

**CITY OF OAKLAND**  
**AGENDA REPORT**

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TO: Office of the City Administrator  
ATTN: Deborah Edgerly  
FROM: Public Works Agency  
DATE: June 24, 2008

RE: **Informational Report from the Public Works Agency Regarding Citywide  
Graffiti Abatement**

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**SUMMARY**

At the January 22, 2008 Public Works Committee meeting, a report was requested on the Public Works Agency's graffiti abatement program. This report provides information on how blight in the form of graffiti vandalism is addressed. It provides information on programs in the PWA - Keep Oakland Clean and Beautiful Division (KOCB), PWA - Parks and Buildings Division (PBMD), CEDA's Code Enforcement Unit, and Oakland's Redevelopment Agency.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

This is an informational report only; therefore there are no fiscal impacts.

**BACKGROUND**

In 1994, the City was experiencing a large spike in graffiti vandalism on public and private property. Up to that time, graffiti abatement was managed by Code Enforcement staff, which sent abatement notices to private property owners. Graffiti on public property was handled by staff as they were painting on a routine basis, e.g., electrical facilities, etc. There were also community volunteers assisting with graffiti abatement. A graffiti abatement unit in PWA was established at that time to deal with the increasing problem of graffiti.

Code Compliance continues to address complaints of graffiti on private property through the mandated notification process. More recently, a specialized target program was initiated by the Oakland Redevelopment Agency, which has an agreement with the Youth Employment Partnership, Inc. ("YEP") to provide graffiti abatement services in the Coliseum Project Area. The graffiti abatement work performed by the youth is on private property facing the public right-of-way.

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This report will summarize the various programs and operations dealing with graffiti. PWA is continually evaluating new approaches to this problem.

## **KEY ISSUES AND IMPACTS**

Graffiti vandalism continues to be one of the more challenging problems that the Public Works Agency (PWA) and the Oakland community are facing. Despite ongoing efforts to deal with graffiti, it continues to persist.

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

### **PWA Graffiti Abatement on City Property**

#### PWA Operations

The Graffiti Abatement Program within PWA / KOCB is responsible for the abatement of graffiti on City property. This includes electrical poles, utility cabinets, sidewalks, litter containers, and recreation facilities in the public right-of-way. The majority of work for KOCB is driven by complaints, which are generated and tracked through the Public Works Call Center. The supervisor will review, prioritize, and assign the tasks based on the location, amount, and type of graffiti. Any explicit language or gang related graffiti is a priority. In many cases there are repeated efforts to remove graffiti until the tagging has ceased. Though the majority of our work is complaint-driven, there are some areas and structures that are visited daily until the tagging is discontinued. Staff is assigned to specific geographic areas to monitor and abate graffiti on public and private property. The Graffiti Abatement Program includes seven full-time employees ("FTEs"), consisting of three electrical painters, four painters, and one half-time supervisor, for a cost of \$1.8 million dollars annually. This cost does not include operational costs for materials and equipment. During the six month period from July 1 to December 31, 2007 staff responded to 923 complaints. Their daily assignments are based on complaints within their assigned areas. If graffiti or illegally placed posters, signs or decals are observed during the course of the day, they are addressed immediately.

When the graffiti abatement operation started in the 1990's it was the intent of the City to abate graffiti on private property to get rid of the problems it attracted such as crime and increased blight. The intent was to abate graffiti one or two times on private property and have tenants/owners take it on after that point. Due to ongoing problems with graffiti and its relationship to attracting other unwanted behaviors, in some cases staff has continued to abate graffiti on private property over long periods of time. Based on our limited resources and the high demand to abate graffiti on public property staff is transitioning to one time abatement on private property. Staff will make attempts while in the field to communicate with the owner or tenant that they are responsible for managing and/or abating graffiti on their private properties, and that the City will

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perform a one-time abatement. If staff is unable to make contact while in the field, the complaint is forwarded to Code Enforcement for formal notification. The Electrical Painters abate graffiti when it's observed in areas where they are engaged in routine work. They are also assigned to work on streetscape project requests from the Electrical Services Division, and streetlight projects around new commercial and residential developments. This is not graffiti abatement work, but part of their regular responsibility.

Upon completion of a project, painting is recorded on streetlight pole maps and forwarded to the Electrical Services Division. The information is then entered into the "Electrical Structures" database which determines painting frequency.

Digital cameras are used to document tags and graffiti that may be related to gang activity. When appropriate, the photographs are forwarded to OPD's Gang Unit, as well as the unit that patrols Oakland Housing Authority property, to identify known gang tags and other vandals using tags.

Staff uses various standards in the abatement of graffiti based on the location and surface material. Typical methods used are roller and spray painting on walls and fences, and pressure washing on natural fences, retaining walls, and sidewalks. There are eleven standard colors used to paint out graffiti. We are in the process of purchasing pressure washing equipment that will allow us to recover runoff when abating various sites, and utilize environmentally friendly agents in the abatement process. The response time to abate graffiti is usually within 48 hours of notice. Our focus is to continue to work toward permanent solutions to the systemic problem of graffiti vandalism, and to focus on long-term solutions including enforcement, education and mitigation/prevention.

The abatement of graffiti on signs is handled by the Traffic Maintenance Section whose work is complaint driven. They will respond to remove graffiti or stickers on a sign and replace the sign if necessary.

