



August 3, 2021

The Honorable Jenny Durkan, Mayor
 The Honorable Lorena Gonzalez, City Council President
 City Councilmembers
 Mr. Adrian Diaz, Chief of Police
 c/o Seattle City Hall
 600 Fourth Ave.
 Seattle, WA 98104

Sent Via Electronic Mail

RE: *Growing concerns over sharply reduced numbers of Seattle Harbor Patrol personnel – urge City to remedy the situation both this summer and long-term*

Dear Mayor Durkan, Council President González and City Councilmembers, and Chief Diaz:

We are writing as a coalition of businesses, governmental agencies, non-profits, and recreational boating organizations, united in expressing our growing alarm over the sharply-reduced number of personnel for the Seattle Harbor Patrol and urging your action to remedy this safety-threatening situation, both this summer and for the long-term.

Seattle is blessed to be a hub of waterways that provide substantial economic, outdoor recreation, and tourism benefits to the City, especially in our warmer spring, summer, and fall weather. Marine businesses line Puget Sound, the Ballard Locks, Lake Union, and Lake Washington. The Port of Seattle hosts major cruise lines and operates some of the largest cargo-container terminals in North America. The Lake Washington Ship Canal and Salmon Bay is home to the very large North Pacific fishing fleet, which brings many jobs and businesses to Seattle. The Seattle Boat Show, the opening day of boating season, and Kenmore Air bring throngs of people to the City to patronize Seattle businesses. And dramatically growing numbers of boaters, kayakers, and stand-up paddleboarders dot the saltwater as well as the Lake Union and Lake Washington freshwater.

But with those tremendous benefits come genuine obligations to water safety, to human safety, and to the health and well-being of residents and visitors alike. We want to bring to your attention our growing concern and alarm that those obligations are not being met – and the results can be tragic.

The Seattle Harbor Patrol used to be seen as a national model for marine safety and law enforcement, with sufficient personnel to ensure the safety and enforcement of the three waterways that frame the City – Elliott Bay, Lake Union, and Lake Washington. Unfortunately, those days are in our distant past, the safety of our waterways is being sharply compromised, and the Seattle Harbor Patrol is only a shell of what it used to be.

Our most current information is that the Harbor Patrol, despite being budgeted for up to 30 FTE officers and civilians, is now operating at less than half of full strength. On many occasions – including during our sunniest and hottest days of summer – there is only one Harbor Patrol boat to cover the vast marine environment of Seattle, to enforce boating laws like Boating Under the influence (BUI), to conduct search and rescue, and to respond to incidents both minor and major. Whether the root cause is a series of retirements, cutbacks in land-based patrols, or a combination of things, we hope you will agree that the result is unacceptable.

On the weekend of June 26-27, the first full weekend of summer and amidst the most severe hot-weather temperatures Seattle has ever seen, people took to the water in droves. Two of them never came back – one drowning near Andrews Bay, and one near O.O. Denney Park. While one of those drownings was technically outside of city boundaries, the larger point is that there was no Harbor Patrol vessel nearby to respond quickly to either of these incidents.

Furthermore, the marine businesses and the Port that operate off our shores deserve the same level of safety patrols that their counterparts on land receive. We're not at all sure they are getting that.

People of all backgrounds, cultures, and colors take to the beautiful waters in Seattle, and we are afraid that they are not getting the protection they deserve and that the waters they ply are not nearly as safe as they need to be. We implore you to fix this shortfall, both for this summer and just as importantly, for the long-term in the face of mass departures of Harbor Patrol staff who are going to need to be replaced and retrained. Lives are at stake, both now and in the future.

We thank you for your consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,

Peter Steinbrueck, Commissioner
Seattle Port Commission

Bob Wise, President
Recreational Boating Association of Washington

George Harris President/CEO
Northwest Marine Trade Association

Eugene Wasserman, President
North Seattle Industrial Association

Peter Schrappen, President
Washington Maritime Federation

Mike Stewart, Executive Director
Ballard Alliance

Jordan Royer, Vice President for External Affairs
Pacific Merchant Shipping Association

Brandi Gaines,
Fremont Chamber

David D'Hondt, Executive Vice President
Associated General Contractors of Washington

Adrienne Dahlin, Commodore
Puget Sound Yacht Club

Mauri Moore Shuler, President
Lake Union Liveaboard Association

Bob McConnell, Commodore
Seattle Yacht Club

Peter Erickson, President
Seattle Floating Homes Association

Terron Lindholme, Commodore
Queen City Yacht Club

McAulay Haney, Commodore
Rainier Yacht Club

Peter Tarabochia, President
Seattle Marine Business Coalition

Jennifer Greer, Commodore
Tyee Yacht Club

Todd Banks, General Manager
Kenmore Air

Steve Kodish, Commodore
Meydenbauer Yacht Club

Margie Freeman, President
Lake Union Association

Elliott Strong, CEO
Coastal Transportation

Russell Shrewsbury, VP
Western Towboat Co.

Charlie Costanzo, General Counsel & Vice
President – Pacific Region
The American Waterways Operators