

District of Columbia Government
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A
Box 75115
Washington, DC 20013



January 6, 2005

Peter Jones
Ward 6 Neighborhood Services Coordinator
Suite 124
609 H Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002

Re: H Street Alley between 12th and 13th Streets, NE

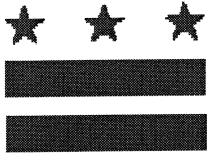
Mr. Jones:

At the December 9, 2004, monthly Commission meeting, with a quorum present, the Commission voted unanimously to request that the alley that runs parallel to H Street, between 12th and 13th Streets, NE be declared a *persistent problem area*. As a point of reference, the two attached letters dated October 6 and July 8, 2004 outline the efforts of the Single Member District representative from our Commission to resolve these problems. Accordingly, to assist in the development of a work plan to resolve the immediate problems in this alley, our Commission submits the following observations for consideration:

Trash. Over the last year, the residents on Linden Place have been dutifully calling the Mayor's hotline number when the trash spills out from the containers located behind Danny's Carryout located at 1251 H Street, NE and Hill Instant Carpet Service, 1249 H Street, NE.. Recently, thirteen mattresses were deposited in these containers due because these dumpsters are not secured against public use. In the spring and summer months, rodents infest the alley due to the overflowing trash. In addition, three dumpsters continue to appear on 12th Street near the corner of H Street. Many of these dumpsters lack permits and periodically are placed in public space creating an opportunity for illegal dumping on sidewalks. The tracking numbers assigned by the Executive Office of the Mayor's citywide hotline number regarding this issue are 802595 and 824914. Potential solutions that the persistent problem area group should consider securing alley dumpsters with an enclosure that prevents public dumping and removing of dumpsters on public space. For that reason, the Department of Health (Rodent Control) and the Department of Public Works (Sanitary Enforcement and Illegal Dumping) should be included in the persistent problem area group.

Tree boxes. On 12th and 13th Streets, as well as the space between the Auto Zone parking lot and the alley, the tree boxes are not being maintained on a regular basis. The tree boxes on 12th and 13th Streets are constantly filled with garbage and the three boxes that separate the alley and the parking lot are not watered. We request that the Department of Public Works (DPW) be included in the persistent problem area group and that as part of the solution, DPW initiate citing the businesses on these streets for litter related violations in an effort to make the street more attractive.

Illegal Mechanics. Despite repeated requests for the Office of Investigation, Weights and Measurers to stop illegal mechanics, this practice continues to occur in our neighborhood. Mr. Anthony Hooks, from the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA), conducted three inspection and was unable to find any illegal car repairs on or adjacent to the Auto Zone despite the fact that a reporter from



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the City Paper was able to easily identify and discuss these repairs with the illegal mechanics. The third attachment is a copy of the article from the August 6, 2004 issue of the City Paper. Mr. Kevin Carter, Mr. Hooks' supervisor, is reluctant to reopen the investigation of these mechanics because they also work on the street and not just on the Auto Zone parking lot. The issue at hand is that these mechanics solicit customers in the Auto Zone parking lot, buy the request parts required and then conduct the repairs in and around Auto Zone parking impacting the availability of parking on H Street, 12 Street and 13 Street as well as contributing to the illegal dumping as the water drains in the alley are being used as a disposal facility for car fluids (oil, brake and transmission). We request that DCRA be included in the persistent problem area group to investigate Auto Zone's inability to prevent illegal activity on or around their property as well as the Metropolitan Police Department's Environmental Crime Unit to prevent illegal dumping in our water runoff drains.

Illegal Activity. This past fall, several residents reported late night activity in the alley ranging from apparent prostitution to drug distribution as individuals riding bicycles drop off and retrieve bags from the garbage containers. In addition, there has been a rash of break-ins and thefts from the alley where the criminals gain access to the backyards by using on the electric poles that have built in climbing pegs. These electric poles are abutting the backyard fences. We request that Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO) and a representative from the Metropolitan Police Department's (MPD) Police Service Area 102 be included in the persistent problem area group. The expectation is that PEPCO's involvement will facilitate the removal of the climbing pegs and that MPD's participation will lead to the eventual consideration of this alley as a pilot project for the placement of closed circuit television camera to help combat neighborhood crime.

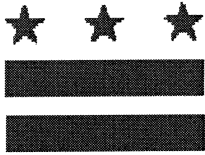
Fines and Citations. We request that the Office of the Attorney General appoint a representative to persistent problem area group in order to assist the effort in to fine businesses for city code and regulation violations.

In closing, we ask that the persistent problem area group conduct the first meeting on February 3, 2005, at 6:00pm at the Sherwood Recreation Center. As there are several members of our community that have been combating these problems over the past year, we request that you provide confirmation of this meeting to our Commission by January 27, 2005, to include listing the members of the persistent problem area group.

