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by City Manager's Office
Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Albert Balagso

SUBJECT: 2009 GRAFFITI SURVEY

DATE: April 14, 2009

Approved

Christine J. Shippey

Date

4/14/09

INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

The Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) conducted its first annual Citywide survey of graffiti tags in January 1999. Since that time, a survey has been conducted each year in an effort to evaluate the level of activity compared to the baseline of 71,541 tags¹ established in 1999. Since the initial survey, the number of tags identified by PRNS' Anti-Graffiti and Litter Program (AGLP) steadily declined until 2007, when the City experienced its first increase since 1999. In 2008, although the AGLP removed nearly twice the square footage of graffiti compared to 2007, the graffiti tags increased from 2,594 to 13,902. The following chart summarizes this activity:

Year	Total Tags	Year	Total Tags
1999	71,541	2004	3,913
2000	35,744	2005	2,035
2001	10,498	2006	129
2002	5,612	2007	2,594
2003	3,827	2008	13,902

The purpose of this memorandum is to transmit the results of the 2009 graffiti survey.

ANALYSIS

The foundation of the AGLP is built on the guiding principles of collaboration, communication and coordination. The program's successes have been due in large part, to the effective coordination between City departments, volunteers, and external partners such as San Jose Police Department, Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), Cal Trans, Santa Clara Valley Water

¹ Only markings or "tags" that were visible from streets were counted. It is important to note that tags on school properties, inside buildings, public restrooms and behind shopping centers and tags in alleys were not counted.

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District and the Santa Clara County Departments of Roads and Airport, Probation and Corrections.

Over the years, this collaboration has enabled the City to ensure a broad continuum of services including community outreach, eradication and enforcement. This past year the anti-graffiti collaborative partners worked on the following initiatives:

- Volunteerism has been and continues to be the key to protecting our neighborhoods from graffiti. Although the AGLP maintains a volunteer database of over 3,000 community volunteers, staff has worked throughout the year to validate the existing list in an effort to improve coordination. Since volunteers have different levels of involvement, staff has designated volunteers into three categories: 1) single day event volunteers (individuals and groups) who want to participate in events like Earth Day, 2) adopt-a-block volunteers who are often made up of individuals or groups that take on a geographic location, and 3) the super volunteers that do all of the above and also occasionally work throughout the City. Our objectives are to confirm where our volunteers are working, to identify areas where new volunteers are needed, and improve coordination of volunteers throughout the City.
- As a result of Juvenile Detention Reform discussions within the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force, collaboration with the Sentencing Alternatives program was re-established. Sentencing Alternatives refers juveniles into the AGLP program to abate graffiti as a part of their community service hours. The program refers 25-45 juveniles per month and to date, 294 juveniles have been referred. These juveniles have provided over 4,884 hours of community service and removed 7,257 tags that have amounted to 88,041 square feet of graffiti. The success of this program is the result of collaboration between the City and the Santa Clara Juvenile Justice System. The Santa Clara County Probation Department will be expanding this collaboration with the addition of county wards to supervised work teams.
- The San Jose Police Department Graffiti Unit has implemented a regional Graffiti Taggers database. This database is shared by most law enforcement agencies in the region. The agencies share data related to known graffiti taggers. This shared information provides the ability to link specific incidents of tagging to individuals which can lead to felony charges and convictions. The department is also working on an internet-based citizen reporting link. The Department hopes to launch the web site later this year.

Despite these efforts, the 2009 survey results confirm that for a second year, the City continues to experience a significant increase in the level of graffiti activity. The most recent survey, conducted in the third week of February 2009, identified 19,240 tags versus 13,902 in 2008, an increase of 38%.

An initial review of tags abated during the first six months of this fiscal year compared to the same time period last year indicates that staff removed 5% fewer tags this year. However, a review of the square footage abated during the first six months of this fiscal year compared to the same time period last year indicates that staff has abated 57% more square footage this year.

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The table and chart below provides a historical overview of the tags abated by PRNS over the past four years.

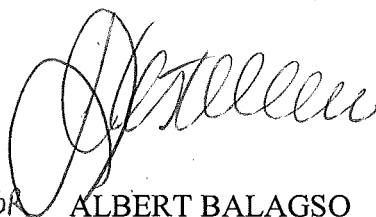
GRAFFITI ABATEMENT				
Four-Year Analysis – Tags Abated and Square Feet Removed				
FISCAL YEAR	TAGS ABATED July to December	ANNUAL TOTAL	SQUARE FEET REMOVED July to December	ANNUAL TOTAL
2008-2009	41,181	TBD	429,095	TBD
2007-2008	43,159	84,062	244,380	797,226
2006-2007	26,455	50,902	292,385	700,396
2005-2006	27,789	47,863	173,915	400,268

This increase in graffiti volume can be attributed to the recent trends staff has identified, such as the use of “slap tags”, the use of extreme water guns, larger tags on walls of all types, and the increased popularity of “tagging crews”. Slap tags are pre-drawn tags placed onto mailing labels or nametag labels which are quickly and discreetly applied onto all types of surfaces. Extreme water guns, which are Super Soaker type water guns filled with paint, are used to create very large tags which can often be several stories tall. Tagging Crews are groups of individuals with the sole purpose of putting up the crew’s tag as large and in as many places as they can.

These new methods by graffiti vandals are not exclusive to San Jose, as other cities across the nation are experiencing similar trends. The increase of larger tags and added square footage requires much more staff time and material to abate, negatively impacting our response times. Consequently, the AGLP response time performance is tracking at 90% for gang graffiti (24 hour removal) and 76% for the graffiti hotline (48 hour removal). Graffiti not removed within these timeframes is generally eradicated within the next 24 hours.

In an effort to improve response time, the Graffiti Hotline is now staffed during normal business hours. This step allows the AGLP to obtain accurate complaint details from the caller that will ensure staff is responding to correct locations for a faster and more efficient response. Enforcement staff are also proactively contacting owners of private properties with visible graffiti and notifying them of the services available to assist them in abating the graffiti on their properties and of the possible consequences for non-abatement.

The next city-wide quarterly graffiti clean up is scheduled for the week of May 4, 2009. For information on this event please contact the Anti-Graffiti office at 408 277-3208.



ALBERT BALAGSO
 Director of Parks, Recreation
 and Neighborhood Services