

Hon, Ashton J. Hayward III, Mayor
City of Pensacola Council Members
Brian Spencer
Gerald Wingate
Andy Terhaar
P.C. Wu
Jewel Cannada-Wynn
Larry Johnson
Sherri Myers
222 N. Main Street
Pensacola, Florida 32502

Dear Mayor Hayward and City Council,

First and foremost, I want to thank you for your service to our city. Our community has experienced dramatic and positive changes, especially over the past 5-6 years. As your Chairman of the Downtown Improvement Board (DIB), I can report to you that your downtown is emerging as an economic engine for our community.

A vibrant downtown is vital to attract tourists and businesses looking to relocate. Our community enjoys a benefit over every other Florida beach town. We have a vibrant, historic city on the waterfront. Visit Pensacola has used this distinction to drive tourism to record numbers. More and more people want to open businesses downtown and live downtown. The demand is evident by the additional commercial spaces being built in the core area and the over subscription of the Southtowne Apartments.

This growth comes with a price. We have experienced a significant increase in demands on infrastructure and parking. Your DIB is working hard to develop plans to meet current and projected future demand. This is imperative to continue and sustain our current growth. These investments will also spur growth throughout the area, as many communities have demonstrated when the urban core grows, the community at large grows also.

This growth also comes with significant risks. One of the missions of the DIB is to create and maintain a safe, clean and aesthetically pleasing environment for people to live, work and play. The current panhandling problem poses a significant risk to that mission. If our community cannot deliver a safe, clean and pleasing environment to sustain this growth, then we risk losing customers, residents, employers and investors. No one wants to return to the days of vacant storefronts and empty lots downtown.

As I mentioned in previous correspondence to you, there has been a dramatic increase in panhandling activities in the past year or so. This is not coincidence. The growth of downtown has created additional economic opportunity for those individuals that are loitering and panhandling.

Approving the current panhandling ordinance is vital to the continued success of Pensacola. It is important to continue the positive momentum that we currently enjoy. Many of the downtown merchants have been investing in downtown for decades to get it to where it is today. New entrepreneurs are also investing in downtown, and all of them desire a safe, clean and welcoming atmosphere for their customers and clients.

The opponents of this ordinance argue this isn't compassionate or it is unfairly targeting the rights of those panhandling. I couldn't disagree more. The Pensacola community is the most compassionate and philanthropic community I have ever lived in. Many of the business owners in the DIB are some of the most philanthropic people I know, and support the very organizations who help these individuals in need. It is the success of their downtown businesses that allow them to donate, volunteer, and assist these charitable causes.

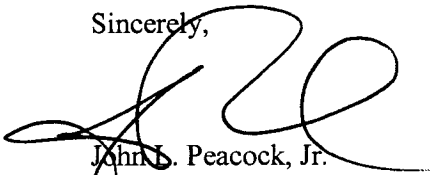
It is worth noting that none of the community organizations available to these citizens are located in the downtown core. If we as a community are committed to helping these individuals, directing them to sources of support is exactly what we should be doing. The answer is not to simply do nothing.

I agree with those who have said this ordinance does not solve the problem of homelessness or poverty. These are community-wide issues that demand community-wide attention. Unfortunately, our community and downtown business owners cannot wait until the perfect answer is found.

The DIB is committed to an aggressive education campaign to inform the public as well as those less fortunate on ways to get help, and locations for specific services and community organizations. We are prepared to work with everyone involved in a long-term solution but this is a necessary first step.

I strongly encourage you to support this ordinance and together let's continue the process of finding a broader solution over the long term.

Sincerely,



John S. Peacock, Jr.

Chairman, Downtown Improvement Board