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OCT 21 2009

Councilmember Tim Burgess  
Seattle City Council

2009 Downtown Residents Survey

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Objective

Evaluate attitudes and perceptions of Downtown Seattle residents on issues involving neighborhood cleanliness and safety.

### Methodology

This study consists of one-on-one phone interviews, employing a custom-designed survey. An independent research provider, EMC Research, conducted the interviews from August 7-24, 2009. This is the fourth wave of the study comparing residents' perceptions of cleanliness and safety. This study examines residents' levels of concern for ten related issues and their perceptions of how well "Downtown Seattle" is addressing these issues.

### Target Sample

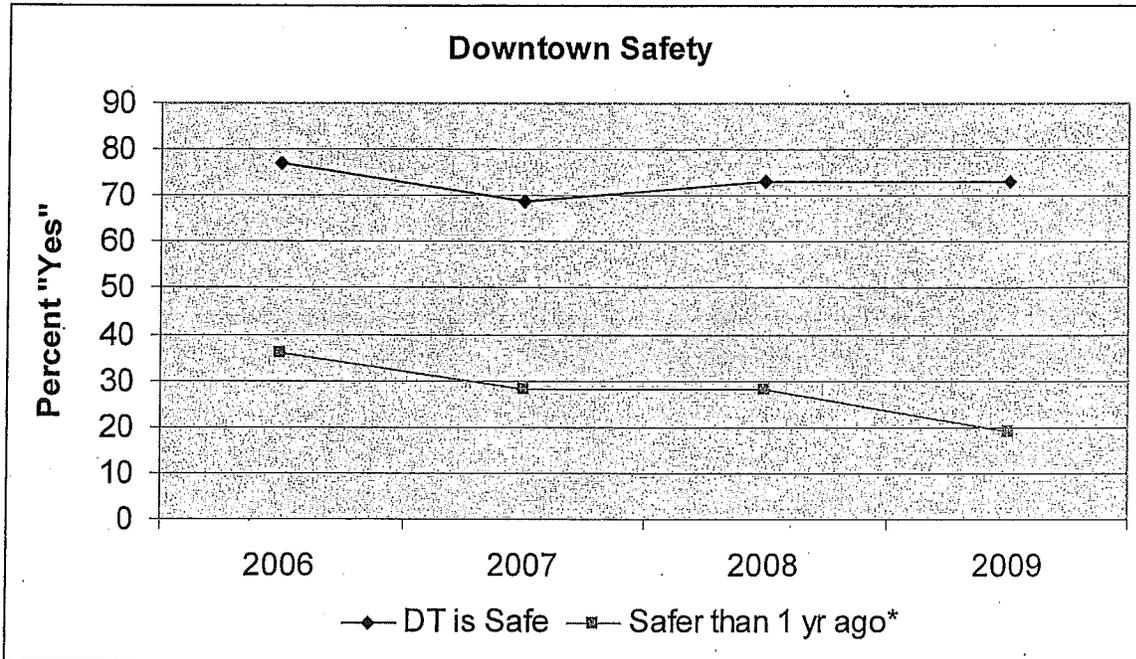
600 interviews were conducted among a representative sample of Downtown Seattle residents: They were looked at in the aggregate and segmented into four neighborhood groupings:

- Belltown (largest percent of residents and survey respondents)
- Pioneer Square/International District
- Central Business District/Waterfront/West Edge ("CBD")
- South Lake Union/Denny Triangle

## Findings

### Safety

- Approximately three-fourths (73%) of respondents believe downtown is a safe place to live. This has remained relatively flat for the four years we have tracked this. The total has ranged from 69% in 2007 to 77% in 2006. The graph on the next page shows residents' responses to the question "Is Downtown Seattle a safe place to live?" for all four years.
  - In 2009, levels decreased in perceptions of safety in the CBD (80% to 73%). However, this was after a 20-percentage point increase between 2007 and 2008 (60% to 80%).



**Figure 1. Is Downtown Seattle a safe place to live? (All Respondents)**

While overall perceptions of safety have remained stable, when asked if downtown is a safer place to live than it was a year ago\*, only about 1 out of 5 (19%) residents said that it was. In 2007 and 2008, about a quarter (28% in both years) said so.

- Of those who said Downtown is not safe, about 4 out of 10 (41%) said it was less safe than a year ago.
- A majority (59%) said that there was no difference in safety between the current year and a year ago. Of these, about 8 out of 10 (79%) said that Downtown is safe.

#### Safety – Day vs. Night

- Almost all residents continue to feel safe walking downtown during the day (over 90% in all four years of the study). Perceptions of nighttime safety also remain stable (50% felt safe walking at night in both 2008 and 2009 versus 46% in 2007). However, perception of nighttime safety decreased over the four years of the study from a high of 60% in 2006.

