



CITY OF OAKLAND

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TO: City Councilmembers
FROM: Councilmember Jane Brunner
DATE: May 22, 2007

RE: A REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION FOR THE OAKLAND AMBASSADORS PROGRAM

SUMMARY

In an effort to improve public safety and address both real crime and perceptions of crime, my office, in partnership with Covenant House, the Youth Employment Partnership and the Uptown Merchants Association, proposes an Oakland Ambassadors Program.

Oakland youth and young adults will be teamed up to serve as Oakland Ambassadors. These Ambassadors will work in the vicinity of Oakland BART Stations and in neighborhoods adjacent to commercial districts to serve as guides, sources of information and to act as a consistent visible presence on the street. They will work with area merchants to ensure public safety. They will offer to accompany any residents and visitor who would so request from BART stations to their cars or homes, within a proscribed distance from their work area.

The recommended program will be in downtown and areas around all Oakland neighborhood BART stations. We envision that the program will be funded through a public-private partnership with half of the total cost coming from the Oakland Redevelopment Agency and the other half from private funding.

BACKGROUND

Oakland residents have consistently ranked crime and public safety as their top priority. Surveys of local businesses also show that crime is their number one issue when it comes to establishing, attracting or growing businesses in Oakland. It is also clear that for many visitors to our city, Oakland struggles with its image as an unsafe city.

The City of Oakland has consistently taken a two-pronged approach to improving public safety: providing real alternatives to criminal activity to our young people and young adults, and providing traditional law enforcement services.

The Oakland Ambassadors program is an effort to provide real job opportunities to at-risk youth in Oakland while adding an important service to Oakland's commercial districts. Selected and trained by reputable and effective Oakland-based youth services organizations—Covenant House and Youth Employment Partnership and others—Oakland Ambassadors will serve in teams in our commercial districts.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Each neighborhood BART Station will have its own team of Ambassadors, who will be the “eyes on the street” for their district. The teams of six will be on the streets between dusk and 8 pm. Ambassadors will:

- walk with people who exit from BART stations
- maintain a visible presence on the streets
- give directions when needed

In downtown, the Ambassadors will do the above, plus the following:

- get to know merchants and residents of their neighborhoods
- call proper authorities to collect trash and dangerous objects on the street
- report threatening or violent behavior to law enforcement personnel
- keep a watchful eye on citizen safety and property

Additionally, they will have access to Covenant House, Youth UpRising and YEP's wraparound support services to help them develop self-sufficiency in areas including housing, transportation, child care, and physical and mental health care.

Oakland Ambassadors will be Oakland residents, ages 18-24. They will be selected for their interpersonal skills and desire to be a positive part of Oakland's social fabric. Their training will include:

- 3 weeks of Youth Employment Partnership (YEP) job readiness training, and customer service training combined with Youth Uprising's Youth Leadership and Safety training with a bonus for successful completion
- 22 hours per week of work experience
- 2 hours per week of continued job soft skills training
- training in customer service skills, safety, and program-specific tasks
- academic support for their required 15 hours per week in college classes or GED study lab

Each team will include one supervisor, who will work 25 hours per week in conjunction with YEP Work Experience Counselors to supervise participants and consult with YEP staff when issues arise.

In developing its partnership with the City, we see the following three strategies as essential to the program's success:

- 1) providing appropriate training and support for team members and leaders
- 2) ongoing cooperation with merchants to ensure the most efficient use of the Ambassadors, and to receive feedback as the program evolves
- 3) teaching the Ambassadors to be pro-active about crime prevention, and no expectation that they will be confrontational when faced with threatening behavior

OUTREACH TO BUSINESSES AND MERCHANTS

The success of the Ambassador's Program is contingent upon the participation of the community. Local businesses must be educated on the program, asked for their input on how the programs may serve their needs most effectively and asked to contribute funds in order to accomplish these goals. As such, we propose conducting preliminary meetings within the eight business districts to introduce them to the program and ask them for feedback. After compiling their comments and tailoring the program to address their concerns, we will then conduct follow-up meetings to present a finalized version of the program. At this point the program's budgetary requirements will be assessed and presented to the local businesses to enlist their financial commitment to the program.

RECOMMENDATION

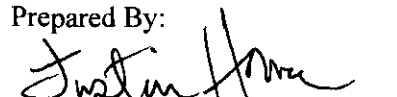
To increase public safety in our most important commercial districts, and to give employment opportunities to Oakland youth, I recommend that the City Council endorse this program in principle, ask staff to work with my office to return to Council with detailed cost analysis and to refer consideration of funding for the program from Redevelopment Funds to the Budget process.

Respectfully Submitted,



Councilmember Jane Brunner

Prepared By:


Justin Horner, Sr Policy Analyst