

Bin there, paint that - Containers need not be trashy, but should law be involved? CITY PROPOSES NEW GARBAGE RULES

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Consider the trash bins of Anchorage.

These large garbage containers plopped next to streets tarnish the landscape, some planners and lawmakers say, and shouldn't be there.

The city last week recommended new rules for the bins that call for them to be screened and set back from the street. The recommendations are part of a bigger rewrite of the zoning code.

No doubt, the proposals would make the city more attractive and healthier for the children who now play next to trash in bins lining the streets in front of their homes. But they raise questions too: Is it right to make a law about something mainly because many people think it's unappealing?

Will the rules work in a snow-bound city, and will they be affordable for the landlords and other business people?

The garbage bins jut into streets, or sit right next to them, especially in neighborhoods where there are older apartment buildings, from one side of Anchorage to the other -- Muldoon to Midtown, Russian Jack to Spenard.

This many in-your-face trash bins apparently is a unique aspect of Anchorage.

"There is more prominent placement of Dumpsters (in Anchorage) than anyplace we've been," said planning consultant Matt Goebel of Clarion Associates. Denver-based Clarion works around the country and was hired by the city to help redo the zoning code.

It's easy enough to find the kind of views that jumped out at the Clarion professionals:

On a short stretch of 25th Avenue in Spenard, nine trash bins hang out on the side of the road. Before pickup, open trash bins and ones overflowing with plastic bags offered a messy contrast last month to some distinctive-looking apartment buildings as residents went about their midday business.

Nursing assistant Jocelyn Hernandez can see about eight trash bins in the immediate vicinity of her Mountain View apartment building. Four-plexes and other apartment houses, most with asphalt in front, dominate her section of Mumford Street.

"The kids don't really have a place to play," Hernandez said. And sometimes, she said, she sees rats around the trash bins.

WHAT'S ON THE TABLE

Along San Roberto Avenue in Russian Jack, a half-dozen kids gathered near a trash bin one afternoon last week, trying to lure drivers over for a car wash.

"They're ugly," 14-year-old Perry Copeland said. "Look at that one; it's all rusty and things."

And, he said, "they do kind of stink sometimes."

Existing law requires screening for some trash bins in parking areas but has little else to say. That would change with the city recommendations.

Here is what the rules would do:

- * The city's plain, boxy four-plexes, an icon of earlier years when the population was booming and anything with walls would rent, couldn't have trash bins at all. All apartment buildings with seven units or fewer would have to switch to individual trash cans, normally put out front on trash day only.

- * Where allowed, trash bins would have to be screened from view on all sides with a 6- to 8-foot fence or walls and a gate.

- * They would have to be placed back from the front of a building wherever possible and couldn't be put in areas used to meet minimum parking or landscaping requirements.

Building owners with law-breaking trash bins would have five years to comply.

City planners considered proposing that trash bins be fully enclosed, with a roof, but dropped that idea, city planning director Tom Nelson said. Critics argued that it would be too expensive: The structure would have to be larger, snow might overload the roof, or the roof might make it harder for trucks to pick up the garbage.

The city wants builders to think specifically about where to put trash bins when they plan future developments, something that often has not happened.

"With new development, we're saying when you design your site, if you're going to have outdoor storage, minimize the visibility and still provide access for the garbage collector," Nelson said.

Many newer apartment buildings appear to have set aside special spots for trash bins.

And some of the new hotels on C Street, for example, have taken special trouble with their garbage. For instance, the Fairfield Inn and Suites Marriott at International Airport Road and C Street built a small, green, house-shaped building for its garbage containers and that of a neighboring hotel.

"They made a point of making it match the building (the hotel) since there was no other place to put the Dumpsters (but next to C Street)," said Myrna Green, Fairfield's general manager.

The University of Alaska Anchorage also has tackled the aesthetics of trash bins creatively.

"We're kind of an anti-Dumpster place," said Cyndi Spear, associate vice chancellor for facilities. "For a large institution, we have virtually none."

A contractor picks up trash within buildings daily.

