



AGENDA REPORT


TO: Jestin D. Johnson
City Administrator

FROM: Fred Kelley
Director, Oakland
Department of
Transportation

SUBJECT: Vehicle Enforcement Unit Update

DATE: February 17, 2024

City Administrator Approval


Jestin Johnson (Feb 29, 2024 19:54 PST)

Date: Feb 29, 2024

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends That The City Council Receive A Report On The Oakland Department of Transportation's New Vehicle Enforcement Unit, Including An Analysis Of Results In Abandoned Vehicle Tows Over the First Nine Months Of Operations And Data-Informed Recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Taking over duties from the Oakland Police Department (OPD) in early 2023, the Oakland Department of Transportation's (OakDOT) Vehicle Enforcement Unit (VEU) was established to provide abandoned vehicle, scofflaw and vehicle encampment services in the City of Oakland (City). As requested by the Public Works and Transportation Committee, this report provides an update on the unit's status and operating results over approximately the first nine months of operations, the period available at the time of the report's preparation.

While overcoming many obstacles to stand up the new unit, others remain. As the VEU is working to build its capacity, the demand for its services is growing even faster. This report explains how the unit has worked to prioritize its work fairly and equitably recognizing that many neighborhoods are disproportionately impacted by stolen, stripped, burned out, encamped and generally blighted vehicles. The report uses available data and lessons learned to date to make recommendations for how the City can respond to the growing demand for the VEU's services.

Significant findings in the report include: between June and November 2023, requests for abandoned vehicle services exceeded requests for illegal dumping; the majority of VEU tows involve stolen and or severely blighted (burned and or inoperable) vehicles; the demand for VEU services is growing much faster than the unit's capacity to respond, with the result that the backlog of requests continues to grow; and more requests involve public safety and public

health issues, which are extremely resource intensive. For example, the number of stolen vehicles in Oakland has nearly doubled in the past two years and prioritizing the recovery of these vehicles makes other operations less efficient. Also, vehicle encampments, which continue to grow in number, often require coordinated responses across departments and are extraordinarily resource intensive. This spotlights the need to clarify policy objectives and work to ensure sufficient resources are in place to achieve them.

To that end, recommendations include increased VEU staffing, using a 4-day, 10-hour work schedule for increased efficiencies, and offering overtime opportunities to address the backlog of tow requests.

BACKGROUND/LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

In April 2021, the [final report and recommendations](#) of the Oakland Reimagining Public Safety Task Force was published, including recommendations to have civilian experts respond to community requests for service that were previously fulfilled through OPD staff.

In August 2021, the City Administrator's Office convened an interdepartmental effort that ultimately produced the VEU as a new operating unit within OakDOT's Parking & Mobility Division.

In November 2021, [an informational report](#) on the OPD abandoned vehicle operations was received by the Public Works and Transportation Committee, including information about staffing challenges and the growing backlog of service requests. The report includes a summary of the interdepartmental effort and a clear summary of state and local law governing vehicle abatement operations (see in particular [Attachment B](#) of that report).

In June of 2022, the Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Mid-Cycle Budget was adopted by City Council, transferring thirteen vacant positions from OPD to OakDOT and creating three additional technician positions to support encampment operations.

On January 30, 2023, the VEU launched by training thirteen (13) Parking Control Technicians (PCTs), who agreed to act in the VEU technician role, per agreement with the Labor Union, pending the creation of a new VEU technician classification through the Civil Service process.

On February 13, 2023, the VEU started abandoned vehicle tow operations and supporting encampment management operations.

On February 20, 2023, the City suffered a ransomware attack that wiped out its Oak311 and CityWorks service request data and prevented staff from using the system for months.

In June of 2023, the Fiscal Year 2023-2025 Budget was adopted by City Council, freezing two vacant positions in the new VEU, comprised of one field technician position and one office support position, as a cost saving measure.

ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The VEU is organized into three details: Abandoned Auto, Scofflaw, and Vehicle Encampment. The report below begins by describing the unit start up, including staffing and its three details, highlighting accomplishments and ongoing challenges, continues with an analysis of towed vehicle data for the first nine months of operations, and concludes with lessons learned and recommendations.

1. OakDOT's Vehicle Enforcement Unit: Fresh Start And Major Challenges

Based on the interdepartmental task force work, the group identified that one of the principal challenges was the high vacancy rate among Police Service Technicians (non-sworn Police staff) assigned to the Abandoned Auto and Scofflaw details and the frequent diversion of those technicians to support the City's Encampment Management Team (EMT) operations. This work eventually led to the recommendation that City Council provide additional staffing for "vehicle encampments," so that staff dedicated to traditional abandoned auto operations were not routinely diverted to EMT operations.

