



October 12, 2021

Seattle City Council  
600 Fourth Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98104

King County Council  
516 Third Avenue, Room 1200  
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear City and County Councilmembers,

We are writing to urge immediate action and investment by the City and County Councils to address the mental health and substance use crisis in downtown Seattle and improve safety and security for all who live, work and visit here.

The health and renewal of downtown Seattle matters to our entire city and county. Downtown Seattle is the economic, cultural, sports, tourism and civic center of our region, welcoming tens of millions of visitors and workers each year. The concentration of economic activity in downtown generates millions of dollars in annual city, county and state tax revenue that is critical to sustaining services and expanding infrastructure in our region. Over the previous decade, downtown Seattle has been the fastest-growing residential neighborhood in the city. Nearly 100,000 people currently reside downtown. Thousands of residents of each City and County Council district work and visit downtown each day and half of all economic activity within the City of Seattle has been concentrated downtown.

The pandemic has had an outsized impact on the 12 neighborhoods that comprise downtown Seattle, resulting in more than 500 permanent small business closures, the cancellation of 90 conventions, and a 65% decrease in earned income in 2020-21 for arts and cultural organizations. Throughout the pandemic, the unemployment rate in downtown was higher than the county average, with hospitality, arts and service sectors deeply impacted. While we've made great progress over the summer in beginning the renewal and recovery of downtown through private and public investment and partnership, the long-term health of our region's urban core is dependent on it being healthy, safe and welcoming for all.

The current realities on the streets of downtown Seattle — and the lack of a clear and well-resourced strategy to address the mental health and substance use crisis and ensure safety and security for all — is a front-and-center threat to recovery and the lives of people in need. If this crisis is not adequately addressed, it will harm job creation, recruitment and retention,

further delay re-openings, devastate our arts and culture sector and ultimately put Seattle's very future at great risk.

There has been a significant increase in violent crime in downtown Seattle since 2015. SPD, already understaffed for a city the size of Seattle, has lost nearly 300 officers since early 2020. Property crime and shoplifting are having a major impact on many downtown retailers, restaurants and attractions. Retailers, arts and cultural venues and other businesses are spending sizable resources on private security to compensate for a lack of police and the absence of other public safety and health responses.

According to the Regional Homelessness Authority (RHA), there are an estimated 800 unsheltered individuals downtown. A majority are suffering from behavioral health issues and/or substance use disorders, are disproportionately people of color and have been unhoused for more than two years. Unsheltered individuals are concentrated in specific areas of downtown, creating significant public health and community impacts for housed and unhoused residents. For example, between July and September, ambassadors with the Metropolitan Improvement District (MID) cleaned up more than 7,800 incidents of feces in public areas downtown.

There is a population of individuals downtown that is having repeated interactions with law enforcement, emergency response and the legal system. According to one report, in 2019, 500 individuals were responsible for more than 4,800 reported crimes. Crime is concentrated in certain well-documented areas of downtown, creating a disproportionate impact on specific blocks and businesses. Certain areas – in the heart of the retail and arts and cultural core – have been taken over for shoplifting and drug-trafficking operations. Retail theft is rampant and visible organized fencing operations are costing retailers millions in stolen goods and additional expenses for increased security.

Simply put, the current systems, programs, responses and interventions are inadequate and ineffective in addressing these issues.

**Following are just some recent testimonials of impacts to workers, properties, businesses and nonprofit arts organizations, visitors and residents:**

- Major arts and cultural organization: In the months of August and September, two of our employees were assaulted, there were two arsons, one burglary and all of the windows in one of our buildings were vandalized. The monthly cost incurred for additional security staffing at our buildings, above and beyond what we would traditionally have in "normal" times, is \$29,500. We are a nonprofit organization for which these costs are very material and detrimental to our sustainability.
- Property owner with retail and office space: Our retail tenant has had to hire both off-duty police and armed security and is still struggling with shoplifting. The manager today shared with me that safety is even a bigger concern as this morning they caught two people at different times smoking drugs in their store and that this is happening more regularly and staff is very uncomfortable. They have hired security but since

COVID they have had to turn to off-duty police and armed guards at a tremendous expense.

