

Clean city center requires cooperation

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The drive to clean Providence's downtown got off to a well publicized start last month. On the first day 23 drivers had their cars towed from the streets of the city, paid \$15 towing fees, received \$5 parking tickets, and had the traumatic experience of thinking their vehicles had been stolen.

What is the connection between removing cars from tow zones and clean streets? Vehicles, especially when illegally parked over long periods of time, serve as collectors of litter that blows about the city and prevent mechanical sweepers from reaching gutter areas. In transit lanes where two zones are usually designated, it is necessary to prevent illegal parking also because of the heavy volume of traffic and the need to keep our narrow streets open for fire lanes. Lower Weybosset Street, for example, frequently has such parked vehicles on both sides of the street preventing the smooth flow of traffic and further adding to an already congested downtown.

Towing cars for cleaner streets may seem unduly harsh to a driver population long indifferent to vehicle violations in the capital center. Once the initial shock has worn off, however, most would agree that such measures are needed to clean up the downtown and to facilitate traffic flow. Continual and equitable enforcement by the police will help ensure these objectives.

Cleaning the downtown, a task long overdue, is more than just periodic street sweeping and emptying trash barrels. It requires the combined efforts of both downtown interests and the city, to get the job started and operating on a continuing basis. Most important to these efforts, of course, is the cooperation of the general public whose attitudes and actions will dictate the success or failure of this venture. Making the public aware and sensitive to the value of a clean downtown is also a necessary task if the capital center is to reveal a charm too often masked by litter and dirt.

Cleaning up the small central business district may seem easy, but to do it in an efficient and meaningful manner requires considerable organization, something now in place in the form of the Downtown Providence Improvement Association, Inc. A chronology of events leading up to its formation may prove this point.

The problem of litter and refuse in the downtown has long been acknowledged, but it was a piece on these pages in November of 1978 claiming "Providence is the dirtiest city of them all" which elicited more publicity and discussion on the matter. In January of 1980, after some disjointed city efforts during the previous year, a businessmen's Operation Cleanup Task Force was formed at the request of the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce. After numerous meetings to ascertain objectives and organizational structure, a private, non-profit corporation was formed that summer — the Downtown Providence Improvement Association (DPIA), with its own board of directors and officers.

An executive director was selected and by October a private contractor was at work washing and sweeping the first part of the downtown slated for extensive cleaning. And now that the winter snow has disappeared, the contractor is again on his regular schedule of three times a week cleaning, sweeping and washing of sidewalks while street cleaning still remains a city responsibility.

Downtown merchants and businesses backed these efforts, with 70 of them already having pledged more than \$110,000 for the first year of operation. (Notably missing from this list of contributors are the "paper service" restaurants which generate the greatest amount of potential litter.) The results of this concerned effort are already evident, as witness the numerous comments on the improved appearance of the city center. Areas to be cleaned by the DPIA will be expanded to include all of the downtown as soon as warmer weather prevails.

More than just cleaning the city center, the immediate task, the DPIA also seeks to work with neighborhoods and other municipalities in beautification and anti-litter efforts and "to enhance and promote the physical and economic development of the Greater Providence area, and to do all activities necessary or desirable to enhance the City of Providence." To this end three committees have been established for the enforcement of city ordinances, education of the public, and creation of better public awareness and communication.

The Downtown Providence Improvement Association has set some clearcut and laudable goals for itself, some of which have already been attained, and the elements necessary to reach long term and continuing goals are in place: a strong commitment of private down-

town interests backed by significant contributions; cooperation with city government; an organizational structure in place; and involvement of community leaders who can get things done.

But the key to its success is the cooperation of the general public. A clean city center is more than just aesthetically pleasing; it is a sign that people care about their city. Do the people of this city and state care enough about the appearance of their showcase capital city center? To generate that attitude and pride, even at the expense of towed cars, is the ultimate test.

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