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July 31, 2013

Mayor Michael McGinn
P.O. Box 94749
Seattle, WA 98124-4749

Seattle City Council
P.O. Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Dear Mayor McGinn and Seattle City Councilmembers,

We are deeply troubled by the numerous violent incidents that have occurred over the past several weeks in the core of Downtown Seattle. The frequency of this type of street violence in Downtown's most visible and traveled public spaces demands immediate new enforcement resources and strategies from the City.

The level of intimidation, physical assault and violence, particularly in and near Westlake Park, has been growing in a very visible way. Members of Friends of Westlake Park and staff from the Metropolitan Improvement District (MID) recently met with the Seattle Police Department and the Parks Department to communicate concerns over the increase in violence and intimidation in and adjacent to the park. The incidents described below are just a sample of some of the more troubling activities that have recently occurred in the Downtown core and within Westlake Park.

- Last Sunday evening on Pike Street, a man walked down the street and used a crow bar to smash the windows of cars and businesses.**

A 44-year-old man is in jail for investigation of malicious mischief after reportedly going on a rampage with a red metal bar Sunday night in downtown Seattle. One witness captured some of the damage and a glimpse of the man, dressed all in black, on video. The man allegedly inflicted \$5,000 in damage to nine cars and two business windows in the Pike/Pine corridor, according to Seattle police reports. (SeattlePI.com, July 30, 2013)
- Only days ago in Westlake Park, a group of youths savagely attacked an employee of a nearby building.**

On Thursday, July 18th a concierge for the Seaboard building at 4th and Pike was viciously beaten by a large group of individuals who have taken over portions of Westlake Park. The violent incident was witnessed and reported by the Park Concierge on duty at the time. According to his report, the Seaboard employee was punched and kicked repeatedly by approximately ten men and women, who also attempted to steal his wallet. This incident occurred during daylight hours at approximately 7:00 p.m. (As reported by a Westlake Park concierge)



- **In late June, on a Sunday afternoon at around 5:00 p.m., a group of individuals viciously beat a bicyclist at 4th and Pine adjacent to Westlake Park. The incident was reported by KOMO News.**

The victim later told officers the group started kicking him in the head and ribs until he lost consciousness.

A handful of Good Samaritans intervened and broke up the attack, according to the report. One of the attackers reportedly tried to steal the victim's bike, but a passerby stopped him and returned the bike to the victim. After the attack, the victim was shaken and upset but told witnesses he didn't need any help and didn't want to call 911. He ended up riding the 15 blocks home on his now-damaged bicycle. Once home, the victim realized his iPhone was missing and thinks one of the attackers took it while he was knocked out. He also started to feel excessive pain in his head and had friends drive him to the hospital, where he was found to be suffering from a possible concussion, lumps on his head, scratches all over his legs and body and a sore rib cage. (Komonews.com, June 20th, 2013)

- **On his way to a morning meeting in June, the president of the Seattle Hotel Association was assaulted at Third and Pike.**

Watkins said the suspect was angry, swearing loudly and had just struck another pedestrian in the neck before crossing the street and punching Watkins in the back and shoving him into the street. (Seattle Times, June 28, 2013)

- **At Westlake Park in the middle of the day last month, a woman was badly beaten by a group of young women.**

A woman was badly beaten and kicked by three other young women in the middle of the afternoon Tuesday at Westlake Park. Three suspects were detained by police, but witnesses weren't able to make a positive identification and the suspects were released. (Seattle Times, June 28, 2013)

A video of the attack was posted to KiroTV.com :

<http://www.kirotv.com/videos/news/warning-graphic-woman-kicked-beaten-at-westlake/v5KmC/>

- **In May, a group of individuals in their teens and twenties attacked a man in the middle of a crosswalk in front of Pike Place Market.**

Police say the 16-second attack started when a 19-year-old man punched the victim and knocked him to the ground. He then stomped on the victim's face. A 20-year-old man joined in, kicking the victim in the head multiple times, police said. (Komonews.com, May 21, 2013)

- **In June, a fight involving knives and skateboards broke out near Westlake Park at approximately 5:00 p.m. The fight continued for several blocks before an arrest was made at the entrance to Pacific Place.**

Approximately one dozen individuals who regularly occupy Westlake Park were engaged in a fight that traveled east down Pine Street in front of Nordstrom. One individual pulled out a knife while others held large skateboards over their heads in a threatening manner. Several weeks later the individual who drew the knife in the earlier fight was witnessed punching another male in the face in Westlake Park during the lunch hour. (As witnessed by a DSA staff member).

