

## **Plan for Can Collectors on UBC Campus**

PLAN 503: Assignment 2  
School of Community and Regional Planning  
University of British Columbia

for Peter Boothroyd  
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## **1. Introduction**

This research is an attempt to identify the current stances of relevant stakeholders in regard to the issue of can collectors or “binners” on UBC campus. The research is part of a longer plan, which is to improve the current situation on “binners” on campus, and was conducted during 2004 Winter Term 1 by participating in Social, Ecological, Economic Development Studies through Learning Exchange Program at UBC.

## **2. Background of the Issue**

The practice of can collecting or “binning” – or scavenging, garbage picking or dumpster diving, as it is variously known – is not only seen within UBC campus, but also within the city of Vancouver. Although waste recycling is commonly practiced by many Vancouverites for many reasons, for instance, on-campus residents recycling to financially supplement their activities and others perhaps for environmental reasons, binning as a full-time job may be considered as an informal economic activity, and therefore, binners sometimes becomes a full-time job for those who are underemployed or on income assistance and relies on the income from waste recycling for their livelihood. Hence, most binners stress economic necessity as their primary motivation. According to interviews to some can collectors in Vancouver, major changes in binning have occurred around a few key themes: binning has become more competitive; more seniors are binning; there are a large number of new binners, and they are less aware/ less respectful of binning “rules”; relations between binners has become less civil, more hostile; and violence between binners is more frequent than before<sup>1</sup>. The roll-back of the provincial social assistance system in 1995, with the institution of the BC Benefits Act, is suggested to have led to the expansion of binning activity in Vancouver. Furthermore, recent article on Globe and Mail states that an idea to put uniforms and badges on “good” binners to placate some city residents, who say they’re frightened of the scavengers, came from the binners who feared for the dumpsters being padlocked<sup>2</sup>. One can collector also mentioned the concern that the city hall is trying to crack down street people before the 2010 Winter Olympic.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.anso.ubc.ca/mames/anso303.98/papers/binners.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Globe and Mail, “For dumpster divers, trash talks,” Monday, June 21, 2004.

### **3. Proposal for Action**

#### *3.1 TASK*

The planning task for this issue is to improve the current situation of the issue on “binners” on campus for the betterment and the contentment of all the relevant stakeholders. The plan should also consider the well-being of social, ecological, and economic aspects, their state and directions as well, involving all the relevant stakeholders throughout the process. In particular, the author’s view is that although certain conflicts of interests may arise during the process, the social, economic, ecological integration of can collectors on UBC campus (and furthermore those in Vancouver) into the community will contribute to the betterment and the contentment of all the relevant stakeholders.

#### *3.1 GOALS*

Through a meeting with Margo Fryer and Jodi Newnhan (Learning Exchange), and Brenda Sawada (SEEDS), we came to a conclusion that identifying the main pertinent organizations to this issue and understanding their stance/concern was the primary step for the task above. Therefore, the main objective of this research, first of all, is to investigate current concerns or tensions of various organizations or stakeholders within UBC towards this issue of can collectors on UBC campus. Secondly, this research aims to develop a proposal on how to improve the current situation and what further steps can be taken.

#### *3.2 FACT*

##### Previous process on the issues

The activity of can collectors on UBC campus has been a concern for some time. According to Paul Wong, the Personal Security Coordinator at Department of Health, Safety and Environment (HSE), there was a survey conducted with the community at UBC on this issue about 6 years ago. Although the documents from the survey were not found during this research, Wong mentioned that the community at UBC was generally compassionate towards binning on campus. As for this year, there was a meeting at UBC Campus Security Centre on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2004 on what the impacts/tensions/concerns/comments regarding the activity/work of container recycling throughout campus are, with participants from Campus Security, Education, Plant Operations, Alma Mater Society, RCMP, Housing and Conferences, Learning Exchange, Food

Service, and HSE.

### Main findings

This research identified basically 4 main stakeholders concerned with can collectors on campus: residents on UBC campus, Plant Operations/Waste Management, Food Service, and Campus Security. Below is the summary of their perspectives towards this issue from interviews. The perspectives are summarized into 4 main aspects, following the meeting from February 27, 2004; personal fear or uncomfortableness, custodial/site clean up issues, policy/legal issues regarding access to facilities, and compassionate, community development based response.

