

From: [Cathy Halka](#)
To: [Cathy Halka](#)
Cc: [SAC](#)
Subject: FW: Downtown Bellingham Safety
Date: Wednesday, September 28, 2022 2:24:18 PM
Importance: High

Dear Stakeholder Advisory Committee Members,
Please see message below.
Thanks,
Cathy

From: Bill Elfo
Sent: Tuesday, September 27, 2022 10:02 AM
To: Cathy Halka <CHalka@co.whatcom.wa.us>
Subject: FW: Downtown Bellingham Safety

Cathy, would you be so kind as to share this relevant email chain with the Stakeholder's Advisory Committee – Thank you! Bill

From: Jalyn Rose <rosewater.0202@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 26, 2022 3:52 PM
To: Bill Elfo <BElfo@co.whatcom.wa.us>
Subject: Re: Downtown Bellingham Safety

Hi Bill,

Thank you so much for your response! I appreciate you sharing my message with Rebecca, and you absolutely have my permission to forward it to the Stakeholder Advisory Committee as well.

I have heard about the issues with overcrowding at the jail and support funding for building a new one and providing better resources for those who need it. I hope that there will be solutions soon, and in the meantime between having more jail services we are able to do more to help the businesses downtown deal with the growing crime problems. I am an active voter and will be voting for anything related to this issue when it comes up on the ballot.

Again, thank you SO much for getting back to me. It means a lot to have been heard!

-Jalyn Wilbur

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 26, 2022, at 3:38 PM, Bill Elfo <BElfo@co.whatcom.wa.us> wrote:

Ms. Wilbur, thank you for your communication. I certainly appreciate the nature and severity of the growing crime problems that take place in the downtown business areas. The Sheriff's Office primary law enforcement responsibility is for providing police services in the unincorporated area of Whatcom County. The City of Bellingham, including its downtown areas, are the primary responsibility of the Bellingham Police Department.

However, as Sheriff, I operate the only jail in Whatcom County. While diversion and treatment are needed, a police department needs to be able to book people into jail when public safety or the effective administration of justice so requires. Unfortunately, the jail is grossly inadequate to meet current needs and to meet safety, security, health and legal requirements and we have had to impose "booking restrictions" that preclude law enforcement from booking people into jail.

Multiple citizen task forces, law and justice councils, a Blue Ribbon Committee on Criminal Justice, consultants and the National Institute of Justice have over the last quarter century-all find that the jail is inadequate to handle current demands and recommended that it be replaced. I have consistently advocated for replacing the jail with a facility that will meet current and future needs. This this has not yet occurred. The County Council formed a "Stakeholders Advisory Committee" to study the issue and make relevant recommendations. Their work is currently underway but honestly, even in the best scenario, an adequate jail facility remains years away.

I will take the liberty to forward your communication to Bellingham Chief of Police Becky Rebecca Mertzig. With your permission, I would like to also forward a copy to the Stakeholder Advisory Committee.

Thank you,

From: Sheriff <Sheriff@co.whatcom.wa.us>
Sent: Monday, September 26, 2022 1:34 PM
To: Bill Elfo <BElfo@co.whatcom.wa.us>
Subject: FW: Downtown Bellingham Safety

Sheriff – Forwarding from general Sheriff's email. Dawn

From: Jalyn Rose Wilbur <rosewater.0202@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 26, 2022 12:29 PM
To: Sheriff <Sheriff@co.whatcom.wa.us>
Subject: Downtown Bellingham Safety

Dear Bill Elfo,

I write to you as a long-time resident of Bellingham and an employee of a

locally owned small business in the heart of downtown. Up until about a year ago, I felt safe in our community and at work. I was not afraid to walk around downtown alone during the day, or at night for that matter. I felt like Bellingham's crime rates were relatively low and in check. However, it is no longer possible for me to feel that way.

I work full time off Cornwall Avenue and Chestnut Street at Neko Cat Cafe, and it has become an almost daily occurrence to experience some form of harassment from local homeless and mentally unwell people of Bellingham. These people are becoming bold, brazen, and unafraid of repercussions. We have had multiple minor thefts occur (merchandise items and sidewalk patio furniture). Myself and my coworkers are almost daily verbally harassed and physically threatened both outside and inside our place of work. Someone threw food at our front door, and our outside entry is often full of trash when we arrive in the mornings. We have seen illegal drug use happening in broad daylight and after dark on the streets. One of my coworkers was physically assaulted inside the business; she has since left work out of fear of being assaulted again. Customers have told me they do not feel safe outside the cafe. I do not feel safe inside or outside my work.

We have called the police. We have utilized the Downtown Safety Ambassadors. We have pepper spray. We no longer set up patio furniture on the sidewalk. We lock the doors and windows when we are not open. We don't take the trash out alone or after dark. We have security cameras in the building. We walk or drive each other to our cars at the end of the night. None of these things are enough.

It should not be on the business owners to be the only ones insuring the safety of their employees. There is only so much that they can do. All of us who work at Neko are hardworking, tax paying citizens of this city. We all are positively impacting the town, drawing customers to the downtown area and inviting them to come back. We pay the increased parking fees that were put upon us this spring. But nothing is being done to remove the illegally parked vehicles on the south end of Cornwall Avenue. Nothing is being done to reprimand those who are turning to drugs and violence. The city is not working to provide resources to the homeless population who are non-violent and just trying to make their way.

I am begging you. Please do something to help the citizens of the town you are meant to take care of. Bellingham is a beautiful town with increasing diversity and a unique culture. We should be working to cultivate that, not allowing it to deteriorate. Our town is falling apart. I would hate for this to be your legacy as our sheriff.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I hope to see some change happen soon.

-Jalyn Wilbur