

**From:** [Ray Mcmillin](#)  
**To:** [CityRecorder](#)  
**Subject:** Revised Downtown Public Safety Written Testimony  
**Date:** Monday, July 21, 2025 1:24:10 PM

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Hello, here is my comment regarding public safety, feel free to use any or all of it in public testimony, discussion or sharing.

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Regarding safety, downtown business owners currently have a choice between callousness or submission, neither of which should exist in a healthy society.

A recent news article (<https://www.salemreporter.com/2025/07/14/as-businesses-call-for-fixes-to-clean-up-downtown-some-say-the-problem-is-more-complex/>) demonstrates this.

While one camp is opting to throw trash on the human beings in the doorway, the other camp is rationalizing having feces smeared on their door handles. In a healthy society, there would be a solution that lands between these two extremes. We need compassion and we need integrity. Most people have compassion for the less fortunate, and most people agree that we shouldn't allow biological waste to be used as a weapon. These two perspectives can coexist.

A nuanced approach to this situation is required. Yes, the homeless vet asking for spare change is a result of systemic issues and we should feel compassion for them. However, the shirtless person hurling racial slurs at toddlers while waving a machete is not doing so because of rent prices or interest rates. We can approach systemic solutions all day long to prevent future scenarios, but we cannot retroactively implement them to address current scenarios.

If certain behaviors would not be acceptable for a business owner to engage in, then they should not be acceptable when any other person engages in them. When feces is smeared on your door handle, it's okay to have a problem with this. Excusing said behavior is neither virtuous nor sustainable—it's cowardice disguised as compassion.

Yes, there is a serious issue with access to mental health resources, but it's not up to small business owners and pedestrians to solve this. We pay taxes. It is up to the state and city to use them appropriately. The mental health of every person in Salem matters, but folks forget about the mental health of the teenage employee who is afraid to walk to her car after a minimum-wage shift.

I don't want to live in a world where it's okay to throw trash at the homeless, and I also can't see a future in continuing to excuse bad behavior from adults under the guise of being virtuous or politically correct. This is not a political issue. This is not Biden's fault or Trump's fault. This is our fault. Everyone knows this is true, we're just too afraid to say the quiet part out loud. You are neither a "snowflake" nor "ultra MAGA" for wanting to walk down the sidewalk without getting murdered or raped (of which, one has occurred every three days last year, citation in above article). When normal people cannot speak up, only those voices on the extreme ends of the spectrum end up having their voices heard.

If we want to avoid over-policing, then we need to enforce the social contract, just like we do in every other area. It is legal to scream curse words at nice old ladies, and it is illegal to

jaywalk—but, which of these two things do people feel comfortable doing? Laws are secondary to social tolerance. If we want to see less of something, we need to enforce consequences.

If people are afraid to go downtown, neither side of the aisle will have any customers, regardless of how many signs they put in their window. You can label your store a "safe and welcoming environment," or you can go the other route and post "loiterers will be shot," but neither of these tactics is a wise long-term strategy. Once business owners and their employees get tired of the violence, they will just leave. If Rite Aid can't survive downtown, the niche boutique or artisan ice cream store doesn't stand a chance.

If we want to stop seeing extreme solutions in either direction (whether inhumane callousness or toxic empathy), we need to allow solutions that exist in the rational center. Over-policing becomes an issue when people get sick of under-policing and vote accordingly. If we want to see fewer cops around downtown, then we need to let the existing ones do their jobs. Not everyone likes the police, vegetables, bed times or speed limits, but they're necessary evils in a civilized society.

Downtown needs basic compassion for the homeless, but we also need basic respect for residents and business owners. We need to stop excusing violent behavior from grown adults out of fear of being ostracized.

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Ray McMillin  
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**From:** [Megan Harper](#)  
**To:** [CityRecorder](#)  
**Subject:** Comment for 7.21.25 work session  
**Date:** Monday, July 21, 2025 1:56:04 PM

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I am a resident of Ward 4.

I just read an outstanding column today about downtown Salem and the choices folks who do not have safe shelter are forced to make. I encourage all of you to read it.



