



Dear Chair Mosqueda and Seattle City Councilmembers,

We are writing on behalf of the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, and our 2,500 members, to encourage you to make meaningful investments in the issues that matter most to Seattleites: addressing homelessness, promoting economic recovery, and improving public safety.

Homelessness

Seattle has an opportunity to make significant and meaningful progress by officially transferring authority for addressing homelessness to the King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA). Seattle declared a homelessness state of emergency in 2015. In the intervening six years, Seattle has increased investments in shelter, permanent supportive housing, and mental and behavioral health services, yet homelessness remains a crisis for our city. According to the Chamber's recent research project, The Index, 65% of registered voters cited homelessness as the biggest issue facing Seattle, dwarfing all other responses.

By transferring funding and empowering the KCRHA to independently manage strategies and contracts, the KCRHA can provide coordinated, strategic homelessness services to all of King County instead of concentrating all services in downtown Seattle. The KCRHA can also review individual programs in the context of the needs of the whole county to make deliberate decisions about programs and where and how to deploy resources.

We also encourage Seattle and, later, the KCRHA to fully fund Housing Connector with \$470,000 in 2022. Housing Connector is a prime example of a program that successfully leverages existing resources and units to address homelessness. Housing Connector has housed 2,168 people in King County since its launch in 2019.

Economic Recovery

We also urge you to support an equitable economic recovery. COVID-19 devastated whole industries and walloped small businesses. As businesses struggle to recover and survive the latest wave fueled by the Delta variant, it is critical for Seattle to do everything in its power to support businesses and promote a coordinated economic recovery plan.

We appreciate the proposed increase in the Office of Economic Development's budget, and we applaud the increase recommended by the Equitable Communities Initiative Task Force to invest in small businesses' ability to access capital and technical assistance. Please fully fund this increase.

Central to overall economic recovery is ensuring we have a thriving, vibrant downtown. The Index found 87% of respondents agreed that "a thriving downtown Seattle is critical to our region's economic recovery" and 78% of Seattleites agreed that they were "worried about the future of downtown Seattle." Nearly 9 in 10 respondents agreed that "Downtown Seattle cannot fully recover until the homelessness and public safety problems are addressed."

We urge Council to contemplate additional investments in downtown recovery, especially as the impacts of COVID extend, and work from home policies increasingly indicate that some level of remote work is here to stay for tens of thousands of workers who previously came downtown five days a week. Small downtown businesses rely on the ecosystem of tourists, conventions, large employers, and regional visitors coming to a safe, welcoming environment downtown – we encourage the Council to make investments to that end.

Public safety

We also urge Council to make significant investments in public safety including fully funding Mayor Jenny Durkan’s proposal to hire 125 officers for a net gain of 35 officers, while also making critical investments in policing alternatives, upstream crime prevention efforts, and public safety reform. The Index found 28% of respondents cited crime and public safety as a top issue facing Seattle, and only 30% of Seattleites said that they would feel safe visiting downtown Seattle at night.

Police are not meeting emergency response time targets for the most serious crimes. That is unacceptable. We urge Council to fully fund Mayor Durkan’s plan to add a net 35 police officers, because while we know that slow emergency response times are the result of a multitude of factors, staffing is a factor. The Seattle Police Department (SPD) has been losing officers far faster than it can hire them since 2020, and we urge Council to appropriate funds, including recruiting and retention incentives, so SPD can interrupt that trend.

Not every 911 call needs or should have a response from a sworn officer, which is why we encourage Council to fund and ramp up efforts to pilot and implement alternative emergency responses and to continue to invest in community-led groups working to reimagine public safety, particularly in BIPOC and immigrant communities. The best public safety strategy is to prevent crimes in the first place, which is why we encourage Council to invest in upstream strategies to prevent crime and to increase the number of Community Service Officers within SPD.

Investments in recruiting and retaining the appropriate number of officers to meet response times, as well as alternative emergency responses must not be pitted against each other and should instead be fully resourced to keep our community safe and healthy.

Just like any other City department, SPD should be transparent and accountable for both its actions and its spending. We support police reform and encourage Council to work with SPD to keep leaders and officers responsible. At a minimum, SPD must deliver the long overdue new timekeeping system—tracking hours worked and overtime—so the public can be confident that resources are being used effectively and appropriately. Council should appropriate the necessary IT funds for this upgrade and ensure that SPD delivers the project as quickly as possible.

Revenue

Finally, we urge Council to recognize that the City must demonstrate results with the resources it already has. The Index found that 72% of Seattle voters believe the City of Seattle has enough money to address homelessness, [the City] just needs to spend it more effectively.” Voter confidence can be buoyed by spending existing resources in a way that generates visible and tangible outcomes. A budget is a reflection of priorities, and both the employer community and

Seattle voters want to see addressing homelessness and public safety, alongside economic recovery for downtown Seattle, invested in as top priorities.

We also urge Council to use resources wisely and cautiously since the past year and a half have clearly demonstrated how unpredictable rainy days can be. Please commit the full \$10 million to the Emergency Fund and \$15 million to the Revenue Stabilization (Rainy Day) Fund so Seattle begins to build up our safety net again. We also urge Council to commit to continuing to invest in the City's reserves, which were critical to Seattle's survival throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

We encourage Council to focus on making responsible investments in essential government functions, instead of creating new programs, especially with one-time dollars. While the Chamber's Seattle Fiscal Task Force found that the general fund budget had largely grown on pace with population and inflation, Seattle's special fund expenditures grew more than 30% between 2010 and 2019. Without federal dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act, 2023 will have a tighter budget than 2022. Please use resources wisely and make prudent decisions that set Seattle up for success in 2023 and beyond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rachel Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rachel" being more prominent than the last name "Smith".

Rachel Smith
President & CEO