

CITIZENS AGAINST LITTER

**A Network of Community Volunteers Committed
to Rid the City of Litter and Trash**

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INTRODUCTION

Pittsburgh, like so many other cities, has had a hate affair with litter for a long time. Fortunate cities, like Toronto, don't have litter and don't have the problem.

As far back as World War II, Pittsburgh may have been a dirty city because of working steel mills and air pollution, but, during those years, Pittsburgh's streets were practically litter-free. Materials of all kind were scarce. They were collected off hills, valleys and streets and recycled for the war effort.

Years later, a property owner said in a letter to the editor. "I've been cleaning up other people's messes for most of my 52 years and I'm tired of it." Other individuals, community groups and Pittsburgh mayors are in the same boat. They are tired battling litter. They are convinced that Pittsburghers need an attitude adjustment. Until that happens it's hopeless, they say. To them, it's like rowing upstream.

The frustration for all of us is that we know how important a life without litter is for the city's well being and its appeal to insiders and outsiders. We need clean communities and a clean city for us to feel good about ourselves and to help attract new businesses, new residents and tourists.

In another letter to the editor, a Pittsburgh-proud couple was showing off the city to friends from Easton, PA that commented that Pittsburgh is a beautiful city. "Later," the couple said, "we were walking in Squirrel Hill. We saw lots of litter in front of businesses, homes, and bus stops. Here we were showing off our lovely neighborhood, and we were embarrassed by the filth." For this couple once was not enough. A second visitor, a former resident, told them she was thinking about returning here to live but said, "You wouldn't find this trash on the streets of Seattle."

By now, we should have learned one thing about litter. And it's not rocket science. Keeping litter off the streets is a day in and day out job. As hard as it is to accept, people have to be passionate about litter. It will take an army of citizen volunteers to keep their own neighborhoods clean because the city doesn't have the funds to do it for them and there isn't enough private money around to do it either. Citizens serious about litter do a fantastic job one day and have to redo their work the next day and every day.

When unveiling his 1998 budget, Mayor Murphy said the biggest complaint he received was that the city is dirty. That should tell us that there are many that are passionate about litter.

Barbara Cloud, a newspaper columnist and former fashion editor, has been one of them for 35 years. She ended a column about four years ago with the line, "Our streets look like pig sties."

What follows is a proposal on litter. Not to win the war against litter, but to fight the war. Day-by-day. Block-by-block. Community-by-community. It is based on this concept:

**Tackle something small at first
Be able to wrap your arms around it
Do it right
Gain confidence
Improve what you set out to do
Move on**

THE CONCEPT

Citizens Against Litter is intended to be a citywide initiative that will reach into other communities. At first, however, the initiative would be limited to a single section of the city.

Volunteers in their own neighborhood would commit to collecting litter from their own streets. Each volunteer would be assigned a block and be responsible to keep it litter-free on a regular basis.

Imagine a situation that finds volunteers, day in and day out, removing cigarette butts and packs, pizza boxes, pop cans, candy and food bags and wrappers, and other garbage from sidewalks, curbs, bushes and grassy places.

Imagine the difference this will make when litter is picked up regularly over a period of time.

Imagine the attention this will create when residents see how serious their neighbors are about clearing litter and keeping it cleared. They, too, will want to get involved.

Imagine how contagious litter cleaning can become when a volunteer group grows literally into a small army.

Imagine the pleasure and pride that will grip a neighborhood when streets are clean.

Imagine where this could lead.

CHAMPIONING THE CONCEPT

This initiative will not happen by itself. It requires support from different places.

A company from the private sector is needed to be the sponsor and become the primary mover, possibly recruiting other companies to back the initiative.

A major medium, like WTAE-TV, is needed to adopt Citizens Against Litter as a public service cause.

The city councilman whose section of the city is directly involved is needed to support the efforts of residents with the Mayor's Office and others.

The City is needed. It will not be asked for financial support. It will be asked, however, to endorse the initiative and to provide and enforce those services and laws that will keep streets clean.

Community action and volunteer groups are needed to help the sponsor and media partner recruit volunteers. **(See attached list of groups.)**

Community business associations are needed to keep their own properties, sidewalks, curbs, and garbage/trash areas litter-free on as frequent a schedule as citizen volunteers.

TARGET SHADYSIDE

Shadyside is recommended as the section with which to begin the Citizens Against Litter initiative. Why Shadyside?

Shadyside is one of the city's most diverse communities with:

Beautiful, exclusive residences and streets with very little litter.

Mix of apartment houses, condos, single-family and multi-family residences with considerable litter.

Business districts with merchants associations like Walnut Street and Ellsworth Avenue with considerable litter.

Bridges, overpass walkways, and alleys with considerable litter.

Shadyside Hospital and buildings with healthcare providers with considerable litter.

Public and private schools with large campuses.

An active community group (Shadyside Action Coalition).

The makeup of the community includes professionals, college students, and foreigners, young and old.

The area attracts local visitors and tourists for shopping, bars and restaurants.

VOLUNTEERS NEED VERY LITTLE

Supplies. This army travels light. Volunteers require few things. Garbage bags (with logos), gloves, pickup devises, weed diggers, brooms, possibly shovels.

Also, T-shirts (with logo).

Incentives should be considered. Local merchants could be approached to provide “litter bags” (or “litter bucks”) of free items and discounts as an appreciation for their participation.

Recognition could come at a unique litter-free private street fair event. Volunteers would be introduced and recognized. Food would be displayed on tablecloths spread on the street “that is so clean you can eat right off it”.

Communications could come to volunteers in the form of a newsletter, called “The Newsletter.”

THE CITY’S ROLE

Endorse this volunteer litter initiative starting with the Mayor. Direct the Mayor’s Service Center to work closely with the volunteers and respond to calls to the litter hotline.

Fine litterers.

Enforce street ordinances and fine offenders who do not move cars on street cleaning days.

Enforce ordinances and fine pet owner offenders who do not pick up after their pets.

Clean street sewers and maintain them better.

Enforce ordinances for commercial property owners, merchants and apartment building owners to maintain cleanliness standards for their garbage and trash, on sidewalks and curbsides.

Empty public garbage containers more frequently to prevent spillovers and make it easier for pedestrians to dispose of cans, bottles, and paper things. Also provide more garbage containers.

Consider installing butt pots where smokers can extinguish cigarettes rather than litter streets.

Repair broken asphalt and concrete that cause debris and mud on streets and sidewalks.

Clean streets of leaves and trash according to street cleaning sign schedules so residents will know the City is serious about litter.

A “CAN’T MISS” INITIATIVE FOR PITTSBURGH

At a time in the life of Pittsburgh when most capital projects to keep us “world-class” cost hundreds of millions of dollars, along comes an initiative that is the biggest bargain in the city’s budget. This initiative is a drop in the financial bucket and worth a fortune to boost local pride and Pittsburgh’s global image.

The sponsor of this “can’t miss” initiative will benefit greatly for its contributions to the present and future Pittsburgh and to its citizens.

Everyone is against litter.

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