

To our friends at Seattle Public Utilities,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us to discuss issues relating to trash pickup in the Pike/Pine neighborhood of Capitol Hill. We prepared this memo to document concerns we have gathered from small businesses and community members with the intent that it can be used to guide additional investment into the neighborhood. This work was prepared with support from the University District Partnership and their recent advocacy on similar issues.

Capitol Hill's Pike/Pine neighborhood is Seattle's most dense retail core and its busiest nightlife center. This activity creates high amounts of solid waste in a neighborhood with limited storage space and narrow alleyways. Illegal dumping from unlicensed vendors, overflowing dumpsters and public trash cans, scattered waste, and used oil spills consistently impact the cleanliness and safety of our streets. These issues are compounded when service is missed or disrupted.

The neighborhood's businesses exist in a fragile ecosystem. Costs related to operating a business, including but not limited to insurance, labor, rent, cost of supplies, regulatory requirements, etc., have increased tremendously since 2020. Consequently, a recent study found that 67% of Seattle's small businesses are under more financial stress now than in 2020-2021. Many of the neighborhood's small businesses report profit margins at or less than 1-2%. This means that any improvements that result in more traffic to the neighborhood correlate directly to improvements in the local economy.

Neighborhood cleanliness impacts perceptions of safety, which directly impacts local economic engagement. When visitors see litter, overflowing dumpsters, trash in sidewalks, and unclean alleyways, they internalize the perception that Capitol Hill is an unclean space and, thus, unsafe. Instead, we want to uplift the area as an inclusive, progressive space that people want to spend time in. Waste abatement is a critical component of this work.

We hope that this document can serve as the start of a plan to bring more direct, targeted support to the Pike/Pine neighborhood. NYC Mayor Mamdani was apt in his statement [that garbage should be in bins and not seen on sidewalks or streets](#). We look forward to working with SPU and its contractors in creating a plan to address the immediate needs of the neighborhood.

1. **Fact Finding: How does the Pike Pine Cleaning Pilot interact with trash pickup services?**

This year, the Pike/Pine neighborhood was awarded \$200,000 to fund an effort to clean up the streets, including power washing along known problematic alleyways and streets. The map of the designated area is pictured below. Community members would like to know how this cleaning schedule correlates with Recology and other trash pickup services in the neighborhood, and if those groups are working together to maximize the effect of their services.



2. Need for additional trash pickups in specific areas along the nightlife corridor

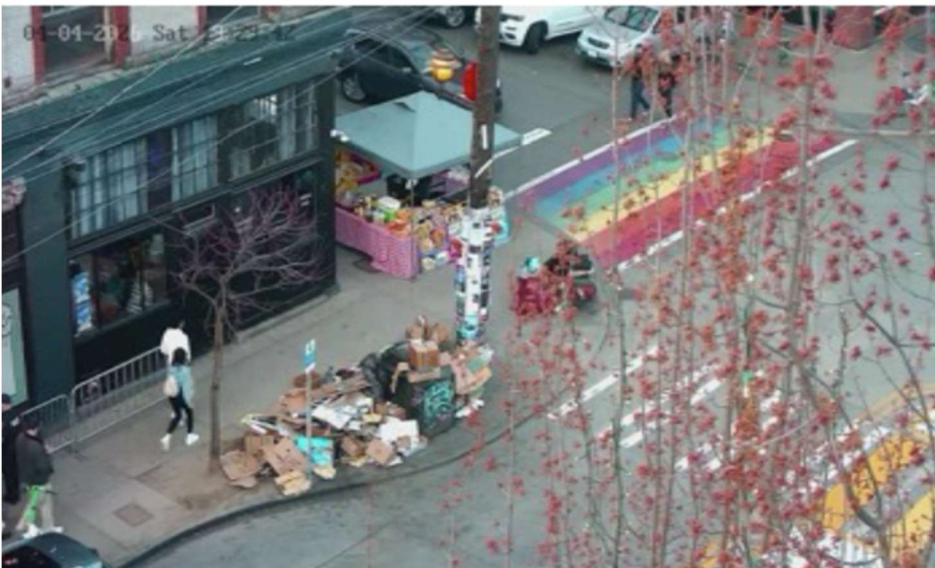
Pike/Pine's vibrant nightlife scene often leads to large amounts of solid waste piling up along the thoroughfare, as people use public trash cans and private dumpsters to dispose of trash. The following morning, the community must clean in and around these areas to make the neighborhood presentable for their customers and the general public. It is not sustainable for small businesses and their workers to conduct the trash mitigation services the City is contracted to provide.

A few locations have turned into recurring hot spots for missed pickup and/or scatter issues. These include:

- a. Every corner of 10th and Pike, particularly on days with strong nightlife presence (Wednesday evening to Monday morning)
- b. Along 10th and 11th from Pine to Union
- c. Alley behind Pride Place

SPU should increase inspection capacity to the Capitol Hill neighborhood with the expectation that inspectors would conduct proactive alley walks, identify repeat offenders, track service level issues, coordinate with the community, and work with haulers to ensure timely correction.

