

Impacts of Homelessness & Street Dependency in Downtown

The **Downtown Strategy** calls for the City to address homelessness and street dependency in terms of humanitarian needs, public resource needs and impacts to downtown public spaces and businesses.

- Impacts relate to the fact people experiencing homelessness are forced to live out in the open (e.g., tent camping, carts of personal property)
- Other impacts relate to behaviors that are not always caused by people experiencing homelessness, yet these behaviors are often associated with street dependency (e.g., open drug use, people asking for money)

Collective Impacts are putting great strain on downtown businesses, affecting customers, owners, employees and private property. Many businesses report they are losing customers and employees, and they will not renew long-term leases in the downtown. They are sympathetic to the systemic issue of homelessness and humanitarian needs, however they do not feel the City is doing enough to enforce boundaries for acceptable behavior.

Also strained are City services, where field staff are especially impacted (e.g., clean team, parking services, code enforcement, police, fire and paramedics).

Public Comments by constituents site that the impacts to downtown seem to be increasing in number and severity. People sense there is a higher level of aggression on the street, with more open drug use and instances of harassment as well as people in crisis. There is a sense new people are arriving from out of town, several of whom are aggressive and threatening to the community, including to the vulnerable homeless population.

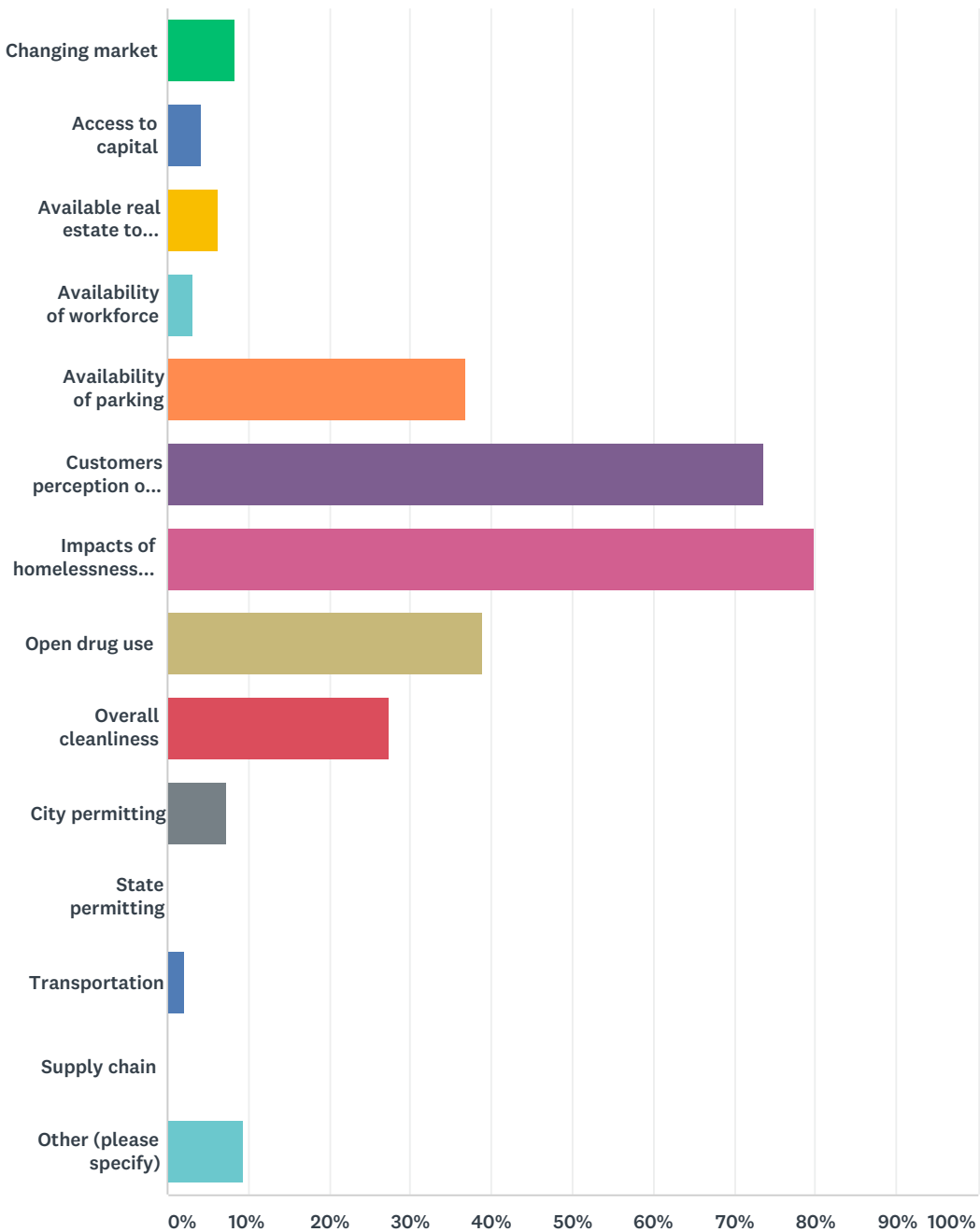
Moving forward it is important to consider how we can mitigate some of these impacts while at the same time helping people in need. *What are the boundaries of acceptable behavior and how can we enforce these boundaries? It is important that the City provide clarity and transparency for everyone about how the City is addressing these impacts.*

