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AGENDA REPORT

TO: Sabrina B. Landreth
City Administrator

FROM: Karen Boyd
Asst. to the City Administrator/
Communications Director

SUBJECT: Listservs & Nextdoor – Neighbors for
Racial Justice Presentation Follow Up

DATE: January 14, 2016

City Administrator Approval

Date:

1/21/16

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends that the City Council Receive a Community Presentation by Neighbors for Racial Justice on Racial Profiling in Neighborhoods and on Listservs.

REASON FOR SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT

On December 1, 2015, the Life Enrichment Committee (LEC) received a presentation from the Neighbors for Racial Justice (N4RJ) on racial profiling on electronic community forums, such as Nextdoor and listservs. N4RJ provided examples of discriminatory practices by community members using skin color alone to make assumptions of possible criminal behavior. N4RJ mentioned how harmful racial profiling is to the Oakland community and families within Oakland. In the presentation, N4RJ mentioned that they met with Nextdoor leadership and asked for some changes that would help people posting to Nextdoor to use descriptive information in a culturally competent way.

As a follow up, the LEC asked for the following:

1. For staff to identify all City departments currently utilizing Nextdoor and listservs;
2. For Council to prepare to formally support the N4RJ requests of Nextdoor; and
3. For Council to prepare to send a letter to Nextdoor indicating formal support of the N4RJ requests and asking Nextdoor to take action.

In response to the LEC requests, staff brings this informational report with background information about Nextdoor and listservs to provide broader context for this discussion.

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

Background on Nextdoor and the City of Oakland's Use of Listservs

Nextdoor's History and Mission:

Nextdoor is a free, private social network tool intended to help neighbors talk to one another. The inspiration behind Nextdoor is to give everyone a trusted way to connect to one of the most

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important communities in life: the neighborhood. Nextdoor's mission is to use technology to build stronger and safer communities everywhere. Since 2011, the company has become a communications tool for neighbors in more than 88,000 neighborhoods nationwide, which is approximately half of all American neighborhoods according to the 2010 U.S. Census and local neighborhood identifications.

To join Nextdoor, every member must present their name and address to verify that they are a resident of the neighborhood they are requesting to join. Nextdoor permits discussion among only verified neighbors in a specific neighborhood, based only on geography. Unlike Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn, Nextdoor limits visibility of and participation in neighborhood discussions to verified members in a given neighborhood. Nextdoor creates online communities that match real community-identified geographic neighborhood lines and allows residents within those neighborhood boundaries to connect. Any resident of a neighborhood can join a Nextdoor neighborhood for free by visiting Nextdoor.com and inputting and verifying their home address. Each Nextdoor neighborhood has a community member called a "lead," who starts the neighborhood and has additional tools to help moderate the content of the neighborhood they lead.

Nextdoor works to foster trusted neighborhood communications that include, but are not limited to, the following examples:

- Find a babysitter or other service recommendations.
- Sell items to those nearby or give things away for free.
- Provide or seek help finding lost animals or people in the neighborhood.
- Organize a Neighborhood Watch group or tap into an existing group.
- Report crime and safety information such as a recent break-in or a flooded street.

Nextdoor, based in San Francisco, has a team of 111 employees, of which 13 percent are Oakland residents.

Nextdoor and the City of Oakland:

The City does not have a formal agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Nextdoor. In August 2013, when the City began to research social media networks for neighborhood organizing like Nextdoor, it considered a pilot with the Nextdoor platform because there were already more Oakland residents on Nextdoor than there were followers to all of the City's other social network tools combined.

The Oakland Police Department (OPD) piloted Nextdoor in Area 2 (North Oakland) after being approached by residents in the Golden Gate neighborhood. The pilot aligned with the OPD Strategic Plan and the President's 21st Century Policing recommendations to expand social network usage and continue to grow OPD's online social network footprint with many tools. Staff recognized that in an effort to keep the community informed, it is important to go where people are, using the tools they are already using, and to take advantage of the growing number of free social media tools available to reach the public. In this case, by April 2014 when OPD finished the pilot and officially joined Nextdoor, approximately 15,000 Oakland residents, representing more than 80 percent of the City's neighborhoods, were engaging with one another on Nextdoor. The City wanted to share information through those existing online neighborhood

networks. Given the immense popularity and broad adoption of social media tools to communicate quickly in this 24/7 world, the number of Nextdoor members in Oakland has grown to more than 48,000. **Figure 1** in the Analysis Section shows Nextdoor's membership growth over time in Oakland.

