

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Date: November 9, 2011

Agenda Item No.: 9

Council Action Date: November 21, 2011

To: RICK COLE, CITY MANAGER

From: JEFFREY LAMBERT, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Subject: SAFE AND CLEAN PUBLIC PLACES INITIATIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff is recommending that Council:

- a. receive a report introducing a Safe and Clean Public Places Initiative;
- b. designate the Safe and Clean Public Places Initiative as a City Council high priority to be added to the City's Goals and Controls projects;
- c. direct staff to proceed with implementation of the components of the Initiative subject to identifying funding or shifting city priorities; and
- d. direct staff to develop performance measures to be introduced in the next quarterly performance measures report in January 2012.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION

On July 25, 2011 Council considered staff recommendations regarding the 10-Year Strategy to End Homelessness. As part of that consideration Council directed staff "...to develop a strategy for dealing with vagrancy..."

SUMMARY

The Safe and Clean Public Places Initiative is designed to ensure safe and clean public spaces for the entire community to enjoy. To achieve that goal, city government can focus internal resources and strengthen community partnerships through:

- a. Redirecting limited law enforcement resources to better enforce existing laws and policies to abate illegal and anti-social behaviors in public spaces.
- b. Redirecting limited maintenance resources to better maintain clean public spaces.
- c. Partnering with community resources to better activate and animate public spaces to encourage enjoyment by the entire community.

- d. Strengthening collaboration with the County, social service agencies and faith-based organizations to support both "place-based" social services and supplement those services by assertive street outreach teams to reach service resistant clients, and
- e. Seeking to reinforce (and in some cases re-orient) social services and philanthropic giving toward the philosophy of a "hand up" rather than a "hand out."

The implications of this approach are that we focus on *behaviors* (public spaces should not be havens for drug dealing, public inebriation, aggressive panhandling and harassment), *conditions* (public bathrooms should not be filthy and dangerous), and *uses* (urban public parks should not become campsites) and the factors in our community that serve to influence behaviors, conditions and uses.

DISCUSSION

Public spaces must be safe, clean and secure for use by the entire community, and yet places like Plaza Park, the Promenade, the South Seaward Area, Mission Park and Mission Plaza have become places where many residents and visitors feel unsafe and unwelcome. While most people would agree with that statement the reality is that many otherwise reasonable people disagree about what to do about it. An objective of the Safe and Clean Public Places is to further define the specifics and stakeholders associated with meeting this very clear goal.

Service providers agree that many chronically homeless and chronic inebriants and drug users on the streets of Ventura are aware of the services available at physical locations (such as the County Clinics, The Homeless One Stop Program, Project Understanding, Turning Point's Our Place Shelter, Operation Embrace at the Harbor Community Church, etc.), however they do not choose to avail themselves of those services. An important component to the Safe and Clean Public Places Initiative suggests that stakeholders work in partnership to address that service gap toward providing assistance to the service resistant.

The implication of a "hand-out" in any scenario is that there is not reciprocity – there is not a mutual exchange. Absent a mutual exchange – "I will give you this service assistance if you agree to change that behavior" or "I will donate this money if you agree that it will contribute to ending an individual's homelessness" – staff asserts that the otherwise well intentioned service and/or philanthropic community actually contributes to an enabling environment that is neither good for the individual or the community. Already, through the Ventura Social Services Task Force, most agencies have adopted this model. Making it universal and effective is the next collaborative challenge, along with gaining public understanding and support.

The pursuit of a successful Safe and Clean Public Places Initiative relies on further developing the collaborative and cooperative trust-based partnerships that the City has established while working in the social arena. Clearly this initiative is aimed at a community partnership to achieve its goal; for example, social service providers, various functions within the County of Ventura, are all key stakeholders in safe and clean public places. These community partners will also have a role in shaping the strategy as we move forward; discussions with these partners are underway and will be reported on in the coming months.

The City has already begun to advance ideas and develop components that are designed to contribute to, and ensure, Safe and Clean Public Places in Ventura. Those include:

Shopping Cart Ordinance Addition to the City Municipal Code

In the meeting of November 21, 2011 the City Council will be presented with components of a draft ordinance to curb the theft, unauthorized use and abandonment of shopping carts that results in blighted neighborhoods and public places.

Anti-Panhandling Campaign

In partnership with the Downtown Ventura Organization (DVO), Downtown Ventura Partnership (DVP), the Chamber of Commerce, and endorsed by the Salvation Army and Project Understanding, city staff are rolling out the initial phases of a reprised and revamped Anti-Panhandling Campaign modeled after the successful campaign of 2009. Components include, but are not limited to, posters, business cards, public service announcements, community and business education programs, and targeted editorial placements. The goal is to encourage and endorse charitable giving that focuses on the support of a "hand-up" concept and away from a "hand-out" activity.

Debris and Data Collection Team

A hybrid of internal and external resources, the Debris and Data Collection Team is designed to remove the debris most commonly associated with illegal camping, or the illegal storage of abandoned personal belongings, in community public spaces. Internal stakeholders of this component include the Parks Division of the Parks, Recreation and Community Partnerships Department, and the Streets Division of the Public Works Department.

The Activation of Public Places

"Activating" and "animating" our Downtown parks with activities and events sponsored by local business and community organizations to make our public spaces more welcoming and safe — because anti-social behaviors thrive in areas where there are fewer people to observe and report them.

Reallocation of Police Resources

Recognizing the significant increase in illegal vagrant behavior, and its impact on quality of life issues for Ventura's residents, PD reallocated two Traffic Safety motor officer

positions to team up with the Downtown Parking District Corporal for the purpose of participating in a collaborative approach to reduce unwanted vagrant behaviors.