#### *Residents (Janice Robinson, Residence Life Manager)*

This kind of impact varies from residence area to residence area, depending on how close garbage areas are to building entrances, etc. Instances of can collectors entering residence buildings are rare, mainly due to exterior doors requiring key/card entry.

- ✓ Personal fear/uncomfortableness – Some residents have expressed concern for community safety, particularly those who have not come from cities where binnars are prevalent, arising from the fact that can collectors often have the appearance of being homeless (poorly kept, ratty clothing, etc.). Residents who have to walk past a bin on their way into their building, or whose window overlooks the area, often voice concerns.
- ✓ Custodial/site cleanup issue – The fact that some can collectors rooting through bins, pulling out other items, leave garbage lying around, do not close bins, etc., is also a problem. Garbage receptacle areas can become a mess, which is frustrating for both staff and students. Residents who have to walk past a bin on their way into their building, or whose window overlooks the area, often voice concerns.
- ✓ Compassionate, community development response - There are also residents who, after living on campus for a number of years, become accustomed to/familiar with binnars, even knowing some by name. The perception of the binnars, for these residents, is that they are “harmless”.

#### *Plant Operations (John Metras)*

- ✓ Custodial/site cleanup issues – The concern is with the binnars who leave a mess

when they rummage through little bins and recycling bins looking for cans. This negatively impacts the campus environment and creates additional, un-necessary work for the crews.

- ✓ Personal fear/uncomfortableness – Some of these “messy” bidders can also become quite aggressive when confronted about the problems that they create. This creates a personal safety concern for the staff.
- ✓ Compassionate, community development perspective – As for bidders who go about their business in a tidy, unobtrusive manner, they do the University a service from a sustainability perspective in that they recycle cans that may otherwise have ended up in the garbage.

#### *Campus Security (Steve Bohnen)*

- ✓ Policy/Legal issue – The primary concern for the Campus Security staff is on policy/legal issues regarding access to facilities, trespass, etc. Campus Security had 6 to 10 cases this year in which they were called to deal with the issue. Can collectors become an issue when they come into building, have conflict with residents or students, or relate to criminal activities. The complexity within this aspect is that Campus Security found a strong (assumed or verified) association between a small number of individuals and thefts that might be occurring while ostensibly foraging for recyclables inside buildings, etc., and that this verification is not easy. Hence, Campus Security desires an updated UBC policies with detailed manual to deal with these problematic situation involving can collectors or individuals using recycling as an alibi for being in UBC facilities for the purpose of theft or other criminal activities.
- ✓ Personal fear/uncomfortableness – The staff mentioned issue of personal safety and fear when can collectors become aggressive.

#### *Food Service (Dorothy Yip)*

- ✓ Personal fear/uncomfortableness – The Food Service’s concern is on personal safety/fear of its customers, due to unpleasant personal interactions between certain can collectors. There were incidents in which a can collector asked a student whether they can take the can which he/she was drinking out of at Pacific Spirit Place. In addition, collecting cans through breaking the lock of their storage

was also a problem for Food Service.

- ✓ Custodial/site cleanup issue – The Food Service also expressed its concern on can collectors picking up food from the dust bins and eating it, which may lead to sanitation and health issues.

### Analysis

As mentioned above, there are various ways of perceiving the act of binning on campus, with advantages and disadvantages as well as external opportunities and threats.

- ✓ Advantages – Binning on campus contribute to the University from a sustainability perspective by recycling bins and cans. In addition, the compassionate perspective by a portion of residents and students is strength in promoting the activity of can collectors.
- ✓ Disadvantages – One of the disadvantages is the personal security/fear of residents and students. Generally, the sense from many students in residence is that they do not have a strong stance against can collecting, but would prefer that it did not happen in residence, and that these individuals were not present in the community, not outside their windows, doors, or homes. This concern is especially expressed by those who have not come from cities where can collectors are prevalent. In addition, as stated above, it becomes a custodial and legal issue when the activity of binning goes beyond a certain degree, such as making a mess around the dumpster, collecting recyclables inside buildings, and perhaps furthermore when can collectors collect cans by breaking the lock.
- ✓ External Opportunities – There is a well-known non-profit recycling depot in Downtown Eastside called United We can (UWC). Ken Lyotier, the Executive Director and Manager of UWC, notified about the idea to distribute ID card to can collectors as a way to introduce themselves to people, which is support by many can collectors as a way of resolving the current situation of the dumpsters being locked down in the city, by marketing their service and gathering to discuss about “manners” of binning.