\* Note that the wording of this question changed in 2009:

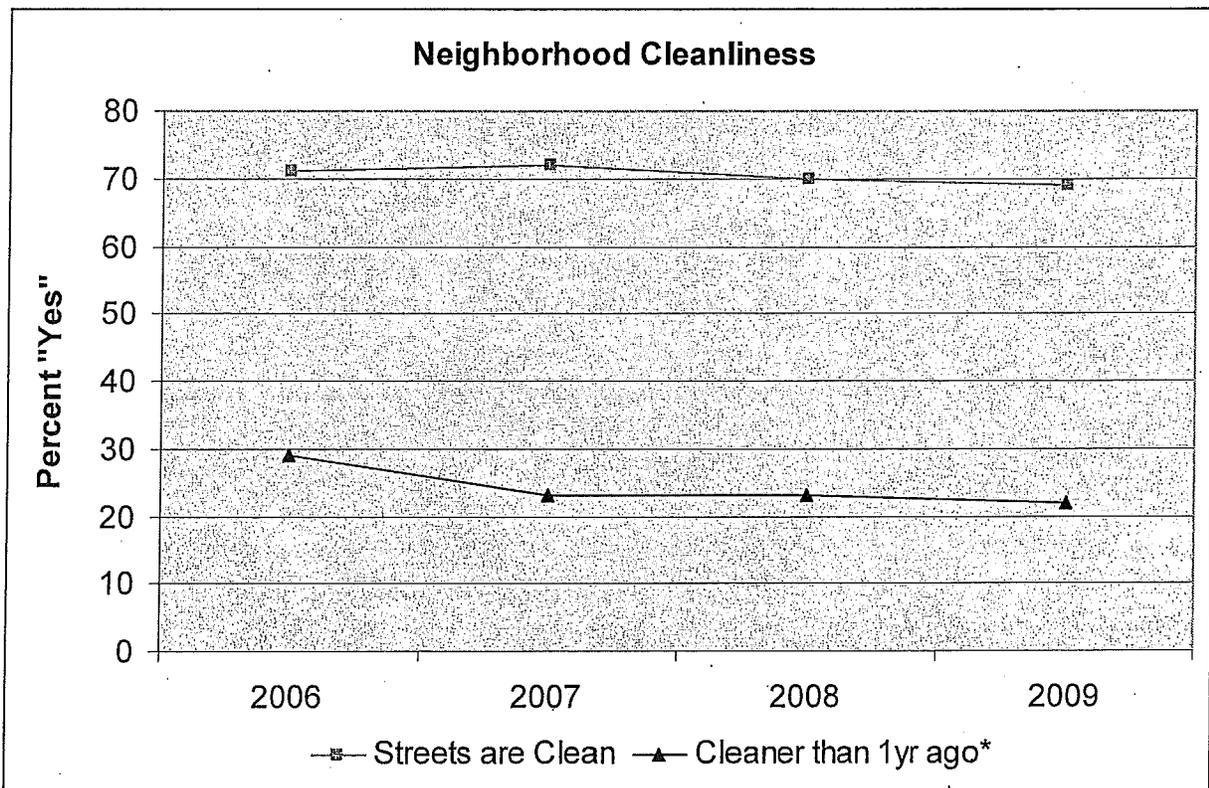
2006-2008: Is Downtown Seattle a safer place to live than a year ago?

2009: Is Downtown Seattle safer than a year ago, less safe than a year ago or is there no difference?

- When asked whether it is safer to walk during the day or at night, 6 out of 10 (61%) say it is safer during the day in 2009, compared to two-thirds (67%) in 2008. Over a third say there is no difference (37% in 2009 compared with 29% in 2008).
  - There was little difference by neighborhood when residents were asked about parity between daytime and nighttime safety.
  - Males were more likely to say that they feel safe walking at night (56% versus 41% for females).

Cleanliness

- About 7 out of 10 (69%) residents felt that the streets and public areas in their neighborhood are clean. We saw this same level in all four years of the study (Figure 2). We did see some changes within neighborhood groups between 2008 and 2009. There was a higher portion in South Lake Union/Denny Triangle saying their areas were clean in 2009 than in 2008 (75% versus 67%). There was also downward movement in the CBD (78% to 70%) and Belltown (71% to 64%).