The few bins, near student housing and the student center, are painted "loud and proud," in Spear's words. One features fantasy creatures, like those in Dr. Seuss books.

"We like having a little fun with them. Trash is not that serious to us," she said.

ENCLOSURE PROS AND CONS

But the dilemma is being taken seriously. The Anchorage Chamber of Commerce opposed putting roofs on trash bin stations and proposed the city require "reasonable screening from (defined) viewpoints."

Spenard businessman Tom McGrath is skeptical about the idea of a four-sided enclosure with a gate.

"They're dreaming," he said. "The garbage collection driver, if he opens the gate, will probably do it with the thing that lifts up the Dumpster and tear it off."

Three-sided enclosures, required in some parking areas now, work pretty well, McGrath said.

Brian Vanderwood, collections foreman at the city Solid Waste Department, agreed that enclosed trash bins are more attractive but said they're a challenge for the collectors.

"People don't maintain them well," he said. "People store stuff there. ... They're not desirable from an operational standpoint."

Steve Jones, president of the Alaska Apartment and Property Owners Association, said he thinks new buildings should conceal their trash bins.

"Frankly, I can't imagine somebody building a new building that wouldn't want to do that," he said. "You don't want to drive up and the first thing you see is a Dumpster."

But the association is worried that the rules would hurt some apartment owners, he said, such as those with no place to put a trash bin except by the road.

The association represents owners of about 30 percent of the rental units in Anchorage, he said.

The issue will come before the Anchorage Assembly, where viewpoints range widely.

Chris Birch of South Anchorage said it's the owner's responsibility, not government's, to decide matters relating to the attractiveness of trash bins. The city's responsibility is for concerns such as safety, he said.

Allan Tesche of the downtown district said decisions like this can be addressed by the community. "If you have a junky neighborhood, you don't feel as good about yourself," he said.

Midtown's Dan Coffey, who owns commercial property and is building a new trash bin enclosure, says he'll weigh public benefit against expense.

"The more the costs, the less the gain in looks, the less inclined I am to support it."

Back in Mountain View, resident Hernandez said she loves Alaska and came in the first place to get herself and her children away from the blighted South Bronx in New York City.

But looking around her particular street, she said, "This little section is like a piece of the Bronx."

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Garbage containers

The city last week recommended new rules for bins.

* The proposed rules are online at www.muni.org, under Project 21 rewrite, public review draft No. 1. Most are in chapter 7. Public comments are due by fax, mail or e-mail by Sept. 16. Fax: 343-7927. E-mail: title21@muni.org

* National consultants will discuss the Title 21 rewrite in several meetings next week at: a work session for city boards, noon to 2 p.m. Thursday on the eighth floor of City Hall; a Title 21 Citizens Advisory Committee meeting 7 to 9 p.m. Thursday in city offices at 4700 Bragaw St.; an Assembly work session from 10 a.m. to noon Friday at City Hall; and a Real Estate Task Force meeting from 2 to 5 p.m. July 11 at City Hall.

Caption: Photo 1: [dumpster1_070305.jpg](#) Photo 3: [dumpster3_070305.jpg](#) Photo 4: [dumpster4_070305.jpg](#) Graphic 2: [dumpster2_070305.eps](#)

Photos by JIM LAVRAKAS / Anchorage Daily News UAA maintenance worker Reuben Floyd moves trash to one of the decorated refuse bins at the UAA dorms on Sharon Gagnon Lane.

UAA has embraced the bins by holding a design contest every couple of years to get them painted. A fantasy scene of a bird set against mountains is painted on a bin near the UAA dorms. "We like having a little fun with them," says a UAA official. "Trash is not that serious to us."

Photos by JIM LAVRAKAS / Anchorage Daily News The trash bins along West 25th Avenue, between Spenard Road and Minnesota Drive, are an example of trash bins parked on the street. Fairfield Inn maintenance supervisor Dominic Oria rearranges some garbage in the trash bin housed in an attractive outbuilding in the hotel's parking lot. The building is painted to match the hotel's colors.

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