Nextdoor serves as another tool for the City to communicate timely information to residents while not intruding on residents' privacy, since **posts between residents on the platform are not visible to City staff**. The City uses Nextdoor primarily as a one-way tool to disseminate information to the community, often targeting communications to geographically specific neighborhoods. The City can only view community comments on the platform when community members send comments and messages in response to specific to City posts. Only then does it become a two-way communications tool.

OPD uses the tool to post information such as important news, crime alerts and updates, and emergency notifications. Nextdoor allows OPD to establish more linkages with the community, especially to communicate with residents about crimes in their neighborhoods and the actions police took in response to those crimes. City departments use Nextdoor to communicate important information to neighborhoods; recent posts include advertising upcoming winter-ready workshops; notifying the community about the Plan Downtown effort; informing neighbors about changes to recycling programs; promoting City-sponsored events such as Love Our Lake Day, Art + Soul, the Oakland Triathlon, concerts and volunteer events, and small grant programs; and providing information about key policy issues such as changes to the minimum wage.

Listservs and Oakland Background

Listservs are electronic mailing lists where people can subscribe to be informed through email notifications. Prior to the advent and popularity of social networking tools, the City used listservs and Yahoo groups in various capacities over the years to share information with residents. OPD's Neighborhood Services Division maintains approximately 43 listservs for the 43 Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils (NCPCs). In the past, the City created six Yahoo groups for each police service area then in existence. The groups were used for notifications, mostly about safety, in those areas. However, the City did not have staff capacity to adequately moderate the Yahoo groups, people could join anonymously and there was no way to determine whether participants lived in the neighborhoods served by the individual group listservs. As a result, and due to the emergence of better online communications tools, communication on those channels diminished considerably over time. City staff no longer use or maintain these Yahoo groups. Neighborhood Service Coordinators (NSCs) now only use the listservs for each NCPC, which are voluntary, opt-in groups.

ANALYSIS

The City's communications staff seeks to have a diversified bundle of tools that will reach community members where they are most engaged online; no single tool is adequate to reach every sector of the population in Oakland. As a result of limited resources and staff capacity, communications staff need to prioritize the use of communications tools that have the broadest reach into the Oakland community. This section of the report specifically addresses how the City

uses listservs and the Nextdoor platform to reach Oakland residents. It also provides information about Nextdoor's efforts to address and curb online racial profiling.

Listservs

As mentioned in the Background section above, Neighborhood Services Coordinator (NSC) staff maintain approximately 43 active listservs for the 43 Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils (NCPCs). Additionally, there are listservs for Neighborhood Watch block captains, National Night Out hosts/co-hosts and Citizens Police Academy participants.

NSC staff primarily uses listservs to push information out to the public. In response to some posts, staff occasionally receives responses from the community requesting assistance on particular problems in the neighborhoods. Staff created the listservs from sign-in sheets at each community meeting. A long-term goal is to try to create an electronic opt-in option for community members to receive emails from their NSC.

NSC staff do not manage neighborhood chat groups where the participants exchange information with each other via email. NSC staff communicates through the listservs with information about Neighborhood Council meetings, crime prevention tips, general City of Oakland events, updates and news, the Neighborhood Services Newsletter, and other information that the community may need to know.

Similar to the Yahoo groups, which are no longer maintained by the City, there are many other listservs and online chat groups created by the community that the City does not manage, write posts to, or monitor.

Nextdoor

How Nextdoor Works for Public Agencies:

Public agencies using Nextdoor have their own free, private, and secure Nextdoor website that they manage on their own. Nextdoor currently has a relationship with more than 1,400 public agencies nationwide. In such relationships, like with the City of Oakland, City staff cannot join individual neighborhood groups.

