

Good evening all. I am here tonight representing many concerned citizens who live in, work, and enjoy downtown Ashland. We are requesting a stronger police presence downtown, specifically on the SW corner of E. Main St and Pioneer St. This area has long been a gathering place for the transient community, and this summer has seen an increase in unacceptable behavior. This has led to myself, my friends, and my co-workers feeling uncomfortable and unsafe in what is supposed to be the apex of our community. We realize that the actions of a few do not represent the population as a whole, but we feel that this situation warrants special attention. The following are true events that have transpired within the past few weeks, and by sharing them with you we hope to prevent them from happening again.

Downtown has long been an animal friendly spot, and I love meeting and interacting with people's pets. However, a line needs to be drawn so that animals and people can both enjoy downtown safely. Last week a customer was bitten by a transient's dog. After a co-worker made several calls to police dispatch on the victim's behalf, the man grew frustrated and left. Assumedly the Police did eventually show up, because later, the dog owner responded to me by throwing his young puppy at me, screaming: "Are you afraid my dog will bite you now?" and proceeded to follow me down the street, shaking the dog violently at me and making pretend growling dog noises. Many of these animals are visibly malnourished, under stimulated, and not leashed. They are not cleaned up after, and many of the downtown sidewalks are now covered in feces and bodily fluids. An officer stationed in the area would have prevented both these occurrences, and would foster a cleaner and safe community for all creatures, animal and human alike.

The aggressive panhandling has also become a growing area of concern. It has graduated from friendly busking to rude and sexually explicit catcalls. Street harassment is not something this city can afford to take lightly, and the fact that I feel unsafe walking down the street in broad daylight is telling. "Wanna fuck?" "Take me home with you!" "You look like you belong in a porno" and "I bet you masturbate" are only a few of the frightening comments I have personally received this summer, and it is an unacceptable violation of my safety. We are combatting these jeers by multiple daily calls to the police dispatch, but we rarely make connection with an officer, despite leaving our names, phone numbers, and place of employment. Having an officer stationed downtown would take the burden of action off us, the victims, and put the focus on preventing these situations, not belatedly reacting to them.

To conclude, let me reiterate that the bad behavior of a few does not represent a whole. Ashland is a vibrant and inclusive community that desires for all of its citizens to feel safe and cared after. By identifying this troubling behavior hopefully we can work together to enact change.

My friends and coworkers who could not be here today have written statements outlining their thoughts on the subject, which I encourage you to read when time permits. Thank you and have a good night.

Kelly Jean Hammond

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To City Council,

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I have lived in Ashland since 2002 and worked downtown for over two years now. I have always felt comfortable around the individuals who choose to congregate on East Main Street and Pioneer, as there is nothing wrong with them being there. However, I have recently changed how I walk around downtown in order to avoid being approached and hassled. I find it unfortunately that I have to not only avoid a certain area while I am shopping downtown, but also while I am trying to do my job. I, as well as many of my coworkers, would feel more comfortable if there was a stronger police presence helping to stop this harassment.

Thanks again,

Cashel Cain

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cashel Cain". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the printed name.

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9-2-2014

My name is Stacy Dean and I have lived in Ashland for 5 years and I am employed at the Paddington Jewel Box/ Paddington Station. I usually love my walk to and from work but as of late I have been feeling uneasy and uncomfortable. The transients that have taken over the corner of Pioneer Street and Main are out of control. Of all my years living in Ashland I have never been upset by them or have felt threatened until now. I not only feel threatened but I feel pushed out of areas that I once felt safe. Ashland is known for its friendly atmosphere and safe environment. As a woman and a human being I should be able to cross the street without being asked to "fuck" or feel as I am being watched and preyed upon. I should not have someone telling me that I "masturbate" and above all I shouldn't have to avoid any street corner whether it is daytime or night time. Now usually if I don't feel like communicating with transients I just politely and silently go on my way but this new group does not allow a quiet passing. If I do say something I get asked if I "would keep them if they followed me home" and if I ignore them I get yelled that I "dropped my smile on the ground." I should be able to walk on the street freely and with no reservations.

There needs to be more of a police presence especially on Main Street. Not only for the community members living and working here but for our visitors/tourists. I can't count how many tourists and visitors I have had come into our store to get away or to vent about the street transients. If we want to keep our little hidden gem/sanctuary safe and desirable for travelers and residents this situation needs to be better controlled. I am not speaking about all of our transient community but this new wave of "travelers" is abrasive and threatening.

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The corner of Main Street and Pioneer has been known to the community as a place for those struggling to get by. And, up until this point, this square has been a mostly conflict-free and friendly part of the community. Some community members have become acquaintances with the regular faces occupying this place, and understand Ashland would not be the same town it is without them.

But, as of recent, there has been a new congregation, mostly of men, who have been harassing the women walking by. This is more than just catcalling and petty jokes, but the use of verbal harassment, unfriendly stares, and following girls. Many co-workers and I have been avoiding that crosswalk simply because of them. We go out of our way to avoid them. We now have to use word of mouth to warn other people, specifically women who are by themselves, against their group. But word of mouth doesn't protect against others who don't know.

The Downtown Police have been called multiple times and when they finally parked their cop car by the block this past weekend, I have heard no complaints or issues stemming from this group, but who knows if they will start their problematic activities again. I certainly won't feel comfortable walking past them if I don't know if the Police are nearby to help.

So I urge the council to discuss having a stronger police presence downtown so that we can protect women in the city Ashland.

-Grace Prechtel

My name is Holly Nienhaus, and I have been an employee at The Paddington Jewel Box for two and a half years. I have to cross the street to Paddington Station multiple times a day, and mild catcalling from transients has always been an inconvenience and annoyance whenever I cross on both corners of Pioneer Street and E. Main St. This summer, it has become substantially worse. The catcalls I have undergone have switched from slightly irritating comments about my appearance such as "you dropped your smile" to loud, sexual and derogatory attacks on my demeanor, personality, and appearance. I have had to completely avoid the corner of Pioneer Street and E. Main Street, which ironically is right next to Ashland Chamber of Commerce. This in itself is unacceptable and unfair. I feel harassed, berated, sexualized, and unsafe. My younger sister just started employment as a Sales Associate at Paddington Station. I worry for her safety and her integrity when she passes those said corners and when she leaves work at night. I rarely ever see the presence of police officers late at night, which I think is something that should be remedied. Whenever the police officers are at the said corners, I feel much better about crossing there and feeling safe.

I have also noticed a lack of care taken of the animals owned by the transients. They appear malnourished and unkempt, and I worry about the quality of their treatment. I have also noticed an increasing amount of feces on the street, which compromises the cleanliness of the streets and the quality of life for the residents and tourists.

I feel it is my right as a citizen of Ashland to feel safe as a woman walking through the streets of Ashland at night and in the daytime. No one has the right to verbally abuse anyone, transient or not. Ashland is a beautiful, cultured, and safe town, and if this problem is not addressed and solved, it will cease to be the wonderful and inclusive place it is now. I think the stronger

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presence of police officers would be one way to help alleviate this problem. I ask you to consider this issues carefully, so that I can feel safe and comfortable walking the streets of Ashland.

Jelly Neenhaus