
OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT BUDGET ANALYST REPORT

Date Issued: October 8, 2010

IBA Report Number: 10-81

Public Safety & Neighborhood Services Meeting Date: October 13, 2010

Item Number: 5

Potential Graffiti Abatement and Enforcement Cost Savings and Benefits with Graffiti Tracker Implementation

OVERVIEW

At the September 22, 2010 Public Safety & Neighborhood Services (PS&NS) Committee meeting, the Committee heard a report from the County of San Diego regarding the Graffiti Tracker Program. The program is a multijurisdictional web-based database system, supported by Graffiti Tracker, Inc., for graffiti incidence documentation and analysis that can assist in graffiti abatement countywide. Currently eleven cities and the unincorporated areas of the County participate in the program. The County has also negotiated a contract with Graffiti Tracker, Inc. to add additional cities within the County, including the City of San Diego. If the City of San Diego joins the County contract, it would participate in an 18-month trial County Graffiti Tracker Program. After the conclusion of the 18-month period, an evaluation of the program would be performed, with the identification of a permanent funding source should the County and participating cities wish to continue the program. Up to this point, both the Police Department and Development Services Department have expressed interest in implementing the program within the City, but have not identified a funding source to support its annual cost.

At the PS&NS Committee meeting, the Committee requested that the IBA work with the Police Department to provide information regarding graffiti incidence and costs within the City and report back at the October 13, 2010 PS&NS Committee meeting. The City Attorney's Office was also directed to provide a legal analysis of the funding options for the program. Our Office met with both the Police Department and the Development Services Department to review data relating to graffiti abatement and enforcement in the

City. This report examines the City's current costs and the potential cost savings that could be associated with the implementation of the Graffiti Tracker program.

FISCAL/POLICY DISCUSSION

Graffiti Incidence and Resources

In FY 2010, there were approximately 15,000 abated incidences of graffiti within the City. The majority of graffiti incidence reports were made directly to the Development Services Department's Graffiti Control Program, within the Neighborhood Code Compliance Division. Of the abatement requests, 14,106 of them were reported directly to the Graffiti Control Program which is responsible for documenting the cases and coordinating clean-up. The program unit is staffed by 4 Utility Workers, 1 Field Representative, and 1 Code Compliance Officer. The clean-up of the graffiti is typically handled either through unit staff, a contract with the San Diego Urban Corps, the Streets Division (for street and traffic sign graffiti), or private property owners. As appropriate, when the occurrence impacts Park and Recreation Department facilities, that department will handle the clean-up.

The Graffiti Strike Force within the Police Department is responsible for handling and investigating reported incidences of graffiti that come into the department. The Strike Force's activities focus on patrol and enforcement activity pertaining to graffiti and the often related violence and gang activity. The Strike Force is staffed with 1 Lieutenant and 7 assigned sworn staff. With reported incidences, the Strike Force takes the report and performs investigative work, with clean-up requests being referred to the Development Service Department's Graffiti Control Program.

The Graffiti Control Program's FY 2011 budget for graffiti abatement totals \$899,105. The Graffiti Strike Force budget totals \$1.0 million. Altogether, including Streets Division costs, the FY 2011 budget for graffiti mitigation within the City is estimated at \$2.0 million. It is important to note that this total does not include the costs incurred by the City Attorney's Office for prosecutorial staff time and Park and Recreation for the graffiti clean-up costs they incur, given the difficulty in isolating costs related to graffiti abatement and enforcement within their budgets. Even so, the \$2.0 million estimate captures the majority of the costs that the City dedicates to graffiti abatement and enforcement on an annual basis.

The following chart details the City's annual graffiti abatement and enforcement costs.

Expenditure	Total Annual Cost
<i>Development Services</i>	
Graffiti Control Staff Salary and Fringe	399,105
Estimated Supplies	20,000
Urban Corps Contract	480,000
<i>Development Services Total</i>¹	899,105
<i>Police</i>	
Graffiti Strike Force Staff Salary and Fringe	1,010,150
<i>Police Total</i>	1,010,150
<i>General Services</i>	
Estimated Streets Division Abatement Costs	60,000
<i>General Services Total</i>	60,000
Total Estimated City Graffiti Abatement Costs	1,969,255

¹Total does not include related administrative costs.

Graffiti Tracker Proposal

Per the City's proposal received from Graffiti Tracker Inc., the first year costs to implement the Graffiti Tracker Program would be \$57,206. This cost includes \$36,000 for access to the Graffiti Tracker system, and \$21,206 for fifteen digital GPS camera packages use for incidence reporting. In subsequent years, the annual cost would be \$36,000 for access to the system. Eight of these cameras would be used by the Graffiti Control Program, and seven by the Graffiti Strike Force.

It is expected that the implementation of the program would result in qualitative efficiencies relating to a reduction in the staff time required to report graffiti incidences and conduct police investigations. Beyond these efficiencies, cost savings can be generated through a reduction in the incidence of graffiti, and cost recovery, in being able to collect more restitution from offenders with successful prosecutions.

With the implementation of the Graffiti Tracker Program, the City of Escondido has experienced a 34.3% reduction in their average monthly graffiti incidences, from 905 in 2009, to the current monthly average of 595 in 2010. Due to the reduction in graffiti incidence in the City, they were able to reduce their annual contract costs with Graffiti Tracker, Inc. by 33.3%. Also, as a result of reduced graffiti incidence, the City was able to eliminate a paint crew from its budget, saving approximately \$30,000 annually. With increased offender prosecutions, collected restitutions have increased. With months still remaining in 2010, the restitutions settled by the City of Escondido's City Attorney have increased by 40.2% to \$107,909, over the amount collected in 2009 of \$76,963.

If the Graffiti Tracker Program were implemented within the City of San Diego, with a similar demonstrated reduction in graffiti incidence and increased restitutions, similar costs reductions and recovery could be experienced. Hypothetically, if the City were to experience just a 25% reduction in the incidence of graffiti, this could reduce City clean-up costs by approximately \$240,000. With FY 2009 City restitution collections of \$25,512, an increase in restitution collections of even \$50,000 within the City to

approximate the City of Escondido's FY 2009 collections could result in \$50,000 in additional revenue to the City that could more than offset the annual costs of the contract with Graffiti Tracker, Inc.

CONCLUSION

The annual costs associated with the Graffiti Tracker Program could be offset by graffiti abatement cost savings and efficiencies. A program costing \$36,000 annually could feasibly save the City \$290,000 in annual graffiti abatement costs and cost recovery through the use of improved technology for reporting and investigations. With this, we recommend that funding opportunities are pursued to support the program. At the October 13, 2010 PS&NS meeting, the City Attorney's Office will be able to advise the Committee on funding options aside from the General Fund that may include Community Development Block Grant, Redevelopment Agency, Seized and Forfeited Assets, or Infrastructure Fund monies. These monies could possibly support the 18-month trial period of the program. Demonstrated annual cost savings and cost recovery could be used to support the program in future years.

[SIGNED]

Melinda Nickelberry
Fiscal & Policy Analyst

[SIGNED]

APPROVED: Andrea Tevlin
Independent Budget Analyst