"No one has dumpsters anymore. The trash and graffiti are a constant. Pests this summer are imminent. The broken windows theory posits that visible signs of disorder and petty crime—such as graffiti, litter, or broken windows—create an environment that encourages serious crime. I think spending on cleaning up the area would do wonders." Liz Elkins, Oddfellows



3. **Need additional support for contamination from unlicensed vendors**

Pike/Pine is host to several illegal vendor tents and food carts that pop up in the evenings. These businesses are not registered with the City and do not have contracts to address their solid waste. Instead, they often leave debris – including buckets of cooking oil, food waste, and cooking materials – alongside public trash cans or among commercial dumpsters located along alleys. What results is a public safety issue: garbage left in public right of ways hinders pedestrian movement on sidewalks, particularly for neighbors who use mobility aids, and resulting grease spillovers and increased rat activity invite further harm.

Illegal dumping, missed collections, and contamination create a compounding effect. Overflowing trash can cause haulers to reject containers or require separate crews for collection, which often takes additional time. While businesses wait for this response, trash continues to accumulate, which creates a visible eyesore and exacerbates safety concerns. This often leads to additional fines for business owners as they wait for correction.

SPU should work with community members and Recology to create a faster response protocol for contaminated containers in high density commercial alleys. The goal should be correction within 24 hours whenever possible.

SPU should also create a policy wherein businesses cannot receive additional fines for trash pickup once they have submitted a request to Recology for additional support.

Example of overflow created by unlicensed vendors outside a major local venue:



4. **Need for Coordinated Support in Nightlife Districts**

The Pike/Pine community requests that SPU create a dedicated weekend recovery plan to address issues that come from nightlife activity. This plan would include schedules for street cleaning, more frequent solid waste pickups, secured containers with locking lids, and a clear plan for recycling, food waste, and grease. We also ask for daily street cleaning on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday mornings, when impacts from weekend nightlife are most visible.

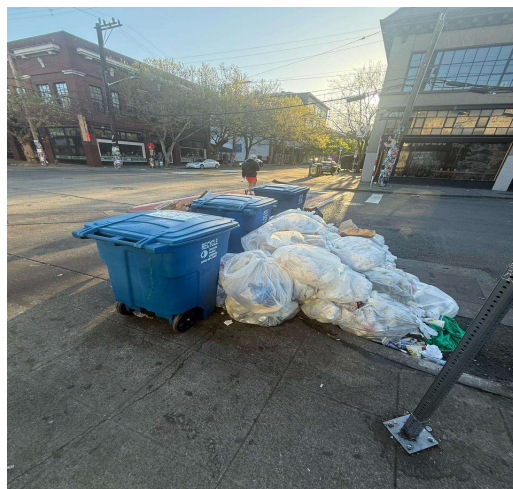
SPU should work with contractors to create a direct line of communication with community, including the local Chamber of Commerce, BIAs, property owners, and business owners, to ensure stakeholders understand who to contact when issues arise. Through this work, SPD should provide community stakeholders with an understanding of street cleaning plans, service schedules, pickup schedules, inspections, and enforcement actions taken in the neighborhood. This way, community can better coordinate to fill in any gaps where needed.

5. **Increased pickup of garbage from Clear Alleys Program**

The Clear Alley Program can better service the community when paired with regular cleaning and alley management. Currently, scatter and waste accumulation builds up over days, which creates a compounding effect that invites more dumping, blocks access to the area, and creates health and pest concerns. Capitol Hill is a small neighborhood with dense streets, so trash bags left outside restaurants or in messy alleyways directly impact the local economy by contributing to blight and safety concerns. We often find folks using accumulated trash as a protective barrier for drug use and sales.

One business experienced several days of missed pick-up, which led to them having to store trash bags in the basement of their restaurant in order to prevent them from building up on the street. This is not fair to the business, but they were left with no other option as they waited for Recology to respond.

We request that SPU bring dedicated cleaning crews if not once a day, then at least around weekends in order to preclude waste buildup from nightlife.



6. Improve planning and scheduling around special events such as PRIDE

Capitol Hill hosts several large events throughout the year; including Pride events, Capitol Hill Block Party, Cal Anderson Garage Sale, that draw thousands of visitors to the neighborhood. These events exacerbate the garbage build-up issue to the point that certain areas and businesses become completely inaccessible. When our neighborhood looks like this, it contributes to the idea that Capitol Hill is a grimy, unsafe place, thereby reducing the likelihood of a repeat visit.

