



MEETING DATE: JANUARY 18, 2011

ITEM NUMBER:

**SUBJECT: CREATION OF A TASK FORCE TO STUDY HOMELESSNESS**

**DATE: JANUARY 6, 2011**

**FROM: CITY MANAGER'S DEPARTMENT**

**PRESENTATION BY: THOMAS R. HATCH, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER**

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: MURIEL ULLMAN, NEIGHBORHOOD  
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## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the City Council:

1. Create a Homeless Task Force made up of community stakeholders to study the impact of homelessness on the City of Costa Mesa based on the recommended composition:
  - 2 members of the Planning Commission (appointed by the Chair)
  - 2 members of the Parks and Recreation Commission (appointed by the Chair)
  - 2 members of the Redevelopment and Residential Rehabilitation (3R) Committee (appointed by the Chair)
  - 1 representative each from both Saddleback and the Light House Churches
  - 1 representative of Share Our Selves (SOS)
  - 3 representatives from local service providers (appointed by City Staff)
  - Up to 5 community representatives-one selected by each City Council Member
  - 1 or 2 City Council liaison (s)
2. Authorize City Staff to solicit applications for 5 City Council appointed representatives to the Homeless Task Force based on the attached Committee Task Force Application.
3. Encourage members of the public to attend and participate in Task Force meetings. Subject matter experts will be invited to participate in support of the work of the Task Force as needed.

## **BACKGROUND**

Over the years, the numbers of chronic homeless and the number of complaints has fluctuated; however, as of late, there have been an increased number of complaints and concerns which are in need of immediate solutions.

Based on these concerns, the Planning Commission held a Joint Study Session with the Parks and Recreation Commission on November 8, 2010 to discuss this issue. Representatives from the City Manager's office updated the Commissions on the impacts and homeless issues within Lions Park as well as some suggestions for future action. The report documented the problems encountered within the park itself including consumption of alcohol and drugs, oral and physical altercations and the intimidating presence of some intoxicated homeless individuals. It also included data obtained through interviews with the Costa Mesa Historical Society, County Library staff working at the Donald Duggan Library, residents, City staff working in Lions Park

facilities such as the Downtown Community Center and impacts communicated by all departments in the City. All parties expressed a high level of frustration both for themselves and on behalf of their customers due to the significant impacts from the escalation in the number of homeless individuals congregating in the park.

Based on the above, on November 17, 2010, the Parks and Recreation Commission recommended that City Council create a task force made up of community stakeholders to study the impact of homelessness on the City of Costa Mesa and authorize the Chair of the Commission to appoint two Commissioners to serve on this task force. On December 13<sup>th</sup>, the Planning Commission also recommended the same and requested that the City Council authorize the Chair of the Planning Commission to appoint two Commissioners to serve on the task force. Additionally, the Planning Commission asked the City Council for immediate action on the following:

- Issue a moratorium on the picnic shelter reservations in Lions Park until such time as a safe solution is determined;
- Recognition that current conditions in Lions Park are unsafe which require both long-term and immediate actions;
- Notify residents that unsafe conditions exist in Lions Park, Downtown Pool and library.

Administrative Services staff has referred these three items to the City Attorney's Office for further review. However, they are continuing to issue picnic shelter reservations only on a month to month basis until such time as the City Council and City Attorney issue further direction. The City Council could direct the City Attorney's Office to further review these three recommendations and develop legal opinions for formal consideration.

As a first step, staff will make Lions Park a top priority and schedule weekly meetings to take action on issues at the park. Staff is also reviewing other legal options associated with park usage such as investigation of civil injunctions against chronic violators. A confidential legal memo will be forwarded to the City Council under separate cover.