On July 1, 2022, thirteen vacant technicians and three supervisor positions became part of OakDOT. The reorganization that transferred these positions to establish the new VEU was and continues to be a major endeavor. Previous and ongoing challenges include: all sixteen positions were vacant and needed to be filled; a new civil service classification needed to be created for the technician position ("Parking Control Technician II"); supervisor and office support positions needed to be changed and filled; one time and ongoing operational funding for the unit needed to be secured, vehicles and equipment needed to be ordered and programmed, office space needed to be found and built out, legal and technical issues needed to be worked out, training programs needed to be established, background checks for all prospective staff needed to be completed, etc.

After initially pursuing a strategy that would have used exempt limited duration employees (ELDE) to staff the unit during the first year of operations, the City agreed with employees and their unions that the best way to staff up was to invite experienced Parking Control Technicians (PCT) from OakDOT's Parking Enforcement Unit to act in the role for six-month periods.

Approximately twenty-five PCTs volunteered, and the first group of technicians started in January 2023 and a second group of technicians, including nine new and three continuing, took over in July 2023. Of the three supervisor positions (Parking Enforcement Supervisor II) originally budgeted for the VEU, one has been filled on a permanent basis and serves as the unit manager. The other two supervisor positions, along with another vacancy in the division, were deleted in order to create a total of three additional positions: one assistant unit manager (Parking Enforcement Supervisor I) and two dedicated office support staff (Administrative Analyst I and Senior Public Service Representative). Beside the unit manager, all other staff are temporary or acting. The civil service process to establish the new VEU technician classification continues to move ahead and is now expected to be complete in late spring or early summer 2024. This effort will be followed by a recruiting process that should be complete in late fall or early 2025.

As the data analysis below will show, this strategy has been a success by at least one important measure: number of vehicles towed. However, the strategy came at a cost and has inherent

limits. Staffing the new unit with existing PCTs meant that OakDOT’s Parking Enforcement Unit was deprived of those same resources. Combined with other vacancies, the Parking Enforcement Unit has been operating at an effective vacancy rate of over 50% since January 2023. While Parking Enforcement Unit technicians and supervisors have helped backfill the vacancies by regularly volunteering for as many as two overtime shifts per week, the negative impacts on parking citation issuance and revenue from fines and fees have been significant. Recruiting efforts for new PCTs are ongoing and a plan was developed and implemented in Summer 2023 for a broad recruitment to hire as many as twenty-eight new PCTs. Given progress to date, a class of fifteen new recruits is set to begin training in February 2024; a second class with as many as thirteen new recruits should begin training in late May or early June 2024. An analysis of the fiscal impact of the vacancies in the Parking Enforcement Unit and lost parking citation revenue due to this approach is not taken up in this report but will be brought forward in Spring 2024 as part of the City-wide mid-cycle budget process.

Less than a week after VEU tow operations started in February 2023, the City was hit by a ransomware attack. In addition to the many other adverse impacts of this major incident, it also crippled the City’s service request platform for nearly four months – which the VEU relies on to identify and respond to abandoned autos. The new VEU unit thus primarily relied on service request data from previously downloaded spreadsheets and forged ahead with operations while the service request platform was not operational. One of the unexpected and problematic consequences of this necessary response, however, is that VEU staff learned to do their work without using the platform. This explains why the analysis below is largely based on towed vehicle results that is maintained in spreadsheets outside of the service request platform. With the latest rotation of acting technicians, training and procedures are now in place to ensure that all VEU activities will be captured in CityWorks going forward.

Through December 2023, the unit continued to operate with a single supervisor and only one dedicated administrative support staff located at City’s 911 Call Center, with an assistant unit supervisor and a second office support staff role unfilled. Among other things, this has meant that the unit only has the capacity to conduct tow operations from 8AM to noon, Monday through Friday. This tow window will expand by an hour or two once the unit is fully staffed and operational in spring 2024, but the maximum number of hours for towing in one 8-hour shift will be limited to five or six hours given the time necessary to start and close out the day (for example, the VEU is responsible for providing all completed stored vehicle reports to OPD at the end of each shift).

Table 1 summarizes the challenges in standing up the VEU.

Table 1: Challenges In Standing Up VEU

Challenge	Needed Action	Status
Staffing - Supervision	Establish Unit Manager (Parking Enforcement Supervisor II) and Assistant Manager (Parking Enforcement Supervisor I)	Permanent unit manager hired (July 2023); working to fill assistant manager role using ELDE contract (January 2024)
Staffing - Office Support	Establish two office support roles for Vehicle Enforcement & Parking Enforcement (Admin Analyst I and	Used ELDE contract to fill Administrative Analyst I (July 2023); working to fill Sr. Public