Respectfully,

Joseph Fengler
Chair, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A

cc: Councilmember Sharon Ambrose



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Box 75115
Washington, DC 20013



October 6, 2004

Peter Jones
Ward 6 Neighborhood Services Coordinator
Suite 124
609 H Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002

Re: Danny's Carryout and the H Street alley between 12th and 13th Streets, Ne

Mr. Jones:

On behalf of the residents of ANC 6A-02, I am requesting your assistance in resolving some long standing issues regarding Danny's Carryout located at 1251 H Street, NE and the H Street alley between 12th and 13th Streets, NE. Several residents have contacted me about continued problems with this business and the recurring illegal activity in the alleyway behind this establishment:

- (1) Illegal dumping. The establishment does not properly maintenance their trash cans. This continues to encourage illegal dumping directly behind this establishment. The tracking numbers assigned by the Executive Office of the Mayor regarding this issue are 427256 and 779269.
- (2) Suspected drug activity. On many occasion residents have witnessed what appears to be drug sales and distribution in this alley. As recently as September 26, 2004, neighbors witnessed one man retrieve a box from Danny's Carryout trash, go into the back door of this establishment and then leave. This same individual as been seen many times "cruising" the alley way and engaging in what appears to be drug transactions.
- (3) Suspected prostitution. Over the last month, residents have witnessed what appear to be couples engaging in sex in this alley. As evidence of this activity, used condoms are often discarded in the alley and found next to the backyard gates of many of the residents.
- (4) Rodent problems. Over the course of the summer, residents directly behind Danny's Carryout experienced a noticeable increase in the rodent population. This continues to be a problem as we move into the fall months.

We are seeking your assistance to initiate a solution to this problem between the Department of Public Works, the Metropolitan Police Department and the Department of Health. The residents will be attending the Police Service Area 102 meeting which will be held on October 21, 2004 at 7:00pm, at the Sherwood Recreation Center located at the corner of 10th and G Streets, NE to receive an update on the actions either implemented or proposed to solve these problems.

Respectfully,

//original signed//
Joseph Fengler
Commissioner, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A-02



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Box 75115
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June 8, 2004

Peter Jones
Ward 6 Neighborhood Services Coordinator
Suite 124
609 H Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002

Re: Auto Zone Investigation

Dear Mr. Jones,

On behalf of the residents of ANC 6A-02, I am requesting your assistance in resolving some long standing issues regarding the operations in the parking lot and alley of the Auto Zone located at 1207 H Street, NE. .

Several members of our community have noticed unlicensed mechanics conducting automotive repairs in the parking lot and alley around Auto Zone. The attachment lists the residents who will verify this potential illegal activity.

Mr. Anthony Hooks from the Office of Investigation, Weights and Measures completed an investigation of the community complaint on April 7, 9, 14 and May 10, 2004. Mr. Hooks observed no illegal operations of a vehicle repair business. However, the attached photos taken by residents could lead one to conclude differently. Based on the photos provided, it would appear that there is a thriving trade being conducted on the in and around the property of Auto Zone.

In close, we are seeking your assistance to request that the Office of Investigation, Weights and Measures reinstate an investigation on the entire property surrounding Auto Zone – to include the parking lot and back alley.

Respectfully,

//original signed//

Joseph Fengler
Commissioner, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A-02

cc: Mr. Anthony Hooks, Office of Investigation, Weights and Measures
Councilmember Sharon Ambrose
Commissioner Jessica Ward
Mr. Bobby Pitman
Mr. Richard Luna
Mr. Charles and Helen Wooden
Mr. Lyndon Bonaparte
Ms. Deia Var Sovczyky



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District Line

From the August 6, 2004 issue.

Oil and Vinegar

Neighbors sour on H Street AutoZone's freelance mechanics.

By Mike DeBonis

The sign affixed to a light pole in the parking lot of the AutoZone on H Street NE is clear: "NO WORKING ON VEHICLES ON PARKING LOT."

But the detritus strewn about the auto-parts dealer's grounds say otherwise. In addition to the ubiquitous motor-oil bottles and wiper-blade packages filling the lot's handful of trash barrels, an informal inspection over several days last week revealed two used fuel filters, an old spark plug, a couple of worn brake pads, empty cans of R134a refrigerant, and a greasy length of radiator hose.

This, the shop's neighbors say, is evidence of a thriving auto-repair industry operating in the AutoZone parking lot and the streets around it. A thriving illegal auto-repair industry, they note.

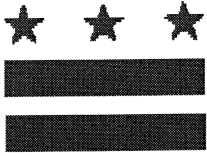
Jessica Ward, an advisory neighborhood commissioner who lives two blocks from the AutoZone, says "They lift the vehicle up and spend time doing whatever needs to be done. It's not a quick look under the hood."

