

**EVERETT COMMUNITY STREETS INITIATIVE TASK FORCE
PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Revised to incorporate Task Force Input from October 2 / Meeting 6

This Task Force was convened by Everett Mayor Ray Stephanson to “foster a vibrant and healthy community . . . [by] better understand[ing] the street-level social issues in Everett’s commercial core areas and identify[ing] potential short- and long-term actions for the community to address those issues.”

The street-level social issues that the City of Everett is experiencing are common to other urban centers throughout the State and the nation. In Everett, these issues are primarily occurring in our highly compact City center. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that Everett is the County seat: downtown Everett is home to the County Jail and most of the major human services providers for the entire County.

As a Task Force, we share the Mayor’s vision that Everett become a vibrant and healthy community. A hallmark of this vision, in our view, is that our community cares about all its citizens and that we act, individually and collectively, to address the needs of all residents.

The Task Force identified the following street-level social issues and conditions to be of greatest concern:

- Street conduct and behaviors: aggressive panhandling, loitering, vandalism, public intoxication, urination and defecation, drug dealing, bizarre, unpredictable, disoriented or disturbing conduct and speech; and sleeping, lying and sitting on the streets.
- Physical conditions on the streets: littering, including alcoholic beverage containers and hypodermic needles; personal belongings stored or abandoned on sidewalks, in alleys and on other public and private property.
- Criminal conduct (in addition to the above): shoplifting, car prowls, theft and miscellaneous other crimes.
- Visible street homelessness.
- Mental illness and addiction problems suffered by many on the streets.

These issues are in large part—but not entirely – a symptom of homelessness, mental illness, addiction, and poverty.

Task Force members and other community stakeholders and members of the public expressed the following **concerns arising from or related to these street-level social issues:**

- The quality of life, attractiveness of the area, and vitality of business activity in the City’s commercial core areas are adversely affected
- Public safety in commercial core areas is perceived by many to be diminished.
- Concern that visible street homelessness in the commercial core areas make those areas less attractive to visitors .
- Concern for the well-being of individuals on our streets experiencing mental illness, addiction, poverty, homelessness and crime.

The Task Force identified a number of **constraints and obstacles to addressing these issues and concerns**:

Institutional challenges:

- Lack of an overall vision and focus on bringing together our currently fragmented criminal justice and human services systems to better address these issues.
- Lack of communication and coordination among social service providers, government agencies, businesses and residents
- Insufficient funding and service capacity to provide the treatment and other services required to successfully address these issues.
- Insufficient supply of low-income permanent housing to meet the needs of the City's population.
- Insufficient police staffing to provide an increased presence in commercial core areas.
- Traditional criminal justice and law enforcement responses, while appropriate for many, are often ineffective, inappropriate, and too expensive to deal with street level social issues -- but effective alternatives to the traditional system are being deployed in limited ways in Everett.
- Governmental restrictions often make it difficult to site housing and services and drive up the costs of these facilities.
- Possible misallocation of resources – too great a focus on “band aid” solutions, not enough on root causes of street-level social issues.

Community conditions:

- Lack of permanent affordable housing in the City, coupled with a high percentage of the City's residents being “housing burdened” (paying over 30% of their income for housing).
- Community fears about the siting of services and housing facilities in their proximity.
- Lack of economic opportunity.
- Unintended negative impacts on neighborhoods and businesses caused by services intended to respond to street level social issues.
- Lack of public understanding of some of underlying causes and complexity of the issues.
- Those in need lack the information about where to get help, and may lack the capacity to help themselves.