

Public Safety and Partnering for Safer Neighborhoods

Mayor Ed Murray ~ June 25, 2014

Council President Burgess, Councilmembers, City Attorney Holmes, Chief O'Toole, department directors, fellow Seattle residents...

After years of fragmentation and disorganization, our city today faces a crisis of confidence in public safety.

This crisis is rooted in the perception that, beyond police reform, we as a City do not have a cohesive, integrated strategy for how to make and keep Seattle safe.

That we as a City, despite recent outbreaks of violence, lack a vision for how to achieve not just a summer of safety but a *lifetime* of safety for our youth, young adults and people of all ages.

And this perception is correct. We have not over the years developed a coherent and coordinated citywide approach to public safety policy.

Unless we as a City address this crisis of confidence, our challenges in public safety will only grow.

Together, we must address this crisis.

We will do so, first, by resetting the conversation.

We must broaden our focus beyond just police reform – and beyond just the police department itself.

Police reform is but one thread of a much larger fabric of public safety – the entirety of which must be strong in order for people to feel safe and protected in their community.

Let me be clear: Police reform is needed, is under way and is moving forward.

We will continue to work with the federal court and the Department of Justice on implementing police reform.

But police reform alone is not enough – our communities deserve more.

So, second, we must show how all City departments can coordinate resources to increase public safety.

Third, we must show how city government can invite people – the people of Seattle – to play a stronger role in keeping our community safe.

After all, public safety is a commitment that extends beyond government. It is our collective responsibility *as* a community *for* our community.

Lastly, we must work together with other cities, the county and the state to address larger challenges that affect public safety in our region but that we alone cannot solve – challenges that include poverty and homelessness, mental illness and gun violence.

[Statement of values, and the Compact for a Safe Seattle]

Public safety is an unwritten compact between the City, the people and the police, which guides our respective responsibilities and our collective accountability.

This compact has become strained in recent years. Instead of responsibility and accountability, our city has seen finger-pointing and blame-shifting.

Today, let us all *renew our compact* to improve the safety and security for the many and diverse communities of our city.

A Compact for a Safe Seattle that recognizes public safety is not something provided *to* the community *by* the government.

Rather, public safety is something *achieved* when the City, the people and the police commit to an urgent, collective effort stronger than the sum of its individual parts.

We must renew this sense of urgency.

Whether it is getting involved in community organizations such as the South Seattle Crime Prevention Council...

... participating in neighborhood block-watches, patrols or walks...

... or attending the neighborhood Night Out Against Crime on August 5th...

...stopping crime requires residents to become active in their communities.

The strongest action any of us can take is simply getting to know one other, getting to know our neighbors and the issues that they face.

Actions become habits, habits become principles, and principles guide our future actions.

Action and accountability must be at the heart of our Compact for a Safe Seattle.

My accountability as your Mayor will be, each year before summer, to present a progress report to the full City Council on how Seattle is living up to this Compact, with clear measurements and outcomes.

[Deliverables and implementation]

To bring the Compact for a Safe Seattle to life today, our action at the City must span the spectrum from prevention to intervention to enforcement.

Our coordinated approach to public safety means we will align our city's efforts towards prevention, including:

- ensuring a safer built environment,
- fostering more active public space and
- generating more economic opportunity.

In the coming weeks, these prevention efforts will be piloted in Central and Southeast Seattle as we launch the Summer of Safety.

And as we develop these pilots, the best elements of these models will be brought to neighborhoods across the city.

Summer of Safety – built environment

First, the Summer of Safety will address the built environment by bringing focused attention to hot spots of crime and violence.

We know from research by noted criminologist David Weisburd that crime is neither uniform nor random.

Rather, his work shows that in Seattle there are clear concentrations of crime in certain blocks, intersections, and public spaces. In fact, roughly 5 percent of our city blocks were responsible for roughly half of all crime.

And no one is more frustrated by this concentration of crime on these blocks than the residents who live on them.