In Oakland, the City Administrator's Office Communications staff, the Mayor's staff, and OPD can post to one, many, or all of the neighborhoods in a specific service area (beats, areas, etc.) or citywide. Unlike the old listservs, staff does not have to join neighborhood groups to post to a neighborhood group. Residents can reply to City posts, send the City a private message, or they can "thank" the City for a post. The Nextdoor "thanks" feature is similar to the "like" feature on other social network platforms. In addition to the posts described above, the City can also post urgent alerts and events to Nextdoor. **The City does not monitor, does not have staff capacity to monitor, and most importantly does not have the access to monitor communications between residents on Nextdoor that do not relate to posts initially generated from the City.**

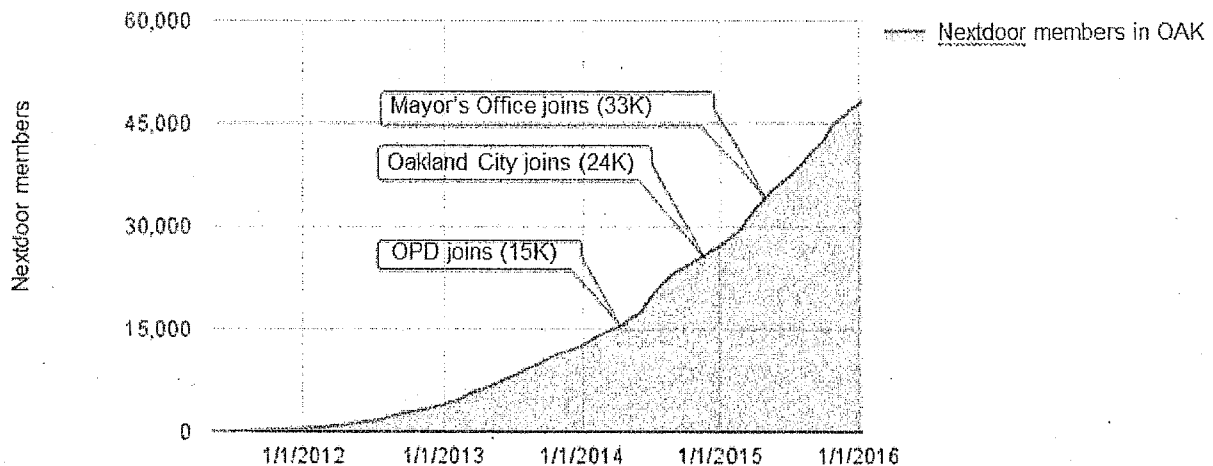
Privacy:

As previously mentioned, Nextdoor takes user privacy seriously. Every neighbor on Nextdoor has to verify their address and sign in with their real name, like in person. They emphasize the fact that they will not share user information with third-party advertisers and that the website is protected by password and encryptions.

Oakland's Nextdoor Usage Data:

As previously mentioned, the City began using Nextdoor as an additional tool for information dissemination because a large number of community members were already participating and engaging on Nextdoor as shown in **Figure 1** below. Having the ability to use multiple tools is important for staff, considering that not every community member uses the same tool. **Figure 1** shows the growth rates of Nextdoor usage over the past four years. As of January 2016, there are more than 48,000 Oakland residents on Nextdoor representing 21 percent of all Oakland households (compared to about 12,000 followers on Twitter and about 8,000 likes on Facebook). Nextdoor reports that 93 percent of all Oakland neighborhoods are represented on Nextdoor and more than 70 percent of those have over 50 members. Oakland has the highest penetration of Nextdoor users than any of the other top 100 largest cities in the country.