Challenge	Needed Action	Status
	Sr. Public Service Representative)	Service Representative using ELDE contract (January 2024)
Staffing - Technicians	Create new "Parking Control Technician II" classification through civil service process; until permanent recruitment is complete, staff thirteen technician positions on a temporary basis	Twenty-five Parking Control Technicians originally volunteered to act in the PCT II role and seventeen will continue to play a role in 2024; civil service classification development is ongoing, with adoption and permanent PCT II recruitment not expected until summer or fall of 2024.
One-time funding to stand up unit	One-time funding in the amount of \$800,000 was necessary for office construction and equipment, vehicles, two-way radios, citation handhelds and tablets.	One-time funding was provided in July 2022, with vehicles and equipment procured and in place by early spring of 2023.
Funding - Operation & Maintenance (O&M) Expense	Secure funding not only for staffing, but general operation and maintenance costs.	Two positions, one technician and one office position, were frozen in order to provide approximately \$280,000 needed for the unit's O&M expenses. Need to secure ongoing O&M funding while unfreezing critical VEU positions.
Office Spaces	Find and build out two separate office spaces, one for the VEU supervisors and technicians and another, specially secured location for administrative support staff accessing Department of Justice (DOJ) systems.	A storage and copy room in 270 Frank Ogawa Plaza (Parking & Mobility Assistance Center) was converted to a locked room with two work cubicles (March 2023); an unused office at a downtown garage was improved for the VEU's permanent home (October 2023).
Secure Access to Department of Justice (DOJ) Database	Establish a secure location and network to access DOJ systems, so that VEU staff can handle towed and stolen vehicle information independent of OPD.	While the special room has been ready since March, technical and operational obstacles remain for establishing the secure network; as a workaround, VEU staff work from the City's 911 Call Center, requiring a 911 Operator to assist and limiting the capacity of the VEU.

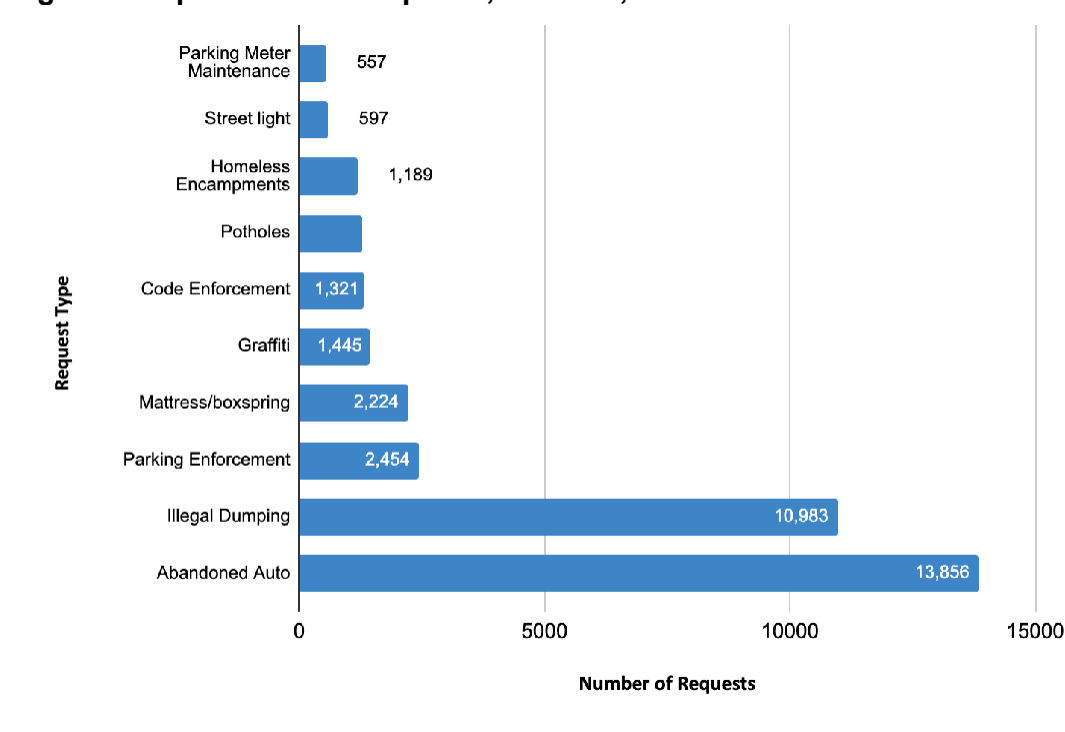
Challenge	Needed Action	Status
Training and Operations	Provide classroom and field training for all VEU staff, including codes (California Vehicle Code and Oakland Municipal Code) use of systems (including CityWorks and other databases) forms (especially OPD's "stored vehicle report") and safety training (including self-defense and narcan).	With the help of OPD and IT, VEU succeeded in providing all staff with training at launch. OakDOT will continue to rely on OPD and IT to assist going forward for new personnel with some training. All VEU staff will require additional support from IT for CityWorks training in spring 2024.

In addition to towing, there is a tremendous amount of work responding to requests. As shown below, the overall demand for abandoned vehicle services is growing faster than anticipated, especially the demand for services involving stolen vehicles, burned out vehicles and vehicle encampments, all of which are relatively resource intensive, requiring hours or even days of staff time.

