

SIX WEEKS/SIX WAYS TO IMPROVE NEW YORK CITY SERVICES

Coordinator: Charles Brecher

Most New York City residents believe they pay taxes that are too high for services that are not good enough. This study group will examine the way in which six major services are delivered in New York City and what drives the cost of those services. In each case we will also consider recommendations made by civic groups and public officials for improving those services, and what the obstacles are to implementing those improvements. The six services are firefighting, sanitation, public education, homeless services, mass transit and parks.

Charles Brecher is retired from teaching public administration at New York University and serving as research director for the Citizens Budget Commission.

Type of Study Group:

Presentations by coordinator combined with discussion among participants. Possible guest speakers from City government.

Readings and other Materials/Online Services:

Reports from civic organizations and government agencies, available online at no cost to participants.

******* SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS *******

WEEK 1

TOPIC: Overview and the Fire Department

An overview of the New York City budget and which agencies require the most money and have the largest staff. This overview will be followed by an examination of the New York Fire Department—the services it provides and ways to make them better.

READINGS:

"Understanding New York City's Budget: A Guide", (Independent Budget Office, 2021);

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"Twenty Years Later: Integrating Services in the New York City Fire Department" by Mina Addo and Charles Brecher, (Citizens Budget Commission, 2015);

"Reviving EMS: Restructuring Emergency Medical Services in New York City" by Marianna Alexander, (Citizens Budget Commission, 2018).

QUESTIONS:

What do citizens want from the NYFD? How do the department's staffing patterns create inefficiencies? How could response times be improved? Are proposed recommendations likely to work and why do they face opposition?

WEEK 2

TOPIC: The Sanitation Department

READINGS:

"Ten Years After: Assessing Progress on the City's Solid Waste Management Plan" by Daniel Huber, (Independent Budget Office, 2017);

"Can We Have Our Cake and Compost It Too?" by Tammy Gamerman, (Citizens Budget Commission, 2016);

"Getting the Fiscal Waste Out of Solid Waste Collection in New York City" by Tammy Gamerman, (Citizens Budget Commission, 2014).

QUESTIONS:

Why are New York's recycling rates relatively low and costs relatively high, and what should be done to improve them? Why does New York have to ship its waste to far away landfills, and how could these exporting costs be lowered?

WEEK 3

TOPIC: Mass Transit

READINGS:

"Prioritizing the MTA's Critical Capital Needs" by Ana Champeny and Alex Armlovich, (Citizens Budget Commission, 2022);

"A Track to Fiscal Stability: Operations Reforms for the MTA" by Alex Armlovich, (Citizens Budget Commission, 2021);

"Four Things You Should Know About the MTA's Commuter Railroads" by Jamison Dague, (Citizens Budget Commission, 2018).

QUESTIONS:

How does the NYC transit system compare with other urban systems?

How do Metro North operations compare with the LIRR operations?

What was the impact of COVID on the operation of the MTA?

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WEEK 4: Parks

WEEK 5: Public Schools

WEEK 6: Homeless Services