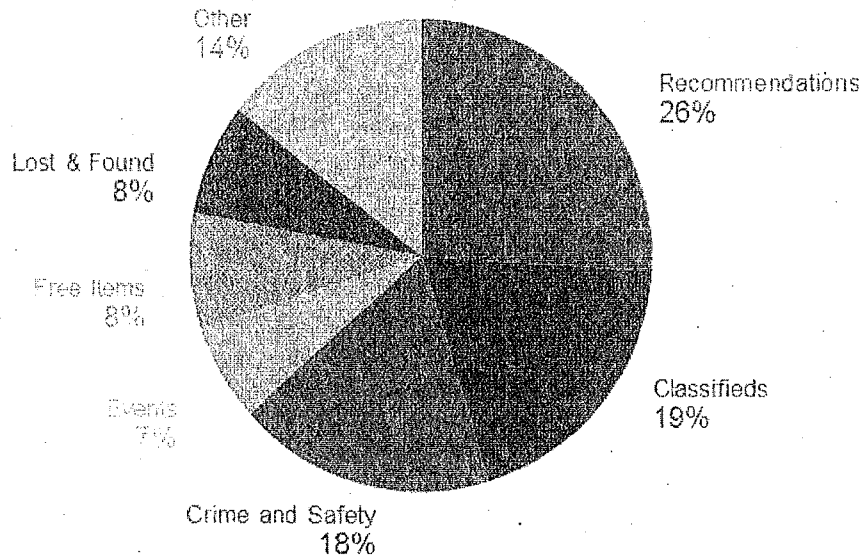
Figure 1: Nextdoor participation growth rates



Nextdoor is used for a variety of reasons nationwide and in Oakland. Specifically in Oakland, Nextdoor is primarily used for recommendations. **Figure 2** below shows that while some people think that Nextdoor is used primarily as a crime and safety tool, crime and safety ranks third, at 18 percent, compared to the uses of the tool for making recommendations (26 percent) and posting classified listings (19 percent).

Figure 2: Nextdoor Uses in Oakland

Wide range of conversations in Oakland



**Note: the *Crime and Safety* category includes more than just crime or suspicious behavior posts. It also includes general safety information such as downed power lines, flooding, etc.

Statistics for the City's Three (3) Nextdoor Accounts:

Nextdoor allows users in different neighborhoods to reply and "thank" the poster. **Attachment A** shows screenshots of what such screens look like within Nextdoor. As of December 2015, Nextdoor reported the following statistics for the City's Nextdoor Accounts:

Oakland Police Department (<https://nextdoor.com/agency/ca/oakland-police-department/>)

- First post April 24, 2014
- 747 posts
- In 2015, OPD's Nextdoor received 1,210 "Replies" and 9,117 "Thanks" to OPD posts

City of Oakland (City Administrator's Office) (<https://nextdoor.com/agency/ca/oakland/oakland-police-department/>)

- First post September 12, 2014
- 47 posts
- In 2015, CAO's Nextdoor received 219 "Replies" and 915 "Thanks" to CAO posts

Office of Mayor (<https://nextdoor.com/agency/ca/oakland/office-of-the-mayor-3/>)

- First post April 29, 2015
- 5 posts
- In 2015, the Mayor's Nextdoor received 74 "Replies" and 178 "Thanks" to Mayor's posts

Requests and Challenges Presented to Nextdoor by Neighbors for Racial Justice (N4RJ):

1. Create Guidelines to Curb or Prohibit Racial Code Words
2. Limit Public Safety Posts to Those Only About Actual Crimes
3. Create Posting Guidelines for Posters to Use to Describe Crime Occurrences
4. Track Posting Behavior
5. Training for the Neighborhood Leads
6. Train Moderators in Multicultural Competence
7. Create a New Crime Post Form / Process

Attachment B contains a detailed description of each of the requests from N4RJ to Nextdoor.

Changes Nextdoor has made thus far:

Nextdoor has been working closely with the City of Oakland and several community organizations to begin to address the question of how to curb racial profiling. Feedback was gathered from the following community groups and partners: N4RJ, 100 Black Men of the Bay Area, OPD, Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center, other law enforcement agencies (i.e., Los Angeles County Sheriff, Detroit Police Department, Sacramento Police Department, Palo Alto Police Department), and other nonprofit partners in and around Oakland. Nextdoor has also reached out to Stanford Professor Eberhardt, who is consulting with OPD on eliminating bias in policing.