1.1 Abandoned Auto Detail: Demand Growing Faster Than Capacity

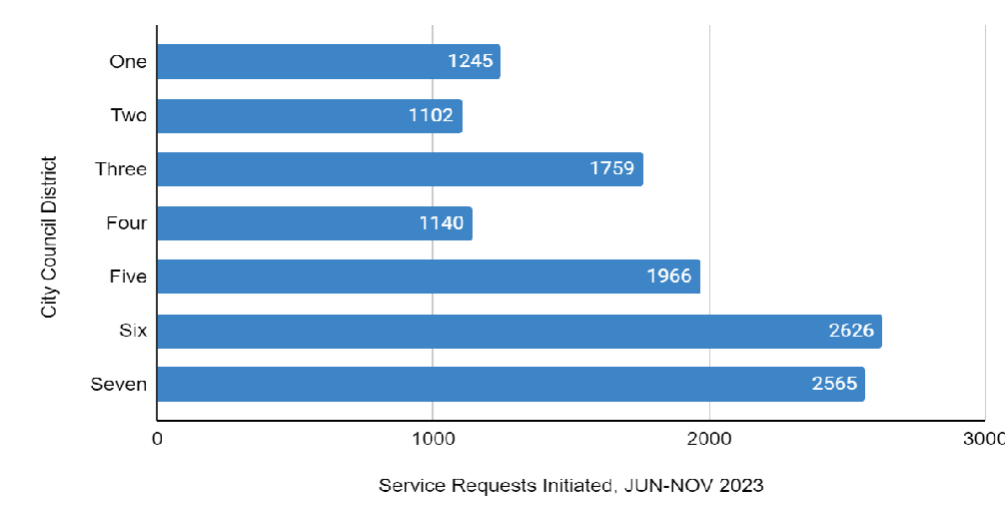
Six of the thirteen technician positions in the VEU were originally assigned to the Abandoned Auto Detail. These technicians are tasked with responding to requests received through the City's 311 systems. From June 1 to November 30, the six-month period after the City recovered from the ransomware attack in spring of 2023, abandoned vehicle requests eclipsed illegal dumping requests as the top request city-wide. The chart below shows how these two categories dwarf all the other requests (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. Top 10 Service Requests, Jun-Nov, 2023



During this same six-month period, abandoned vehicle service requests received varied considerably from one City Council district to another, with the majority of requests coming from East Oakland (**Figure 2**).

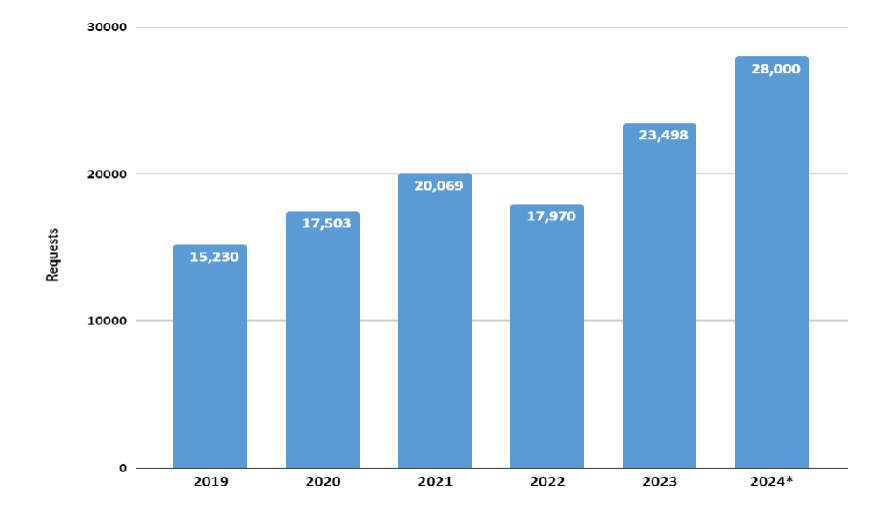
Figure 2. Abandoned Vehicle Service Requests by District, Jun-Nov 2023



Before being integrated into the City's [Oak311](#) service request system in 2019, constituents reported abandoned vehicles to OPD by calling a number and leaving a voicemail. Looking at abandoned vehicle requests over the past five years (**Figure 3**), the trend is apparent: between

