

# Business leaders call for more police in downtown Minneapolis

City Council Member Lisa Goodman joined them and said she would like to hire more officers and rethink other policies to improve safety in the area.

By Miguel Otárola (<http://www.startribune.com/miguel-otarola/396828811/>) Star Tribune |

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Business leaders Wednesday reiterated the call for more police officers to patrol downtown Minneapolis after a summer of high-profile robberies and assaults, and just days after a fatal shooting in the city's theater district.

Their request, made at a news conference Wednesday, was amplified by a City Council member representing part of downtown who said she would like to hire more officers and rethink other policies to improve safety in the area.

"We certainly acknowledge incidents are going to continue to occur, but they can't at the rate and level and with the severity that we've seen recently. It's just not acceptable," said Steve Cramer, president and CEO of the Minneapolis Downtown Council. "We need more presence and we need more continued proactive policing."

Long-term trends [show a decline in violent crime in Minneapolis](http://www.startribune.com/fbi-violent-crime-in-minnesota-dropped-last-year-continuing-decade-long-trend/562007692/) (<http://www.startribune.com/fbi-violent-crime-in-minnesota-dropped-last-year-continuing-decade-long-trend/562007692/>) and across the state. But a string of random robberies and attacks have shaken the [perception of safety](http://www.startribune.com/how-safe-is-downtown-minneapolis-police-stats-validate-perception-of-rising-crime/560291262/) (<http://www.startribune.com/how-safe-is-downtown-minneapolis-police-stats-validate-perception-of-rising-crime/560291262/>) downtown, home to [nearly 50,000 people](http://www.startribune.com/almost-50-000-people-now-calling-downtown-minneapolis-home/505811772/) (<http://www.startribune.com/almost-50-000-people-now-calling-downtown-minneapolis-home/505811772/>).

More than 630 violent crimes have taken place downtown so far this year, almost 100 more than the same time last year but 120 fewer than 2017, according to data from the Minneapolis Police Department. Of those, nine were homicides and 262 were robberies.

[Two violent robberies](http://www.startribune.com/18-people-charged-in-two-violent-group-robberies-in-downtown-minneapolis/560530112/) (<http://www.startribune.com/18-people-charged-in-two-violent-group-robberies-in-downtown-minneapolis/560530112/>) took place in August where groups of people assaulted their victims, one of whom was waiting outside a bar in the early morning. Eighteen people ages 15 to 27 were charged the following month.

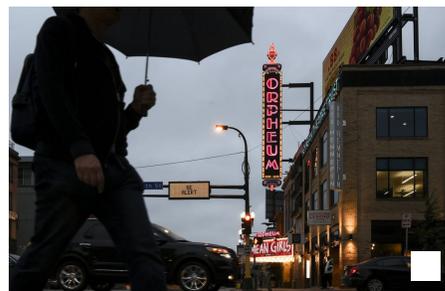
Twenty-one-year-old Enzo Herrera-Garcia was shot and killed while he walked with his girlfriend along Hennepin Avenue on Saturday night. Varnell D. Allen, 23, was [charged with second-degree murder](http://www.startribune.com/charge-suspect-pistol-whipped-fatally-shot-man-walking-with-girlfriend-in-downtown-minneapolis/561887242/) (<http://www.startribune.com/charge-suspect-pistol-whipped-fatally-shot-man-walking-with-girlfriend-in-downtown-minneapolis/561887242/>) this week.

Cramer thanked authorities for their reaction in both cases Wednesday, saying the number of robberies "just fell off the table" following the arrests in the group robberies.

"We want to ... express our appreciation for that strong effective police work and say that we need more of that," he said.

Those incidents have taken a toll on some businesses in the northwest sector of downtown, with customers either going home earlier or not coming at all, said Joanne Kaufman, the executive director of the Warehouse District Business Association.

"It's been a bad summer for business and got progressively worse through the summer," she said.



AARON LAVINSKY - STAR TRIBUNE

Commerce leaders say the increased crime in downtown Minneapolis has driven customers away from the area.



AARON LAVINSKY, STAR TRIBUNE

The scene along the Hennepin Avenue Theater District on Wednesday night in downtown Minneapolis.

Concerns about downtown crime have flared up every few years in Minneapolis going back decades. But City Council Member Lisa Goodman, who represents the section of downtown where Saturday's fatal shooting took place, said she can only think of one or two other times where people felt more concerned about public safety since she joined the council.

She has fielded e-mails and calls from people, many of them millennials, who say they are worried about walking outside after their shifts end at downtown bars and restaurants.

"They don't see visible public safety activity on Nicollet Mall. They feel unsafe on Hennepin Avenue. There are problems in parts of Loring Park," she said. "I believe my constituents when they say they don't feel safe, and I don't think this is a perception of safety issue."

She said the city should hire at least 30 new officers next year, more than double the number proposed by Mayor Jacob Frey in his budget.

She also called for youth who are repeatedly sent by officers for low-level offenses to the Juvenile Supervision Center — a space at City Hall run by nonprofit the Link — to be handled in a different way. The center has served 619 youths so far this year, 87% of whom were connected with social services, according to the Link CEO Beth Holger.

"We have to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. We need to have multiple interventions," Goodman said. "And we need to take it as seriously, if not more seriously, than all of the other things that everyone is spending their time on."

Some changes are already taking place.

The Minneapolis Downtown Improvement District will extend its "ambassadors," often seen with their bright blue and green uniforms, until 3 a.m. this weekend in the Warehouse District. YouthLink, a nonprofit that works with homeless youth, is also extending its street outreach into the early morning this month, Goodman said.

Council Member Steve Fletcher, who also represents downtown, said he was "very optimistic" about the initiatives.

"We have to think about the whole big picture. Public safety is not solely a policing issue," he said. "There are ways that the community can step up to support people before they ever get into a situation where the police need to get involved."

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