



**To:** Mayor Bruce Harrell, Councilmember Andrew Lewis, Councilmember Tammy Morales, Councilmember Sara Nelson, Councilmember Lisa Herbold, Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda, City Attorney Ann Davison, Chief Adrian Diaz

**From:** Lisa Dixon Howard, Executive Director, Alliance for Pioneer Square

**Date:** February 08, 2022

**Subject:** Pioneer Square Crime and Safety Survey

Dear Mayor Harrell, Councilmember Lewis, Councilmember Morales, Councilmember Nelson, Councilmember Herbold, Councilmember Mosqueda, City Attorney Davison, and Chief Diaz:

I am writing to urge you to develop immediate strategies to address the presence and impacts of a lack of public safety and civility within Pioneer Square.

Public safety challenges have perpetuated the COVID-19 pandemic's acute impact on Pioneer Square's economic wellbeing. Our neighborhood maintains the second lowest office occupancy rate at 11.8% as compared to other areas in the City. Daytime workforce foot traffic was down 79% in November 2021 compared to November 2019 and continues to be at this level. Major employers signal that it is not the pandemic that keeps them from returning to Pioneer Square, but that it is an unsafe place to bring their employees. Company leaders have publicly spoken about threats to safety in the Puget Sound Business Journal and The Seattle Times. These, and other high profile stories about the lack of safety in Pioneer Square, continue to build a negative image of the neighborhood, while small businesses suffer the economic consequences.

Pioneer Square small business owners and employees are still fighting to economically survive during the pandemic, while also bearing the brunt of acting as first responders on the front lines of public safety issues, mental health crises, drug use, and verbal and physical assaults in and around their shops. Business owners are growing increasingly frustrated with the rampant lawlessness that spills into their place of business. Often, they feel abandoned by City leaders, left alone to protect their employees and customers from violence and unwelcome behavior. SEASat data show a decrease in property and violent crimes within Pioneer Square from 2019 (655 reported incidents) to 2021 (426 reported incidents). However, in my conversations with community stakeholders, I hear they no longer rely on the police to address immediate needs. In a recent Seattle Times article, one Pioneer Square business owner stated, "I don't even call the police anymore, there's no point. I'm at the stage where I just try to do security for every incident personally, by myself." Using this data does not tell the full picture of

the issues in Pioneer Square nor is it sufficient to allocate resources to our neighborhood.

In November 2021, the Alliance for Pioneer Square conducted a study of 64 businesses with the intent of gaining a deeper understanding of the impact of public safety and civility on the district's economy. Of the 64 businesses that responded, over 75% were small business owners with 20 employees or fewer. The survey showed an increase of localized criminal activity, decreased perception of customer and employee safety, and a significant financial impact to businesses due to crime and safety.

The key takeaways from the survey include:

- Business owners reported 858 incidences of assaults / property crimes / thefts occurring from September 1, 2021 – October 31, 2021
- 36 Business owners estimated the cost of all criminal activity they experienced amounted to an approximate cost of \$192,000
- 55% of business owners say crime has increased from September 1, 2021 – October 31, 2021 compared to September 1, 2020 – October 31, 2020.
- 71% of business owners report their employees feel very unsafe or unsafe working in Pioneer Square
- 82% of business owners report their customers feel very unsafe or unsafe visiting in Pioneer Square
- 8% of business owners did not report incidents to the Seattle Police Department

The Alliance for Pioneer Square has created and continued several programs to ensure our neighborhood is a welcoming and vibrant environment for all, including but not limited to:

- A Facade Repair Improvement Fund (formerly the Broken Window Fund) to provide financial support to Pioneer Square business and property owners to replace broken windows and repair or improve the appearance of building facades or storefronts. Since the launch, we have distributed \$80,000 in assistance directly to businesses and property owners with more rounds planned in 2022.
- An ongoing, regular de-escalation training series led by the Downtown Emergency Service Center (DESC), the Metropolitan Improvement District (MID), and the Seattle Police Department (SPD) designed to train Pioneer Square community members how to recognize, reduce, and manage aggressive behavior.
- A robust set of digital and physical materials to enable business owners, employees, and residents to utilize neighborhood resources such as the MID clean team, SPD Crime Prevention Coordinator services, and the Find It/Fix It app.
- A partnership with the Public Defender Association to support the outreach and engagement work of the JustCARE team in Pioneer Square.

However, our programs alone are not enough to address the increasingly concerning issues present throughout the district. Urgent, significant action is required to address

the unacceptable deterioration of public safety and civility in Pioneer Square. In addition, I ask that you involve the Alliance for Pioneer Square and other neighborhood organizations in critical conversations regarding the chronic challenges of public safety and civility in this neighborhood.

We, as a city, are at a pivotal moment in the story of Seattle. A positive future for Pioneer Square depends on a comprehensive, district wide approach to address the challenges experienced by all who work, visit, live, and do business here.

The last 24 months have been some of the most challenging in Seattle's history, but we remain hopeful about the future. Together we can work towards a brighter future for Pioneer Square, and all of Seattle.

Sincerely,

*Lisa Dixon Howard*

Lisa Dixon Howard  
Executive Director

CC: Deputy Seattle City Attorney Scott Lindsay, Senior Deputy Mayor Monisha Harrell, Deputy Mayor Tiffany Washington, Seattle Director of Public Safety Andrew Myberg, Director Strategic Initiatives Tim Burgess