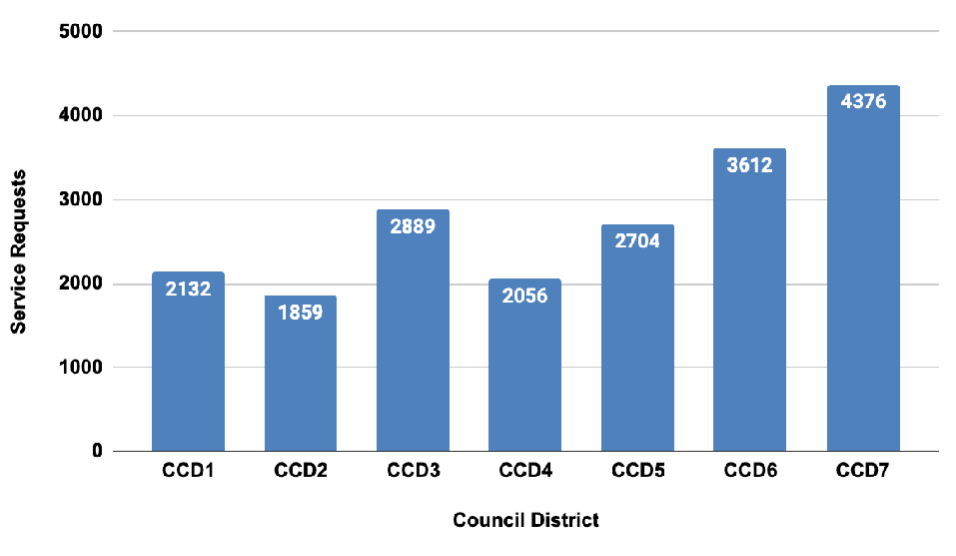
2019 and 2023, demand grew by over 50%. If demand continues at the rate experienced over the last six months of 2023, then the City should expect to receive as many 28,000 requests in 2024.

Figure 3. Abandoned Auto Service Requests by Year, 2019 - 2024



As already observed, the growth in abandoned vehicles is not experienced uniformly throughout Oakland and the same is also true for other serious problems including homeless encampments and sidershows. The graph below (**Figure 4**) combines these three types of requests from calendar year 2021 and looks at their distribution by City Council District:

Figure 4. Service Requests for Abandoned Auto, Homeless Encampments and Sidershows by District in 2021



Historically, then, Districts 3, 5, 6, and 7 have a disproportionately high number of requests for services such as abandoned vehicles, homeless encampments and sidershows.

For these and other important reasons including higher incidents of homicides and other violent crime, the City Administration initiated a pilot in 2021 called “Neighborhood Enhancement Services Team” (NEST). NEST aims to deliver coordinated services to areas of the City most impacted by violent crime, blight, etc. Initially focused on impacted police beats in Council Districts 6 and 7, the pilot has since expanded to beats in Council Districts 3 and 2 experiencing the highest concentrations of violent crime.

In its ongoing support of these and similar efforts, OakDOT’s VEU developed and consistently uses the following criteria for evaluating the priority level of abandoned vehicle requests by taking into consideration NEST beats.

1. **Emergency**, respond and close service requests (SR) as soon as possible (aiming for 24-72 hours); add a comment to the SR indicating the reason for the emergency priority (e.g., “Department of Justice (DOJ) Stop,” “Burned out Vehicle,” “Agency Urgent Request”).
2. **High**, respond as soon as possible as SR is in a NEST beat AND towable on first visit; is not in NEST beat but is towable on first visit and an urgency request has been made and substantiated; or is not in NEST or towable but there is a clear harm reduction issue (e.g., blocking access to a fire hydrant or school loading zone).
3. **Medium**, respond as soon as possible as SR is in NEST; or is not in NEST and the vehicle appears to be towable on first visit.
4. **Low**, respond as soon as possible as to a request that is not in NEST beat and does not appear to be immediately towable.
5. **Evaluated No Action At This Time**, use for Neighbor-on-Neighbor and similar situations; when resources allow, a separate letter may be sent to the registered owner reminding them of their obligation to move their vehicle after 72-hours.

For example, two requests both involving burned out vehicles will be prioritized as “Emergency,” but the VEU would attempt to deal with the request in the NEST beat before the request from the non-NEST beat. Similarly, staff would attempt to respond to a request with an “Emergency” priority in a non-NEST beat before responding to a request with a “High” priority in a NEST beat. The aim of such a process is to consistently address the needs of the entire City in an equitable, fair and transparent manner. As the volume and complexity of abandoned vehicle requests increases, it will be important that staff keep to this process and not allow the “loudest voices” and “the well-connected” to circumvent it.

1.2 Scofflaw Enforcement Detail: Court Decision Puts Program On Hold

Four of the thirteen technician positions in the VEU were originally assigned to the Scofflaw Enforcement Detail. These technicians are primarily tasked with finding and immobilizing vehicles (using “boots”) that have received five or more parking citations. If a registered owner fails to pay off outstanding parking fines and fees after three to five days, staff return and tow the vehicle.

Since 2009, the City has used a “smart boot” solution for immobilizing scofflaw vehicles. If a vehicle has been booted, registered owners can pay off outstanding fines and fees, get the boot

off quickly using a code and get back on the road. Immobilization is an effective way of holding registered owners accountable and far less expensive and resource intensive than towing and impounding. Whenever boots are not removed and returned within three to five days, then the City had the authority to proceed with towing and impounding. Beginning in June of 2023 as many as four VEU technicians staffed the Scofflaw Enforcement Detail using vehicles equipped with automatic license plate readers (ALPR), carrying out all booting and towing operations.