- **On the evening of July 15th, a Downtown employee was attacked and brutally beaten at 7th and Pike.**

The man was walking down the street with a brief case when witnesses say a man in his 20s started beating him for no reason. The victim ended up on the ground. The attack was witnessed by many tourists including Dean Butterfield of San Diego. "The repetition of the blows was just lightning speed. You could hear it all the way over here," said Butterfield standing across the street. (KIRO TV, July 16, 2013).

These violent acts all occurred within the heart of Downtown, the most visited area of our City. They occurred mostly during the day and early evening when the sidewalks are full of Downtown families, visitors, workers and residents. A number of them occurred adjacent to or within Westlake Park. This type of violence is not limited to the Downtown core. Neighborhoods throughout Downtown continue to be impacted by illegal activity.

This level of violence in Downtown is unacceptable. It demands immediate attention and action by the City.

We have patiently participated in the Center City Roundtable effort convened by the Mayor's office last year. We support this process and this comprehensive approach to addressing chronic issues of street disorder in Downtown. We applaud this effort for bringing diverse stakeholders to the table with key City and County government leadership and strongly support the Downtown policing strategies put in place by Captain James Dermody.

We look forward to the positive outcomes the Roundtable process will bring, but in the meantime this increasing pattern of violence in Downtown must be addressed immediately. Downtown needs new policing strategies and additional resources for foot and bike patrol officers and Park Rangers.

Specifically, we recommend the City take the following actions:

- ✓ **Institute all-day presence of Park Rangers in the most visited Downtown parks. Uniformly and consistently enforce all park rules.**

The current Park Ranger program as structured and resourced is ineffective. We participated in the Downtown Parks Renaissance Task Force in 2006 that recommended creation of the program and believe it has not achieved the goals that were set out when it was first established because it is not sufficiently resourced. There are too few rangers and they are spread across too many Downtown Parks to have a meaningful impact on any of them. We have regularly communicated this to the Parks Department and City Council, and met with Department leadership as recently as last month.

Downtown has limited park space and these spaces should feel welcoming, safe and inviting throughout the day and evening for everyone. Today, they do not. They are occupied by individuals who do not hesitate to engage in violent and menacing acts throughout the day and evening. While we support park programming and events (i.e. concerts, food trucks, buskers, etc.), programming alone is not a comprehensive strategy to improve the safety of Downtown parks. In fact, violence has unfortunately occurred during some of these programmed events, including a fight that interrupted "Dancing 'till Dusk" in Westlake Park last summer. The recent violence makes us extremely concerned for programs that we produce in the summer and during the holiday season.

As you are aware, we partnered with the Parks Department this year to install a children's play space at Westlake Park and raised \$140,000 in private donations and secured in-kind design and construction services from Mithun and Lease Crutcher Lewis for the project.

The play space has been well-used and serves as an important symbol to Downtown's attractiveness as a great place for families with children to live and visit.

Regular violence surrounding this play space will erode our ability to successfully raise funds and partner with the City on future investments in new and existing Downtown parks.

The 2006 Downtown Parks Renaissance Task Force report recommended funding a supplemental contract for police services between the Parks Department and SPD to provide sworn law enforcement backup to Rangers when necessary.

The Rangers would patrol the parks on foot and bicycle, and would notify SPD through radio contact of illegal activities. Supplemental SPD support for the parks would be provided through a contract between Parks and SPD, who would work together to determine the areas of SPD emphasis in the downtown parks. (Downtown Parks Task Force Recommendations, 2006)

To our knowledge, the resources to implement this supplemental contract for SPD services have not been provided.

We urge you to increase the number of rangers on staff to achieve full-time coverage in Westlake, Occidental and Victor Steinbrueck Park and to establish and fund a contract between Parks and SPD for supplemental police services dedicated to Downtown parks. Enforcement of illegal and violent activity in our urban parks should be immediate, consistent and involve law enforcement when necessary. This standard has not been achieved with the existing resources. Additional resources for enforcement are critical. There are great urban parks around the country that have robust security and management strategies in place that create thriving and safe public spaces for all. Our Downtown parks should be on this list.

✓ **Significantly and immediately increase the number of foot and bike patrols in Downtown's most visited areas.**

The level of foot and bike patrols in Downtown today is insufficient to deter the types of violent acts that have occurred over the last several months. Today, there are fewer sworn Seattle police officers per 1,000 Seattle residents than there were 13 years ago. In the year 2000, there were 2.24 officers for every 1,000 Seattle residents compared to just 2.07 for every 1,000 residents today. Since 2010, the number of officers assigned to 911 response and patrol functions has declined significantly.