- Retailer along Third Avenue: Over the course of just two weeks in September our front windows were broken three different times as a result of gunshots and individuals throwing objects at our storefront.
- Property owner with multiple buildings downtown: We have four major office properties downtown. Employees now drive between locations that are only five blocks away because they're afraid to walk. Hearing concerns from tenants as well. Concerns over public safety are bigger than those about COVID.
- Arts and cultural venue: We've had multiple staff assaulted over the summer and have had to increase our security.
- Gallery owner: At this point I have no staff that will work on-site. In the last year I have vetted, hired, trained and on-boarded staff members who I thought were tough enough to be able to survive working in this climate, only to have each of them finally break and quit after an average period of six months due to safety issues.
- Resident: We've had multiple attempted and successful break-ins and have had to hire security to patrol at night, install more cameras and change the locking system on all the doors. I can't even count how many times we've had to deal with graffiti and human feces, bottles of urine, assaults and abuse. I've always tried to maintain a stance of 'treat people with respect' in order to avoid confrontation but that has failed to work here.
- Restaurant owner: We are on the brink of having to lock our doors because our staff can no longer take being on the front lines of mental health and harassment patrol. We have stayed open throughout the pandemic and feel proud of being able to serve the community who supports and loves Pioneer Square. But we are at a complete loss as to how to handle the relentless aggression that plays out at our business.
- Manager of a mixed-use property: The security guard at the building found an individual sleeping on the doorstep when she arrived at 7:30 a.m. He became aggressive and lunged toward her, but eventually did leave. At 8:05 a.m. the guard did a patrol around the building, and when she returned she found the same individual inside the building seated at the security desk. When she requested that he leave the property, he told her that he would kill her.
- Downtown ambassador: A man entered the park and began to slam tables and chairs, scaring guests. A park ambassador approached the man and asked if he could stop, explaining that he was scaring others in the park. The man yelled an expletive and walked away. Moments later, he reentered the park and made a death threat and gesture directly at the ambassador. The man jumped the railing into the roller skating rink at Westlake Park and began to walk toward another individual and then left the park.
- Downtown ambassador: A downtown ambassador was reporting to his shift in the Belltown neighborhood and in uniform when he was stabbed in the back walking off a

Metro bus. He was later taken to the hospital and was treated for his injuries and later released.

These issues have also been well chronicled in print and broadcast media in recent months:

- *“Repeat offender’s threats led to temporary closure of Seattle Starbucks store, police say”* (KOMO News)
- *“Weyerhaeuser cites crime in Pioneer Square for delay in reopening its Seattle headquarters”* (Seattle Times)
- *“‘Two truths’ to downtown Seattle living: Vibrant, diverse atmosphere butts up against drug use, street crime”* (Seattle Times)
- *“Pioneer Square stabbing victim says city isn’t doing enough to clean up Seattle streets”* (KIRO 7)
- *“Seattle police intervening in fewer mental health calls, data show”* (Crosscut)
- *“Man arrested after trying to kidnap 4-year-old walking with her parents downtown”* (KOMO News)
- *“Couple attacked, man killed while retrieving stolen items from Seattle homeless encampment”* (KIRO 7)

This is an unacceptable, dangerous and immoral public health and safety crisis and your urgent action is needed.

Specifically, we request the following:

1. That the City Council adopt the entirety of the Mayor’s public safety and housing investments in the proposed 2022 budget to increase police staffing, build new housing and shelter, expand the Health One program and increase the number of Community Service Officers.
2. That the City Council and County Council fully fund implementation of the recommendations of the 2019 High Barrier Work Group, which was jointly convened to address individuals with significant and repeated interactions with the criminal legal and emergency response systems.
3. That the City Council establish a safety and security grant program to offset the significant additional security-related expenses being incurred by small businesses, retailers and arts and cultural venues due to reduced SPD staffing and increased response times.

4. That the City Council and County Council jointly fund and establish an initiative to substantially reduce organized retail crime in downtown Seattle and eliminate established fencing enterprises by investing in additional investigative, prosecutorial and reporting resources. In developing such an initiative, local leaders should review the program recently announced in San Francisco.
5. That the City Council and County Council jointly support the development and funding for a downtown homelessness response strategy led by the Regional Homelessness Authority (RHA) to provide necessary emergency and permanent housing, outreach, treatment and ongoing care to the unsheltered population downtown.

These actions and investments are critical to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable in our community and addressing the safety and security issues impacting downtown Seattle. It is through these actions that we can collectively continue to support the recovery of small businesses, restaurants, arts and cultural organizations and enable employers to bring workers back to the office.

We urge your leadership and immediate attention to these issues.

Sincerely,

Bernie Griffin  
5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Theatre

Denise Moriguchi  
Uwajimaya

Ali Ghambari  
Cherry Street Coffee

Janice & Randy Blair  
Waterfront Landing Resident

Kristin Sawin  
Weyerhaeuser

Cary Clark  
Argosy Cruises

Roger Nyhus  
Nyhus Communications

Gina Hall  
Uplift Northwest

Amada Cruz  
Seattle Art Museum

Judy & Jon Runstad  
Wright Runstad

Jon Scholes  
Downtown Seattle  
Association

Chad Mackay  
Fire & Vine Hospitality /  
Fierro Tech

Valerie Heide Mudra  
Roya Crest Condominium  
Resident

Marques Warren  
Downtown Spirits

Ryan Smith  
Martin Smith Inc.