I am encouraging you all, as you enter the work session, to consider that sometimes people who make what we consider poor choices also have a very poor range of options.

I am in favor of looking at what we can do to improve downtown for everybody.

Law enforcement officers, to the best of my knowledge, are not equipped to help someone meet their basic needs such as a place to safely use the toilet, mobility aids, a place to safely sleep or store belongings, food, and basic human dignity. There might be individual officers who know about these resources through time and experience, but that is not their primary function.

I am asking this council, during tonight's work session, to consider the needs of the most marginalized first.

**From:** [Lynelle Wilcox](#)  
**To:** [CityRecorder](#)  
**Cc:** [Vanessa Nordyke](#); [Julie Hoy](#); [Paul Tigan](#); [Linda Nishioka](#); [Shane Matthews](#); [Deanna Gwyn](#); [Dr. Irvin M Brown](#); [Micki Varney](#); [Mai Vang](#)  
**Subject:** Public comment 3: 072125 City Council work session - agenda item 2a  
**Date:** Monday, July 21, 2025 1:53:16 PM

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Mayor Hoy and City Councilors

My name is Lynelle Wilcox. I live on Norway Street in Ward 1. I began working with people experiencing homelessness when I volunteered at a Salem warming center about 8 years ago. I'm now the Program Manager at SafeSleep United – an overnight, year-round, low barrier shelter for women and women with kids.

I'm writing this third letter (but who's counting?) as public comment on Agenda item 2a: Improving Public Safety and Livability.

**Thank you:** So much has been built and done since I started serving people experiencing homelessness in 2018. We've had Housing First with positive results, and more permanent supported living, and sober living places to live, and more housing overall. We've had more programs, services, shelter beds, bicycle police and homeless outreach SOS police, and more mental health professionals being involved in mental health crises.

I am so grateful for the city, county, state, federal, and private contributions that have contributed this growing network of places for people to live, and programs, services, and supports. Thank you!

Each of these things work, and we need more of each. So much time, money, blood, sweat, tears, and hearts have been invested to make this progress. I hope that funding can become more stable so we can do more of these things that work, and so we don't lose progress with homeless prevention.

**Homelessness growing:** Even with all this time, money, and work, homelessness is growing. The common image of homelessness is a dirty scruffy person that conjures many negative perceptions. People might not realize that each person is a fellow human being with a story, and many stories could have been/could be us.



**Homelessness growing:** Even with all this time, money, and work, homelessness is growing. The common image of homelessness is a dirty scruffy person that conjures many negative perceptions. People might not realize that each person is a fellow human being with a story, and many stories could have been/could be us.

And people might not realize that families, mothers and kids, dads and kids, senior citizens, people with disabilities, teenagers, and people who had “normal” and full lives are also ending up homeless.

**Lack of shelter beds and housing:** Even with more housing and more shelter beds than ever, more people are experiencing homelessness than housing and shelter beds can accommodate. There are also people we cannot shelter due to gaps in the systems and services. Shelters each require that guests are able to do Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) independently. Many people we serve are seniors and/or people with disabilities who need more assistance than a shelter is able to provide. There are not enough assisted living, memory care facilities, group homes, adult foster care homes, hospitals for people experiencing mental illness, and permanent supported housing for people who need those supports.

The people we are not able to serve are heart-breaking.

**Some stories:**

One lady struggles with mental illness. She’s shared about some of the extreme trauma she experienced since she was a very young child, and after earning her trust, she sometimes will talk openly about her multiple personalities. They each have different voices, different makeup, different styles of dressing, and

different behaviors.

We tried very hard, for a long time, to have her stay inside with us. Yet her past haunts her so vividly, so loudly, so profanely. Almost every night, one or more personalities will be present, screaming at the top of her lungs, or crying - full bodied sobbing with yelling mixed in. And almost always extreme profanity, and conversations with people we can't see. That much chaos and pain in high volume really doesn't enable other people to sleep well. So we had her leave, yet she's stayed in the area even though she can no longer come inside the shelter.

Because there is nowhere for someone in her condition to go, we don't condone her presence, yet we don't trespass her either. And because she is a fellow human being, a warrior surviving in spite of her past abuse and trauma, we made sure she isn't freezing, starving, or dying of thirst.

