

BROOKLYN QUEENS LAND TRUST
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My name is Demetrice Mills, President of the Brooklyn Queens Land Trust, a 501 c (3) organization that owns 35 properties that are used as community gardens for the benefit of neighborhood residents. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and thank you to Borough President Eric Adams, State Senator Montgomery and all the legislators here for bringing these issues to the public's attention.

This past year has been very trying for our organization because of an avalanche of violations amounting to thousands of dollars. They had accumulated over a number of years unbeknownst to us and increases over time due to interest charges. It brought all our work to a halt because a 'hold' was placed on BQLT's contracts with the NYC departments of Parks and Youth and Community Development, our major funders.

Problems we encountered in an effort to resolve the problem:

First: Violations become liens on a property. In addition to having a hold on our city contracts were faced with liens on several of our properties. Our board felt that we had to pay and take out loans regardless of the merit of the charges since our properties were at stake.

Second: It is very difficult to communicate with the Dept of Finance. The DOF 's website says you can write to a post office box in New Jersey, call 311, or go to the Brooklyn Business Center in the Municipal Building that will take a check or debit/credit card to pay what you owe. Our staff tried 311: Our inquiry had to be dictated to a 311 responder who then called the Dept of Finance, the answer was then relayed to our staff but never resulted in a resolution of the issue.

Third: Community gardens are not solely responsible for rat infestations. It is a neighborhood problem that needs to be addressed in a holistic manner. Yet repeatedly BQLT is singled out when there is a rat infestation in a neighborhood.



Even after we hired a pest control company, the NYC Health Department personnel found the treatment inadequate. In addition, we were told to organize a Rat Academy with a guaranteed attendance to show commitment to address the problem. Note that city owned community gardens with rat infestations are not cited and do not pay any fines.

Forth: It can be devastating for a small organization with a \$160,000 budget to come up with close to \$15,000 with no way to recoup that money. What is worse is that we have proof that some of the charges either were dismissed years ago or unwarranted such as charging BQLT double because the community garden is made up of two lots.

We hope this information is helpful to you to improve the services to the public and prevent the heavy-handed approach of some of the city's agencies.

Thank You,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Demetrice Mills'.

Demetrice Mills, Board President
Brooklyn Queens Land Trust