Jeffrey Roh  
IntuitiveX

Dan Feeney  
Hines

Tony Stewart  
Skanska

Allison Delong  
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Jack McCullough  
McCullough Hill Leary

Lou Bond  
Melbourne Tower

Ross Baker  
Virginia Mason Franciscan  
Health

John Schoettler  
Amazon

Stephen Koehler  
Koehler & Company

Ed Leigh  
Equity Residential

Matt Griffin  
Pine Street Group

Charles Riley  
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Tom Pozarycki  
WaFd Bank

Clise Properties

Ada Healey  
Vulcan, Inc

Aaron Blankers  
Washington Holdings

Simone Loban  
Simone David Barbershop

Pat Callahan  
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Brandon Gardiner  
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Daniel Ederer  
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Jane Lantzy Lewis  
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Dan Temkin  
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Carla Murray  
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Mari Horita  
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Megan Karch  
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Lisa Nitze  
Nitze-Stagen

Rick Yoder  
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Mark Houtchens  
Vance Corporation

A-P Hurd  
Skipstone

Quentin Kuhrau  
Unico

Gregory Johnson  
Wright Runstad & Company

Ken Lederman  
McCullough Hill Leary

Lauren Sato  
Ada Developers Academy

Lisa Howard  
Alliance for Pioneer Square

Jesse Spring  
Bad Bishop

Steve Horvath  
Belltown United

Barry Blanton  
Blanton Turner

Jack Noftsger

Angela Dunleavy

Liz Park

Allison+Partners

FareStart

Healthcare

Mark Carter  
Boise RV

Bart Carter  
Carter Agency

Father Paul Magnano  
Christ Our Hope Catholic  
Church

John Oppenheimer  
Columbia Hospitality

Kristopher Haynes  
Concerned Citizen

James Weaver  
Concierge Guild of Seattle

Bryan Zagers  
Coughlin Porter Lundeen

James Coughlin  
Coughlin Porter Lundeen

Terry R Lundeen  
Coughlin Porter Lundeen Inc

Weldon Ihrig  
Downtown Resident

Rik Koncel-Kedziorski  
Downtown Resident

John Thomas  
Downtown Resident

Gerard Flower  
Downtown resident

Lisa Robinson  
Downtown Resident

Ronald Swartz  
Downtown Resident

Elizabeth Dunn  
Dunn and Hobbes, LLC

Lisa Picard  
EQ Office

Kristen A Delegates  
Evergreen Health

Bryce Taylor  
GLY Construction

Kent Hendricks  
HB Management

Elta Ratliff  
Homeowner

Mallory Carter  
Hewitt

T. Ryan Durkan  
Hillis Clark Martin & Peterson

Jason Rosauer  
Kidder Mathews

Allison Shephard  
Holland Partner Group

Lori Carter  
iHeart

Bill Frame  
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Patricia Loveall  
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Karen Benoit  
Kidder Mathews

Dana Klein  
Kidder Mathews

Melissa Lukach  
Modernist Cuisine Gallery

Tyler Barth  
Kilroy Realty Corporation

Jordan Selig  
Martin Selig Real Estate

Bryce Tillett  
N/A

Diane Aboulafia  
Member Downtown Seattle  
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Rob Harwood  
Mossy Rob

Jesse Ottele  
Newmark

Deborah Bogin Cohen  
n/a

James Gengler  
N/A

John Wuest  
Northwest Commercial  
Mortgage

Jane Rakay Nelson  
Nelson & Nelson PLLC and  
resident

Leland Hagendorf  
Newmark Tower

Maria Royer  
Real Retail

Owen Young  
Newmark Tower home owner

Douglas Steding  
Northwest Resource Law

Adam Boyd  
Resident

Tija Petrovich  
President-Pioneer Square  
Residents' Council

Ann Vandehey  
Renaissance Seattle

Maureen Dykinga  
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Juergen Oswald  
Renaissance Seattle Hotel

Peter Giese  
resident

Russel Robertson  
Schwabe Williamson & Wyatt

Fiona Ronyai  
Rotary Club of Seattle

Kenneth Loen  
Resident

Bill Weise  
Silver Cloud Hotel - Seattle  
Stadium

Alexander Long  
Seleuss Chocolates

Evelyne Rozner  
SEABOARD Resident

Morgan Carter  
Teach for America

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Unico Properties

Dan Novack  
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Amory Gengler  
Vons

Charla Sullivan  
volunteer with Visit Seattle

Laurie Levine  
Visit Seattle

Tim Holt  
Washington Holdings



Peter Christian  
Washington Athletic Club

Madeline Herzog  
Vulcan Inc.

Michael Walzl

Ann Yoder  
Wild Ginger and The Triple  
Door

Gerald Irwin  
Westlake Center

Emily Brown

Mary McWilliams

Katie Nagle

Paul Pradel

Cris Gunter

Pete Dykinga

Jaan Lumi

CArden Johnston

Kathleen Ludwig

Jeff Ducharme

Marko Komlenovic

Valerie Rosman

Noah Strand

Stephen Hubbard

Johan Strand

London Strand

Deborah Bogin Cohen  
n/a

cc:

King County Executive Dow Constantine  
Mayor Jenny Durkan  
King County Prosecutor Dan Satterberg  
City Attorney Pete Holmes