

September 14, 2023

RE: Public Safety and the State of Asheville

Dear Mayor Esther Manheimer, City Manager Debra Campbell, and Asheville City Council Members,

Today we are reaching out as a united voice of concerned citizens, employers, and business owners, to discuss and address the short-term need for additional public safety in our City of Asheville. Once again, as Fall approaches, Asheville is confronted with the inadequacy of our efforts to address the issues of violent crime, open drug use, public harassment, and the safety of our citizens and customers in our community.

In the absence of significant progress, the City has fallen short in its duty and responsibility to its residents and neighborhoods. This requires rededication and realignment of proper appropriations to fund an increased public safety presence and urgent need to help protect our community.

We need your immediate action to protect the livelihood of our workforce, neighborhoods and businesses that generate a significant tax base that provides funds for vital City services. Our asks are concise and clear:

1. Provide an increased public safety presence. There was a visible difference during the City's 60-day initiative that has since become less effective or has diminished significantly. Fully reinstate or increase community service programs to aid in addressing crime, drug use and addiction, and removal of vagrants from public property and on our City streets. For example, have police officers actively walking our streets, not sitting idle in cars. We are asking for safe, clean, and activated neighborhoods, including downtown, for our workforce, our citizens (housed and unhoused), and our customers for the livelihood of our community and sustainability of our businesses.
2. Work Immediately with the Buncombe County Commission now to re-engage the County Sheriff's Department to aid in patrol and equal enforcement of the law of Asheville starting October 1, 2023.
3. Work with the Asheville Police Department to provide further appropriations of funding to allow for more police to patrol our City's neighborhoods, divert crime, and enforce violations that are routinely overlooked.
4. Consistent and Clear communication on progress for short term (1 month), midterm (3 and 6 months), and long-term goals (1 year).
5. Focus resources on our citizens experiencing chronic homelessness, mental illness and/or drug addiction.

We understand, respect, and support the long-term initiatives underway to address some of the complicated root causes such as mental illness, drug addiction and places for people to go. However, our community cannot afford to ignore the negative impacts of crime, vagrancy and harassment.

We are all being pushed to a point of despair in a community we have all worked so hard to build into a beautiful and wonderful place to live, work, and visit. Please help us to move quickly to regain the safety of our City to make it a great place for everyone to be.

It's time to get to work!