However, in July 2023 the Coalition on Homelessness successfully filed a legal action against the City and County of San Francisco. A California Court of Appeal decision meant that the San Francisco Metropolitan Transportation Authority (SFMTA) could no longer tow legally parked scofflaw vehicles without a warrant, and other California agencies followed suit. Without the ability to tow a scofflaw vehicle, immobilization no longer works as a means of collection.

Suspension of the program has meant that the four technicians in the detail were available to assist with Abandon Auto and Vehicle Enforcement Details. It is also expected to have a negative fiscal impact as a line item in the Fiscal Year 2023-2025 Budget called for the scofflaw program to generate approximately \$1 million annually. Staff will contribute a full accounting of the program as part of the City's Mid-Cycle Budget process later this spring.

1.3 Vehicle Encampment Detail

Upon launch, the Vehicle Encampment Detail was staffed by three dedicated technicians with two principal duties: first, assist the City's EMT by participating in scheduled encampment closure and deep cleaning operations; and second, conduct vehicle encampment assessments independent of EMT operations, often in preparation for an upcoming EMT operation that includes the posting of no parking signs. The assessments were designed to inform a harm reduction strategy that both acknowledges the ongoing use of vehicles as shelters while seeking to minimize the negative impacts on both the unsheltered and the broader community.

Since the VEU launched in February of 2023, the EMT led over two-hundred-fifty (250) operations. While the occasional EMT-led operation does not require any VEU support, more often than not EMT operations are large and complex and have required the use of more than the three dedicated VEU technicians. For example, the 1707 Wood St operation in West Oakland, which took nearly a month to complete, at times required all available VEU staff.

Since September, the EMT has made about forty requests per month for vehicle encampment assessments, but VEU responses have largely been limited to pre-operation activities, including the posting of temporary no parking signs, in preparation for upcoming EMT operations.

More recently and independent from the EMT, the VEU has been coordinating responses with other departments and agencies to vehicle encampments posing public safety and health emergencies. The latter demonstrates the VEU's growing capacity to deal with some of the most challenging situations, but also that its limited resources require technicians to be routinely diverted from responding to ordinary abandoned vehicle requests.

The challenges for responding to vehicles in encampments are at least three-fold: first, the City should expect the next Point-in-Time Survey to find around two thousand vehicles continuing to be used as shelters in Oakland; second, there is a need to clarify under what circumstances the City would tow and impound a vehicle that is being used as a shelter; and third, OakDOT's

Vehicle Encampment Detail increasingly works directly with other departments such as Oakland Fire Department and Oakland Public Works in responding to public safety and health emergencies related to vehicles in encampments, coordinating with while operating independently of the EMT. Much like reports of stolen vehicles, these latter types of requests are prioritized, with responses often coming within a day. Moreover, they are relatively resource intensive. For example, in October clearing one large vehicle encampment posing a major fire hazard to Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) tracks and infrastructure took approximately ten days of VEU staff time. These and other issues concerning encampments in general and vehicle encampments in particular will be addressed in a forthcoming informational report from the City's Encampment Management Division.

2. OakDOT Vehicle Tows: The First Nine Months

To frame this analysis, it is important to keep in mind why the City exercises its authority to tow certain vehicles from public and private properties: under [Oakland Municipal Code 10.64](#), the City Council declared that “the accumulation and storage of abandoned, wrecked, dismantled, or inoperative vehicles or parts thereof on private or public property is found to create a condition tending to reduce the value of private property, to promote blight and deterioration, to invite plundering, to create fire hazards, to constitute an attractive nuisance creating a hazard to the health and safety of minors, to create a harborage for rodents and insects and to be injurious to the health, safety and general welfare. Therefore, the presence of an abandoned, wrecked, dismantled or inoperative vehicle or part thereof...is declared to constitute a public nuisance which may be abated as such in accordance with the provisions” of and under the authority of various state and local codes. **The total number of vehicles towed during the first nine months of VEU operations was 2,508.** The table breaks this number down by California Vehicle Code (CVC) tow authority (**Figure 7**).

Figure 7. Total VEU Tows, Feb – Nov 2023

<u>Tows</u>	<u>Authority</u>	<u>%</u>
846	22651(o) - Expired registration	33.7%
778	22651(c) - Stolen	31.0%
407	22669(d) - Inoperable	16.2%
280	22651(k) - 72 hour violation	11.2%
80	22651(j) - No plate and no VIN	3.2%
54	22651(l) - No parking construction zone	2.2%
21	22651(i) - Five or more citations	0.8%
19	22651(n) - Signed tow away zone	0.8%
13	Other	0.5%
10	22658(a) - removal from property	0.4%
<u>2,508</u>		<u>100.0%</u>

Staff often uses expired registration as the first tow authority whenever available. This likely explains why CVC 22651(o) is the most often used authority for the VEU. Other numbers in Figure 7 are far more surprising: over 30% of the vehicles towed by the VEU being stolen and another 16% being completely inoperable. When the analysis is extended to include another 250 vehicles that were towed for both expired registration (first authority) and inoperable (second authority), **we learn that nearly 60% of the vehicles that the VEU towed in the first nine months of operations were either stolen or inoperable.** This is not only evidence that the unit is prioritizing requests involving these types of vehicles, but also raises the question of what impact this concentration of “Emergency” or “High” priority tows has on the unit’s overall productivity measured in terms of vehicles towed and service requests closed using available resources.