#### PWA Parks and Buildings Maintenance Division

The Public Works Agency Parks and Building Maintenance is responsible for the abatement of graffiti in and around City buildings and parks. Staff is assigned to specific calls to abate graffiti. While in the field on assignment, if staff sees graffiti, it is painted out or reported back to the shop for dispatch. Notifications are received via Corrigo, Magic Tickets, telephone calls from individual sites, and staff via Nextel radio. Corrigo and the Magic Tickets are work management systems that are presently used to issue work orders and track complaints; however they will soon be replaced by Cityworks.

The response time for servicing complaints is generally within 24 hours or less. Response is usually expedited to staff by the use of direct connect two-way radios. During the period of

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July 1 through December 31, 2007, staff responded to 208 complaints, which translates to approximately \$156,000 annually for staff costs. Occurrences of graffiti vandalism on private facilities and/or on public rights-of-way are referred to KOCB staff via telephone and e-mail. Our methods to abate graffiti include the use of different anti-graffiti agents applied to surfaces, pressure washing, and or painting.

### Public Agency Coordination

PWA works closely with other public and private agencies, such as the Oakland Unified School District, the federal, state and county agencies, and utility companies, when graffiti is observed on their properties. This connection will be enhanced by the utilization of Cityworks, the new Public Works work management system.

### Volunteer Opportunities

A new volunteer graffiti abatement program was started in 2008. Currently there are volunteers who have received graffiti abatement kits (provided by KOCB), and instructions on their use and the tracking of the locations where they have abated graffiti. KOCB staff will continue to do outreach with the community to increase volunteer participation.

The abatement of graffiti on signs is handled by the Traffic Maintenance Section. Their abatement process is complaint driven. Typically they will abate the graffiti or remove the stickers from the sign; if this is not feasible the sign will be replaced.

### **Graffiti Abatement on Private Property**

#### CEDA Code Enforcement

The Community Economic Development Agency (CEDA), Building Services Division is responsible for enforcement of the Oakland Municipal Code Chapter 8.24 as it relates to the abatement of graffiti on private property. The information provided by CEDA on the current process is noted below:

#### The process of abating a blight complaint (private property)

- Code Compliance receives a complaint about a blighted property, which may include graffiti on private property. The case is assigned a complaint number and an inspector is assigned to investigate the complaint as noted.
- The inspector verifies the complaint and the blighted conditions. The inspector provides investigation of blight complaints on private properties, which may include graffiti. The owners are notified in writing to abate the blighted conditions on their property within 10

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– 21 days. The property owners have 14 days from the date of the notice to file an appeal. If the property owners fail to comply, then they will be assessed a fee, and our department will contract to have the property abated by a third party vendor. Publicly awarded contracts for abatement work on privately owned properties are authorized by three City ordinances: Blight (Ord. 10, 986 & 12.046 CMS) and Graffiti (Ord. 10.997 CMS).

#### CEDA's Oakland Redevelopment Agency (ORA)

For the second consecutive year, the ORA will contract with Youth Employment Partnership, Inc. to provide workforce training services for the proposed graffiti abatement program for a period not to exceed 12 months. The agency will hire and train a crew of four young adults to work up to 15 hours per week (5 days per week, 3 hours per day, from 7:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.). Youth will perform the following:

- Abate graffiti at various locations in the Coliseum project area.
- Track graffiti abatement and provide weekly reporting to the ORA and Public Works Graffiti Abatement Division. Over a six month period in 2007, the youth targeted 650 properties and abated graffiti from 150 buildings (multiple tags on each building) on International Boulevard from 22nd Avenue to the San Leandro border.
- Due to an overwhelming demand from local business groups and the residential community to address blight in their respective areas, the ORA sponsored Operation Tough on Blight. This operation was conducted in the Coliseum project area during the month of March 2006. Over the course of several weekends, teams of ORA staff and code inspectors systematically targeted and methodically surveyed the entire Coliseum project area. As a result of the operation, over 800 citations were issued for a variety of code violations, with ultimately an 85% compliance rate from the property owners.
- During the course of the operation, it was also noted that a strong need existed to support youth workforce development and training services to address at-risk youth and graffiti in the neighborhoods.

#### **SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES**

Economic: The continued efforts of the Graffiti abatement staff will assist in improving the physical appearance of the City of Oakland, which translates directly into attracting and retaining business and promoting civic pride.

Environmental: A decrease in the amount of blight/graffiti vandalism will decrease the amount of toxic chemicals used in this vandalism, which impacts air quality and the ozone layer.

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Social Equity: The enhanced efforts of collaboration and partnering with the citizenry and the business community and the Public Works Agency will enhance the quality of life and safety of the people, and discourage some of the petty crime.

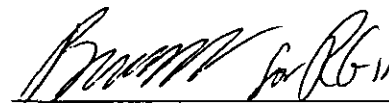
#### **DISABLED AND SENIOR CITIZEN ACCESS**

The decreased amount of graffiti and increased beautification will enhance the overall living conditions and safety for the disabled and senior citizens.

#### **ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

No action is requested, since this is an informational report.

Respectfully submitted,




Raul Godinez II  
Director, Public Works Agency

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Prepared by:  
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Keep Oakland Clean and Beautiful Division

APPROVED AND FORWARDED TO  
THE PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE:

  
Office of the City Administrator

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