## **ANALYSIS**

### Progress to Date:

Since the attached staff report was prepared, City staff has been moving forward to address the impact of homelessness in Costa Mesa. Current actions include:

- Meeting with local churches and social service providers serving the homeless and enlisting their volunteers to help move homeless out of the park and into housing
- Conducting an assessment to evaluate the number of Costa Mesa residents who are homeless
- Meeting with Police and Fire Department personnel to improve coordination with District Attorney's office in prosecution of consistent park violators
- Working with the City Attorney's Office to examine other possible laws and/or regulations to address the secondary effects of homelessness on neighborhoods and surrounding communities
- Re-evaluation of our park permit/picnic shelter reservation regulations
- Calculating the budgetary impact of continued police and fire enforcement actions related to homelessness in Area 1 (Lions Park Vicinity)
- Meeting with law enforcement personnel in other cities to assess best practices and first responder responsibilities
- Meeting with County of Orange to discuss regional alternatives which the City of Costa Mesa could be a party to with respect to impact of homelessness in the City

### Long Term Actions:

While law enforcement continually addresses criminal behavior in the community and City staff continue to work with both churches and social service providers on an ongoing basis, the effectiveness of their actions are diminished without long term remedies. Based on the research staff has gathered, as well as interviews with many of those impacted by homelessness in the community, solutions to homelessness are as varied as the individual. The final recommendation in the attached staff report is the development of a data-driven, collaborative strategy to achieve solutions for Costa Mesa that appropriately limit our scope of the larger responsibility of chronic homelessness, yet focus on Costa Mesa's own homeless population.

The proposed Task Force scope of work is as follows:

- Evaluation of current actions
- Legal review of park policies, procedures and ordinances as well as the identification and review of new ordinances designed to address long term municipal code offenders in the park, as well as enforcement of current state and local laws to deal with problem individuals
- Review best practices of other cities with the goal of developing data driven solutions
- Examine the characteristics of the homeless population to develop appropriate short term and long strategies to deal with homeless Costa Mesa residents

The Task Force would be estimated to complete its work and make recommendations to the City Council in 6 to 9 months.

### Selection of Task Force Members:

The recommended composition of the Task Force is based on staff's ongoing experience with community stakeholders who are involved with the homeless population on an ongoing basis in Costa Mesa. This involves not only political officials but also residents, businesses, churches, and social service providers. Larry Haynes, Executive Director of Mercy House, has agreed to act as a Task Force Facilitator on a voluntary basis. He too has guided staff in task force composition. Both staff and Mr. Haynes recommend that the size of the Task Force be limited in order to provide efficient recommendations and solutions.

Based on the above, the recommended Task Force composition is as follows:

- 2 members of the Planning Commission (appointed by the Chair)
- 2 members of the Parks and Recreation Commission (appointed by the Chair)
- 2 members of the Redevelopment and Residential Rehabilitation (3R) Committee (appointed by the Chair)
- 1 representative each from both Saddleback and the Light House Churches
- 1 representative of Share Our Selves (SOS)
- 3 representatives from local service providers (appointed by City Staff)
- Up to 5 community representatives-one selected by each City Council Member
- 1 or 2 City Council liaison (s)

Staff from various Departments will assist the proposed Task Force in conducting research, data gathering and other tasks requested by the group.

Should City Council agree to the formation of a Homeless Task Force, it is recommended that staff solicit applications for the Task Force from the general public for the City Council appointed positions.

### **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

The City Council can choose not to create a Homeless Task Force and continue to address impacts of homelessness on a case by case basis.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

There should be no fiscal impact to the general fund other than the Staff and City Attorney's Office time associated with research, analysis and coordination.

### **LEGAL IMPACT**

Staff will be working closely with the City Attorney's Office to examine the legal aspects of any prospective homeless solutions.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the ongoing as well as recent impacts of homelessness in Costa Mesa, it is clear that more collaboration, communication and specific solutions are needed. Therefore staff is recommending that the City Council create a Homeless Task Force to study the impact of homelessness on the community and development implementable solutions.

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Thomas R. Hatch  
Assistant City Manager

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Muriel Ullman  
Neighborhood Improvement Manager

[Attachment A – Agenda-Related Written Communication presented at the 11/8/10 Joint Parks and Recreation and Planning Commission meeting regarding Downtown Community Facilities: Current Issues](#)

[Attachment B – Committee Formation Application](#)