Some of their efforts to date focus on education, prevention, and response, including the following:

1. An acknowledgement from top Nextdoor executives that the company can help in the larger effort to reduce racial profiling.
2. Educating and training Nextdoor staff to support the removal of profiled content.
3. Adding pop-up screens that alert users to the Nextdoor expectations, including the prohibition of racial profiling as defined in the Nextdoor community guidelines.
4. Allowing neighbors and community members to flag a post specifically for racial profiling and immediately escalating such flags to the Nextdoor Neighborhood Support Team.
5. Creating a form for residents when posting about a crime or suspicious activity. This form focuses on guiding residents through a series of questions about observed behaviors when residents share information about suspicious behavior with each other.

FISCAL IMPACT

Currently, there is no fiscal impact associated with this report at this time.

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

This subject matter is of interest to the public. In preparation of this report, staff met with the N4RJ as well as Nextdoor in addition to posting this report through the City's normal posting process.

COORDINATION

The City Administrator's Office worked in collaboration with the Oakland Police Department in preparation of this report. This report was also reviewed by the Office of the City Attorney and the Controller's Bureau.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: There are no economic impacts associated with this report.

Environmental: There are no environmental impacts associated with this report.

Social Equity: Working collaboratively with Nextdoor, the N4RJ, and the NSCs provides the City with a unique opportunity to address issues of social injustice currently in Oakland. Addressing these issues promotes a safer Oakland for all residents.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Staff Recommends that the City Council Receive The Community Presentation by Neighbors for Racial Justice on Racial Profiling in Neighborhoods and on Listservs.

For questions regarding this report, please contact Karen Boyd, Assistant to the City Administrator / Communications Director, at (510) 238-6365.

Respectfully submitted,



KAREN L. BOYD
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Reviewed by:
Claudia Cappio, Assistant City Administrator


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Attachments (2):

- A. Screenshots of Sample OPD Nextdoor Posts with Replies and Thanks
- B. Detailed List of Requests from N4RJ to Nextdoor

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Attachment A: Screenshots of Sample OPD Nextdoor Posts with Replies and Thanks



21 Ghost Town Gang members or associates indicted by the Santa Clara County District Attorney's office 8 Dec


Neighborhood Services Supervisor Jacque Long from Oakland Police Department

Oakland Police Officers worked very hard to bring this case to this point. A Santa Clara County grand jury has indicted 21 people for a series of sophisticated auto break-ins throughout the Bay Area, the Santa Clara County District Attorney's office announced on Monday, Dec. 7. The defendants are allegedly members or associates of the Ghost Town Gang, an Oakland street gang with members who ... [View more](#)

Shared with 4 areas in Oakland Police Department in Crime & Safety

THANK 239 REPLY 10 ▼

★ Laura, Diane, John & Laura, and 236 others thanked Jacque



Safety tip from the Neighborhood Services Section 8 Oct

Community Programs Supervisor Felicia Verdin from Oakland Police Department

Be alert while walking & using your electronic device.

According to current crime trends, robbers want your cell phones, especially iPhones/Smart Phones/iPads

3 tips to practice:

1. Don't make yourself a target:
 - Don't talk on your phone while you sit in your car or walk down the street.
 - Earphones/headphones may draw unwanted attention.
 - No flashy, gold jewelry.
 - Consider ... [View more](#)

Shared with 3 areas in Oakland Police Department in Crime & Safety

THANK 70 REPLY 26 ▼



Public Safety Advisory - Sexual Assault Occurred in the 1200 block of 82nd Avenue

Public Information Officer Team from Oakland Police Department

21 Oct

Oakland, CA — The Oakland Police Department would like to make the public aware of a sexual assault that occurred on October 15, 2015.

On October 15, 2015, at about 2:00 AM, a female victim reported that while she was walking in the 1200 block of 82nd Avenue, she was approached from behind by a stranger who pulled her to the ground. The suspect physically and sexually assaulted her and then ... [View more](#)

Shared with 3 areas in Oakland Police Department in Crime & Safety

THANK 27



Prepare for Winter Storms at Weather Ready Workshop on Saturday

Public Information Officer Harry Hamilton from City Administrator's Office

19 Nov

The City of Oakland's preparations for the strong winter storms predicted are underway. We encourage the community to also prepare. One resource available is a Weather Ready Workshop.

