

# Rally for your Alley

## Why are clean and passable alleys important?

### Fire Safety:

- Provide key route for escape from a burning home.
- Provide key means of access for firefighters to combat a blaze.
- Remove overgrown vegetation and weeds, which can act as tinder and kindling, allowing fires to easily jump from property to property.

### Crime and Personal Safety:

- Overgrown and obstructed alleys provide hiding spots for criminals on the run.
- A clear alley allows officers to more easily track and chase fleeing criminals.

### Quality of Life:

- Clear alleys allow neighbors to take out the trash and recycling without traipsing it through the house.
- They allow neighbors to interact and visit each other's homes without stepping out the front door (or out of your pajamas).
- Obstructed alleys, often filled with construction debris and buckets, can create pools of standing water, which are spawning grounds for disease-carrying mosquitoes.

## **What do city officials and neighbors say?**

**“It is important to keep your alley clean and clear of trash because it may be needed as an escape route if you were to have a fire. Also, firefighters may have to use alley ways to perform rescue operations of victims that are trapped during a fire.”**

**– Derrick Sawyer, Battalion Chief, Fire Prevention Division**

## **Who owns alleys?**

Alleys are normally deeded to private property and therefore are treated by the city as such. They do not clean alleys. When funding permits, they will change alley lights, but nothing more. It is the responsibility of neighbors to keep them clear of obstructions and debris.

## **Can I put up a gate?**

Opinion on whether you are allowed to gate and lock them is inconsistent. Streets Department representatives say that homeowners can gate and lock alleyways provided that everyone with rights to the easement (including utilities, if any) agree to the arrangement and are given a key. You can also eliminate an alleyway if you so desire (provided that utilities are not an issues). In that scenario, everyone's back yard would get extended to the centerline of the alleyway.

## **What about the wires that run up and down the length of many alleys, oftentimes unkempt and strewn every which way?**

Those are the property of individual utilities (normally Comcast or Verizon) and one must reach out to those companies, directly requesting action.

## **What do city officials and neighbors say?**

**“Alleys . . . are private property. They belong to you, the property owner; the City of Philadelphia does not own or maintain them. It is your responsibility to maintain them in a safe and sanitary condition. All abutting owners, generally, have the right to use the entire length of an alley (this is written in your deed). All costs for repairs or reconstruction to an alleyway . . . are shared by those property owners having deed rights . . . Even if only parts of an alley need repair, all responsible property owners must share the cost of the repair.”**

**– The Streets Departments pamphlet entitled “alleys, driveways and retaining walls”**