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At its stated meeting on September 25, the City Council cracked down on the lax replacement of missing and damaged street signs as well as the unauthorized removal of curbside recycling.

Stopping the Abundance of Missing Street Signs

The council unanimously approved legislation (Intro 581-A), which requires the Department of Transportation to replace damaged or missing traffic signs within three business days. Currently the Department of Transportation aims to replace signs within nine days.

Signs that must be replaced within three days include stop signs, yield signs and do not enter signs. The legislation also mandates a stricter deadline for one-way signs. Because those signs are often installed on city streets in pairs, the council approved a seven-business day deadline for them.

" We are significantly cutting that back and I think sending an important message to New Yorkers that when you call 311 we take your call seriously," said City Council Speaker Christine Quinn. "When you say there is missing sign in your neighborhood we're going to respond to it as quickly as we possibly can to make sure we keep traffic as safe as we can in all five boroughs."

According to city estimates, 39 percent of all signs take longer than three business days to replace.

Introduced by Councilmember Joseph Addabbo, the legislation also requires the Department of Transportation to monitor and record when they receive a complaint and when the actual replacement is made. The record will allow the City Council to monitor the department's compliance with the legislation.

Protecting the City's Recyclables

To address a growing black market for the city's recyclables, the council unanimously approved legislation (Intro 582-A) that drastically increases fines for the unauthorized removal of curbside materials.

Introduced by Councilmember Michael McMahon, the bill boosts the Department of Sanitation's current maximum $25 fine to $2,000 for a first offense and $5,000 for a second offense. The fines would only apply to those who remove recyclable materials using a motor vehicle and thus not apply to the sporadic garbage pillager. If found in violation of the legislation, the vehicle used to take the recyclables would also be impounded.

Trash, whether recyclable or not, may not seem like a lucrative commodity. But according to McMahon, trucks not authorized by the Department of Transportation have been reaping the financial benefits of the city's recycling. According to city estimates, Manhattan alone has lost a minimum of 15,000 tons of paper worth $150,000 annually.

" Five years ago the administration was saying we should end recycling," said McMahon prior to the council vote. Now, he added, "There is gold in our containers."

Decaling Commuter Vans

In order to identify commuter vans, the council unanimously approved legislation (Intro 430-A) that requires the Taxi and Limousine Commission to issue them special decals.

Commuter vans carry at least nine passengers , but no more than 20 within a certain area. The service is prearranged, and the vans are not authorized to accept passengers who hail them from the street.

Introduced by Councilmember John Liu, the bill is intended to help both law enforcement and commuters who utilize the commuter vehicles. In Queens and Brooklyn especially, the use of unauthorized vans have grown.

The decals must be on the front, back and sides of the vehicle.

Rezoning the Upper West Side

The council also unanimously approved a rezoning on the Upper West Side between 97th and 110th streets and Riverside Drive and Central Park West. The rezoning is meant to preserve the character of the neighborhood, and reduce out of scale building that has recently increased.

The rezoning imposes numerous height restrictions, said Land Use Committee Chair Melinda Katz, capping buildings at 10 to 11 stories on the avenues, six to seven stories within mid-blocks and approximately 14 stories along Broadway. The rezoning will also preserve affordable housing and small businesses. Â