Saturday, November 21, 10 am to Noon
CORE Weather Ready Workshop
EMSD Media Room, 1605 Martin Luther King Jr. Way, Oakland, 94612

This session will provide Oakland residents and business owners with ... [View more](#)

Shared with all areas in City Administrator's Office in General



★ Don, Helga, Jewel, and 52 others thanked you

Attachment B: Neighbors for Racial Justice (N4RJ) Requests of Nextdoor

1. **Create Guidelines to Curb or Prohibit Racial Code Words:** Based on the ongoing use of code words that distance those who post (“posters”) from the reality of racialized posts, the N4RJ requested that Nextdoor institute guidelines prohibiting the use of abusive racial code words, abbreviations, or directly derogatory terms.
2. **Limit Public Safety Posts to Those Only About Actual Crimes:** In order to help curtail ongoing racial profiling, the N4RJ requested that “suspicious behavior” posts be prohibited. The subjective nature of these such posts allow for more implicit racial bias. Instead, crime posts should be limited to the reporting of actual crimes being committed.
3. **Create Posting Guidelines for Posters to Use to Describe Crime Occurrences:** In order to reduce the risk of unwarranted harassment of neighbors, N4RJ requested that post timing and detail guidelines be developed for description posting. Vague and out of date descriptions endanger innocent neighbors, and do not align with the purpose of the “Crime & Safety” section. Specifically, N4RJ requested the following guidelines:
 - a. Limit posts that include physical descriptions of involved individuals to the “Urgent Alerts.” This would help overcome out of date descriptions.
 - b. Posts that give general/vague/non-specific descriptions should be prohibited. These descriptions are responsible for the harassment of neighbors that “fit the description,” and puts those neighbors in danger of negative police interactions.
4. **Track Posting Behavior:** In order to provide insight into crime reporting behaviors (both in the Crime & Safety, and the Urgent Alert sections), N4RJ suggested that Nextdoor track posters, content, and crime report occurrences and produce monthly statistical reports. The reports would describe the crime report post frequency by poster, type of crime, demographics of the people described in the reports, whether or not there was a resolution, and the number of flags on the post.
5. **Training for the Neighborhood Leads:** Neighborhood “leads” are the owners of local neighborhood Nextdoor groups. The N4RJ recommended that Nextdoor modify the process for identifying, recruiting, and retaining leads in order to support an open and welcoming community and to promote a greater level of accountability and diversity. Currently, the leads are self appointed and are required to complete very little training. The specific N4RJ recommendations regarding training include the following:
 - a. The criteria for leads must be modified choose individuals who founded the neighborhood website or invited members. Instead the criteria should be replaced with a rotating group of leads who are chosen based on general Nextdoor involvement / activity. Nextdoor should also seek to enhance lead diversity.
 - b. Nextdoor moderators should closely monitor lead behavior, in order to ensure that leads do not abuse their positions. This might be implemented through the use of a lead reporting system that reviews a lead’s behaviors. If a lead is found to have violated Nextdoor Guidelines, that lead would be demoted or placed on probation.
6. **Train Moderators in Multicultural Competence:** In order to provide a safe and consistent Nextdoor experience, the N4RJ recommended that Nextdoor moderators (staff members) be further trained in multicultural competence and be encouraged to build a socially just

orientation towards the communities that they monitor. In order to increase Multicultural Competence, N4RJ recommended that Nextdoor moderators be provided with ongoing continuing diversity education focused on helping them to understand and recognize micro aggressive, sexist, heterosexist, racist, classist, xenophobic, and other oppressive posts / behavior. In order to provide ongoing support for moderators, N4RJ suggested that Nextdoor contract with social justice experts who can help to specifically address intolerance and profiling issues.

7. **Create a New Crime Post Form / Process:** The N4RJ also requested that Nextdoor change the format of the crime report form which neighbors fill out in order to post online. N4RJ created a potential new form which would force the poster to focus first on the behavior of the person in the neighborhood before focusing on the person's description. A copy of the recommended form is shown on the next page.