

Questions/Areas for Tim Burgess

In preparation for your visit on Thursday we asked members of the Civic Engagement Group⁽¹⁾ here at Skyline for suggested questions or topics they would like you to address. The items below are a distillation of those comments. We do realize that some of these may be somewhat far afield from your areas of responsibility. Those questions which we think are of greatest interest are marked with an asterisk

Housing and Homelessness

*A number of encampments have been closed – how many of the affected residents have been placed in temporary or permanent housing, and how many have simply moved to other areas?

*The initiative promoted under the name “Compassion Seattle” was rejected by the courts, but it appears that the most significant element, sweeping and closing encampments, is the most visible change emanating from the Mayor’s office. Won’t this largely just move the issue from neighborhood to neighborhood? Examples – 2nd and Pine was the major drug trafficking nexus for many years, then it moved to 2nd and Bell (Pharmacy Park), and then to 3rd and Pike and 12th and Jackson. Isn’t this just kicking the can down the road?

How many residents have been displaced since the prohibition on evictions expired?

*The Rental Housing Association asserts that 10,000 residential units have been closed due primarily to city-imposed restrictions. Is this accurate, and if so, won’t it be likely to increase the incidence of homelessness? If restrictions on rental housing operations have materially resulted in a reduction in available stock, should these restrictions be removed?

What is going to be done to increase the availability of workforce housing? Are we going to be a city of almost exclusively wealthy homeowners, renters in subsidized housing units, and homeless?

*The new Regional Homeless Authority now exists. What positive or negative impacts has it had on homelessness in Seattle to date, and what impacts do you expect it to have by year-end?

Over two years ago the process was completed (including EIS) to use a portion of the Ft. Lawton property for low income/affordable housing; this has been approved yet no construction has occurred? What is the Mayor doing to facilitate this construction?

Police and Crime:

The Mayor’s announcement regarding the search for a new chief of police appeared to many as a suggestion that Acting Chief Diaz is a shoo-in and the national search and process is pro forma, done to satisfy the Charter requirements. Is this correct? If not, who will be managing the search, what is the timeframe, and what citizens or citizens groups will be involved in this process?

*Police officer retention and recruitment continues to decline. What is being done to counteract that trend? Specifically, do you foresee the City Council agreeing to transfer and recruitment bonuses?

*Shoplifting is endemic in this city – shop owners and managers have largely given up and are just considering it a cost of doing business. What is the city, (i.e. specifically, the Mayor’s office and other departments) doing about it?

- (1) The Civic Engagement Group, (established in January of 2016), meets monthly to share ideas regarding governance, politics, policy at the federal state and local level. Members organize candidate forums, and invite speakers to meet with the community to discuss topical matters. The CEG is an informal collection of individuals, and is not a part of or affiliated with either the Skyline Resident Association or the management of Skyline or its parent organization, Transforming Age.

The Police Department has undertaken targeted efforts to remove large gatherings which are, or are at least perceived to be centers of drug trafficking and dangerous. These include the corners of Third and Pine, and 12th and Jackson. Similar efforts in the past were undertaken with respect to areas like 2nd and Pike, and 2nd and Bell, with the result that the problem was simply relocated. In the past these actions have simply shifted the location of activity to other places. Why will clearing the most recent sites have any different impact?

*Response times appear to continue to degrade, and it is reasonable to believe this is in part due to the reduction in the number of officers on the street, and to an increased incidence of criminal activity. There is also some concern that the response time may be degrading in part due to officer frustration, with a resulting practice of delaying or slowing times by “cooping”. Can you comment on this last aspect?

The Mayor, as a candidate and in office, has emphasized the need to reduce gun violence. The city is largely preempted from any local control regarding firearms possession. What, if anything can the city do, and what action does the Mayor plan to take in this area?

What, if anything is being done to reduce the theft and sale of catalytic converters? (Have you considered proposals to etch ownership information onto converters on a mass scale?)

The Seattle Times recently reported that while reports of use-of-force reports have declined, there appears to be a disproportionate incidence of such actions, by race, and that racial demographic information was not recorded in approximately 1/3 of the reports. What is being done to correct these situations?