**Figure 2. Are the streets and public areas in your neighborhood clean? (All Respondents)**

- Similar to the number who said that Downtown Seattle is safer than a year ago, about 1 out of 5 (22%) said that Downtown is cleaner versus a year ago\*. This level has remained relatively stable, with a slightly higher percentage (29%) saying so in 2006.
  - With the exception of slightly higher numbers in the Pioneer Square/ID group saying that areas are cleaner than a year ago (27%), there is little difference by neighborhood.
  - Of those who say streets are clean, nearly a third (30%) says they are less clean than a year ago.
  - About half (53%) say there is no difference in the level of cleanliness Downtown compared to a year ago. Of these, 73% say Downtown is clean.

### Issues: Level of Concern

In addition to questions about overall cleanliness and safety, respondents were asked about current levels of concern for ten specific issues as well as how well these issues are being addressed in their neighborhood. The issues we asked about were (in descending order of respondents' overall levels of concern): buying and selling of drugs (75%), dangerous behavior from alcohol consumption (69%), aggressive panhandlers (66%), public urination (65%), panhandling (63%), public drunkenness (61%), loitering by adults (58%), downtown park safety\*\* (57%), loitering by youth (54%) and excessive nighttime noise (53%).

- When looking solely at "extreme concern", buying and selling of drugs (46%) is the top issue of concern. This is the case in all neighborhood groups. Buying and selling of drugs has been the top concern all three years this question was asked.
- The largest decrease in concern for buying and selling of drugs was in Belltown. In 2007, 7 out of 10 (70%) said they were extremely concerned in this neighborhood, that held steady in 2008 (64%), but dropped to half (50%) of Belltown residents in 2009 expressing extreme levels of concern.
- Over the last three years, there has been a slight decrease in levels of extreme concern for all issues. Most of the drop occurred between 2007 and 2008.
- The CBD saw the most notable improvements in 2008. However, levels of concern there held steady between 2008 and 2009. From 2007 to 2009, the largest improvements are in the areas of aggressive panhandlers (57% to 32%

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\* Note there was a change in the wording to this question in 2009:  
 2006-2008: Are the streets and public areas in your neighborhood cleaner than they were one year ago?

2009: Is Downtown Seattle cleaner than a year ago, less clean than a year ago or is there no difference?

\*\* Note that there was a change in the wording for this issue from "Keeping Downtown Parks Safe" to "Downtown Park Safety".

extremely concerned), public drunkenness (43% to 20%) and loitering by youth (41 to 19%).

- South Lake Union/Denny Triangle saw a significant (21 percentage point) decrease in the level of extreme concern for public urination between 2007 (46%) and 2009 (25%). In 2008, nearly 4 out of 10 (37%) expressed extreme concern for this issue in South Lake Union/Denny Triangle.

### Issues: How Well Addressed

With the exception of park safety (18% extremely well), all issues we asked about received levels of only around 10% rating the issue "extremely well" addressed. Therefore, when looking at how "well" addressed an issue is, we look at the combination of "extremely well" and "somewhat well".

- While buying and selling of drugs tends to be the top issue of concern, it consistently ranks near the bottom in terms of how well addressed residents consider this issue. Less than half (45%) of residents consider this issue "well addressed".
- In 2009, dangerous behavior from excessive alcohol consumption saw the highest rating for how well this issue was addressed (59%). It was also the top rated issue in Belltown (56%).
- Downtown park safety ranked highest in Belltown (58%) and Pioneer Square/ID (63%) for how well this issue is addressed. This tied with dangerous behavior from excessive alcohol consumption overall as the best addressed issue (59%). In terms of how well addressed the issue is, Downtown park safety is similar to levels we saw for "keeping downtown parks safe" in 2007 (62%) and 2008 (64%).
- Overall, there is little change over the past three years, but there are some changes in individual neighborhoods between 2008 and 2009 (in each case, 2007 and 2009 levels are similar):
  - The largest difference was the perceptions of how well addressed public urination was in the CBD. In 2008, over half (56%) said this issue was well addressed there, while in 2009, about 4 out of 10 (39%) said so.
  - There was also a decrease in perceptions of how well addressed public urination was in Pioneer Square/ID. In 2008, nearly half (47%) saw this as well addressed; in 2009, that number fell to just over a third (36%).
  - Another issue that saw significant improvement in Pioneer Square/ID was the issue of loitering by youth. In 2008, two thirds (63%) said this issue was well addressed, but only half (49%) said so in 2009.
  - Belltown saw an improvement in perceptions of how well addressed buying and selling of drugs is (44% in 2009 versus 32% in 2008).
  - Between 2008 and 2009, South Lake Union/Denny Triangle saw decreases in perceptions of how well addressed the issues of panhandling (47% to 36%) and public drunkenness (68% to 57%).

For additional information, please contact either Paul Dobosz (206) 613-3212 or Elliott Krivenko (206) 613-3255