- ✓ External Threats – As mentioned in Background of the Issues, there is a popular belief that binning in Vancouver has been increasing and becoming competitive. In addition, the city possibility of dumpsters being padlocked and not having access to the recyclables is a big threat to the can collectors.

There seem to be two major implications from this analysis for the next step.

- A) The degree of personal fear and uncomfortable feeling of residents on campus towards can collectors varies from the feeling of shock/displeasure and uncomfortableness to that of being accustomed to/familiar with can collectors, and that this variable seems to depend on the length of time and the degree of interaction between residents and can collectors. Hence, in order to increase the feel of security and increase integrity of can collectors into the community, certain action, which may take various forms, is needed to create more familiarity or understanding of lives of can collectors.
- B) On-campus organizations such as Food Service, Plant Operations, and Campus Security, basically have the same standard or stance towards binning on campus; they allow binning as long as it is not done inside buildings and does not accompany messing up dumpsters, problematic situation (trouble with students or residents), and criminal activities. Therefore, certain method, which may take various forms, needs to be developed in order to prevent can collectors from behaving as such if they want to continue collecting cans on campus.

### *3.3 POSSIBILITIES*

The options of the next steps to take to achieve the task above are listed below, according to the analysis of A) and B) above.

- A) Minimizing personal fear/uncomfortableness among residents and increasing the understanding of can collectors
  - ✓ Present the documentary that examines the lives of “binners” – *Trapline* – to Resident Advisors (student staff in residence), resident associations, residents, students, etc., to minimize personal fear towards can collectors and increase understanding of their livelihoods.

- ✓ Circumstantial research and better understanding of the situation of can collectors on campus – number of can collectors who come to UBC campus, who they are, where they collect cans at UBC, which depot they take their cans, and perhaps where they live and their circumstances. According to Ken Lyotier, can collectors who leave a mess are mostly people with disorders in need of help. Therefore, methods such as Participatory Learning and Action<sup>3</sup> (PLA), involving can collectors and students, may be appropriate to know about them as well as to help them overcome addictions or poverty.

B) Preventing can collectors from behaving in ill-mannered way from security/clean up issues

- ✓ Consult with Ken Lyotier at UWC for the possibility of having a same kind of ID card scheme, with the intention of facilitating a meeting among can collectors to discuss about the “manner” of binning.
- ✓ Putting signs in restaurants which notify not to pick up cans and bins inside the buildings.
- ✓ Update UBC policy on trespassing and manual to deal with incidents involving can collectors.
- ✓ Explore the possibility of providing recyclables collected by Food Service, residential buildings, etc. Although students in some residential buildings oppose against giving out their recyclables to use for their own purposes, Food Service notified that the income from recycling was financially trivial to them.

C) Others

- ✓ Develop opportunities to create partnerships with can collectors on UBC campus and United We Can to increase the role of recycling at UBC. UBC's plan increase in population through the University Town Initiative and the possible gaps in recycling initiatives in current plans suggest the possibility to develop a partnership around recycling involving UBC residents, students, academics, and organizations, can collectors, and United We Can.
- ✓ Seek for opportunities for social housing at University Town.

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<sup>3</sup> PLA refers to a range of methodologies with a common aspect of full participation of people in the processes of learning about their needs and opportunities, and in the action required to address them.



### *3.4 DECISION*

Further investigation of the stances and concerns of the stakeholders at different levels (for example, employees of Campus Security, Food Service, etc.) including more organizations (such as Department of Anthropology and Sociology or Faculty of Medicine) is necessary for comprehensive understanding of the issue. Therefore it is not appropriate to make a decision at this point without full consensus of the stakeholders. However, the most appropriate step to take would be to submit this report to Ken Lyotier at United We can, Learning Exchange, etc, and to discuss the possibilities and to expand the awareness of the issue.