

Addressing Street Disorder to Preserve Jobs and Improve Our Quality of Life

Excerpts from Correspondence Received by City Council Members

“I would like to address the issue of panhandling in the streets of Seattle....As a downtown working mother of both a newborn baby and sixteen year old daughter, I have many concerns about my safety. As a female worker, I try to dodge panhandlers at every intersection while I make my way to our different locations. I avoid those panhandlers I know to be aggressive, vocal and intimidating while also being compassionate to the plight of some of the Real Changes sellers whom I respect for their hard work and devotion....It seems to me that over the years panhandling has become more aggressive, personal and intimidating in Seattle. I simply avoid going places if I know that I have to walk by someone who will treat me aggressively and rudely.”

-Devony Boyle, Rainier Beach Resident

“. . . I am taking the time to let you know the importance of my take on public safety in Seattle. (Not getting any better, but largely getting worse.) Being in the hospitality industry, I have seen deterioration of our streets, [in]filtrated with intimidating characters, blatant drug use, and solicitation. . . . I deal with hundreds of guests and visitors to our city every day. I . . . listen to what they are saying about what’s going on in our streets, both day and night. They tell me what a beautiful city Seattle truly is . . . with one exception, ‘the street people.’ The visitors do not feel comfortable walking from their hotels, to the market, or catching the bus without being approached by many different panhandlers and street people along their route.”

-Louise Smith, Downtown Hotel Employee

“I have lived in Seattle for 11 years and never have I felt more unsafe living and working in this city as I do today. I work downtown and my 18 month old daughter attends a childcare downtown....Yesterday (Jan. 26 at 10 a.m. on 1st Ave. between Spring and Madison) I was chased and harassed after I said I did not have any spare change....I am uncomfortable taking my family downtown day or night and find the situation getting worse and worse - year after year.”

-Cara Egan, West Seattle Resident

“I live and work downtown. I'm a resident in the Watermark Condominium building on 1st & Spring Street, and work on 6th & Pine. Everyday I get asked for money during this 10 block walk. It happens both from the homeless, or non-profit organization such as Save the

Children, Greenpeace, or SPCA. All are rather annoying and I've learned to deal with it living downtown....I've witnessed countless times a male worker prey on an attractive female and give her a hard time. They sometimes walk half a block step for step with you until you have to be plain rude....Just over the weekend my girlfriend was aggressively panhandled in the pay parking lot behind Watermark around Western & Spring. It was quite late at night and luckily I was in the area walking her dogs. There have been several times where a person has walked up to her car on Western when she's been parking and aggressively hounded her for money.”

-Brian Ellis, Downtown Resident

“This incident occurred in the Chinatown ID yesterday 01/25/10. The gentleman, early 40's, is from out of state and was trying to take his 76 year old mother out to dinner. They were walking to a restaurant in the 600 blk of S.Weller St when their way was blocked by the intoxicated man who panhandled them for money. The couple attempted to step around him but he blocked their attempts to get past him several times still asking for money. The mother/son succeed[ed] in getting around the person, but he started following them asking for money even though the victims told him no. They were followed for several blocks, the man continuing to ask for money even though they declined.

“This is a specific example of incidents that too often happen in the CID when families/visitors try to go out for dinner. While this is clearly aggressive, it is a graphic representation of the impact panhandling has on visitors, residents and business owners.”

-Maribeth Ellis, Executive Director, Chinatown International District Business Improvement Area

“I lived at Harbor Steps (1st & University) for the past two years, before moving a couple of weeks ago to the Denny Triangle. The move made me realize just how much aggressive panhandling, non-aggressive panhandling, and petition/donation solicitations (both aggressive and non-aggressive) I was subjected to at Harbor Steps.

“One very rude and profane panhandler chose to sit out in front of the closed clothing store on 1st just north of University. Walking by or entering or exiting a taxi, this fellow would ask for money, and when politely declined would let fly with a long string of insulting profanity. Once, accompanied by a middle aged woman and my 20 year old daughter, he made specific derogatory remarks to each of them.”

-Brian Scott, Former Downtown Resident

“[A]s a business operator in the downtown area, aggressive panhandling is the most problematic issue that I deal with on a daily basis....Panhandling in Seattle is no longer the benign activity that it once was. Today, panhandlers no longer confine themselves to anonymous spots on the sidewalk between businesses or underneath overpasses where commuters and

passersby may come across them. Now they position themselves right next to the front doors of the restaurants and businesses in the downtown area in order to take advantage of the more captive audience entering and exiting the building. Their attitude, when asked to step away from the flow of business traffic or that towards those that do not give them what they ask for, is one of entitlement and belligerence that too often escalates to verbal harassment or abuse....As someone that operates five restaurants downtown, this poses a burdensome challenge to my efforts to create a welcoming, tourist and family-friendly atmosphere of commerce in our city.”

-Alan Booth, Restaurant General Manager

“I write this email as a patron and long time supporter of Pike Place Market that grows weary of the continued overt drug activity and panhandling across from and in Victor Steinbrueck Park....The past year there has been overt violent activity across from the VS Park in front of the restaurants and shops that line the Park. Not only is this violent behavior scary, threatening and disconcerting-- it crushes business for the shops, restaurants and Pike Place Merchants both inside and outside the PPM.”

