

Neighborhood Retail Alliance

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Memorandum

From: Dr. Richard Lipsky

To: Elected Officials

Subject: **Garbage Disposal, Public Health and Intro 407**

Date: 8/25/03

On September 15, 2003 the maximum rate for charging city retailers for their garbage collection will rise dramatically. The new rate, now based on weight rather than volume, will effectively raise the collection cost from the current \$12.20 per cubic yard to a rate that is equivalent to over \$40 a cubic yard. This potential tripling of carting costs comes on the heels of a post-9/11 recession that has had a devastating impact on neighborhood retailers. This downturn was recently exacerbated by the blackout that severely hit city food stores. In addition, all of New York City's efforts to close a record 6 billion dollar budget deficit, higher real estate and sales taxes, a record hike in the cigarette tax and an aggressive municipal enforcement program, have led to an unprecedented level of small business bankruptcies and foreclosures.

This bleak economic climate is one of the primary reasons for the introduction of Intro 407, a bill that would legalize the use of commercial food waste disposers. The garbage rate hike would hit hardest those food retailers who generate wet, organic waste. The use of disposers would mitigate the rate hike by allowing stores to grind the heavier garbage for disposal through the city's sewer and waste water treatment infrastructure.

Rat Epidemic and the Neighborhood Environment

Health Commission, Dr. Thomas Frieden, with the encouragement of Mayor Bloomberg, has launched a full-scale public health campaign geared at dramatically reducing the well publicized rat epidemic that has hit many city neighborhoods. Dr. Frieden recognizes that these rodents are disease carriers who thrive on putrescible residential and commercial garbage. That is why, in conjunction with the New York City Housing Authority, he has initiated a pilot program of installing food waste disposers in selected housing projects.

Dr. Frieden acknowledges that the only way to curtail the rat menace is to eliminate the food that attracts them and enables them to multiply. This awareness is one reason that the Department of Sanitation has established Operation Dumpster, a program that prevents restaurants and stores from storing garbage in noxious smelling dumpsters that act as magnets for rodents. At the same time, the prohibition on outdoor storage forces these retailers to store putrescible waste in the same environment where food is prepared for consumption and sale. In addressing one problem an even greater one is created. This is precisely why the city of Philadelphia insists that, before granting any restaurant or food store a dumpster permit, the retailer must purchase a food waste disposer.

Costs and Benefits

The Department of Environmental Protection has publicly testified in opposition to Intro 407, citing increased costs of \$12 million annually for retrofitting the waste water treatment infrastructure. Frankly, we believe that the estimates are both alarmist and unreliable. Over 100 municipalities allow commercial food waste grinding without any extra financial burdens to those cities and towns. In addition, the DEP's concerns are extremely short-sighted for the city as a whole. We are now experiencing a severely escalating cost for the removal of municipal

solid waste. Out-of-town landfills have begun to raise their dumping fees while simultaneously limiting the amount of waste they accept. This situation will only get worse as other jurisdictions begin to question the efficacy of being dumping grounds for New York's garbage.

In addition, the city is looking to buildup to ten marine transfer facilities at a cost that continues to climb while not active movement is visible for their construction. The more we can process garbage through grinding the less we have to spend on transfer facilities that most communities resist because of their noxious presence. The greater the percentage of putrescible garbage that is removed through grinding the more the marine transfer facility, with contaminants removed, can be utilized as post-collection recycling centers that further reduce the City's ultimate reliance on costly garbage exporting. On balance, New York City can't afford to ignore the positive benefits of food waste disposers.

Environmental Elitism

Some of the best known environmental organizations have taken a position against food waste disposers. It seems that their primary objections revolve around the impact that effluents might have on surrounding waterways. In these objections they are demonstrating a greater concern for the potential impact on algae in Jamaica Bay than they are on the environmental dangers posed by rodent-attracting putrescible garbage in city neighborhoods. In addition to attracting these disease-carrying rodents, the putrescible waste attracts an insect population whose presence has been cited as an underlying cause of the inner-city asthma epidemic. These environmental hazards are of much greater seriousness than any potential impact on surrounding waterways and can be significantly mitigated through the use of garbage disposers. Any

environmental group that refuses to see the importance of disposers in this capacity is not worthy of the name.

What Needs to be Done

Intro 407 needs to be passed quickly so that stores can cope with potentially devastating garbage hikes. The swift passage of this law will make neighborhood businesses more productive while at the same time insuring that the neighborhood environments are as healthy as possible for all New Yorkers.