

## Frequently Asked Questions: Disruptive Behavior in Downtown



Collaborative efforts to understand the scope and magnitude of disruptive behaviors downtown brought many concepts to the forefront.

**We heard** a great deal from discussion sessions about disruptive behaviors. The spring 2016 sessions were focused and pragmatic – stakeholders in the downtown made it clear that our community seeks effective solutions to reduce disruptive behaviors, not a simple rehashing of common complaints. One concern was consistent: *what can businesses do to help themselves and help their community?*

**The following FAQ** was assembled based on comments and concerns from the engagement sessions, as well as extensive consultation with experts from the City of Loveland, the Loveland Downtown Partnership, various Loveland nonprofits and service agencies, and business owners themselves.

### What is a “disruptive behavior”?

Disruptive behaviors are those which detract from downtown’s attractiveness and friendly atmosphere. Being a largely public space at the heart of Loveland, all stakeholders strive to ensure the downtown is a safe, welcoming, physically-beautiful and aesthetically-pleasing place to live, work and play. Any behaviors that discourage residents – in cars, on bicycles, on foot, etc. – from gathering in or enjoying their time in downtown is problematic.

There are countless disruptive behaviors, but many of them include excessive noise, unsightly activities, and behaviors that provoke fear or discomfort in their peers. Our engagement sessions zeroed-in on 4 major areas:

- **Aggressive Behaviors** – public indecency, public intoxication, aggressive panhandling, etc.
- **Environmentally-Detractive Behaviors** – littering & human waste, inconsiderate smoking, loud noise & disturbing the peace, reckless driving & vehicle exhaust, camping, etc.
- **Downtown Safety & Physical Conditions** – public amenities, alleys, lighting, music, restrooms, etc.
- **Downtown Service Resources** – police & code enforcement, mental health & homeless services, etc.

### Isn’t this just a homelessness problem?

**No.** No single group is entirely responsible for any of downtown’s disruptions. Keep in mind: not everyone who “looks homeless” is homeless, and that there are many more people experiencing homelessness than just those who “look homeless.” We should speak about these community peers fairly, not with hostility. It is vital that public discussion of behaviors does not “implicate” any one group.

We know that other communities who have made substantial improvements to their downtowns and reduced disruptive behaviors focused on reducing each behavior, not blaming particular groups. **You can help achieve this goal: frame the conversation as “disruptive behaviors” instead of “problems with the homeless” around your peers and your staff.**

### **Why hasn't this persistent issue been solved?**

There is no easy answer. One reason why is disagreement over the problem: **what are disruptive behaviors that everyone can agree on?** We repeatedly found that behavior considered undesirable by one entity is not considered so by others. Still, we will have to address them together. Just as creating a vibrant downtown requires collaborative effort, the same goes for reducing disruptive behaviors – no one entity can do it alone.

Many “undesirable” behaviors are also perfectly legal. All Loveland citizens enjoy equal rights and liberties, particularly free speech and access to public space. The only behaviors that can be legally enforced against are those which are against the law. However, undesirable behaviors – and environmental conditions that may worsen behaviors – **should be reported to the Downtown Development Authority**. This enhances our awareness as we construct and implement solutions.

### **What are other communities doing?**

Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to reducing disruptive behaviors. **Given best practices and Loveland's attributes, several strategies were explored:**

- Reprioritizing public and private developments
- Ordinances regulating/restricting select behaviors;
- Further enhanced Police presence in downtown;
- “Sense of safety” public amenity enhancements
- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design
- Outreach (Police-free engagement with “disruptors”)
- “Behaviors-focused” public-private partnerships

### **What's Loveland going to do – how can I help?**

It became clear in discussion that all stakeholders work each day to achieve the shared vision of downtown. We will continue exploring possible strategies, and remain in contact to help address specific behaviors. In the meantime, the DDA, City, and other entities will continue implementing the Downtown Plan. Remember: many strategies require collective effort. Improvements to the downtown environment, which can decrease undesirable behavior, can only be made when there is a will to do so.

#### **Your business can help by remaining diligent.**

Participate in downtown planning outreach sessions. Talk to staff at other establishments, experts at the City and service agencies, and your own staff about developments and strategies to address disruptive behaviors.

### **I just saw an illegal behavior. Why haven't the Police gotten involved?**

In most situations, Loveland Police Department must be *responding to reports* of illegal behavior. Therefore, **disruptive or suspicious behaviors must be reported to**

**Loveland Police**. Only then may Police be obligated to intervene. Remember, citizens serve as eyes and ears for Police. **If you see or hear something illegal or suspicious, take the few minutes necessary to report it.**

### **Who do I call about “undesirable” behaviors?**

**Contact the Downtown Development Authority at 970-744-4794**. They will contact the right person to address the problem and let you know who else to notify.

### **What can I do if panhandlers “target” me?**

The City of Loveland enforces a panhandling ordinance. **All panhandling is a legal expression of Constitutional free speech rights, so long as it meets these criteria:** (1) it occurs on public land, (2) it is not threatening, coercive or obscene, (3) it does not involve fighting words directed at, or touching, the person solicited.

It is recommended that businesses **positively engage with panhandlers**. Experts report that building relationships in downtown, and reminding those who are compelled to panhandle that they, too, are members of our community, yields mutually-beneficial outcomes. Hostile or impartial attitudes towards *anyone* only leads to persistent, or worsened, behaviors and conditions. **If you have any questions or concerns about engagement, contact 137 Homeless Connection at 970-685-4173.**

### **Should my business/staff donate to panhandlers and/or feed the “needy”?**

This is a complex question, but the short answer is: **no**. Loveland is lucky to have many services and resources available for those in need. House of Neighborly Service and 137 Homeless Connection have the capability serve individuals experiencing homelessness well.

By contributing to panhandlers or feeding those who ask for free meals, businesses may feel they are doing the community a service – and rightly so. However, these acts of kindness make individuals less inclined to engage with service agencies. This hastens progress in ensuring that these individuals regain self-sufficiency.

### **In that case, what should my staff do when they encounter panhandling?**

**Hand them the free Resource Cards** produced by 137 Homeless Connection. These cards have a map of local resources and a list of contacts for those resources. We recommend you make these cards available to all of your staff and patrons. Please call 137 Homeless Connection any time to restock your business with Resource Cards.

**Remember: if panhandlers exhibit aggressive behavior after you provide them with a Resource Card, they can be reported for violating Loveland's Panhandling Ordinance.**