PBIA Survey of Ratepayers: In March of 2018, the PBIA advisory board sent an online survey to the 368 ratepayers on its contact list, and received 95 responses. Of the 43 open-ended comments, almost half touch on the impacts of homelessness or behaviors associated with street dependency in downtown. These comments are indicative of much of what liaison and field operations staff are hearing from businesses and the broader public on a daily basis.

A sample from the PBIA Survey as it regards to this topic follows.

Q3 What is the biggest challenge facing your downtown business? Select up to three.

Answered: 95 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Changing market	8.42% 8
Access to capital	4.21% 4
Available real estate to expand operations	6.32% 6
Availability of workforce	3.16% 3

PBIA Short Survey

Availability of parking	36.84%	35
Customers perception of downtown being unsafe	73.68%	70
Impacts of homelessness & street dependency	80.00%	76
Open drug use	38.95%	37
Overall cleanliness	27.37%	26
City permitting	7.37%	7
State permitting	0.00%	0
Transportation	2.11%	2
Supply chain	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	9.47%	9
Total Respondents: 95		

Date	PBIA Survey Responses Related to Negative Behaviors or Homelessness
Apr 06 2018 09:13 AM	Buildings and vehicles are vandalized downtown. My 21-year old son was assaulted downtown by a man who appeared to be either high or mentally ill. Punks throw themselves and their belongings in front of traffic just to cause a scene. Junkies openly shoot up on the sidewalks, and the police do nothing. There is trash, excrement, cigarette butts, used needles and vomit on the streets of our beautiful town. Just this week there was a random shooting deaths downtown!! I am both a business owner and a resident of downtown and have observed a tipping point in the failure to enforce laws and ordinances. Something needs to done. Homelessness is a problem we must handle with compassion, but the lawlessness must stop. The ruffians harm both business and the vulnerable homeless population.
Apr 04 2018 10:40 PM	Downtown challenges seem to be going in the wrong direction. This city is a jewel and the priorities of our council are skewed. I want grand mothers and grand babies downtown. We need to take care of our own - houseless people - but we can't carry the west coast. I am so sad right now about downtown. It's so much worse. Breaks my heart and I've been at this for 40 years.
Apr 04 2018 02:44 PM	We need to address the homeless issue
Apr 03 2018 02:16 PM	I haven't been able to hire employee due to the downtown issues. They don't want to work here.
Mar 28 2018 11:45 AM	Aggressive and violent street people are at an all time high. Very difficult to run a business with this element.
Mar 28 2018 08:56 AM	It is not just a perception that downtown is unsafe. The city allows people to break trespassing laws, openly use drugs and leave human waste, garbage and used heroin needles in the alcoves of our businesses and it makes it unsafe for visitors and all of the people who work downtown. It's sad that the capital city doesn't have the political will to enforce the laws on the books, and therefore most people that I know don't come downtown because it is dirty, lawless and unsafe.
Mar 27 2018 06:08 PM	Having homeless services located on main thoroughfares has a big impact on perceptions. Walking downtown streets at night, one sees homeless folks sleeping in many of the doorways of businesses. This has an impact on their decision about coming back downtown.
Mar 27 2018 06:05 PM	We have not renewed a long term lease for our business space. We plan to move out of downtown because the homeless have made downtown their home.