Sometimes she will ask for food and say we never feed her. And we can tell her that we may not have fed HER, but we did give dinner to someone else who lives inside her body. Yet if SHE is starving now, we'll feed her too.

And her nightly screaming fits? It took a while to learn that this happens TO her; not BY her.

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We had a new woman stay with us one week. And the new woman was talking to people I can't see, and I asked her if she was ok?

She explained that the teeter totter room was tottering. And realizing she must live in alternate reality sometimes, I asked if there's anything I can do, and she said no thank you, and then she spoke more quietly to the people I cannot see.

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One night, our longtime lady was outside screaming and crying, cursing and wailing as she loudly spoke and sobbed at people we don't see.

She was so loud that our new lady could hear everything our longtime lady was saying. And our new lady was set off by the trauma and the drama.

We asked our new lady, 'What's up?' Our new lady shared that she is very upset because someone is sawing the outside lady in half, and that's why the

lady outside is crying and screaming so loudly and hard.

We went outside and talked to our long-term lady, and explained that she is setting someone else off, because she is being so loud. And we asked if she can please move, or be more quiet because we have a new lady who is hearing her cry and sob so loudly, and our new lady thinks someone is sawing our long-term lady in half.

And our long-term lady said "Well YES! She is the one sawing me in half!"  
(And how do you not crack up at that moment?)

And yet she moved.

It's a rare moment when alternate realities mesh like that.

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One time, our long-term lady was having a very hard time. Her different personalities were each in deep pain, so different people inside of her were yelling and cursing, screaming and talking.

The person we know her as most came to our door in total tears. Explaining that she is exhausted and just wants to SLEEP. But "they" won't let her. They keep talking and screaming. And is it possible that I have earplugs she can use to try to finally get some SLEEP?

Of course we do, so I brought her some earplugs and a hot cocoa.

And the voices still loudly talked and cried, sobbed and screamed outside.

The tortured person we know best finally came to the door, in complete exhaustion and total tears, and handed me back the earplugs. And told me they don't work.

And what can you say to that?

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One man shared that shelters trigger his trauma from being in jail and prison. When he can't sleep, he can unwind by sweeping sidewalks outside. Most shelters have curfews where people need to be inside, so sweeping at 2am for a few hours isn't a viable option. Yet his fears and voices in his head are most active at that time. So he opts to leave the shelter since he won't be able to sleep anyway, and rules don't allow him to sweep for a few hours each night.

It's easy to think that the people who can't follow shelter rules are the problem. Sometimes the problem is the reality that keeping track of the people you serve doesn't enable the flexibility that some people need in order to stay calm enough to stay inside.

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Some people experience illness, or health issues that result in blood, vomit, urine, poop, weepy wounds, or pus happening. If those things are not controllable, shelters can't serve those individuals because the resulting biohazards put everyone's safety at risk.

The very people who are most ill, most vulnerable, are often the very people we are not able to serve. There is rarely a place and an opening for these individuals to go.

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One woman experienced reality that led her to believe that she needed to tuck all the shelter guests in. We had many conversations with her about personal boundaries, personal space, the fact that tucking a stranger in might freak the person out, and how tucking other people in is NOT allowed – it crosses boundaries and is dangerous.

She was extremely sweet, and was not hearing any of our input because she SO strongly believed that she had to tuck everyone in. We tried following her every time she got up, but we don't have staff capacity for that to be sustainable. It was heart-breaking to need to exit her, yet she wasn't able to seek help or change her beliefs and actions.

What if we experienced a belief that seems so kind, and actually puts everyone, including ourselves, at risk?

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Some individuals experience alternate realities that have them accusing others of things they aren't doing. If the accusations aren't stoppable, the accusatory or menacing behavior isn't viable. These realities are happening TO the person, not by the person. They are warriors trying to exist in our reality that isn't aligned with theirs.

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One woman came to SafeSleep struggling with trauma, mental illness, and addiction. She was catatonic and wasn't able to answer simple questions, or go two blocks without becoming disoriented and lost.

