

Mayor Ted Wheeler

Prepared remarks

Press conference on increased safety measures for Old Town Entertainment District
September 20, 2022

This morning we are here in Portland's Old Town Entertainment District to build on the early progress we have made in the neighborhood through additional community safety measures that will help Old Town adapt to the increasing number of visitors.

Old Town has been a key Entertainment District in Portland for decades, and with the support of the local businesses I'm standing with today, it will continue to be an entertainment hub in our city for decades to come.

As we emerge out from the pandemic, the crowds in Old Town have returned by the tens-of-thousands. The streets are jamming up—particularly on weekends—and people need more room to spread out.

As visitors are back patronizing Old Town's entertainment district, we need bigger sidewalks. We need more room for pedestrians.

In lieu of that, we're going to close lanes and streets to give people the elbow room they need to move around more freely and enjoy themselves.

This also has a public safety advantage. Late night pedestrian gridlock flares tempers that can lead to altercations.

The success of the reemerging nightlife district here in Old Town builds upon our work to remove problematic encampments that block the right-of-way. It also shows our continued commitment to working with the Old Town residents and business owners to keep this momentum going.

Let me be clear—we still have a lot of work to do here in Old Town.

My team and I have continued to initiate regular conversations with community leaders and our public safety teams to determine ways we can build on the progress being made in Old Town that will help address violence and crime in the Entertainment District and beyond.

We're bringing back an approach Portland has used in the past and we're and improving upon it.

Recent data shows us that Old Town suffers from a high-level of gun violence and this violence often peaks during Friday and Saturday evenings.

Under my direction, the Portland Police Bureau will have the authority to close streets between NW 1st Avenue and NW 5th Avenue and West Burnside to NW Everett to vehicular traffic on Friday and Saturday evenings.

This action will do three things:

- 1.** This will provide a safer walking environment for patrons with more room to spread out. I also hope this will encourage more visitors to travel by transit.
- 2.** This creates a safer working environment for business owners and employees in the neighborhood.
- 3.** This will allow the Portland Police Bureau and our public safety partners to better focus their resources in Old Town and respond more quickly to crimes and violence as it occurs.

The Portland Police Bureau will also dedicate a small group of officers to be present in the Entertainment District during these closures to patrol the area.

We will also provide physical safety enhancements such as improved lighting.

Residents and tourists alike deserve to enjoy a night out on the town in safety and I applaud PPB for taking the initiative to address a major problem with the resources at-hand.

This effort will continue to build on the initiatives I began earlier this year, and I will continue to add additional measures to help address violence city-wide.

I am committed to ensuring the Old Town neighborhood thrives for generations to come.

I am pleased to be here with local business owners: Chair Jesse Burke from the Old Town Community Association, Dan Lenzen of Dixie Tavern, and Gerard McAleese who was gracious enough to host us this morning at Kell's Irish Restaurant and Pub.

Additionally, I'm joined this morning by Director Mike Myers who will speak to initiatives resulting from Emergency Declarations that I have issued this year, and Captain Jim Crooker from the Portland Police Bureau, who will speak about the community safety issues currently facing Old Town.

In closing, I invite folks to come down and visit the entertainment district, as we continue to emphasize safety.