In the last three years, the number of officers assigned to 911 response has declined by 52, or 9%. The total number of officers and sergeants assigned to the precincts has declined by 47, or 6%. (SPD Staffing Report, May 2013)

The violent incidents detailed above occurred during the day and early evening, many in broad daylight, despite recent implementation of hot spot policing tactics. Clearly the perpetrators are not deterred by the current SPD staffing levels or strategies from engaging in brutal and conspicuous violence in the heart of Downtown.

While we understand that 911 calls for service in the West Precinct are down for January-May, 2013 compared to January-May, 2012, the current levels of crime remain unacceptable and additional resources and strategies are necessary.

A decline in 911 calls in and of itself is not a measure of a healthy, safe and welcoming neighborhood that we embrace.

Additional officers on foot and bike should be deployed immediately and remain in place indefinitely to achieve consistent presence at key locations in Downtown. Many of the violent incidents cited above have occurred in the early evening hours, and so police presence should particularly focus on this time period and be sustained.

The number of Downtown employees, visitors and residents has increased dramatically over the last decade, placing greater demand and importance on the provision of public safety services.

Population citywide has also increased over this period. Today, there are markedly more people spending time in Downtown and whose safety and quality of life have the potential to be negatively impacted by street disorder and violence.

The economic and population growth in Downtown also means there are additional revenues to the City. We urge you to invest a portion of this additional revenue in new enforcement resources to maintain a clean, safe and welcoming Downtown for all. Existing foot and bike patrol resources are insufficient to address these issues. Moving existing resources from one area of Downtown to another in response to increases in criminal activity is not a sustainable strategy and has been ineffective. New officers are required to make a meaningful impact.

As you are aware, private property owners in Downtown have recently agreed to support renewal and expansion of the Metropolitan Improvement District (MID). The nearly \$8 million annual business improvement district includes a doubling of the contract for off-duty SPD officers (\$300,000), funding for a mental health professional (in partnership with the Union Gospel Mission), expanded cleaning services and new services in Belltown and additional portions of Pioneer Square. These service additions and new partnerships are helping, but alone they are not enough.

We call on the Mayor and City Council to take immediate action to stop the current level of intimidation and violence we are experiencing throughout Downtown. To reclaim our neighborhood and our public places, it will take more Parks Rangers, more police officers and strategies that will engage people and groups at the first signs of intimidation, fights and violence. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Kate Joncas
Downtown Seattle Association

Blake Nordstrom
Nordstrom

Judith Runstad
Foster Pepper

Jack McCullough
McCullough Hill Leary

Matt Griffin
Pine Street Group

Bill Lewis
Lease Crutcher Lewis

Pat Callahan
Urban Renaissance Group

Paul Lambros
Plymouth Housing

Linda Mitchell
Downtown Residents Council

Jared Smith
Parsons Brinkerhoff

Mark Barbieri
Washington Holdings

Beth Takekawa
Wing Luke Asian Art Museum

Cary Clark
Argosy Cruises & Tillicum
Village

Rita Brogan
PRR

Joe McWilliams
DSA Board Member

Jane Lewis
Pine Street Group

Jane Nelson
Kantor Taylor Nelson Evatt &
Decina PC

Richard Stevenson
Clise Properties

Mark Houtchens
Vance Corporation

Leslie Martin
Nordstrom

Patrick Gordon
ZGF Architects

H. Martin Smith III (Mickey)
Martin Smith Inc.

Bill Weisfield
Elliott Bay Asset Solutions, LLC

Craig Schafer
Hotel Ändra

Gerry Johnson
Pacifica Law Group

Kathy O'Kelley
Hines

Natalie Price
Frause

Dan Greenshields
Capitol One

Kathryn Williams
HomeStreet Bank

Paul Ishii
Mayflower Park Hotel

Paul T. Killpatrick, Ph.D.
Seattle Central Community
College

James Hendricks, Ph.D.
Seattle Children's Research
Institute

Stewart Parker
Infectious Disease Research
Institute

Charles Riley
Lane Powell

Jon D. Magnusson
Magnusson Klemencic
Associates

Carla Murray
Starwood Hotels

Don Wise
Metzler North America

John Hanley
David Wright Tremaine

Jim Neal
Talon

Denny Onslow
O&S Partners

David Douglass
Tatum