*It has been suggested that the City should develop teams of unarmed personnel who may be able to more effectively intervene in those instances involving individuals with mental health or substance abuse problems, relieving sworn officers (armed police) from that task. Is this under active consideration and/or implementation, and to what extent do is it opposed or do you expect it to be opposed by the Police Officers Guild?

We appear to have a revolving door criminal justice system of arrest, granting of bail, release, and re-arrest. This problem appears to be driven by jail capacity and judges. What is or can be done to keep repeat offenders off the streets? (Please discuss the interrelationship and roles of the various elements of the criminal justice system – police, jail capacity, prosecutors and judges.)

Infrastructure and capital improvements:

The voters approved a massive infrastructure levy (\$930 Million) in 2015, but we don’t actually see any major activity or improvements. What is being done?

Given the rising cost of labor and materials in the construction industry, why did the Mayor decline to use the \$100 Million available in bonding capacity to begin work on some of our bridges?

When will the West Seattle Bridge be reopened?

One letter in the Seattle Times which struck a chord with residents at Skyline, is the deteriorated nature of sidewalks and crossing areas. This is a particular concern for Skyline residents. Is there any systematic plan to address this issue? (For Example, see the bus stop at 8th and James.)

*What is the most effective way to get an intersection traffic flow reduced, or slowed down – i.e. – installation of a four-way stop or a stoplight? (Can you suggest any specific actions which citizens can effectively take to secure four-way stops, stoplights, etc.?) Finally, who should we talk to about doing a volunteer monitoring of vehicular traffic, and installation of driver report cards?

*Skyline requested approval for a skybridge to connect the two buildings facing each other on 8th Avenue. That request was denied. Is there any reasonable possibility that the city’s hostility toward skybridges might change in the foreseeable future?

Is the First Avenue Streetcar project still under consideration, and if so, is there a timeframe for construction?

Should vehicular traffic be prohibited within the Market, (e. g. on Pike Place), and why or why not? To what extent have market vendors been involved in these discussions, and do they have a consistent or differing views on the matter?

Economic recovery – particularly downtown:

*Small businesses, particularly in downtown, have clearly been hurt over the past few years. Some of this decline has been attributed to criminal activity or at least the fear of crime, as well as the appearance of graffiti, trash and a generally unattractive appearance. A less discussed factor may be the reduction in the downtown workforce due to Covid driven decentralization – the “work from home” approach. What is the city doing to promote a return to business operations in the downtown core?

Some neighborhoods, including First Hill, (under leadership of the First Hill Association) have organized community cleanup efforts (painting over graffiti, trash removal etc.), to improve the appearance of public areas. Has the Mayor’s office or anyone else attempted to encourage such efforts in the downtown area?

*One generator of economic activity is believed to be sporting events. What is the Mayor doing to bring the NBA back to the city? Will this effort, if any, necessitate a substantial outlay of public funds for a new arena, and if so, where do you expect it to be located?

Other Areas of Interest and Concern:

Shifting responsibilities: First the Zoo, then the Aquarium were transferred to a new NGO; Then the remaining Parks Department was transferred to a new entity; Most recently the issue of homelessness was transferred to the Regional Homeless Authority. Will this transfer of municipal functions to newly created entities continue under Mayor Harrell, and if so what’s next?

City Light Skagit River Dams: What is the status of the suits contesting relicensing of the city’s dams on the Skagit River? Who is handling the negotiations with the plaintiffs (local tribal communities)?

*City Revenues: It appears that an initiative (several have been filed) to repeal the Capital Gains Tax, and a suit to repeal the City’s high-income employee tax could reduce city revenues. Can you tell us what the dollar and programmatic impact of those revenue losses might be?

Ukraine Refugees: The Mayor and some of his colleagues undertook a concerted effort to raise money for Ukraine refugees. What is occurring in this arena – how much is available to assist refugees financially, how will it be used, and have any Ukraine refugees arrived in Seattle yet?