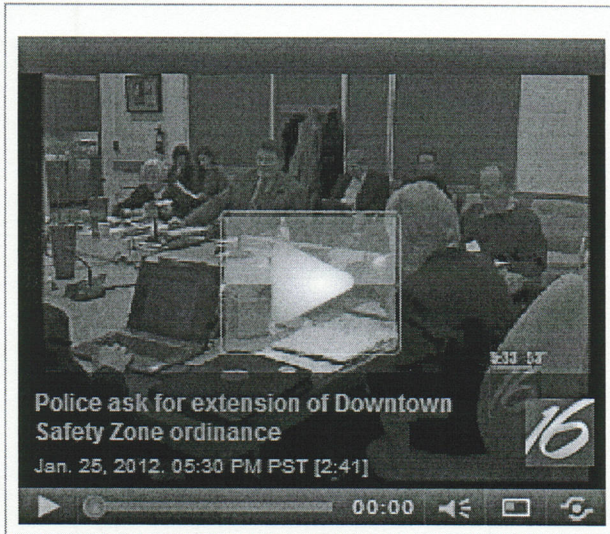


**LEGISLATIVE #**

**110683**

## Council weighs whether to extend downtown safety zone



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Published: 1/25 5:53 pm

Updated: 1/26 7:24 am

EUGENE, Ore. (KMTR) – City council is starting to discuss whether renewing the city's "Downtown Public Safety Zone" would be beneficial or not.

Under the ordinance, people who are cited or arrested in the area for various crimes specifically listed can be banned from downtown for up to 90 days. If they violate that ban, they are sent to jail.

City police are hoping city council opts for the zone saying that it's been a good tool for them to cut down on crime and avoid arrests. The ordinance sunsets, or expires, in April.

The downtown public safety zone has been in effect since 2008. In Wednesday's work session, police showed council graphs and various statistics hoping to prove that the ordinance had worked as

planned. Surveys showed that various residents throughout the community were more likely to go downtown and enjoy different parts of town knowing they wouldn't be harassed or assaulted or encounter unwanted drugs and alcohol.

The key, according to some councilors, is the lack of jail beds. The ordinance helps because criminals aren't arrested on the first offense in some cases and therefore it saves room for more concerning crimes. Other city councilors expressed concern about discrimination. They ask if police are focusing on the behavior more so than the individual.

Other concerns included whether the crimes had shifted to other parts of town, which some felt it has.

Andrea Ortiz, city councilor, said she originally agreed to the 2008 ordinance because it was simply another tool. There weren't as many officers at that time but now, there are.

"If it's city-owned property, city streets, everybody should have access to them. I agreed to support it at the time because we didn't really have a whole lot of tools in our tool box, as it gets used a lot, but since we're going to be increasing to nine officers, we have the red caps and we have midtown security, they are all downtown," she said.

Another councilor replied, saying if it was a tool then it is certainly a needed tool now since the county is so low on resources due to its hurting budget.

When the question was posed whether it was true that this exclusion zone was effective or not, Mike Clark, city councilor, didn't hesitate.

"I'd ask you to speak to Betty Snowden. Find out if she is still getting racist things written and said to her face and screamed at her and written on her building, her front windows broken, things being left out in front of her door so far over the line. The only tool officers had was to arrest someone so they could spend an hour in the jail before they were matrixed, only for them to come right back out and get in her face again."

A lot of the listed offenses are in fact felonies, according to a local prosecutor.

The area that the exclusion zone currently applies extends from Lincoln to Pearl before 7th and 11th Streets and includes the Eugene Library, LTD Bus Station and more.

Before city council makes a decision, there will be a public hearing for those in support and opposing the zone. That is scheduled for February 21st.

There could be some modifications to the ordinance, too, like whether it should be a long-standing zone or sunset in one or two years.