

August 7, 2023

To: Bellevue City Council

Fr: Craig Spiezle

Re: Re-Imagining Neighborhood Safety & Well Being

Hello. My name is Craig Spiezle a resident of Bellevue. I am speaking to request City Council embrace a holistic view of neighborhood safety, which has been coined "BeSafe". This effort reflects input from listening sessions with over 20 community organizations. In addition, I have had numerous meetings with representatives of the Police Department, OEM and Neighborhood Services. My presentation submitted earlier to Council provides additional details.

BeSafe is an umbrella initiative with the goal to help make our neighborhoods be safe and feel safe, to promote emergency readiness and to enhance a sense of community. BeSafe has the potential to build bridges between the city and the community and ultimately help neighborhoods become a "force multiplier" for the Police and Fire Departments.

As a past president of the Lochleven Community Association, block watch captain and member of CERT, I understand first-hand the challenges of keeping neighborhood programs vibrant and engaging. Issues include: leadership turn over, cultural dynamics, neighborhood churn and the lack of city resources needed to effectively nurture and sustain them.

Bellevue is not alone. Nationally the Neighborhood Watch Program has become challenged to maintain. In an effort to be more engaging and relevant, the national charter was expanded over a decade ago to include disaster preparedness and emergency response. Locally, Mercer Island and Redmond have embraced this expanded role. Other cities have expanded their scope and initiated rebranding efforts to be more inclusive and welcoming, while cities such as San Francisco and Spokane have created 501c3 organizations to be more agile and responsive to the communities needs

Residents have cited many safety related concerns. These range from street and pedestrian safety, elder abuse, and first aid training to porch pirates to emergency readiness to address environment threats including earthquakes, power outages, heat domes and unhealthy air quality.

I believe Bellevue now needs to think outside the box. While individual city departments are doing a good job, from the community perspective their efforts are siloed, fragmented and inconsistent.

BeSafe needs to build on the foundation of crime prevention. The Police Department under Chief Shirley has made great progress and is making additional investments as we speak. That said the Police Department cannot be expected to address these issues alone. It is a shared responsibility between all City departments.

The City needs to take a broader view from the community perspective. We need programs tailored not only for home owners but for residents of condos and apartments. Newsletters alone are not the answer. Neighborhoods need an advocate or ombudsman to proactively engage them and represent their needs back to the City. We need a toolkit including a calendar of initiatives to support specific neighborhood needs.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal. I look forward to working with the city to help make Bellevue neighborhoods BeSafe.

Goodnight and BeSafe.

Craig Spiezle

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