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It's Easy Being Green Newsletter

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A TriBloomingdale Initiative
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UWS neighborhood EDUCATION and PERSONAL ACTION

The Streets They Are A Changin'



NYC's COVID pandemic has set in motion and accelerated a deep reconsideration of what's supposed to happen on our streets. This means the relationship between what falls under public jurisdiction and what is purely private behavior could be headed for a big re-balance. From insurgent outdoor dining to soaring home delivery of food and packages, from car-free 'open streets' to challenging customary free parking, there are many corners that might be turned starting with new Administration coming to City Hall in January 2022.

Meet the New York City Department of Transportation. According to its website, NYC DOT's mission, "is to provide for the safe, efficient, and environmentally responsible movement of people and goods in the City of New York and to maintain and enhance the transportation infrastructure crucial to the economic vitality and quality of life of our primary customers".

Well, OK. Note the "economic vitality and quality of life" language. It is exactly here that the ground is shifting, or more concretely, the purposes, expectations and uses of our streets, are changing. Since the onset of COVID in March 2020, both individual behaviors and local business actions have been the driving forces of changes to our streets. Whether it's the unplanned, but probably here-to-stay outdoor dining fad, mobility shifts away from riding the subway toward increased reliance on autos and micro-mobility's like bikes and scooters, along with the growth spurt in home deliveries of food and packages – something that started prior to the pandemic, but is also likely here-to-stay -- how streets are used and who gets to set the norms and rules demands our attention because there will be conflicts. With a new Mayor and new leadership, not just at NYC DOT, but also in senior economic development positions, these new faces will become active in the City's debate over how streets are used, how changes are made and how conflicting expectations may be negotiated and resolved.

Let's take a couple of steps back to ask why any of this should matter to regular New Yorkers. Living in a dense urban neighborhood like the Upper West Side, you're likely to walk a lot and you rightly expect and demand pedestrian safety. With the escalating growth of e-bikes for deliveries, biking for pleasure and commuting, the adoption of scooters by the young and adventurous, safety for all and the rules and customs that underpin safety for all must be a top priority; but there's no going back to the olden days where it's just cars, trucks and buses that pedestrians must put up with. Streets themselves, once the exclusive domain of those cars, trucks and buses, now have to co-exist with outdoor dining facilities and "open streets", which ban through traffic at certain times of day, to make way for leisure, people-watching and play. Let's admit it, these new developments are urban amenities, quality of life upgrades, not inconveniences. But it's also true to

say their place in the urban fabric is not yet normalized.

And then, there's parking. Since the mid 20th Century, NYC car owners have been able to park their cars on many City streets for free, either overnight or 24/7. Think of that: something for free in Gotham! Gotham, where the supply, linear feet of curbside doesn't increase, despite rising demand. Now, that era could be ending. Here are two drivers of change. First, revenues from street-loving restaurants would stimulate the City's economy. Second, establishing designated parking areas that charge fees, by the minute or the quarter-hour for delivery and commercial vehicles, will help decongest both bus and auto traffic by eliminating double parked vehicles that block the flow of traffic. Such urban improvements become more feasible if private cars no longer park for free on the streets, or if parking is restricted to designated local zones.

The end of an era? Think of it this way, in the words of the great writer Miguel de Unamuno, "We should try to be the parents of our future rather than the offspring of our past."

Nancy E. Anderson, Ph.D. is the Founder of Nancy E. Anderson Associates whose mission is deploying useful knowledge for climate-smart cities. Prior to that, she was the Executive Director of the Sallan Foundation, with a background as a Senior Environmental Advisor in NYC government.

Legislative Update

Kudos to NYC City Council for passing the **Straws Upon Request bill**

The Straws and Stirrers bill, Int 0936-2018, will ban restaurants from offering plastic straws, except upon request for people with disabilities, as well as a total ban on plastic stirrers and splash sticks. The bill was passed by the City Council in May, 2021.

Passage of this bill is an important step in reducing the use of single-use plastics. Scientists estimate that 33 billion pounds of plastic wash into the ocean every year.

That equates to about two garbage trucks' worth of plastic entering the ocean every minute ([usa.oceana.org/press release](http://usa.oceana.org/press-release)).

Thanks to former Councilman Rafael Espinal, who originally sponsored the bill, and to Councilwoman Helen Rosenthal, who saw it through to fruition. Mayor De Blasio supports the bill and is expected to sign it into law, which will become effective November 2021.

<https://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2021/05/13/city-passes-bill-limiting-single-use-plastic-straws-in-eateries>

Let's Be Plastic-Free!

THE REUSABLE REVOLUTION

The Reusable Revolution is about changing models in the food service industry and changing the mindset and habits of consumers to move away from our throw-away culture and to adopt reusables.