We met her where she was at and coordinated doctor visits, transportation, assessments, and supports. It was slow and rocky, yet over time she was able to answer most questions, and eventually became conversational and more independent.

She now is living in adult foster care, in a lovely home, with excellent staff. They provide three meals a day, snacks, medication management, trips to play pool, go bowling, shopping, hiking at Silver Falls, making ceramics, and other activities, and she is learning to use public transportation.

She reconnected with family and is especially loving the chance to be an aunt to her 3 year old nephew. She loves cats and she volunteers at a cat rescue place.

She still struggles with voices in her head as part of her mental illness. No medication so far has been able to stop that. The voices don't like her, and they are always there. I don't know how you sustain self-worth through that ongoing narrative, yet she somehow has accomplished so much. Yet every single day, she is ALWAYS working, speaking, and thinking over, around, and through the voices in her head. I don't know HOW she does that. I have no idea if I could do the same. Could you?

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These are just a few of the many, many people who struggle significantly with mental health. These are just a few of the people who have slept outside, sometimes downtown, sometimes in doorways. These are just a few of the people who rarely have somewhere to go, somewhere to live, sleep, poop, or exist.

Where do they go as we tell them they can't be anywhere? And where are the bootstraps they are supposed to pull up?

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The ripples of their homelessness affect all of us in some ways. The ripples of their homelessness affects them most of all. They are often treated as invisible

or as vermin. They are the victims of discrimination and violence on an ongoing basis.

And somehow, most of them cling to reality or alternate reality, and some sliver of hope to get up each day, and try again, and again, and again. And some of them make it, against all odds.

We never know who will make it, yet each person deserves basic safety, having basic human needs met, livability, and the chance to try again, against all odds.

We have the responsibility to decide how we treat others as we balance safety and livability **for all**. We have the ability to spark hope or crush it. We have the ability to decide who we want to be. I hope we live up to our best selves.

Thank you for your consideration.

Lynelle Wilcox

**From:** [lorrie walker](#)  
**To:** [citycouncil](#); [CityRecorder](#); [Trevor Womack](#); [Sen. Patterson](#); [Sen.KateLieber@oregonlegislature.gov](#); [H Tom Anderson](#); [lorrie walker](#)  
**Subject:** July 21, 25 / Work Session  
**Date:** Monday, July 21, 2025 1:50:39 PM

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Mayor Hoy, City Council,

I live in Ward 2, SCAN neighborhood.

I have worked with unsheltered, mentally ill, addicts and alcoholics as a staff at the Oregon State Hospital and on the streets of Salem for many years

I am concerned what the focus would be regarding the request for more police in downtown Salem for unsheltered, mentally ill and others.

1. Criminalization? Dehumanization?
2. Treatment? Marion County will be opening a behavioral health unit with very limited beds.  
Jail?
3. Crime Data. Will the crime data for downtown be separated into categories;  
A) gang and gun crime incidents  
B) crimes against unsheltered  
C) West Salem / Wallace Marine Park crimes  
D) Crimes by unsheltered  
E) Business thefts, etc
4. Public Restrooms. Where are they?  
Where can unsheltered use a restroom other than Arches, UGM?

Question?

If city councilors cannot meet in neighborhood meetings or talk with people they represent how can they have a business forum?

Will city counselors have a Unsheltered forum to hear from unsheltered, organizations that serve unsheltered, advocates?

Bias comes in many forms. Yes, we need to be aware of business needs.

I am appalled at the many hate filled comments and behavior by some Salem business leaders.

Some put cold water hoses on sleeping people. One admitted to putting feces on sleeping people. These are crimes. Abuse.

I am thankful for the business leaders who are kind and compassionate.

Do we have any idea why a 17 year old murdered a unsheltered man simply walking down a street. Hate?

Do we have any idea why 2 young people were targeting unsheltered, throwing eggs at them?

Hate. Acceptance of hate. Bias.

Hate cannot be allowed to be tolerated or promoted by business leaders or the city of Salem.

These issues were already worked on by the city of Salem Homeless Task Force. Hate wasn't part of it. Why isn't that being reviewed?

These people are all someone's loved ones. Parent. Sibling. Child. Cousin.