<p>Mar 27 2018 01:31 PM</p>	<p>The Providence center and all of the facilities to cater to the homeless population have, in my opinion, failed. Driving into and thru downtown Olympia is quite the site now.</p>
<p>Mar 27 2018 01:17 PM</p>	<p>The number of street people and their behavior have gotten completely out of control. I feel like they have taken over our town.</p>
<p>Mar 27 2018 12:52 PM</p>	<p>My business is fortunate to be strong and healthy enough to survive the current downtown situation but it is a constant struggle to keep drug deals out of my place of business. My staff has had to become monitors and polices it regularly. Our yelp reviews continue to get more focused on our place being great if you can deal with the sketchiness around our building or they just literally come down to eat and go elsewhere because they feel uncomfortable. We do our best but my staff is stressed to the max.</p>
<p>Mar 27 2018 12:34 PM</p>	<p>The Providence site is a mess beyond description. Horrible impression on a primary street in downtown. Street camping allowed with apparently no limits enforced. Needs to be moved to a less conspicuous spot. Of course the artesian well site continues to be a disaster of open drug use and violence. The perception created by these two horribly ill-conceived sites convinces people to stay away from the downtown area and take their business elsewhere. .</p>
<p>Mar 27 2018 12:19 PM</p>	<p>The homeless problem really effects business. If we could we would move our business out of downtown.</p>
<p>Mar 27 2018 11:53 AM</p>	<p>We have no faith in the city to hear our concerns, we've been to meetings and been shouted down. We try to keep our doorway clear and we get boycotted. We want to work with the homeless advocates but they (and those of you on the council who see through that lens first), are oblivious at best as hostile at worst toward any dissenting opinion. We love our community and do our best to show it, but we also watch kids sit and sell drugs on 4th ave on the side of the pet store, most times with toddler age children in tow. What happens when someone gets desperate and tries to rob them? They hang out there instead of the park around the corner because there are cameras on the park. The Police officers say the city told them not to bother street folks, so that's what we're up against. My employees don't feel safe after work, day or night, because every one who has worked downtown for more than a year has a story of being followed and asked for money because everyone knows restaurant workers oftentimes have cash after their shift. One of my servers had some homeless men catcall and harass her one morning before my shop opened. My early morning baker has been flashed. It's a problem and no one thinks the solution is "cleaning the streets". We want to be Olympia, be compassionate, but we have too much on our plate running businesses, raising families, and dealing with the repercussions of your (the city's) utter inaction to really be effective. The city allows the vocal, hostile minority to impose their very specific vision on everyone who lives or visits here. Its not working.</p>

<p>Mar 27 2018 11:51 AM</p>	<p>The street dependent population in the alley way off of 4th avenue by king Solomon's reef and quality burrito has gotten out of hand and customers have directly told us that the sheer volume of people loitering and pan-handling has caused them to not visit our business. Something needs to be done to police it because our business' are suffering as a direct result</p>
<p>Mar 27 2018 11:41 AM</p>	<p>Changing the aspect of downtown from a homeless people haven into downtown is a safe and fun place to be at will bring back more visitors. As a person that lived in 6 countries in Europe I know for sure that the heart of a city needs to be clean of drug use and homeless people. This is the business card of a City and a destination. Needs to look clean, feel safe and be entertaining.</p>
<p>Mar 27 2018 11:27 AM</p>	<p>It seems the "graffiti artists" are getting the best of us, especially in the alley ways. I've noticed that no sooner than a business applies a coat of paint to the facade, it's tagged very quickly, sometimes the same day.</p> <p>Realizing there's nothing that can be done to avoid this (they're sneaky), I just wanted to mention it, as it does contribute to the overall "feel" of a somewhat dangerous environment.</p>
<p>Mar 27 2018 11:20 AM</p>	<p>Out of town guests are posting on social media about downtown Olympia not being safe.</p>
<p>Mar 27 2018 11:11 AM</p>	<p>We are delighted that the downtown ambassadors are now within city government. It may be too early to see the difference downtown, however their stability with good management and opportunity to coordinate services with city staff and police is valued. They are a great resource and we love them.</p>