

**A POSITION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE
DOWNTOWN SPOKANE PARTNERSHIP
Adopted September 25, 2019**

**REGARDING: A REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC CRIMINALITY,
ADDICTION AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN OUR DOWNTOWN CORE**

Public criminality, addiction and mental health issues are very concerning and urgently need our community's focused attention. Beyond the adverse impacts caused by decades of policy and decisions to concentrate services for these distressed groups in our downtown, this paper primarily focuses on the most significant threat not just to the vibrancy and health of our region's economic and cultural center, but to every neighborhood in the city and surrounding region: the criminal and nuisance behaviors caused by addiction and to a lesser but still significant extent, the unavailability of adequate mental health treatment facilities.

Regional approach

The challenges of addiction, mental illness and criminal behavior are not just local but are present in every jurisdiction. To be successful, any plan must be regional in nature. Only by working together can we pool scarce resources, implement best practice solutions and avoid inadvertently pushing people into neighboring jurisdictions. This *decentralized* approach also dramatically improves the odds of recovery by allowing people to separate themselves from the highest concentration of use and sale of drugs that occurs in urban cores as well as to associate with and integrate into the community rather than be forced to live primarily with others experiencing significant life challenges. These problems are spread throughout our community. The services needed to solve them and restore lives should be similarly diffused and not concentrated, as they are presently, in the downtown core and adjacent neighborhoods.

Access to services

Expanded access to mental health and addiction treatment services are needed, in addition to mentorship, life and job skills training. These services need to be delivered by best practice methods that strive to instill hope, gratitude, and responsibility for one's actions and choices so as to build the character, confidence and self-worth needed for individuals to sustain treatment and to progress as independently as possible.

The community needs to expand access to mentorship, life and job skills and employment opportunities in order to provide people with a legal means of providing for themselves and their families, for it is also through work that people find the purpose and inner strength needed to persevere through challenges.

When people are either unwilling or unable to seek appropriate help and treatment, and when the community is faced with criminal behaviors that adversely impact our community as a whole, active intervention using tools such as [Ricky's Law](#) should be utilized to help people break the cycle of addiction and to get people the help they need.

Again, services, shelter, housing and opportunities need to be provided for in every neighborhood, not just downtown. Downtown Spokane has nearly 20,000 residents, 60,000 employees, and is the cultural and economic hub that drives our region's economy. If the adverse effect of continuing to allow the problems of public criminality and addiction persist unabated, the vitality of our downtown will be jeopardized. It would not be possible to provide the necessary essential services for the disabled, the vulnerable and the unfortunate without the downtown tax base.

Accountability

The rules and laws that govern society need to be applied the same to every member of the community. Criminal justice reforms are needed to deliver fair, swift and certain justice that, when coupled with adequate staffing and visible community policing, will; deter crime, reduce unnecessary stays in the jail system, reduce the number of innocent victims haunted by crime, restore order and regain trust from the community. While

we recognize that it is not possible to arrest or incarcerate ourselves out of these problems, the availability of a criminal sanction is a necessary element of any solution. Assuring public safety is the most basic duty of government. Crime begets crime. Our police must be able to arrest people who commit crimes in our city, including misdemeanors. Our detention facilities must be able to safely accommodate those arrested, pending trial or other resolution. If they cannot, and they are not, it will be well known by the criminal element in our community and the problems will grow to our collective detriment.

In order to address our present inability to administer justice that is exacerbating criminal activity head on, a new, modern, safe and efficient detention and rehabilitation center must be built as soon as possible to reduce operating costs, increase capacity, and to replace aging facilities that pose unsafe conditions for detainees and corrections officers. This facility should be co-located with best practice programs for accessing recovery, mentorship, life and job skills necessary for those exiting the system to have a better chance of being self-sufficient, law-abiding citizens.

The pending construction of a jail diversion facility and the implementation of supervision for perpetrators of property crimes, if managed properly, can provide the necessary consequence, reduce the jail population, help to restore justice for the victims of crimes, and reduce unnecessary displacement from employment and government assistance for those who would be deemed by the courts to benefit from alternative forms of accountability and do not present a risk to society. It will also, ultimately, reduce public expenditures and provide more positive outcomes than we can presently achieve.

Modifications to the current policies and practices around pretrial and bail need to be approached cautiously and with the victim taking first priority in the judicial system's decision-making tree. Using best practice assessments can remove or avoid people from entering jail who can be better managed by other methods which then frees up space to once again hold convicted misdemeanant criminals accountable while not putting the community further at risk from habitual reoffenders. However, if not managed correctly this policy can put citizens at risk of being victimized by repeat offenders.

A systematic review is needed to ensure proper staffing exists at all level of the justice system so that the entire system functions effectively and efficiently, not the least of which includes the shortage of police officers and sheriff's deputies necessary for best practice proactive community policing that strengthens community ties with police and prevents crimes before they ever occur.

We need to return the City Police Precinct to the core of downtown. Best practice research demonstrates a direct correlation between centrally located, community-oriented policing and the reduction in criminal activity in downtowns. This strategy also has a profound impact on the sense of safety, is absolutely critical to the vitality of any urban core and requires the unequivocal support of the Mayor's office as well the Council and the entire criminal justice system to be effectively implemented.

The point of contact for this memorandum is:

Mark Richard
President, Downtown Spokane Partnership
mrichard@downtownspokane.net
509.456.0580