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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

Testimony of Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President on Proposed Rule Changes for the Removal of Derelict Bicycles from Public Property, Department of Sanitation August 9, 2016

My name is Gale Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. I would like to thank Commissioner Kathryn Garcia and the Department of Sanitation for holding this hearing on proposed rule changes for the removal of derelict bicycles from public property. These changes are very much in line with recommendations we've made to DSNY, and I'm excited the agency agrees that we should make it easier to remove bicycles that have clearly been abandoned by their owners.

As the Manhattan Borough President, I have heard many grievances about abandoned bicycles from my constituents. The hundreds if not thousands of abandoned bicycles that litter our streets create a visual atmosphere of decay, which affects our communities and our businesses. Also, the abundance of derelict bikes chained to bike racks serves as a hindrance to cyclists, and their ability to find a safe and legal place to chain their bicycles.

You may wonder—how many of these abandoned bicycles are there? Is it really that big of a problem? In order to find out the scale of this issue, my staff collaborated on surveying downtown Manhattan, looking on every street and Avenue below 14th St for these abandoned bicycles. This was a large, time consuming project, so I'd like to thank my very talented intern, Paul Hirschhorn, a student at Columbia University, for taking the lead on overseeing it.

DSNY says that in 2015, 525 bicycles were reported abandoned in the entire city. But in the small section of Manhattan we canvassed south of 14th Street, which is only about 4.6 square miles large, my staff reported finding 378 bikes that appeared to be derelict. If we had continued our search and found bikes at the same rate, there would be over 1,800 abandoned bikes scattered throughout Manhattan alone.

For our survey, each abandoned bicycle was evaluated, mapped, and documented. After this process, the data was analyzed to see: 1) how many of these bikes would be collected under DSNY's current policy; and 2) how many of these bikes would be collected after the proposed policy change.

Under the current policy for derelict bicycle collection, these bikes must meet three out of following five criteria: (1) bike is crushed; (2) has missing parts (3) is over 75% rusted (4) has missing or flat tires, and (5) and damaged parts. Under these rules, only 188 of the 378 bicycles that my staff identified as abandoned would be collected.

Under the proposed rule changes, however, three changes would occur: (1) a bike would only need to meet two of the above criteria; (2) the criterion for "flat or missing tires" would be eliminated, and (3) the rust percentage would be lowered from 75% to 50%. Of the bicycles

canvassed by my office, these changes would expand the number of bikes DSNY could qualify as “derelict” to 284—a 96 bike discrepancy between pre and post change rules.

However, if the “flat or missing” tire criterion were still included, 71 out of these remaining 94 bikes would be collected, meaning that 355 of the 378 bikes that appear derelict would be removed. I would recommend that DSNY take another look at the proposal to remove this criterion from consideration. At the least, we should closely monitor the effectiveness of these rule changes, for a period of at least one year, to ensure the greatest number of abandoned bicycles is being removed from public property.

The collection of abandoned bicycles also presents the DSNY with a unique opportunity to repurpose these bikes and give them back to our communities. Currently, when the agency removed abandoned bicycles, they are repurposed as scrap metal. But many of these bicycles can be repaired, and then given away at low or no cost to low-income communities. There are a variety of organizations that have partnered in these types of endeavors, including the Bike Rescue Project and Recycle-A-Bicycle. I urge DSNY to consider partnering with these groups in a pilot project to help refurbish derelict bicycles for re-use.

Once again, I thank Commissioner Garcia for the opportunity to testify in favor of the rule changes being discussed today. To reiterate: I am strongly in favor of the proposed rule change to decrease the number of criteria a “derelict” bicycle must meet from 3 to 2 criteria. And I look forward to continuing to find ways to making New York one of the most bike-friendly cities in the country, and also a cleaner and more business-friendly one as well.