Today much of fast food dining and virtually all take-out and delivery services use disposable food ware, which include boxes, take out containers, plastic utensils, cold and hot cups and lids, and condiments. According to the environmental group, Upstream, approximately one trillion disposable food service products are used every year in the United States . See <https://upstreamolutions.org/>. Many of these disposables end up in our oceans or in landfill.

Reusable food ware is better for the environment but also proves to be better for businesses' bottom line. Studies show that reusables save money for businesses even after accounting for the investment in any capital costs including dish ware, dishwashing capacity as well as labor costs. See Rethink Disposables for details: <https://www.rethinkdisposable.org/>. For businesses that prefer to outsource this part of their operation, the number of reuse service providers is growing.

And reusables are safer and healthier for the consumer. Disposable food ware contains hundreds of chemicals. Many of these chemicals, such as PFAS, which are used to make cardboard stain resistant, or the bisphenols and phthalates used to make plastics softer or more flexible, are known to be harmful to our health.

Here are some food service companies that are leading in reusables:

- **Just Salad** (www.justsalad.com), with more than 20 locations in NYC (including one at 70th & Broadway), is a great model for a successful reuse business with their Reusable Bowl program and their new BringBackBowl program. The Reusable Bowl program has been in practice since their opening in 2006; on premises, customers can purchase a reusable salad bowl for \$1. In the BringBackBowl program, which is now being piloted, when ordering online, the customer will receive her order in a reusable bowl which can be brought back to the restaurant to be sanitized and reused again. The company states that their bowl programs help save over 75,000 lbs of plastic every year!
- **Deliver Zero** (www.deliverzero.com) provides reusable containers to restaurants for their take-out service. Similar to Grubhub or Seamless, Deliver Zero is an online take-out delivery service, but it provides the meals in reusable containers which the customer can either give back to the delivery person with the next order or drop off at any participating restaurant. This Brooklyn-based company was started in 2019 and now has over 120 participating restaurants in NYC, including several on the UWS.
- On June 8, **Starbucks** announced that customers can start bringing reusable mugs at company-owned cafes beginning on June 22, after pausing the program for over a year due to Covid-19. The company stated that restarting this program is part of their goal to reduce waste by 50% by 2030.

Let's encourage more restaurants to adopt reusables by signing this petition to "reopen with reuse":

https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/reopen-with-reuse?source=facebook&&fbclid=IwAR08GgFxVbID-Q1oinziuQ4FBBNLKehHwuWA63-7recjh2lp6OaK30Yu8_I

For more information on this exciting revolution, check out:

<https://upstreamolutions.org/learning-hub>

This article focuses on commercial adoption of reusables but consumers can play a role too. Here are some ways:

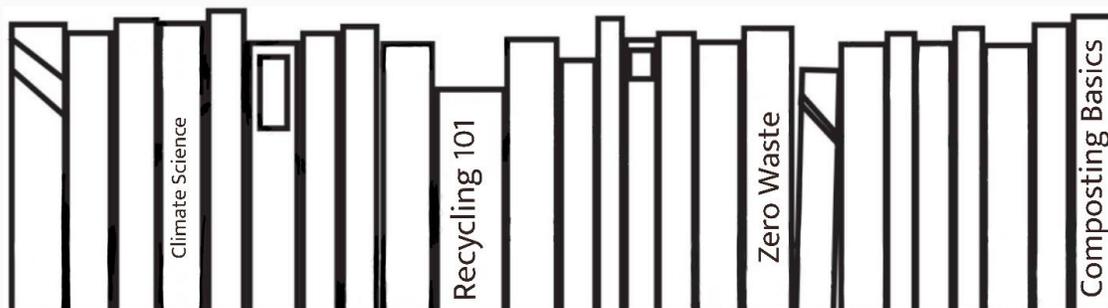
- Bring a refillable liquids container and a reusable straw to your favorite beverage shop (No more plastic cups and straws!)
- Carry a food container to restaurants for leftovers
- Bring a food container to markets to carry home prepared foods. At Whole Foods and other markets they will tare the container first.

As always we welcome your questions and comments.

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Reading Corner



Innovations in Carbon Capture

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/23/magazine/interface-carpet-carbon.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20210624&instance_id=33775&nl=the-morning®i_id=33246002&segment_id=61607&te=1&user_id=e8683de71e7ed8241043654cd99e4dab

NYC Pollinator Gardens in Parks

<https://gothamto go.com/nyc-parks-unveils-8-new-pollinator-place-gardens/>

The Public Health Impacts of Air Pollution from Traffic by Neighborhood-

Infographic

<https://a816-dohbsp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Traffic/index.html>

City Parks Foundation-Environmental Education

<https://cityparksfoundation.org/?s=environmental+education>

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can make a difference; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

- Margaret Mead



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