To address these hotspots, we will begin a series of “Find-It-Fix-It Community Walks”, where community residents, police and city officials walk together to identify issues and find solutions – including graffiti removal, street lighting, litter and garbage clean-ups, and trimming overgrown bushes, trees and weeds.

Our first walk will be July 2nd, at 23rd and South Jackson. That evening, Councilmember Bruce Harrell, City Attorney Pete Holmes and I will host a roundtable discussion about public safety with community groups like Mothers for Police Accountability and SeaMar at Cannon House in the Central District, and then lead the first of this summer’s community walks.

We will grow this approach over time and expand it throughout the city, using data to drive our response and measure our effectiveness.

Summer of Safety – activation

In addition to improving the built environment, we must activate public spaces with programming, bringing “eyes on the street” that discourage illegal activity.

Our Summer of Safety will include:

- Extending hours at our community centers and parks to provide more programming geared at both youth and young adults during the day and in the evening hours.
- Expanding out-of-school time social hours for teens at local libraries.
- Moving beyond parks or libraries, we will reclaim the streets themselves – by partnering with communities to close neighborhood streets for a day of activities and games.
- And we will continue to support the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative’s work with the residents of Rainier Beach in implementing events, cleanups and activities to address community concerns.

These are just some of the ways we will partner with residents to foster positive, community-based activities this summer.

And, through Council's courageous vote to fix and fund our parks, together we are helping to ensure a lifetime of activation at the 465 parks and 26 community centers all across our city.

Summer of Safety – job opportunities

Third, the Summer of Safety will expand summer employment programs for our young people.

In the last decade, employment fell for almost everyone, but none more strongly than for teens, where employment declined dramatically by almost 50 percent in 10 years.

It is often said “nothing stops a bullet like a job.” One recent experiment in Chicago shows that a summer job can decrease the chance of arrest for violent crime by as much as half.

The City of Seattle runs a number of summer programs providing youth with jobs with private employers such as Swedish Medicine and Puget Sound Solar, as well as in our own departments.

This year – thanks to partnering with the private sector, local philanthropy, community partners like Rainier Vista Boys & Girls Club and our own city resources – we will increase last summer's available youth opportunities by 50 percent.

This will bring the total of summer youth opportunities made possible by the city to over 1,000 for the first time ever.

This is progress. But this is not enough. This is not acceptable. We must do better.

I've reached out to local business leaders and asked them to lead an effort to create more job opportunities for our young people.

In the coming year, we will work to streamline and unify this program, and at least double the number of opportunities for jobs in 2015.

Better policing

Two days ago, the Council confirmed Kathy O'Toole as Seattle's Chief of the Police because you share with me a confidence in her ability to lead our police department and transform its culture.

For a department:

- that has seen four leaders in the past two years,
- with conflicting mandates from different branches of government,
- without clear direction and expectations provided for officers about how to perform their jobs effectively...

...this transformation will be vital to our Compact for a Safe Seattle.

It will require the following steps:

1. First, as mentioned, we will meet and exceed all elements of the federal court order.

This includes making sure our officers receive the appropriate training, tools and support to do their jobs well, and implementing the use of the latest technology in policing.

2. Second, we will give clear guidance and support to officers for proper enforcement of the law.

We will make it clear that, quote, “there’s nothing I can do” is no longer an appropriate response to residents who raise concerns.

We will also make it clear to officers who act in good faith to enforce the law: this City will have your back.

And the Mayor’s Office is opening lines of communication between the City Attorney, the County prosecutor and the police department to ensure that police have a clear understanding for how and when to use prevention, intervention and enforcement tactics – and also to ensure that when arrests are warranted, those arrests have the full backing of prosecutors.

3. Third, we will reconnect officers to the communities they serve.

There is a difference between policing a community and community policing.

This difference is felt most strongly in our communities of color.

Community policing means that people see the police not as an outsider but as a member of their own community.

True community policing is the embodiment of our Compact for a Safe Seattle. To achieve it, we must ensure that the police department reflects Seattle’s diversity.

