
Government of the District of Columbia



DC Department of Public Works

Testimony of

William O. Howland, Jr.

Director

Public Oversight Hearing

**B17-396, “Street Sweeping Improvement Enforcement
Amendment Act of 2007”**

And

**B17-394, “District Of Columbia Vehicle Towing,
Storage, And Conveyance Fee Act of 2007”**

January 29, 2008

Committee on Public Works and the Environment

Jim Graham, Chair

Council of the District of Columbia

John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
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TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM O. HOWLAND, JR.
DIRECTOR, DC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
PUBLIC HEARING ON
B17-396 “STREET SWEEPING IMPROVEMENT ENFORCEMENT
AMENDMENT ACT OF 2007” AND
B17-394 “DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA VEHICLE TOWING, STORAGE,
AND CONVEYANCE FEE ACT OF 2007”
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS AND THE ENVIRONMENT
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B17-396 “STREET SWEEPING IMPROVEMENT ENFORCEMENT
AMENDMENT ACT OF 2007”

- Good morning Chairman Graham and members of the committee. I am William O. Howland, Jr., Director of the DC Department of Public Works (DPW). I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify on Bill 17-396, the “Street Sweeping Improvement Enforcement Amendment Act of 2007” and Bill 17-394, the “District of Columbia Vehicle Towing, Storage, and Conveyance Fee Act of 2007.”
- Both bills will prove instrumental in improving our environment. The first bill gives us the means to effectively clean the District’s streets. The second bill will help us to improve rush hour traffic flow thereby reducing emissions and fuel use. I will address the street sweeping legislation first.
- When Mayor Adrian Fenty took office last year, he laid out his “100 Days and Beyond” plan for the District. Critical to that plan’s infrastructure and environment platform is photo ticketing by street sweepers – or what we’ve dubbed “Sweepercam.”
- Cameras will be installed on mechanical sweepers to photograph vehicles parked in the curb lane during designated sweeping hours, and tickets will be mailed to the vehicle owners. This software application is the next step in license plate recognition technology that is in use in our vehicle booting program.
- Today, there are so many vehicles parked along the residential street sweeping routes that our sweepers are not doing the job District residents

expect and deserve. For every vehicle parked illegally along a sweeper route, three parking spaces are kept from being cleaned by the sweeper.

- I would like to quote the findings from the pollutant removal study that measured the amounts of various pollutants our sweepers clear from our streets.
- Oil and grease were removed at the highest rate – 10 pounds per mile swept. A 10-mile route would remove 100 pounds of oil and grease, on average.
- Nitrogen and phosphorus were each removed at a rate of 3 pounds per mile swept. A 10-mile route, for example, would remove 30 pounds of nitrogen and 30 pounds of phosphorus.
- These are significant findings, so when the sweepers are not removing these pollutants, the next rain sweeps them, along with trash and other debris, into the sewers for a one-way ticket to the Anacostia River.
- I also would like to note that on any given day, our Parking Control Officers are able to enforce street sweeping regulations on only about 20 percent of the routes. Sweepercam would raise that rate to 100 percent, which means more equitable enforcement in our residential neighborhoods.
- Our residential signed mechanical sweeping program is an example of how DPW adapts to meet residents' needs. During the 1990s, residents of the District's most densely populated neighborhoods were very frustrated with the trash, debris and litter accumulating on their streets.
- Together, residents and DPW found the solution: alternate side of the street parking and a fleet of mechanical sweepers to achieve a higher level of cleanliness.
- For it to work, residents must commit to move their vehicles for the sweepers to reach the curb lane. Every block where signs are posted for weekly street sweeping is a block where 80 percent of the residents made the commitment to alternate side parking.

- How do we know residents value the program? We know they value it because they signed on the dotted line, agreeing to move their vehicles so the sweepers can do their job.
- Unfortunately, residents are not getting the service they expected even though they are keeping up their side of the bargain. Other motorists are ignoring the signs in such great numbers.
- With Sweepercam, sweepers will photograph vehicles parked in the curb lane. Once the information is captured and recorded, it is transferred via wireless communication to another site for further processing and ticket issuance. After the ticket is validated, it will be mailed to the vehicle owner who then has the opportunity to go through the normal ticket adjudication process.
- Additional benefits of Sweepercam include vehicle owners being able to view their citation online. It also will improve the city's customer service efforts by providing visible evidence that a sweeper was on site in the event of a citizen complaint. For years, the District has mailed tickets for red light running and speeding. Sweepercam tickets will be handled the same way.
- We have tested the technology for about a year and consulted with other jurisdictions about their experience, including Chicago where a contract is nearing award. Now, we are seeking the Council's approval of legislation that gives the Mayor the authority to issue parking tickets through the mail.
- I would like to conclude this part of my testimony by saying DPW's primary goal is to change behavior among motorists who prevent our sweepers from doing their job. By issuing warning tickets during the first 30 days of implementation, we hope to see a reduction in the number of violations. Once we begin issuing tickets, we expect to see a further reduction in the number of violations.

B17-394 "DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA VEHICLE TOWING, STORAGE, AND CONVEYANCE FEE ACT OF 2007"

- DPW tows vehicles that hinder traffic flow by parking in curb lanes during rush hour. We either tow the vehicles ourselves or they are towed by a company under contract to us to perform that service.

- Before the vehicle is towed, the owner receives a citation for the parking violation. If a private contractor tows the vehicle, the motorist pays the towing and impoundment fees. Currently, DPW pays the tow and impoundment fees for vehicles towed by the private contractor, which means the city and its taxpayers foot the bill.
- If DPW relocates the vehicle to a nearby legal parking space, the owner is **not** charged a fee for the towing.
- DPW only charges a tow fee and impoundment fee when we tow the vehicle to the impoundment lot, which is so distant from the majority of our rush hours streets that taking a vehicle there is impractical.
- The bill would give DPW and our contractors the authority to charge the same amount as a tow fee for relocating the vehicle. We are making the playing field even. Vehicle A gets impounded and charged the tow fee. Vehicle B is relocated but charged no fee. The bill ends the disparity . . . and everyone will be charged.
- Allowing DPW the opportunity to impose a vehicle conveyance fee would not only regulate the current practice of towing, it would provide a variety of benefits that would save city resources.
- It would give the District government greater flexibility to use private tow companies, which would alleviate the demands on the government's tow vehicles. It also would give the District greater flexibility to have vehicles towed to private lots, which would alleviate crowding and reduce the amount of time spent on a tow.
- Finally, a conveyance fee would make the cost of these tows the owners' responsibility, regardless of whether the tow is performed by the District government or a private company. This rightfully shifts the financial burden from District taxpayers to the owner of the vehicle.
- Keeping curb lanes free of parked vehicles during rush hour means better traffic flow, reduced vehicle emissions and ultimately, a cleaner, healthier environment for District residents and the thousands of visitors who travel into the city for work, school and recreation each day.

- DPW looks forward to the passage of this legislation.
- Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify on these two bills. I am prepared to answer your questions.