

NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS DISTRICT RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE THE IMPACTS OF VIOLENT CRIME, THEFT & UNADDRESSED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ISSUES

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Context

Seattle's commercial districts are the heart of our neighborhoods and the center of all public life in our city. However, with the uptick in crime and behavioral health issues across the city, neighborhood business districts are getting hit hard and need help from our city leaders. Below are a series of policy ideas that a coalition of commercial districts are working to bring forward as the city looks to support economic recovery and advance new strategies to keep our communities safe.

- **Dedicated Mayor's Office Attention to Street-Level Crime and Disorder**
- **Community Safety Hub Coordinators in Neighborhood Business Districts**
- **High-Visibility Foot-Beat Patrols (Trained/Unsworn) in Neighborhood Business Districts**
- **Broken Window & Damaged Storefront Fund**
- **Small Business Insurance Affordability and Access Study**
- **SPD Emphasis Patrols and 911 Response**

Dedicated Mayor's Office Attention to Street-Level Crime and Disorder

Seattle needs a sustainable system for interdepartmental issue resolution when it comes to the impacts of crime and behavioral health issues in neighborhood business districts. The most intractable problems faced by small businesses today are usually the place where multiple city departments intersect. Far too-often these problems are not able to be addressed in the normal course of City business. Sometimes issues escalate and result in an ad-hoc Interdepartmental Teams (IDTs) that is called upon to focus on complex issues in certain geographies. These IDTs are then blessed to work across department lines (or between agencies) to solve complex problems. What if this wasn't the exception to the rule, but the norm? The Mayor's Office should have a dedicated person who understands the complexity of the issues caused by repeated criminal activity or behavioral health issues and could play a key role in triaging complex situations and bringing people to the table to iron out an issue before it escalated to a Deputy Mayor's desk.

Community Safety Hub Coordinators in Commercial Districts

Commercial districts throughout the City are getting hammered by coordinated theft and behavioral health issues. The City needs a series of geographically-specific people who could connect with the community and help identify patterns and people who are having an outsized impact in a given neighborhood. They would coordinate with outreach services if the person is suffering from behavioral health issues, or they would build a dossier on prolific criminals to help the prosecution have the information they need to put an end to these unchecked burglaries. This team could even work out of Harrell's new public safety department or the Office of Emergency Management—an agency that is set-up to work across bureaucratic borders. These positions would be geographically assigned to just a few neighborhoods for each coordinator—Council Districts and police precincts are too large for one person to have the needed impact.

Currently, the burden of this coordination is being placed on the community. For example, the Ballard Alliance, has worked vigorously over the last year to coordinate with the district councilmember, SPD, the City Attorney's office as well as supportive service agencies to address the significant impacts of one prolific offender. Neighborhoods like the U District have had 25 small businesses report broken windows in the last few weeks alone--not to mention countless unreported in-business disturbances. Without a coordinated effort supported by the City, everyone in these geographic hot-spots feels left alone and hanging in the wind.

These Community Safety Hub Coordinator positions would liaise between SPD, City Attorney, KC Prosecutor and neighborhood commercial districts could help provide meaningful coordination between these departments and organizations. Here are the key reasons why this approach is needed:

- The Seattle Police Department currently has inadequate or no capacity to provide timely and intensive follow up on these issues.
- Neighborhood business districts do not have the resources or authority to work across departments and teams to coordinate this level of communication and shared focus. Communities are left to chase down incident reports and details from victims (e.g. video footage) and connect dots for high-impact individuals. This is important work and no one else is currently doing it.
- For years, the City Attorney's office has created an environment where they do not value the work of SPD and, consequently, the department sees little value in making needed arrests for fear that prosecution will never happen. An independent Hub Coordinator could work to build back this trust over time--both between city departments and with the community.

There's more work to be done, but a sustained, city-funded resource to track these issues and coordinate responses would provide neighborhood relief and provide capacity to address a larger number of high-impact individuals.

High-Visibility Foot-Beat Patrols (Trained/Unsworn) in Commercial Districts

We need commercial district foot patrols, but they don't have to be sworn officers with a badge. There are many examples to pull from, where staff remain in specific high-traffic geographies and over time are able to build relationships and trust with the community. Specifically, these teams of foot patrols could:

- Reestablish a walking foot patrol in neighborhood business districts.
- De-escalate mild to moderate crisis situations without the involvement of SPD.
- Bring-in the appropriate city/human services and expertise to problem-solve or support when necessary.
- Wear high-visibility jackets and hold a visible presence within neighborhood business districts.
- Develop relationships and build trust with neighborhood stakeholders while providing an unarmed safety solution.
- Spot trends and issues across the neighborhood that require further investigation and a coordinated response.
- Offer a great recruiting ground for SPD while also addressing the ongoing feeling of abandonment and chaos in neighborhood business districts.

Broken Window & Damaged Storefront Fund

With neighborhood business districts seeing major increases in vandalism, broken storefront windows and doors, as well as late-night smash/grab burglaries, the city should play a role in funding repairs. Recently, OED matched community dollars in Pioneer Square and the U District to give out dozens of window and facade repair grants. This is a major cost for businesses to absorb, on top of any stolen cash or merchandise. Grants in these districts have ranged from \$500 to \$5,000 and could have a serious impact as a program if continued.

Small Business Insurance Affordability and Access Study

In the last two years, with the significant uptick in crimes, insurance and affordability and availability issues have become a serious concern for businesses across Seattle. To date we have only anecdotal stories of the impacts these crimes have had on small businesses and their ability to get and maintain affordable insurance. But recently, we have come to learn that businesses routinely choose to not report many crimes because they are afraid of losing their insurance or that their rates will increase astronomically.

In SODO, a business that had ten companies to choose from in 2019, now has only three and the offered insurance is more expensive with much higher deductibles. In the U District, businesses have been told they do not qualify for insurance simply because they operate in the U District and it's not a safe area. This is unacceptable—access to insurance is a key part of running a business. The City should study this issue to better understand the impacts of our current public safety crisis on small business insurance affordability and access. A study could look at the insurance rates and availability across the City and test for geographic equity across neighborhoods and any disproportionate burdens being placed on small businesses, specifically businesses owned by women and people of color.

SPD Emphasis Patrols & 911 Response

While the strategies outlined above can provide an effective, lower-cost, faster-to-scale strategy that will enhance public safety in neighborhood business districts, by no means do they completely remove the dire need for increased support from the Seattle Police Department.

We need to be targeted in how we deploy our police force to ensure they can promptly arrive on the scene when there is a major emergency. There is also a role for the police to help deter crime from happening in the first place. Using the on-the-ground data generated by the Community Safety Hub Coordinators and Foot Beat Safety Teams outlined above, SPD could strategically place emphasis patrols in identified target areas to swiftly interrupt negative activity and break the pattern. There are very few mechanisms available currently to disrupt criminal patterns and the combined approach of SPD emphasis coupled with these new resources will make a significant, positive impact for our neighborhood business districts. This fact cannot be overstated - interrupting criminal activity before it happens achieves the following:

- Reduces the number of arrests and incarcerations
- Limits SPD involvement on lower-level crimes (e.g. break-in, property damage etc)
- Reduces the strain on the criminal justice system