For the first time, the Seattle Police Department will soon hire a liaison to our East African population.

This will prove essential in helping the police department better serve this growing Seattle community.

And our Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs is also working to match 20 female police officers with 20 young women in our immigrant/refugee communities to deepen ties between our police force and those communities.

4. Fourth, Chief O’Toole in conjunction with all City departments will develop and deliver a community safety plan for every one of this City’s neighborhoods.

These will be created in consultation with each neighborhood and will reflect the specific needs of each neighborhood.

5. Fifth, we will reform our police discipline and accountability process.

I’ve asked my special advisor, Dr. Barney Melekian, to review and make recommendations. Today, I am providing you with a copy of his report.

Based on his report, I recommend:

- making the Office of Professional Accountability independent from the Police Department;
- providing OPA with independent citizen oversight; and

- ensuring that the discipline process is independent, fair and transparent, both to the police and to the public.

I will send a formal proposal to Council, and I look forward to working with all of you on these important reforms.

6. Sixth, I have directed the creation of a joint enforcement team to ensure that across City departments we have a coordinated response to chronic nuisance businesses and property owners who create hotspots for crime and disorderly behavior – and who disrupt the quality of life in our neighborhoods.
7. Seventh, because crime has no borders, I have directed Chief O’Toole to engage neighboring cities about public safety challenges we have in common and to develop shared solutions.

[Larger regional issues]

In addition to prevention and policing, there are larger issues that affect our public safety and require us to extend our compact to our partners throughout the region.

Our conversations about public safety cannot overlook individuals in crisis on our streets and in need of help.

In Seattle, in every neighborhood, we have people in crisis.

These crises – whether related to finances, mental illness, or personal safety – end up with people on our streets and homeless, or in our criminal justice system.

Today in Seattle, at any one time there are 9,000 people who are homeless.

But with temporary shelters at full capacity, many of these people have no place else to go except Seattle’s parks and streets.

For many, our shelters are not serving their goal of a short, rare transitional need – and a large percentage live in these shelters long-term.

We must also acknowledge that many of our region’s homeless come to Seattle because of a lack of services elsewhere.

We know that when possible it is best to stabilize people quickly and – when safe – in their communities.

So, with Councilmembers Clark and O’Brien’s leadership, we will work with our neighboring cities, the county, and the state to strengthen the network of services – from mental health, substance abuse and counseling services, to financial planning, increased shelter and affordable housing – so that more people find solutions in their communities.

We will also build upon the Center City Initiative, which brings together law enforcement, social services, businesses, residents, and local government to discuss and propose solutions for social disorder downtown.

I am grateful to Councilmembers Rasmussen and Bagshaw who continue to support and have passion for this program.

Guns

Perhaps most urgently – and perhaps our greatest challenge – we must address the issue of gun violence.

Two weeks ago, Seattle was in the national news because of a shooting at Seattle Pacific University.

This random act of violence was a horror for that community and for our city. And I am honored that today we are joined by the University President Dan Martin.

And while the litany of mass shootings scar our memories and dominate the narrative on guns, they represent less than 1 percent of gun violence in America. There are other stories to be told.

That same week, three young black men were killed in Seattle – with a fraction of the public or media attention.

Every day in this country, 32 people are killed by guns – a Virginia Tech massacre a day.

Gun deaths are a national problem and they need a national solution.

Mayors, governors and presidents across this country have struggled with this issue for far too long.

The gut-wrenching truth is that I do not possess the simple solution that has evaded my predecessors and colleagues. Nor have I uncovered the undiscovered words of grace that will heal the families of those who have been harmed by gun violence.

But these are not reasons to lose hope.

Deaths by guns are *not* inevitable.

Gun deaths are preventable, and we must combine the best in sensible laws, smart law enforcement and public health to end this epidemic of violence.

We are not looking to take guns away from responsible citizens, but we currently make it far too easy for criminals to get guns.

We must change that.

