



# *CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT*

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City council MEETING DATE 3.20.12      ITEM NUMBER:

**SUBJECT: HOMELESS TASK FORCE UPDATE**

**DATE: March 20, 2012**

**FROM: JEFF MATHEWS, HTF CHAIR AND MURIEL ULLMAN, NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT MANAGER**

**PRESENTATION BY: JEFF MATHEWS / MURIEL ULLMAN**

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Approve Recommendations of the Homeless Task Force
2. Receive and File 2008-2010 Resources Impact in the Lions Park Vicinity Report

## **BACKGROUND:**

The Homeless Task Force was formed by the City Council in January, 2011 in response to a series of incidents in the Lions Park vicinity. Problems due to vagrancy included individuals sleeping in the park overnight, multiple encounters between the homeless population and library and community center patrons as well as a variety of complaints from adjacent property owners and park users. Business owners in the City also complained about homeless individuals sleeping on their property at night and loitering in front of their businesses during the day. Many of the people encountered were mentally ill and/or suffering from substance abuse.

Seventeen members were selected by appointment and application and could be joined by up to two City Council member liaisons. The Task Force was further subdivided into three subcommittees focusing on specific project areas such as services, impact of homelessness on the general community and data collection.

The Homeless Task Force (HTF) met monthly beginning in March, 2011. They adopted a mission statement during the first meeting, charging the Task Force to:

“Establish realistic strategies and make recommendations that address the Needs of the Costa Mesa Community, Residents, Businesses and the Homeless.”

Meetings focused on a variety of topics including:

- Civility law (ordinance) review
- Homeless law enforcement combined with municipal code prosecution and mental health outreach

- Mental health and medical issues plaguing the homeless
- Financing strategies/funds available for supportive housing.

The HTF was also instrumental in developing a definition of a “Costa Mesa Homeless Resident” in an effort to tailor homeless reduction actions towards our residents. Additionally, the HTF commissioned a needs assessment conducted by Vanguard University which served as an evaluative tool that identified Costa Mesa’s current homeless population.

Committee members and staff visited a variety of cities and/or non profit organizations including Pasadena, Carlsbad, Village of Hope in Tustin and Laguna Beach. These trips focused on identifying municipalities and nonprofits that had experience with the issue of chronic homelessness and could offer insight to the nature of practices and policy. Meetings also focused on the analysis of CMPD response, available social service response, mental health issues, substance abuse issues, medical issues and potential and existing ordinances. Finally, the Task Force has also focused on law enforcement and legal strategies which better address these unique problems.

Concurrently, HCD staff organized an In-House Coordinating Committee. This was done to identify partners not involved directly with the Homeless Task Force for inclusion in discussion and strategy. These parties included other departments from the City, County-level departments and nonprofits, Probation, Parole, as well as City staff impacted on-site at the Lions Park area. This body met at the Donald Duggan Library on a monthly basis.

Since the inception of the Homeless Task Force, several actions have been taken on both a formal and informal basis by both the City and its community partners. Several churches and social services joined CMPD, the City Attorney and HCD staff and began working together alongside the faith-based and nonprofit communities in an attempt to seek solutions to day-to-day homeless issues. Involved parties worked cooperatively and addressed such issues such as food sharing, client referrals, citizen complaints, and alternative storage for goods owned by homeless residents.

Some successes include:

- Ongoing voluntary assistance provided on a weekly basis at both Lions Park and Donald Duggan Library by both the Orange County Health Care Agency and local non profits such Veterans First, resulting in over 180 engagements with mentally ill homeless, 24 linkages to housing and suspension of two week-end food sharing programs by the faith based community in 2011, and reunification with several homeless people with their families.
- Working closely with Church Consortium to assist city in encouraging churches to work on alternate HTF solutions vs. food sharing in Lions Park
- Creation of a de facto “Homeless Law Enforcement Team
- Constant communication and follow-up between residents, Costa Mesa Police Department (CMPD), City staff and City Attorney regarding court referrals, stay away orders, citizen complaints, homeless service referrals
- Meetings with local liquor stores regarding responsible alcohol sales

- Community meetings with residents to ensure that complaints and chronic violators are being tracked by CMPD
- Outside law enforcement jurisdictions have ceased dropping off offenders at Charlie Street; meeting with CMPD and other law enforcement agencies in an effort to prevent common practice of using Costa Mesa hotels and social services for non residents
- The development of a series of ordinances designed to address quality of life issues in the entire City including the passage of a prohibition of smoking in city parks, a bike rack ordinance and a sex offender ordinance
- The City has worked with the Churches Consortium resulting in the development of a privately funded storage area for homeless items for Costa Mesa residents to CMPD time collecting abandoned property left in the parks.
- Proactive efforts by CMPD and City Attorney's Office to respond to repeat offenders, leading to a more vigorous prosecution efforts and better communication with District Attorney's office.

The Homeless Assessment and Strategy Report was presented to the City Council at the Study Session on February, 28, 2012. This report can be accessed on the City's Homeless Task Force Web Page located at <http://www.ci.costa-mesa.ca.us/departments/CMHomelessTaskForce.htm>. At that meeting, the Council reviewed the recommendations and asked that staff bring the formal recommendation back to a City Council meeting in March. They also asked staff to research some of the costs associated with serving the homeless in the Lions Park vicinity.