Unfortunately, due to ongoing line of duty injuries and unanticipated vacancies, the reassignment of these two Motor officer positions to the Vagrant Collaborative team is not expected to occur within the next four months.

The Ventura Police Department is very aware of the impact of officer reductions on service to the community. In response, the Department applied for two Federal grants that would have specifically aided in the City's response to unwanted vagrant behavior. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful in being awarded either the Federal COPS grant officers or the Bureau of Justice Assistance grant positions that we requested. We will continue to apply for grants where possible.

The Police Department will also work collaboratively with the City Attorney's Office concerning the effectiveness of the current policies, procedures and practices of the City's AP&P (AP&P 8.3) governing the Police Department's use of administrative and criminal citations as well as the Chronic Offender Program.

CITIZEN ADVISORY GROUP REVIEW

There is not a formal citizen advisory group for an initiative associated with the goal of providing Safe and Clean Public Places for all residents. That being said staff has engaged three groups on the issue – the Ventura Social Services Task Force (VSSTF), the Downtown Ventura Partnership (DVP) and the Chamber of Commerce (CofC).

Staff outlined potential program components to DVP staff and select Board Members Tuesday morning November 1, to staff and select CofC Board Members later that same day, and to the Ventura Social Services Task Force on Wednesday, November 2.

While staff did not request formal support for the program, it was clear that the DVP and CofC thought that the Initiative was well thought out. Because the number one priority of the DVP work plan for 2011 was to deal with the 'vagrancy issue' in downtown they were specifically and enthusiastically in support.

The VSSTF membership was very concerned that any actions associated with the Safe and Clean Initiative be confined to dealing with *illegal behaviors*, and that the status of being homeless was not criminalized.

It is important to note that the Salvation Army (Captains Bill and Tolani Finley) and Project Understanding (Executive Director Rob Orth) – both influential VSSTF members – are in full support of the Safe and Clean Public Places Initiative.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS / PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

City staff have been engaging in formal and informal interfaces with community members regarding the safeness and cleanliness decline in public areas for many years. The reality is that the steady and marked decline of municipal proactive and reactive resources associated with the reduction of the general fund priorities were shifted away from this basic goal – and the business and resident community has begun to reach a tipping point regarding their comfort level with our prominent public places.

Upon being directed by Council, staff public communication and engagement activities will feature regular and consistent communications with key community stakeholders toward shared ownership of the initiative throughout our community. Workshops and cross-training opportunities will be provided to city staff and community partners to coordinate and improve the maintenance of safe and clean public places, and a media campaign with educational materials will be developed to inform the community about how we can work together to mobilize municipal and partner resources to create a safer and cleaner environment in our community.

FISCAL IMPACTS

For the purpose of funding the approaches suggested in this Administrative Report the Fiscal Impacts (beyond the reallocation and redeployment of existing resources) are approximated to be:

- \$6,000 - \$8,000 per month for the Debris and Data Collection Team, including some enforcement activities associated with the shopping cart ordinance;
- \$150,000 approximate annual loss of traffic fine revenue as the result of the reallocation of two traffic safety officers;
- Potential (not yet specifically identified) loss of revenue or added costs associated with activating public places; and
- Other fiscal impact analysis can be developed based on Council direction.

ALTERNATIVES

As the Council is aware, we are stretching our resources to not only maintain routine city services, but an ambitious list of fifty “goals and controls” projects already on this year’s workplan.

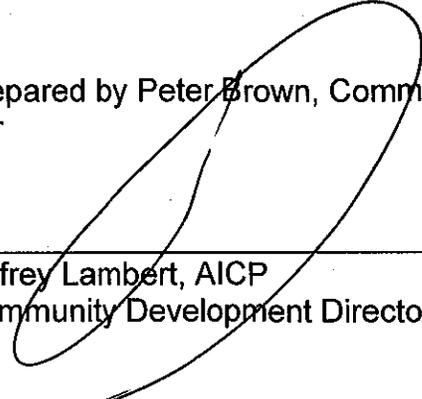
While safe and clean public places are a high community priority, there are many other high community priorities that compete with it for time, attention and resources. So the alternatives presented are not so much whether to address this problem, but options for different ways of doing so.

As an alternative to a *city/community partnership* outlined in this report, the Council could choose to tilt more toward a *city-focused* -- or a *community-based* effort.

City-focused: Acknowledging the urgency of this challenge, a more direct and accountable option would be to redirect significant additional City resources to achieving safe and clean public places. The Downtown Foot Patrol was very effective in maintaining safety and the application of staff or contract maintenance resources has long been effective in maintaining clean spaces. If City Council wants to redirect resources to this as a new, high priority, hard decisions will need to be made about what is not going to be done so we continue City Council's policy of "living within our means."

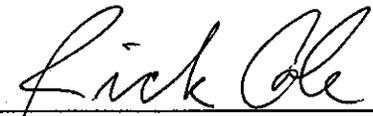
Community-based: Recognizing limited City resources, the Council could direct staff to put greater emphasis on enlisting volunteer, business, church and County agency responsibility for abating the conditions that give rise to and flow from anti-social behaviors in our public places. The City could put the onus on other stakeholders to "step up to the plate" for the conditions which are not traditionally city responsibilities.

Prepared by Peter Brown, Community Services Manager
For



Jeffrey Lambert, AICP
Community Development Director

FORWARDED TO THE CITY COUNCIL



Office of the City Manager