

# City leaders must act to keep downtown Minneapolis safe

We want our professional sports teams proud to welcome fans downtown.

By Lester Bagley , Matt Hoy and Ted Johnson | SEPTEMBER 24, 2019 — 5:47PM

On Sunday, more than 100,000 fans traveled to downtown Minneapolis to attend the Vikings second regular season home game and watch the Twins continue their drive toward the playoffs. In three weeks' time, the Timberwolves season begins and their fans will be streaming downtown, too.

We are honored that the Minnesota Lynx, Timberwolves, Twins and Vikings serve as a gateway to tens of millions of people who are drawn to downtown Minneapolis by our sports teams and the other events held at our three facilities.

Our visitors come from throughout the Upper Midwest and deliver a significant economic impact to Minneapolis and our region. It's important to remember that they don't just spend money inside our facilities. They park. They shop. They stay at hotels. They eat. They drink. Along the way, the money they spend at downtown businesses contributes to state and local sales taxes, liquor excise taxes and lodging taxes to support our community. When they go home, they tell their friends about their positive experiences, which causes their friends to visit too.

All of this fuels a truly remarkable economic engine serving not only downtown Minneapolis but our entire state. It is easy to take that for granted. We should not.

The reality is, downtown Minneapolis isn't as safe as it once was. Nothing will stop people from coming downtown more quickly than the perception or reality that it is unsafe. Our professional sports teams are collectively urging Mayor Jacob Frey and the Minneapolis City Council to invest in public safety for downtown Minneapolis.

We are not alone. This opinion is shared by many who call Minneapolis their home. A recent survey found that an overwhelming 68% of Minneapolis residents supported adding 125 police officers, and 63% support adding 250 officers. Given that resounding show of public demand, support for Mayor Frey's proposal to add 14 police officers is the very least we can do.

When any visiting fan experiences a crime during a visit to downtown Minneapolis, they do not suffer in silence. They tell their story to everyone they know, and social media empowers them to share it swiftly with a broad audience. Collectively, this negative story-sharing is toxic to our community's reputation and our downtown economic engine on which we rely.

The great news is that downtown Minneapolis is growing. But our police force must grow with it. It's that simple. A stronger police presence deters criminal activity, and removes the relatively small number of perpetrators responsible for harming innocent people. As businesses that invest in bringing off-duty police officers into our facilities, we see that the presence of trained police officers in uniform is one of the very best ways to prevent problems. What is true in our facilities is equally true on the streets.

We appreciate the complexity of this issue and understand that investing in our police force is not just about adding to the number of officers.

It also means ensuring that our police force understands the community it serves and has a direct connection to that community in meaningful ways. Officers must be well-trained in handling conflict de-escalation and cultural competency. They must build positive relationships with the community they serve through open and honest dialogue. Programs to achieve these goals need to be part of the solution.



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Minnesota Twins third baseman Miguel Sano hits a home run with the Minneapolis skyline as a backdrop.

Both types of investment are essential to improving public safety in downtown Minneapolis.

We also know that we need to address systemic challenges of education, hunger and other fundamental needs that need to be part of the long-term success of our community. But not having a solution to these challenges should not be a reason to delay action on the mayor's proposal.

We owe all visitors a safe experience, both because it is the right thing to do and because it is necessary to maintain community pride and vibrancy. Beyond visitors, we owe the same to the Minnesotans who live, work and play in downtown Minneapolis.

It's easy to take the magic of downtown Minneapolis for granted. But leaders of other cities can tell you from firsthand experience how quickly the reality and perception of crime in a city can spiral out of control, if you let it.

Let's not be that city.

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