Increasing Penalties for Failure to Maintain Vacant Lots

Date: October 29, 2026

Good morning/afternoon Members of the Department of Sanitation,

My name is Felicia Johnson, and I serve as the District Manager for Queens Community Board #14, representing the Rockaway Peninsula and Broad Channel. I am submitting this written testimony to strongly support the Department's proposal to raise the violation fine for failing to keep vacant lots clean from $100 to $250. However, while this step is necessary, fines alone will not resolve the severe enforcement and operational bottlenecks our communities face daily.

The Impact on Queens District 14

Community Board #14 is unique in both geography and land use. Our district contains an exceptionally high concentration of vacant city-owned and privately owned lots, many of which are under the jurisdiction of or shared by various municipal agencies. Over the past few years, our office has experienced a dramatic surge in 311 complaints, direct outreach, and photo evidence sent by constituents depicting overgrown, debris-filled, and rat-infested lots.

These unmaintained spaces are more than just neighborhood eyesores; they create serious public safety risks, health hazards, and environmental burdens for neighboring residents.

Higher Penalties Are Warranted

The current $100 penalty has long ceased to function as a meaningful deterrent. For negligent property owners, a $100 fine is often treated merely as a minor cost of doing business rather than an incentive to properly maintain their land. While raising the fine to $250, the maximum allowed under statutory limits—is a necessary baseline adjustment, frankly, penalties should be structured even higher for repeat offenders to compel compliance.

Enforcement & Operational Needs: Expanding the Lot Cleaning Unit (LCU)

Increasing fines addresses only half of the equation; robust enforcement and cleanup capabilities are critical to success. A penalty higher than $100 serves no purpose if violations go unissued or if blighted lots sit uncleaned due to resource deficits.

To ensure this rule change delivers meaningful relief to communities like ours, we strongly urge the City and DSNY to implement the following actions:

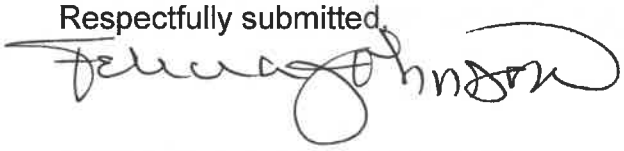
1. **Hire and Assign More DSNY Staff to the Lot Cleaning Unit (LCU):** Dedicated personnel are required to handle the inspection, ticket issuance, and direct remediation of neglected properties.
2. **Establish Dedicated LCU Teams by Borough Density:** Rather than maintaining a centralized or understaffed operation, DSNY should deploy **1 to 2 dedicated Lot Cleaning Units per borough**, scaled based on the actual volume and density of vacant city lots in each borough. Queens, given its vast acreage and numerous unassigned municipal parcels, requires dedicated local coverage to respond effectively to complaints.

Conclusion

Queens Community Board #14 commends DSNY for taking steps to raise the penalty for dirty vacant lots. However, deterrence must be backed by enforcement power. We strongly urge the Department to couple this rule change with a dedicated investment in the Lot Cleaning Unit's staffing and localized deployment across the outer boroughs.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this critical neighborhood issue.

Respectfully submitted,



District Manager, Queens Community Board #14Q