



Seattle City Council

Seattle Safer Streets Initiative Update Significant Steps to Address Street Crime and Social Disorder

In August 2008, in response to frequent complaints from throughout the city, Councilmember Burgess and colleagues proposed a series of measures to address street crime and social disorder. This paper provides an update and steps taken so far.

Prevention and Treatment Steps

1. Create joint police-mental health professional response teams designed to respond to incidents where alternatives to jail or hospitalization are appropriate, providing rapid support to individuals in crisis while freeing neighborhood patrol officers to maintain basic police services. Establish as a two-year pilot project funded with money from the King County Mental Illness and Drug Dependency (MIDD) Fund.
Status Update: Total funds of \$500,000 pilot approved by the King County Council on October 6, 2008; included in 2009 King County Budget, approved by the King County Council on November 24, 2008.
2. Establish safe housing for children involved in prostitution, including transition and support services. A city-funded study¹ of child prostitution in Seattle found that as many as 300-500 children may be involved in street prostitution in the Seattle area. The study found a severe lack of transition housing for children who want to escape the coercive violence and abuse of prostitution. Nearly all of the children involved in prostitution have chemical dependency and mental health issues requiring extensive treatment and secure housing to escape their pimps. In addition, there is evidence that some child prostitution is gang-organized and managed. Establish as a two-year pilot project for housing and wraparound services funded with money from the King County Mental Illness and Drug Dependency (MIDD) Fund.
Status Update: Total funds of \$500,000 pilot approved by the King County Council on October 6, 2008; included in 2009 King County Budget, approved by the King County Council on November 24, 2008.
3. Support funding for a Crisis Diversion Center through the King County Mental Illness and Drug Dependency (MIDD) Fund. This Center is designed as an alternative for individuals in crisis where jail booking or hospital admission is not required or appropriate.
Status Update: Funding of \$4,500,000 for 2009 included in 2009 King County Budget, approved by the King County Council on November 24, 2008.

¹ See "Who Pays the Price? Assessment of Youth Involved in Prostitution in Seattle," by Debra Boyer, PhD, June 2008. Available at http://www.seattle.gov/humanservices/domesticviolence/Report_YouthInProstitution.pdf.

4. Add two full-time support workers to the Seattle Municipal Court to enhance monitoring and counseling for defendants placed in diversion treatment programs. Large numbers of criminal defendants in Municipal Court have mental illness or chemical dependency issues and expansion of services designed to avoid jail by focusing on long-term solutions is highly desired.
Status Update: These positions were not added to the 2009-2010 Court budgets; however, an evaluation of Municipal Court operations is underway, and should be completed by late summer, 2009.

Policing and Criminal Justice Steps

5. Maintain the city's commitment to hire additional police officers. In 2007, the Council and Mayor agreed to a plan to increase the size of the police department by 105 net officers. Various studies, and the experience of other cities, show that the presence of police officers deters street crime and social disorder. Cops matter! Full implementation of the Neighborhood Policing Plan requires the hiring of more officers. Even as the city faces budget cuts because of the slow economy, Seattle must remain committed to increasing the number of officers available for patrol duties in our neighborhoods.
Status Update: In progress. 2008 hiring goals were met, and we are on schedule to reach our 2009 hiring goals. The Council approved the funds necessary for 2009 on November 24, 2009.
6. Encourage more assertive policing to deal with street crime and social disorder. This means additional emphasis patrols—officer presence—in areas with recurring problems. Our police officers must know that city officials support—and expect—proactive and assertive response to these problems. There is no justification for allowing open-air drug markets, street prostitution, graffiti, aggressive panhandling and other social disorder to continue on our streets. Assertive and proactive policing to address street crime and its attendant social disorder improves quality of life, reduces fear, and builds community cohesion.
Status Update: Council action pending.
7. Re-establish one police detective position dedicated to the tracking and analysis of graffiti crime as previously existed in the police department. Equip park and public utilities staff with tools to photograph and document graffiti removal for evidentiary purposes. Graffiti is often gang-related and sometimes used as “turf marking” or to intimidate. Identification and prosecution of graffiti perpetrators is possible. In fact, Seattle had good success in this area when the graffiti detective position was staffed.
Status Update: This position was not funded for 2009-2010. Evaluation of how best to respond to the continuing graffiti problem continues.
8. Return School Resource Officers to select public high schools and middle schools in Seattle. The presence of uniformed police officers in schools has proven to be a positive and well-accepted practice in Seattle and many other cities in the United States. Seattle withdrew officers from schools several years ago, but the recent increase in gang recruiting and gang-related violence suggests we should return the officers. The school superintendent fully supports this recommendation.
Status Update: Four middle school officers have been assigned as part of the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative. Deployment of five high school resource officers is pending agreement with the school district on cost allocation.

9. Re-establish the city prosecutor's High Impact Offender Targeting Program by adding one full-time position to prosecute individuals in the city with more than ten prior misdemeanor or felony convictions. A similar program exists in the prosecutor's office for frequent domestic violence perpetrators. These efforts should be expanded to target other individuals who are engaged in continuing and destructive criminal behavior.

Status Update: Funded in 2009 City Budget and approved by Council on November 24, 2008.

Legislative Steps

10. Increase financial penalties for patronizing a prostitute and reinstitute peer-support and counseling groups for women involved in prostitution. The current maximum penalty for patronizing a prostitute is \$500 in Seattle Municipal Court. This penalty should be raised to \$1,000.

Status Update: Council Bill 116324, passed unanimously on September 22, 2008. Council Bill 116472 was passed on March 9, 2009 to support peer-counseling transition groups to encourage individuals to leave prostitution.

11. Enact new legislation that imposes civil and criminal penalties when businesses, property owners or property managers knowingly allow criminal behavior to occur and fail to take steps to stop it. Also, add a regulatory section to the city's business license that gives the city the authority to revoke a license when a licensee knowingly allows criminal behavior to occur on their premises and fails to take steps to stop it. These "good neighbor" provisions will provide added tools to control and eliminate chronic trouble spots that are the focus of continuing crime and social disorder.

Status Update: Legislation will be introduced to Council in April 2009.

12. Expand the downtown Metropolitan Improvement District (MID) north to include select portions of the Belltown neighborhood. The MID has been tremendously successful in creating cleaner and safer streets and alleyways in the downtown core. Expansion of the MID into Belltown will bring those same services to the north of downtown.

Status Update: Legislation is being developed for consideration by Council.

For further information, or to comment on the **Safer Streets Initiative**, contact the office of Councilmember Tim Burgess at 206-684-8806. Or write tim.burgess@seattle.gov.

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