



Seattle City Council

February 4, 2010

David Jones
Office of the City Auditor
P.O. Box 94729
Seattle WA 98124-4729

Re: Assessment of City Graffiti and Litter Laws, Best Practices and Recommendations

Dear Mr. Jones,

As Council members, we hear from many citizens who do not feel safe in their own neighborhoods. These citizen concerns are expressed in e-mails and telephone calls to Council members and regularly at community meetings.

We are concerned about “street disorder” in Seattle. Recent academic studies confirm and quantify the connection between visible environmental disorder and higher rates of crime. Two of these studies are enclosed for your information. The study from the Netherlands focuses on the negative impacts of litter and graffiti, including documentation of the increase in crime that occurs when these environmental disorders are not cleaned up.

As a result of citizen concerns and the studies linking environmental disorder to increased rates of crime, we request that your office conduct a performance review of the way the City handles graffiti and litter removal, prosecution of offenders and public education efforts to discourage graffiti and litter.

We acknowledge these problems do not have simple answers. The City already has many dedicated staff painting over graffiti and picking up litter every day, yet the problem remains. To achieve cleaner, safer streets the City may need better education efforts, a more coordinated response among different city departments, stronger laws and enforcement – or all of the above. And the way to reduce graffiti may differ from the way to reduce litter.

To help us find workable solutions, we would like your office to explore the following areas, comparing Seattle’s efforts to recognized best practices around the country:

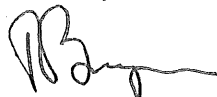
1. Current city ordinances regarding graffiti and litter and whether these laws are sufficient, including an assessment of whether business owners should be required to clean-up and remove graffiti and litter that is adjacent to their properties;

2. The frequency of arrest and prosecution of offenders and rates of re-offending;
3. The coordination of clean-up between different city departments and, specifically, whether or not these efforts should be centralized in one department or office;
4. Education of local residents and business owners about their responsibilities according to the law, the negative effects of graffiti and litter and the positive benefits of clean neighborhoods;
5. City programs for encouraging community organizations to involve themselves in this effort;
6. The effectiveness of private sector programs that target graffiti and litter removal, including those of the Metropolitan Improvement District; and
7. Innovative efforts other cities have successfully implemented that Seattle might replicate.

Please include in your assessment specific recommendations or actions the City should take to reduce street disorder by eliminating graffiti and litter.

If possible, we would like to receive your assessment and recommendations no later than June 1, 2010 so this issue can be part of our fall budget process. Please feel free to contact us if you have questions about this request. Councilmember Burgess' office has done a preliminary study of these issues and would be happy to work with your staff as they start this review.

Sincerely,



Tim Burgess
Chair, Public Safety and Education



Tom Rasmussen
Chair, Transportation

Cc: Councilmember Sally Bagshaw
Councilmember Sally Clark
Councilmember Jean Godden

Enclosures