

Mayor Wilson Community Solutions Remarks

Hello everyone, thank you for being here today.

It's the fall season – I hope you're all enjoying it. The leaves are changing color, to bright hues of red and orange. Seasons change.

Today, I want to share with you some major changes that we're making in the City of Seattle, in collaboration with many of the people in this room today.

For years, mayors and their teams have come and gone. But the moral outrage of homelessness in one of the wealthiest cities in the richest country in the world has only worsened. In the four years before I took office, unsheltered homelessness increased by over 50%.

This is unacceptable.

On any given night, thousands of men, women, and children in this city have no place to call home. Well over half don't even have the benefit of a shelter roof. Let us be clear: homelessness is not a natural occurrence. It is a policy failure.

We see this from Little Saigon to Chinatown, from Greenlake to Roosevelt, from Beacon Hill to Rainier Valley, to West Seattle and Ballard. But you know who else sees it? Tens of millions of people online, as YouTubers train their cameras on Seattle to showcase drug use and street disorder.

Across America and beyond our borders, Seattle and some peer cities are perceived by millions of people to be frightening and chaotic places.

Those of us who live here know that the actual picture is more nuanced. Crime is down across almost every metric, and many of our neighborhoods bustle with activity.

But there is also a painful reality that is captured in these videos. We can decry the way these videos are presented, while also recognizing that this is a problem – not just for tourism, but for all of us.

It's a problem for all of us who care about progress and democracy and humanity. When we let progressive cities be painted as bastions of disorder and unaddressed human suffering, we drive people toward more punitive solutions that often don't work.

Before I ran for mayor, I wrote an article called “Where the Left Went Wrong on Homelessness.” I wrote about how progressives get it wrong when we trivialize what people see and experience every day when they walk around our city. I wrote about a “habit of deflection on the left” that makes it sound like we are in denial.

Instead, I argued, we need to acknowledge what people see with their own eyes, and offer real solutions. I pointed to local examples like JustCARE and our state’s Encampment Resolution Program. Some of us know what works. We simply need the political will to bring the solution to scale.

So that’s what we’re going to do. This summer’s World Cup was a fabulous experience for our city. Part of that was the success of a pilot program in Pioneer Square which placed 70 out of 80 people in sustained, long-term shelter or housing. Today, I’m announcing that we are expanding this program to other parts of Seattle. And we are doing this with efficiency, using existing resources, marrying my shelter acceleration initiative with this proven strategy.

Here’s how this works: In June, weeks before the first World Cup match when Belgium drew 1-1 with Egypt at Lumen Field in front of 66,000 fans, the “Streets to Housing” pilot program was launched in Pioneer Square with the City’s support. This was an effort led by DSA and a coalition of service organizations, using the Community Solutions framework.

The partners shared data, followed individuals from outreach to successful placement in shelter or housing, and monitored what happened thereafter. Not only were 70 out of 80 people placed into shelter and housing, but these were not easy cases: 47 percent of those individuals had been homeless for more than 3 years, 77 percent suffered from addiction or mental illness, and 16 percent were seniors.

The partners used a By-Name list, identifying every individual living unsheltered in that area and offering wrap-around support. Instead of repeatedly referring people between disconnected parts of the homelessness response system, this program was highly centralized – zeroing in on specific barriers that specific people faced and connecting them to the appropriate resource. And it was also successful because of space available at Bayside, the first major new site in my shelter acceleration initiative, which opened in June.

This same framework was also used successfully by the Washington State Department of Transportation to resolve more than 40 large encampments in Seattle from 2022-2025, with *a 95% placement rate* into shelter and housing.

Now, we will scale this success. That means working with more neighborhoods across Seattle to proactively develop By-Name lists that can be used in real time by the City and

our partners. It means prioritizing shelter placements for those individuals who are having the greatest impact on public space.

The bottom line is this. Our public parks and public sidewalks belong to the public: they should be kept open and usable for their intended purposes. Scaling up this approach is how we can meet this reasonable expectation, without merely pushing human beings around our city from one block to the next.

Helping the people currently living in those spaces will help us, in turn, re-activate those spaces for the public and local businesses.

We will go as fast as we can and I want to see steady, visible improvements. The \$37 million for shelter expansion in my budget proposal – a budget that, I am proud to say, closes the \$175 million deficit I inherited - will be crucial to this effort.

What's new is the commitment from the array of partners in this room to scale this up – with the City leading and coordinating this effort. This is a commitment to common sense.

What's also new is that this brings us into alignment with the nationally-recognized Community Solutions framework, which has been used successfully in cities across the country such as Atlanta, Charlotte, Anchorage, Kansas City, Houston, and Denver. In Denver, a [New York Times analysis published last week](#) showed their unsheltered population is down 64% *in three years*. Quite simply, we're doing what works for everyone else. This is commitment, here in Seattle, to get rid of what doesn't work. A commitment to common sense.

Make no mistake: That is the kind of striking progress that we are going to make here in the Emerald City.

Change is in the air - let's enjoy the changing seasons.

Thank you.