## **Analysis**

### **1.CMPD/Fire Cost of Serving Homeless in Lions Park**

Attachment A contains a report which was prepared by HCD and the Police Department identifying the impact on City resources from calls for police and fire services in and near Lions Park including Lions Park, Fire Station #3 , the Neighborhood Improvement Center, DTCC , Historical Society and Library. Methodology included tracking the number, type and length of police contacts with an individual. The field time for these interactions was based on the average length of that type of call from the 2008 calls for service data. Cost of time spent on these cases was derived by multiplying the amount of time spent multiplied by the hourly top step salary of a Costa Mesa Police Officer.

Most categories of calls have remained constant. The major increase was in the category of Patrol Checks which can be primarily attributed to the proactive approach of the Costa Mesa Police Department initiating these Patrol Checks. However, based on a qualitative analysis from CMPD, the majority of calls in Lions Park and the immediate vicinity are reasonably attributed to the chronically homeless population in Lions Park. Page 89 of the report reveals that over \$76,000 has been spent on Lions Park vicinity calls from 2008-2010 which represents approximately 3-6% of the total costs for the area.

The Fire Department also reported that between 2009-2010 there were 462 responses to homeless calls in Lions Park for approximately \$58,443. Additionally, they reported a 165% increase in calls between 2009-2010.

Lieutenant Sharpnack has requested statistics on homeless patients from local hospitals but has not yet received any information.

### **3. Goals of the Homeless Task Force**

This combination of efforts has led to the development of a strategic framework of priorities tailored to Costa Mesa's specific context. The overwhelming conclusion after a nine-month process is that ending homelessness is a regional responsibility which can only be accomplished by provision of housing, appropriate services and a multi-faceted approach to law enforcement. Additionally, there is not a "one-size-fits-all" solution; a carrot and stick approach is recommended. Many of the goals and solutions presented are collaborative and integrated vs. a one shot approach to a problem. All programs are intended to serve Costa Mesa homeless residents while enforcement/legal action will not discriminate between Costa Mesa homeless vs. non Costa Mesa homeless. The end result is to penalize chronic offenders who are repeatedly arrested in the City while assisting those homeless who are long term residents. Hopefully, this collaborative approach will prevent Costa Mesa from continuing to be a magnet to homeless individuals who come to this City solely to access services and motel housing.

Based on the cumulative meetings of the HTF as well as a special Goal Setting Workshop held by the HTF on Saturday, October 15, the following goals have been adopted:

- Goal 1: Define who is a Costa Mesa Homeless Individual
- Goal 2: To Protect the Health and Safety of Costa Mesa residents through enforcement of "Civility" Laws and provision of Alternative Storage Site
- Goal 3: Proactive Problem resolution with Regard to High Crime/Vice Hotels which cater to transient population enforcement of local codes and ordinances at problem halfway houses
- Goal 4: Centralized in-house homeless services coordination
- Goal 5: Integrating law enforcement, mental health and legal strategy as a 3-pronged approach to homelessness
- Goal 6: Research Permanent Supportive Housing and Possible Access Center
- Goal 7: Review Interim Housing Options
- Goal 8: Development of an Appropriate Metrics System to Monitor Reduction in Homelessness
- Goal 9: Promotion of Lions Park as a Local Venue for Special Events and Change in Facilities to more Creative Usage

In summary, individuals served will require varying levels of service based on their unique circumstances. However, it is also important to balance the needs of the homeless with that of local residents and businesses. The Orange County Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness has a regional focus. Costa Mesa plans to address this regional problem by providing services to local Costa Mesa homeless residents initially identified by the Vanguard Needs Assessment and other local data sources.

Attachment B contains these major and minor goals as well as the recommendations by the Homeless Task Force. Attachment C contains a cost matrix which lays out the goals, action items and their estimated costs. Some of the minor goals are underway and/or completed such as the hiring of the park rangers, while others will require formal Council action.

**ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:**

The City Council can choose to partially implement the HTF recommendations or not implement any of the recommendations at this time. No new City staff is anticipated during the implementation phase. Existing staff in HCD, CEO's office and CMPD are already coordinating Homeless/Neighborhood Improvement Task Force efforts.

**FISCAL REVIEW:**

The HTF Priorities Cost Matrix identifies the approximate costs of implementing this pilot program. No new staff is anticipated during the implementation phase. Existing staff in HCD, CEO's Office and CMPD are already coordinating Homeless/Neighborhood Improvement Task Force issues.

**LEGAL REVIEW:**

There is no legal review required at this time. Several of the recommendations will involve new ordinances and be presented to the City Council on a case by case basis.

**CONCLUSION**

It is recommended that the City Council review and adopt the Homeless Task Force Recommendations.

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Jeff Mathews, Chair  
Homeless Task Force

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Muriel Ullman  
Neighborhood Improvement Manager

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Thomas R. Hatch  
Chief Executive Officer

[Attachment A–2008-2010 Resources Impact in the Lions Park Vicinity on the City of Costa Mesa](#)  
[Attachment B – Goals, Action Items and Recommendations](#)  
[Attachment C – Priorities Cost Matrix](#)