

SPUN Committee July 14, 2015

SPU Briefing on Clear Alley Program

The City initiated the Clear Alley Program in 2009, removing most waste containers from downtown Seattle alleys to improve conditions and reduce opportunities for illicit activity.

A. Background

Program Basics

- The CAP requirements (through Code and Administrative Rule) prohibit permanent storage of waste containers in the public right of way in specific geographic areas.
- The areas include all of downtown Seattle, Pioneer Square, Chinatown/ the International District and Columbia City.
- Customers either store their containers on private property or set out their garbage and recycling in prepaid bags for frequent collection (multiple pickups per day).
- The program has exemptions for food waste carts and recycling carts with glass. These commodities cannot be set-out in bags and the carts can be stored in the public right of way if a customer has no private storage options.

Initial Reasons for 'Clear Alleys'

- Create cleaner, safer business districts
- Reduce uncivil behaviors and illegal activities in the alleys
- Increased the attractiveness of alleys for pedestrian use
- Allow better alley access for business services such as deliveries

Initial Challenges

- The pre-paid bag service requires more routing and manual operations to provide frequent pickups. This creates a cost increase for the collectors and SPU.
- The City priced the pickup service below the full cost of service to make the transition more palatable for impacted businesses. SPU now subsidizes the CAP program with \$1.4 M per year.
- However, this still created a cost increase for most customers.

- In addition, there were plenty of initial operational challenges educating customers, providing sufficient waste removal and controlling for impacts from birds, rodents and pedestrians.

B. Community Feedback 2015

- SPU and DPD convened a round table discussion in June with representatives from Downtown, Pioneer Square and International District business groups and contractors, Waste Management and Recology.
- All groups reported they still consider the Clear Alley transition a success, and would not want to see dumpsters and other big waste containers return to the alleys.
- The groups did report some ongoing operational challenges, such as:
 - Supporting frequent and well-timed bag and debris collection.
 - Continuing to improve communications between customers and haulers, especially focused on proper set-out condition and timing for effective removal.
 - Educating customers on proper handling of cooking grease and loose cardboard
 - Bulky item illegal dumping sometimes takes too long to be picked up
 - Cardboard can be scattered and due to confusion of who is supposed to pick it up, can stay too long in alleys
 - Enforcing against illegal setout of 'unpaid' garbage in alleys. SPU now pays \$72,000/yr for pickup of unpaid garbage in alleys.
 - "Container creep" when customers are supposed to return their dumpsters and totes to their own property but leave them out in the alleys.
 - Widely differing collection times for non-contracted collections, (recycling and compost) on customer by customer basis. This means the alley as a whole could have compost totes and/or uncontained cardboard out in the open 24/7.

C. Department Feedback 2015

- DPD continues to see positive benefits for liveable downtown.
- SPD continues to value the program.

D. SPU's Management of the Program Moving Forward

- Continue to proactively facilitate communication between collection contractors and community BIAs.
- Continue to work with community BIAs to educate customers about what goes where when
- Actively enforce against unpaid bags/illegal dumping

- Emphasize with collectors to call in bulky items and to pick up cardboard whenever they see it
- Periodically monitor for container creep and remind customers about the rules
- Enforce collection time and frequency with collection contractors