Recently, on 12th Street NE, Ward saw one of the mechanics doing an oil change on the curb. He had drained the dirty oil into an upside-down garbage-can lid. "That's like five cans of oil. Where does that go?" she asks. "It's the environmental hazard I'm mainly concerned about."

AutoZone's policy on the mechanics is as clear as the sign posted in the lot—"No working on cars," says Tom Wood, the store's manager. Or not: The sign isn't absolute, Wood says; there's no problem replacing your wiper blades or topping off the antifreeze. But: "Can't jack up a car in here. That's prohibited," he says.

If mechanics solicit work from the shop's customers and do repairs in side streets or alleys, that's not his concern, says Wood. "They're not doing it for AutoZone. There's nothing AutoZone can do about it," he says.

Ward says work in the parking lot dropped significantly after the shop's management cracked down last year, but the repairs simply shifted to side streets and alleys. "Personally, I don't feel that's solving the problem," she says.



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After fielding months of complaints, the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs dispatched an inspector in April and May to determine whether an illegal business was operating out of the parking lot. The inspector concluded there wasn't.

But the neighbors aren't satisfied with that determination. The residents' newest strategy to keep the illicit gearheads out of the area is a photo-documentation campaign. Joe Fengler, another advisory neighborhood commissioner, says a handful of neighbors have snapped about two dozen pictures of the mechanics in action. With the photographic evidence, Fengler hopes to convince District authorities to reopen the investigation.

Fengler and Ward may be fighting more than businesses and city authorities, however; they may be fighting the laws of capitalism. If cars need fixing (as they often do at auto-parts shops), and people are there to fix cars, then cars will be fixed. This accounts for the open-air auto-repair market, and H Street isn't the only one.

On a recent evening at an AutoZone on Rhode Island Avenue NE, the parking lot mechanics are out in full force. A couple of guys fiddle under the hood of an old pickup with Virginia plates. Another guy has his conversion van on a jack, tightening lug nuts. One, in a grimy green T-shirt, sits hanging out of the driver's seat of a green Dodge minivan, can of beer in hand. "Mechanic?" he asks. "You need a mechanic?"

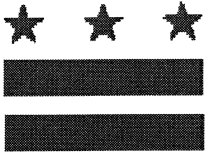
His name is Cornelius Williams. He says he regularly solicits work out of AutoZone parking lots, both here and on H Street. "You're not supposed to [work in the lot], but if someone breaks down, you ain't got no choice but to do it right here," he says.

On a good day, Williams says, he can make \$200, but usually he only does an average of two or three jobs per week. For a tuneup, he says, he usually charges around \$40, not including parts—much less than the \$150-plus a garage may charge. "A lot of people can't afford to go to a shop," Williams says. "Those goddamned garages tear peoples' asses up."

Joe, another regular at the Rhode Island shop, says he's developed a happily symbiotic relationship with his host. He can solicit customers in the lot, just as long as he does the work elsewhere. One of Joe's customers, the driver of a green Kia who declines to give his name, says he has the AutoZone guys double-check work he has done at a legitimate garage. "Second opinion, just like a doctor," he says.

The Kia owner won't be going back to the H Street AutoZone anytime soon, though. Three months ago, he says, he received a ticket for simply opening his hood in the parking lot. "All I was doing was seeing if I needed some oil," he says. Joe seconds his assessment of the H Street shop. "I been down there a couple times," he says. "I see what goes on."

The H Street repair trade is far from exterminated, however. On a Wednesday afternoon, a mechanic named Ben sits in a car parked on the curb looking for work. Ben says he's one of a crew of five or six regulars who work the



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AutoZone: “There’s always somebody around,” he says. His personal specialty is installing clutches and transmissions.

Ben’s going rate for a tuneup is slightly higher than Williams’: \$50. But it’s still much better than the legitimate alternative, he says. “It’s gonna be way less [than a garage],” he says, before ducking out to do a job. “We just help people out.”

The argument that the street mechanics provide a low-cost service to poorer motorists doesn’t hold much sway in the neighborhood. Fengler says the street mechanics endanger public safety. “There’s a reason that you take the car to a mechanic that’s certified,” he says. “They work in bays, with lights and the proper tools....It’s like having an illegal contractor work on your house. There’s no guarantee.”

For Ward, the bottom line is that the unlicensed tinkers are breaking the law. “Everybody wants to make a living, I understand,” she says. “[But] there’s D.C. law and regulation that no auto repair can be done on the streets. It’s against the law.”

Back on Rhode Island Avenue, a Southeast resident who calls himself Tony T. waits while Joe inspects the brakes on his mammoth vintage Sedan de Ville. In a couple of minutes, the two will pull out of the lot, so Joe can replace Tony’s brake pads on an Eckington side street. “You get the same quality work done here that you get done in a shop,” Joe says, as he replaces Tony’s wheel.

“[Legitimate garages] take more guesses and more money,” Tony says. “I like these guys. They’re trustworthy.”