Now that we know why vehicles are being towed by the VEU, the remaining question concerns where they are being towed from. **Figure 8** below shows the number and percentage of tows alongside the percentage of service requests received by City Council District.

Figure 8. VEU Tows by District, February – November 2023

City Council District	Tows	% Tows	% of Requests
One	132	5%	10%
Two	169	7%	9%
Three	605	24%	14%
Four	49	2%	9%
Five	526	21%	16%
Six	446	18%	21%
Seven	581	23%	21%
Totals	2,508		

When the percentage of tows is approximately the same or greater than the percentage of service requests received, as in West Oakland and deep East Oakland districts, the more likely that an area is experiencing a high volume of stolen and significantly blighted vehicles. The reverse is the case when the percentage of service requests is greater than the percentage of tows, with more requests being made for lower priority situations such as vehicles registered to residents in the area that have not moved for more than 72-hours.

The table below (**Figure 9**) presents the number of authorized tows carried out by the VEU by police beat, highlighting those beats with the greatest need (representing “hot spots” and underlined in the table).

Figure 9. VEU Tows by Police Beat (Hotspot), February – November 2023

OPD Beat	Tows	OPD Beat	Tows	OPD Beat	Tows
10X	24	21X	24	31Y	111
10Y	23	21Y	25	31Z	39
11X	10	22X	5	32X	72
12X	20	22Y	5	32Y	63
12Y	9	23X	278	33X	70
13X	7	24X	13	34X	60
13Y	3	24Y	19	35X	91
13Z	2	25X	16	35Y	4
14X	19	25Y	4	3X	17
14Y	6	26X	187	3Y	6
15X	14	26Y	151	4X	30
16X	1	27X	26	5X	71
16Y	6	27Y	67	5Y	69
17X	12	28X	12	6X	127
17Y	17	29X	43	7X	128
18X	11	2X	39	8X	67
18Y	12	2Y	72	9X	8
19X	83	30X	102	Total	2508
1X	13	30Y	45		
20X	26	31X	24		

The distribution of tows by district and beat reflects two basic facts: first, stolen and severely blighted vehicles are more likely to be found in certain neighborhoods and, second, that the VEU is prioritizing its work in such a way to address this uneven distribution.

The final table shows that abandoned vehicle tows represent only a fraction of the total number of tows undertaken by both OPD and OakDOT in any given year (**Figure 10**).

Figure 10. Total OPD Tows by Year, 2021 - 2023

Tows	2021	2022	2023*
Other	7,309	5,317	4,809
Abandoned	1,559	1,281	1,613
Crash Related	2,935	2,657	2,713
Stolen	4,789	5,662	8,682
Combined	16,592	14,917	17,818

*represents 9 months of data

Between 2021 and 2023, the number of stolen vehicles towed in Oakland spiked by more than 80%. When the decision was made to have OakDOT's new VEU handle stolen vehicles when

responding to 311 requests, the one consideration made was the need to have OPD take the lead whenever it was found that such a vehicle had a felony warrant associated with it. It was never contemplated that the increase in stolen vehicles seen in 2022 would continue to spike and that such a large percentage of the new unit's work would be dedicated to stolen vehicle operations. Because of the tremendous demand for these urgent requests, the negative impact on the new unit's overall productivity was not registered until only recently.

Whatever changes or adjustments the City makes in response to growing volume of abandoned vehicle service requests and the increasing demands on OakDOT's new unit, it is important to retain a focus on bringing relief to those communities that are bearing the brunt of the abandoned vehicle problem.

3. Rising to the Challenge: Experienced-based Recommendations

At present, there is a backlog of approximately 9,600 open or pending abandoned vehicle requests. How many vehicles should the City be prepared to remove and for what reasons? What amount and kind of additional resources will be needed? What can be done to address the root causes of this explosion in abandoned vehicles? In this concluding section we attempt to answer some of these questions by offering additional analysis and accompanying recommendations.

3.1 Consider Increasing Staffing Resources to Address the Size and Complexity of the Abandoned Vehicle Problem

We saw above how abandoned vehicle service requests now exceed the number of illegal dumping service requests and that combined these two types of requests account for more than fifty percent of all service requests that the City receives. Abandoned vehicles and illegal dumping operations are comparable in some operational aspects and very different in others, but they are both resource intensive.

