Holistic Public Safety: A Safer City for All

I have listened to my district, and public safety is top of mind. We want to feel safe in our neighborhoods and the places we visit, like Alki or Downtown; we are frustrated by putting millions of dollars into whack-a-mole solutions; we have compassion for people who are struggling; we are ready for real, evidence-based, lasting solutions to public safety challenges, not divisive fear-mongering and status quo.

Creating a safe urban environment is one of the government's most important jobs. We need both police and alternative responses, we can lead with compassion and refuse to tolerate harmful behavior. And when we address poverty, mental illness, and drug addiction, we decrease homelessness and crime.

Police recruitment challenges are nationwide and we cannot put our urgent public safety needs on hold while we rebuild the force. For far too long we’ve been overly reliant on armed officers as the primary tool in our public safety toolbox, and we’re especially feeling the pain of that short-sightedness now. Compounded by the fact that armed officers haven’t always made all of us feel safe—we continue to see racialized over-policing that leads to unjust brutality and death, and we haven’t yet found satisfactory solutions to that. We need holistic public safety to truly make our city safe for all of us. And that means we need a full suite of evidence-based tools in our toolbox. Now.

Invest in Housing, Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder Care

This is at the top of the Public Safety list because we need to start truly investing in solutions that actually deliver lasting results. No more whack-a-mole money down the drain. We need coordinated and concerted investment, using state and federal money, in stable, rapid, emergency housing with the necessary wraparoundsocial services. We’ll also need to invest in crisis care centers, street care teams, immediately available voluntary in-patient care, and well-paid social workers. When mental health and substance use disorder needs are met prior to public crisis, public safety will be dramatically improved. For more, see Housing & Homelessness.

This may bring up a sense of unfairness to some who think people who are mentally ill or are addicted to drugs are undeserving, and/or need to be punished. But those of us who are close to people who have suffered from either know that it is much more complex than that. For things
like violent crime or drug dealing, yes, incarceration is appropriate. But the data repeatedly show that incarceration—for single-use drug possession or public consumption—is expensive and ineffective. We address these problems more effectively and less expensively by bringing people inside via tiny homes, hotel rooms, permanent supportive housing, and safe lots, where it is easier to provide the necessary social services as well.

This may also bring up concerns for some of us that people will move here specifically to take advantage of our services. I would propose we pilot eligibility criteria whereby we help people who are already here first, and there is a waitlist for everyone else. While an overwhelming majority of homeless people in Seattle became homeless in the local area, we still need to cooperate with nearby cities and counties to ensure they pull their fair share alongside us.

Alternative Response and Diversion Programs

- **Skilled Unarmed Responders:** Approximately one fifth of 911 calls are for mental/behavioral health or substance use disorder crises. We have waited far too long for Mayor Harrel’s proposed Third Department/CARE Team. We need to fully fund this now. We need fairly-paid, highly-skilled, low-turnover social workers to lead mental and behavioral health crisis response, and medical professionals to lead substance use disorder care, to both preserve armed officers for the calls where they are actually needed, and also because we’ll be sending the most qualified person for the job. These additional teams will reduce response times, improve outcomes, and alleviate the strain on the under-staffed police department.

- **Diversion Programs:** We need to finally expand Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) into a full-scale program. LEAD has been so successful as a pilot program that it has been studied by top experts and replicated nationally and internationally — we should learn from our own success and scale the program.
  - “Law-enforcement assisted diversion (LEAD) showed that diverting people away from jail to harm-reduction case management and legal assistance was associated with 60 percent lower recidivism, reduced legal and criminal justice system use and costs, and greater likelihood of obtaining housing, employment and legitimate income” (Susan E. Collins, PhD, UW; cited research here)
  - According to a peer-reviewed study that looked at 318 people suspected of low-level drug and prostitution crime in downtown Seattle, participants in the program were 60 percent less likely to be arrested, 89 percent more likely to have a place to live and 46 percent more likely to have a job in the six months following enrollment.

- **Therapeutic/Community Court:** The Community Court program, although recently shuttered by the City Attorney, had an 80% success rate at preventing recidivism within two years. Community Court and a complimentary Therapeutic Court specifically tailored for drug use (like King County’s decades old program) will be crucial tools for improving safety and helping get lives back on track.