We know that in states that have background checks for all private handgun sales, there are:

- 17 percent fewer firearm aggravated assaults.
- 38 percent fewer women are shot to death by their intimate partners.
- 39 percent fewer law enforcement officers are shot to death with handguns

And I will work with my allies – faith leaders, law enforcement, moms, and mayors to ensure that in our state, every sale of every gun goes through a background check.

But background checks alone will not be enough.

Trace data shows us that guns used in crimes in Seattle come from across the state and across the country.

So, our Police Department will partner with law enforcement at every level to focus on gun-trafficking and break the chains that bring guns to our streets.

But even as we pass better laws, and even as we engage in better law enforcement, we must recognize that will not be enough.

We can prevent gun deaths by recognizing that it is an epidemic. And like with any epidemic, we know that research can make a difference.

Motor vehicle accidents have long been the leading cause of injury death in this country. But research has led to 20 years of declining rates of automobile deaths.

Gun deaths, however, have remained steady.

Today, in Washington State, total gun deaths exceed automobile deaths.

So, we will continue to partner with the County in taking every public health measure to decrease gun deaths.

And this fall, County Executive Constantine and I will host a summit with local and federal law enforcement, domestic violence prevention advocates, health providers and others to share existing data, discuss best practices and coordinate community prevention programs.

[Inequality]

Councilmembers, today, I am asking each of you to support improved prevention, intervention and enforcement, and to renew our partnership with the community.

But we must also recognize that we can never truly address crime without addressing the underlying problem of inequality.

While it is often discussed that poverty corresponds with those who commit crimes, poverty also corresponds with those who are victimized by crimes.

We know nationally that those earning less than \$7,500 annually are three times more likely to be victims of violent crimes compared to those making more than \$75,000.

No one is hurt more by crime than the poorest.

And in this city, as in most cities, we cannot talk about poverty without talking about race.

In Seattle, 54 percent of African American children live in poverty, compared to 6 percent of white children.

That is a moral failure that we all share, and that we all must confront.

On the eve of the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, for far too many of our brothers and sisters, our sons and our daughters in communities of color, far too many challenges remain.

We have inherited a legacy and history of institutionalized racism but we must do better.

So, to truly fight for public safety, we must also fight against inequality.

That is why together, we passed a ground-breaking law to get this city to a \$15-per-hour minimum wage to ensure that workers of all races can earn a living wage – with special thanks to Councilmembers Licata, Harrell and Sawant, for their leadership.

That is why together, we committed this City to achieving pay equity for women of all races – with special thanks to Councilmember Godden.

That is why together, with the leadership of Council President Tim Burgess, we developed a plan for implementing a universal pre-k that will ensure that children of all races enter school ready to learn, prepared to succeed.

That is why together we are committed to police reform.

Without fighting against all inequality, our fight for public safety will never be complete.

[Conclusion]

I'd like to conclude by telling you about one of the young people we lost recently to senseless violence.

He was a very bright child.

He started kindergarten a year early because he displayed a special academic ability.

He graduated from Garfield High School with his high school diploma and an Associate's Degree obtained through Running Start.

He was a recent graduate of the University of Washington with a Bachelor's degree in Communications.

In addition to freelance work in web design, he'd just begun a new job as a Data Analyst at a local consulting firm.

In his spare time, he pursued several artistic interests including fashion design, art, music and dance.

Most recently, he developed an interest in researching and advocating the health and environmental benefits of eating locally grown, non-GMO foods.

His longest-running passion was for the Japanese language and culture.

He took Japanese language courses through high school and college, and became fluent.

He dreamed of traveling to Japan one day to work as a translator.

The last posting on his Facebook was on May 30, 2014.

It said: "The future is always with you."

This is someone Seattle nurtured – this bright young African American man – and someone whose future was senselessly taken, someone we all senselessly lost.

These young people are all of our children.

We must do better.

To paraphrase Albert Camus:

Perhaps we cannot prevent this world from being a world in which young people are killed.

But we can reduce the number of young people who are killed.

And if you don't help us – who else in this world can help us?