They are absolutely us.

Oregons broken mental health system isn't questioned.

We need to be very aware of people some view as unworthy.

Respectfully,

Lorrie Walker

Ward 2 SCAN

Legal Guardian, Advocate for Unsheltered & or Mentally ill.

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**From:** [Lynelle Wilcox](#)  
**To:** [CityRecorder](#)  
**Subject:** Public comment 4: 072125 City Council work session - agenda item 2a  
**Date:** Monday, July 21, 2025 2:03:28 PM

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Mayor Hoy and City Councilors

Salem Reporter spoke with local businesses about safety and livability. They dropped their paywall so everyone can read it!  
Businesses they spoke with mostly suggested kindness.

<https://www.salemreporter.com/2025/07/14/as-businesses-call-for-fixes-to-clean-up-downtown-some-say-the-problem-is-more-complex/>

**From:** [Chair of MCDCC](#)  
**To:** [citycouncil](#); [CityRecorder](#)  
**Subject:** Downtown Public Safety - Written Testimony - Marion County Democrats  
**Date:** Monday, July 21, 2025 2:14:28 PM

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Dear Salem City Council,

I'm writing regarding the work session this evening on downtown safety.

As you may be aware, the Marion County Democrats maintain an office space in downtown Salem, at 245 High St NE, across from the Cherriots transit mall at Courthouse Square. We have an important perspective on Mayor Julie Hoy's proposal to add more police to downtown Salem.

At our office location, our volunteers regularly interact with unhoused individuals. Their requests of us are for water, to use an outlet to charge a mobile device, or to use our restroom. In the past, we have experienced individuals who rest within our doorway. Like downtown businesses, we have experienced urine or feces outside of our building. It is important to note that we have not experienced this in over a year. The most damage we have experienced in the last six months were by individuals who place Trump stickers on our front window or damage our logo decal - damage that is probably from Republicans, not unhoused individuals.

We strongly believe that unhoused individuals deserve dignity. We don't believe any individual wishes to rest unhoused or to relieve themselves in a public place. We see these as symptoms of a systemic failure. It is alarming that the answer from our mayor is to add police.

In listening to public testimony from select business owners, it is clear that unfortunate human beings are being seen as an inconvenience and a nuisance. We would all be well-served to remember how fortunate we are that we can't relate to their experience.

The median income for a Salem Police Officer is \$98,000. Salem voters, with the support of the Marion County Democrats, recently passed a levy to protect other city services. We strongly oppose adding an additional burden to our city budget for more law enforcement. We did not endorse the Livability Levy for the Mayor to immediately propose further bloating the police budget, increasing stress on other city services and potentially worsening our shortfall in future budget years.

The money it would cost for increased police presence downtown would be better used to build public restrooms in the downtown area. We believe the City should instead problem-solve by providing adequate facilities for houseless individuals, instead of increasing police presence to possibly intimidate and criminalize the human suffering

we see everyday.

We urge you to reject the Mayor's proposal to add more police to downtown Salem. We instead strongly support practical and direct resolutions for the problems being articulated by business owners.

The majority of Salem residents experience rental increases, utility increases, and more expensive groceries. The truth is that Salem has more in common with houseless individuals than with business owners who desire that Salem residents pay for policing their investments.

We understand businesses downtown are important to our local economy. However, the expectation that any business operating in an urban center would not encounter unhoused individuals is not based in reality and should not be legitimized with increased police presence at the expense of everyone else.

We urge your compassion for unsheltered individuals. We urge solutions to these problems that do not include law enforcement or further expansion of the Salem Police budget.

The Marion County Democrats have experienced the same problems as business owners. However, we understand our location puts us in community with Salem's unsheltered, and we are committed to treating all as human beings deserving of dignity, regardless of their economic status.

We do not perceive downtown to be particularly dangerous when we recognize the unsheltered as part of our community, too.

Please instead invest in public facilities in the downtown area. Thank you for reading.

In Solidarity,

Paige Barton (she/hers)  
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phone: 971-330-0592

Stay Up To Date with the Marion County Democrats at [www.mariondemocrats.org](http://www.mariondemocrats.org)