The Oakland Public Works unit responsible for illegal dumping requests is Keep Oakland Clean and Beautiful (KOCB). That unit has been operating for decades and is resourced with eighty-one (81) positions (nine of which are currently frozen). OakDOT's VEU did not exist a year ago and is now resourced with seventeen positions (two of which are frozen). Although there is a different level of physical work involved in cleaning illegal dumping versus towing, VEU work often involves multiple visits and KOCB and VEU are now both responding to tens of thousands of requests annually, and the new VEU could use more personnel.

Recent VEU results are consistent with historical data showing that initial evaluations or "first visits" by technicians result in approximately 20% duplicate requests, 60% of vehicles "gone on arrival" and 20% of vehicles being either marked, towed, recovered or other action. Technicians "mark" vehicles with orange stickers that notify the registered owner or person in control of the vehicle that it is subject to removal after 72-hours. In those cases, a "second visit" is required. The process of towing a vehicle can take between forty-five minutes and several hours.

Before towing, evaluating and marking an abandoned vehicle requires an average of fifteen minutes of staff time (taking into consideration technician, supervisor and administrative staff contributions). In the simplest case, a duplicate request is caught during the initial intake process and may be evaluated and canceled within approximately a minute of administrative

staff time. VEU is working to catch all duplicates before they are submitted to technicians in the field. In complex cases involving criminal activity, debris, vehicle encampments or other complicating circumstances, **a first visit producing an adequate evaluation may require hours of staff time and coordination with other departments.** Information presented above indicates that the requests being made of the VEU are only getting more and more complicated, which must be understood in turn as requiring more and more resources to provide an effective response.

This suggests that the magnitude of the abandoned vehicle problem and the resources currently committed to responding to that problem are out of alignment. This being the case, staff recommends a staffing analysis be conducted in time for the next budget cycle in order to fund positions (supervisory, administrative and frontline technicians) and align clear goals and VEU activities.

3.2 Authorize VEU Overtime Now and Work Toward 4/10 Alternative Work Schedule in the Future

To date, VEU staff have worked a limited amount of overtime, but usually only in support of EMT operations or for administrative purposes. As reported above, technicians have been backfilling the Parking Enforcement Unit with overtime shifts. When the Parking Enforcement Unit is back at full strength in February 2024, that need will go away and technicians in the VEU would be more likely to accept overtime opportunities addressing the backlog of abandoned vehicle requests by working extended hours. Offering a significant amount of overtime will require a designated funding source. Similarly, the City's administrative instruction for alternative work schedules (AI 504) provides a 4 day/10 hour (4/10) schedule for select departments and units. When Abandoned Auto was in OPD, the unit used such a schedule. Going forward the City should consider extending this type of schedule to the new VEU as it is estimated to result in a 5% productivity increase (due to less travel and start-stop time) and would create a weekly (i.e., Friday) opportunity to do fully staffed overtime shifts. The longer workday would also allow for extended towing hours for the VEU.

FISCAL IMPACT

This report is for informational purposes and therefore has no direct fiscal impact.

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

No specific public outreach was conducted in relation to this report, but OakDOT regularly attends community meetings in an ongoing effort to share information about the new VEU and to better understand the needs of the community.

COORDINATION

Vehicle enforcement operations are coordinated on a daily basis with the Oakland Police Department, the Parking Enforcement Unit, the Encampment Management Team and the Parking and Mobility Assistance Center. The Abandoned Auto Task Force, consisting of the City

Administrator's Office, OPD, OakDOT, the Economic Workforce Development Department, Planning and Building Department, the City Attorney's Office and City Council staff, continues to meet on a monthly basis.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: Building the City's capacity to effectively respond to the instances of abandoned, blighted and stolen vehicles will improve commercial corridors by increasing access to parking, reducing safety concerns, and if the City is successful at identifying unlicensed businesses that wish to become compliant, it will increase the tax base.

Environmental: Reducing the instance of abandoned vehicles can address environmental concerns as abandoned vehicles represent a safety hazard that includes the release of toxics into the environment such as spilled motor oil that ends up entering the storm water system and releases to the Bay.

Race and Equity: Neighborhoods with the largest number of abandoned vehicles and vehicle encampments are often the same neighborhoods that have the lowest equity scores in Oakland. The presence of vehicles on the street reduces property values, creates safety hazards that can discourage pedestrian activity as they block sidewalks, and can contribute to criminal activity at or near the vehicles that serve as magnets for crime.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Staff Recommends That The City Council Receive A Report On The Oakland Department of Transportation's New Vehicle Enforcement Unit, Including An Analysis Of Results In Abandoned Vehicle Tows Over the First Nine Months Of Operations And Data-Informed Recommendations

For questions regarding this report, please contact Michael Ford, Parking & Mobility Division Manager at 510-238-7670.

Respectfully submitted,

Fred Kelley

Fred Kelley (Feb 29, 2024 17:08 PST)

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