



April 28, 2023

RE: Support for Safe Open Spaces Ordinance

Council President Beggs and Members of the Spokane City Council:

On behalf of hundreds of employers, small businesses, residents, and hospitality partners across Spokane, we are pleased to share our support for the current proposed “Safe Open Spaces” ordinance. Following lack of action by the state legislature to establish regulations and penalties related to drug possession and use, it is especially imperative that Spokane urgently address the increasing impacts of open drug use in our community.

The “Safe Open Spaces” ordinance, as proposed, is crucial to restoring public spaces that are now overrun by individuals consuming drugs, leaving behind paraphernalia, and creating hazards to health and safety. Drug possession and use in public has created a negative environment in our city, where businesses struggle to attract the needed workforce, consumers choose to shop elsewhere, residents fear for their safety, and visitors avoid our city.

We hear from our members about the daily harm caused by lack of regulation and criminal sanction for drug use. Sidewalks, parks, plazas, and building entrances are being obstructed by individuals openly using drugs while the remnants of drug abuse litter our commercial centers, neighborhoods, and waterways. Employees report being exposed to drugs and harassed as they make their way to and from work, retailers have shoplifters brazenly walking off with merchandise, and citizens are being threatened with violence by individuals under the influence of drugs.

Our public places are becoming increasingly unsafe, unsanitary, and unusable. With similar policies already in place in [Marysville](#), [Lakewood](#), [Kent](#), and [Bellingham](#), it is imperative that Spokane is not left behind. Drugs should not be used in our public spaces. It's dangerous for both the individuals using them and the people nearby. The 285% increase in overdose deaths in 2021 reported by the Spokane County medical examiner is just an indicator of the myriad of health hazards for everyone when drugs are consumed publicly, including the accidental inhalation or ingestion of drugs and the spread of blood-borne illnesses from needle punctures. Drug use is not just hazardous, it creates dangerous conditions for our citizens when individuals are aggressive and threatening while actively using drugs or trying to finance their abuse. In comparison to the same time last year, by the end of March 2023 in just downtown Spokane, property crimes have already increased by 267% while violent crime increased by 43%—and these statistics only reflect crimes that are reported.

Our community urgently needs relief. Without the strong, decisive action that begins with the regulations and sanctions outlined in the proposed “Safe Open Spaces” ordinance, including establishing a gross misdemeanor penalty for drug use and allowing confiscation of drugs by police officers, we risk further endangering our community. The “Safe Open Spaces” ordinance is common-sense policy that we need to finally stop the worsening conditions we see every day in our city.

Ultimately, without the “Safe Open Spaces” ordinance, the status quo creates a situation where our businesses cannot generate the tax revenue that supports necessary city services and funds day-to-day city functions in neighborhoods across Spokane, impacting every citizen of Spokane. By establishing an expectation for clean, clear, and safe public spaces, we’re encouraged that your action can also provide the tools to help intervene and incentivize people in the midst of addiction to participate and complete much-needed treatment.

There are many facets to the complicated issue of substance use. We are encouraged that the “Safe Open Spaces” ordinance can provide the tools that motivate individuals to seek treatment, restore our public spaces, and address the devastating impacts to our community. The adoption of the “Safe Open Spaces” ordinance is the first step to doing just that.

We also understand that more action is needed beyond “Safe Open Spaces” and remain committed to continuing work with you and our partners supporting offramps into diversion and treatment programs, funding and support from state and federal sources, and successful recovery programs.

We urge you to keep Spokane’s public spaces safe for everyone in our community and support the “Safe Open Spaces” ordinance, as proposed.

Sincerely,



Emilie Cameron, President & CEO
Downtown Spokane Partnership



Alisha Benson, President & CEO
Greater Spokane Incorporated



Maureen Dodroe, Interim President & CEO
Visit Spokane



Derek Baziotis, Restaurant Chair
Washington Hospitality Association, Spokane Chapter



Cal Clausen, Hotel Chair
Washington Hospitality Association, Spokane Chapter

Cc: Mayor Nadine Woodward, City of Spokane
Johnnie Perkins, City of Spokane
Chief Craig Meidl, City of Spokane
Downtown Spokane Partnership Board of Directors
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Washington Hospitality Association Board of Directors