-Alexis Berry, Seattle Resident

“I would like to briefly share an encounter that I had just yesterday in Bell Town with a pan handler. My family lives at the Vine Condo Building on Western and Vine. While walking home from getting coffee on 1st avenue at Starbucks we had a pan handler demand \$20 dollars from my wife and I. We were walking our puppy with us and continued to walk without addressing the gentlemen. At this time he turned following us and reached to grab at our puppy for no explainable reason. I had my wife walk ahead with the dog while I pulled out my cell phone and told the gentlemen that I had called the police. He continued to walk behind me and used some derogatory language in an aggressive manner. This incident was witnessed by some patrons that were just coming out of another coffee/pastry restraint (Macrina Bakery). These patrons were clearly frightened and did not want to walk out onto the sidewalk while he was there. I have noticed the pan handlers getting more brazen and aggressive over the past 6 months.”

-Matt Brandenburg, Belltown Resident

“As a downtown business owner, I cannot stress enough the need to address the increasingly aggressive panhandling taking place on Third Avenue, which is now trickling onto Fourth.

“This morning while walking to work in front of Macy's on Fourth, I was essentially stopped by an aggressive panhandler named ‘Justin’ on a bike. When I declined to give him cash, he said there were ways I could help him other than money. I told him, ‘No thank you.’ He followed me closely (within inches) for a block, continuing to harass me along the way.

“He finally asked if I were interested in helping him and his daughter with a bus ticket. When I said, no, he said, ‘This is the way bad things happen to people,’ then rode off. In part, this is the reason we're moving our office from our current location on Fourth between Pike and Pine to a safer part of downtown. We've seen countless drug dealings, even shootings at Third and Pine, and we're bombarded daily with aggressive panhandlers.”

-Roger Nyhus, Downtown Business Owner

“I have lived/worked in downtown Seattle for about 20 years. While there have always been panhandlers, they never really bothered me until the last four years. I think I speak for a lot of people on this issue. I know friends, co-workers and clients (usually from out of town) who are scared to park their car or walk around certain places downtown even during the daytime....[T]he panhandlers never made an impact on me until the past few years. They used to ask for spare change and when you said, ‘Sorry, don’t have any,’ or ignored them, they left you alone. It was never an issue. The tide has now turned.”

-Arie Stewart, Downtown Restaurant Manager

“I reside just a few steps from Pike Place Market....I witness on a daily basis the same individuals consuming and dealing drugs, harassing residents and tourists, urinating and defecating on public and private property, vandalizing (spray paint, etc.) and panhandling. These activities are inextricably tied together. I can sit on my balcony and watch the same characters panhandle from the tourists who routinely give them money to "make them go away". This is done in the middle of Virginia St., and if residents (who are less likely to give money, because we understand the problem it maintains) refuse to give them money or ignore them, oftentimes the panhandlers shout obscenities or worse. I have been spat upon for ignoring one such request, right outside my doorstep....Though there are many more serious crimes being carried out by these people, the one thing they do conspicuously and continuously is ask for money, using means of intimidation and harassment.”

-Calvin Tang, Downtown Resident

“I...have lived and worked in downtown Seattle for over ten years now. I have dealt with homeless and panhandling most of those days. I have had to deal with a rape incident in the pike street market, seen prostitution/drug abuse/drug deals outside my window and, chased panhandlers out of a restaurant I was working at, people defecating on our restaurant windows while people were eating, panhandlers using our restroom then destroying it. At many instances I would tell a panhandler that I don't have cash and they begin to cuss you out because of it. It has become a large issue.”

-Ron Anderson, Downtown Chef

“We have been in the Chinatown / ID serving the Seattle community for over 25 years....The Chinatown / ID is an important neighborhood in the City of Seattle that offers not

only cultural diversity, but also it is rich with history. These unique characteristics of the Chinatown / ID are vital to the City's efforts to make Seattle a major metropolitan center and global city as it helps attract a more diverse population, work force, and businesses to Seattle.

“Unfortunately, we have seen the level of panhandling and crime increase dramatically over the last several years such that it has significantly deteriorated the level of safety, cleanliness and overall business activity in the neighborhood. Despite our best efforts to keep the neighborhood clean and safe, our buildings and parking meters are constantly littered with graffiti. We have witnessed panhandlers harass our customers as they get out of their cars, approach our doors, or just walking along the streets exploring the CID. In the evening, we have witnessed increased drug trafficking on multiple street corners.

“The community we once had that offered an inviting place for Seattleites to come experience and learn more about Asian culture has now become threatening to visitors and tourists. We have heard from our long-time customers and tourists that they feel unsafe walking to their cars at night.”

**-Bob Ho, Chinatown International District
Businessman**

“I am writing to urge you to support stronger restrictions on panhandling in our community. The prevalence of panhandling in Seattle has increased in the last year, creating an unwelcoming environment in our neighborhood business districts.

“I believe we have an obligation as a community to help those in need, however I don't believe we have an obligation to allow individuals to solicit money from others near ATM's, bus stops or while they are getting in or out of their car. It is time to impose common sense restrictions on these activities just as other cities in Washington and cities across the country have done.

“Panhandling is one of the many activities that define the city's culture and reputation. It not only affects residents and tourist but directly impacts Seattle businesses' ability to recruit and retain the best employees and to stay competitive.

“Please do not minimize the effect that this behavior has on our personal safety, our enjoyment of our city, our ability to attract tourists, and our ability to remain a viable city for businesses to thrive.”

-Carla Murray, Downtown Hotel Employee