- **Community Responder Programs:** Create data-backed neighborhood-level safety alliances where community members and neighbors respond to low-level street crime. Scale up the promising “We Deliver Care” program.
• **Youth and Family Programs:** Support music and sports programs, safe community spaces, and data-backed crime reduction organizations like Choose 180. Increase access to familial counseling.

• **Gun Violence Prevention:** I will support and partner with groups like Alliance for Gun Responsibility, Choose 180, and Community Pathways that provide support and resources to communities that are disproportionately affected by gun violence.

**Recruit & Retain the Best Officers**

According to the US Dept. of Justice, SPD has actually been more violent in their interactions with the public since the federal consent decree began. **Seattlites need and deserve effective policing.** We will recruit 400 officers, and we will set a very high bar, because we want the best, anti-racist, anti-sexist officers in the nation. We can continue to offer the existing high salaries and hiring bonuses, however data indicate that these do not actually work very well. The bigger complaint is low morale. To recruit and retain the best officers, I propose:

• **Reducing call times and first-responder stress:** By urgently starting up the unarmed response teams we can lighten the load of our armed officers and ensure they’re available where they’re needed most.

• **Expanded training** emphasizing de-escalation techniques, cultural competency, implicit bias awareness, including learning when to defer to social workers, community members, and medical professionals who will be part of the revamped emergency response network.

• **Encourage positive and non-confrontational interactions** between police officers and community members. Police officers, in an unarmed capacity, partner with community members to restore the community. Plant pea patches, remove graffiti, clear out vacant lots, youth outreach, etc.

• **Mental Health Care:** Police experience 35 times the number of traumatic incidents as the average person. We should ensure that SPD has the best mental health care and support.

• **Accountability and transparency:** We must have a strict protocol with independent oversight for reporting and investigating misconduct of any form.

• **Investigating hate crimes and sexual assaults:** I'll ensure that SPD take these crimes seriously, including addressing the unacceptable backlog of rape kits.

• We need to attract a **new generation of officers** dedicated to serve and protect our communities. The younger generations have very different views on policing than the Boomers do. We need to dig in and determine what matters to them. And ensure our department both offers and models those things.

• We need to **investigate systemic and leadership challenges** within the department and SPOG and implement better accountability measures — either through the troubled Office of the Inspector General and Office of Police Accountability, or through entirely new departments. Despite further evidence, the council and mayor have done little to address the DOJ’s findings.

• Additionally, we need to ensure that any new contract with SPOG includes provisions for alternative response.
Street Safety

We need to make our streets safe for everyone. Since Seattle committed to the Vision Zero plan, the number of pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries have doubled. The feeling of safety while walking, biking, and taking transit is essential to improving health, expanding accessible mobility, and meeting climate goals in our city. While other council members often block these improvement projects due to small vocal opposition, I will remember that my district has repeatedly requested safe mobility networks. I will advocate to:

- Maximize the $25.6 million safe streets grant from the federal government for D1 to implement speed humps, lower speed limits for intersections near schools and parks, more and wider sidewalks, and lane barriers. SDOT safety teams will know that I am a partner in improving the safety of our communities.
- Add mid-block crosswalks and signalized intersections on arterials in SODO, South Park, and Georgetown which have been identified as high risk points.
- Expedite improvements to D1’s top 20 most dangerous traffic locations.
- Work with SDOT to utilize temporary solutions (e.g., paint, planter boxes) to protect walking lanes on streets without sidewalks as an interim solution due to the high cost of building new sidewalks.
- Rapidly implement a ‘Safety Surge’ of Traffic Calming for Neighborhood Streets.
- Develop a menu of street types that are designed with consistent standards that can be replicated across the city. Some roads should prioritize vehicle throughput, needing a much different design solution to ensure safety than streets that facilitate a vibrant public realm with social and economic activity. This creates efficiencies, saves money, and increases safety.
- Complete protected bike routes on Fauntleroy and between South and Southwest Seattle.
- Create a city E-bike rebate program to help residents use bikes daily in our hilly city.
- Improve bus safety with shorter wait times, better stop lighting and seating, and taking safety recommendations from the bus operators’ experiences.