



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
5th 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
Tishman Speyer

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
Lane Powell

Tom Pozarycki
WaFd Bank

Clise Properties

Ada Healey
Vulcan, Inc

Aaron Blankers
Washington Holdings

Simone Loban
Simone David Barbershop

Pat Callahan
Urban Renaissance Group

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
Marriott International

Mari Horita
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Collin P Madden
GEM Real Estate Partners

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Craig Schafer
Hotel Andra

Megan Karch
IslandWood

Charlie Bauman
Guntower Capital

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Lisa Nitze
Nitze-Stagen

Rick Yoder
Wild Ginger/Triple Door

Bill Weisfield
Elliott Bay Asset Solutions
LLC

Tiffini Connell
West Coast Commercial
Realty

Phillip Greany
Mortenson

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
Kidder Mathews

Kevin Bank
Kevin Bank Law Firm

Patricia Loveall
Kidder Mathews

Mark A Weed
MAIN STREET EQUITY
PARTNERS LLC

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
Resident

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

Jim Neal
Talon Private Capital

Lori Noto
Sugar Mountain Capital

Madhuri Kudaravalli
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Krishna Mogallapu
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Christopher Hoyt
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Randy Hodgins
University of Washington

Lynda Collie
Unico Properties

Dan Novack
Unico

Amory Gengler
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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