Below are a series of photos from the Capitol Hill Pride event. The doors to this business are almost completely blocked off, and the sidewalk is not safe for pedestrians and completely inaccessible for those in need of mobility support. It appears SPU did not have a plan in place to address the accumulation of trash during and after the event – the garbage was left uncollected throughout the following Monday.

We encourage SPU to create a plan to address garbage accumulation during special events and share that plan with local businesses and organizations. When businesses know the plan, they can better accommodate by adjusting their garbage placement or collection practices accordingly.



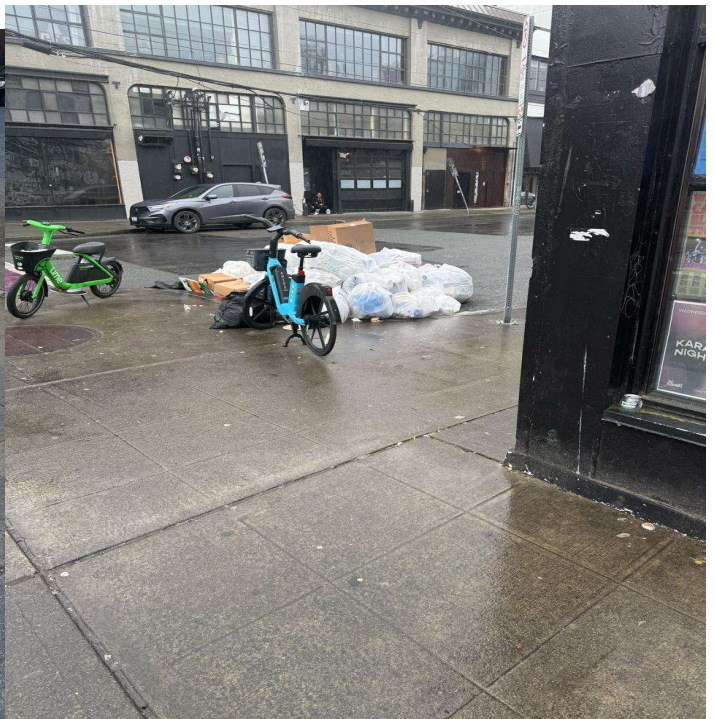
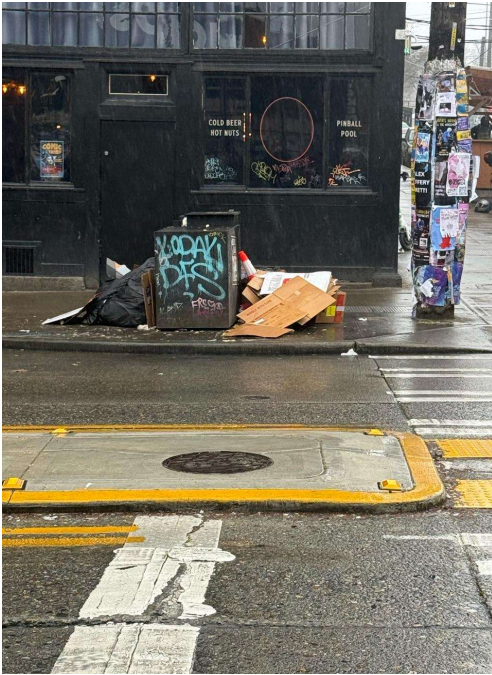
Conclusion

In light of these issues, we request the following support from SPU:

1. Assign **dedicated inspectors** to Capitol Hill and other high need commercial districts so they can develop neighborhood expertise and provide proactive follow up.
2. **Create a toolkit for property owners** that includes where to obtain their pick up schedule, who to contact when pick ups are missed, where to find more information about their solid waste contract, and other necessary information
3. **Strengthen contractor accountability** by requiring route verification, field audits, scatter cleanup, missed collection follow up, and documented corrective actions
4. **Develop a rapid response protocol** for contaminated containers, missed collections, and severe alley scatter in high density commercial districts
5. Require construction projects that block or impact alley access to **prepare a waste collection impact plan** or strengthen existing permit and construction coordination processes to ensure that alley waste collection is addressed before access is disrupted.
6. **Explore an “alley ranger” style pilot** for the Pike/Pine neighborhood that is modeled on proactive litter abatement routes, where crews can identify and resolve alley issues in real time rather than relying on inspection, dispatch, and delayed cleanup

Community partners are ready to work with SPU, Recology, SDOT, businesses, and property owners to improve conditions. We appreciate the opportunity to work with SPU to create both proactive measures to address solid waste buildup, and systems to abate buildup when issues occur.

Below are more photos taken by community members:



7:09

1h

27



Public Litter and Recycling Cans

#26-00065046



Public Litter and Recycling Cans

901 E Pike St, Seattle

OPEN

7 minutes ago #26-00065046

Details

Activity



Details



Overflowing trash

Can type:

Litter can (black)

Problem with can:

Overflow



Location



[901 E Pike St, Seattle](#)



