



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

MEETING DATE: AUGUST 4, 2015

ITEM NUMBER: CC-6

SUBJECT: CONVERSION OF CODE ENFORCEMENT OFFICER POSITION TO PARK RANGER

DATE: JULY 27, 2015

FROM: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICE

PRESENTATION BY: RICHARD L. FRANCIS, ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
MARK MANLEY, POLICE CAPTAIN

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: RICHARD L. FRANCIS (714) 754-5099

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the City Council convert the newly created Code Enforcement Officer position approved in the FY 2015-16 adopted budget to an additional Park Ranger position within the Police Department.

BACKGROUND:

For the FY 2015-2016 budget, the City Council approved the addition of one Code Enforcement Officer position within the Police Department for the purpose of addressing abandoned property on the public right-of way. The public right-of-way includes parks, streets, sidewalks, alleys and any other public area where no private property interest exists.

The issue of homelessness and the associated impacts on the Costa Mesa community has been a continuing challenge for the city and one that city staff has taken tremendous steps over the past several years to address. The issue is multifaceted and is being addressed from a citywide, holistic perspective that includes health and housing services, public safety and crime concerns, and blight and community quality-of-life impacts.

One tangible consequence of homelessness in the community is abandoned personal property from homeless persons often left in the public right-of-way. The homeless community accounts for a substantial amount of the abandoned property left in the city. This can be for several reasons, such as the individuals walking away from the property, either temporarily or permanently, or perhaps they were hospitalized or arrested and public safety personnel were unaware that the property existed or located elsewhere. In any event, whether the property was permanently abandoned or temporarily unattended on public property, the result can have a negative impact on residents and businesses in the community, as well as leave a distasteful impression upon those visiting Costa Mesa.

The Code Enforcement Officer position was designed to work with Police and other City departments to be proactive with locating abandoned property, and responding to assist the Police and Fire Departments, as well as the Network for Homeless Solutions for example, when homeless personal property needed to be collected and booked for safekeeping. This collection effort would also necessitate adhering to accountability procedures established by the Police Department's Property & Evidence Bureau and proper police report documentation in the department's Records Management System (RMS).

Police Department personnel are trained and are legally obligated to take possession of any personal property associated with a person who is in their care and custody. This includes arrestees and those with whom the Police Department has created a special relationship by nature of official duties being performed with that person. Regardless, collection and booking of personal property under these circumstances still does not adequately address the volume of abandoned property often connected with Costa Mesa's homeless population.

ANALYSIS:

Upon further review, we have concluded that there are limitations to assigning a Code Enforcement Officer primarily to abandoned property and associated homeless issues. First, this position would be limited to a conventional 5-day/8-hour a day work week, which constrains availability in the community. Additionally, the training and background clearance required to interface with the Police Department's CAD/RMS and property and evidence procedures can be challenging and time consuming if there is a turnover of personnel in this position; moreover, these requirements are not necessary for other traditional Code Enforcement job functions this position may be asked to perform.

When dealing with personal property left in the public right-of-way, it is not uncommon for Police Department personnel to be confronted or approached by persons, homeless or otherwise, who take issue with the collection or inventory of these items. Code Enforcement Officers do not receive the training, nor are authorized to carry the safety equipment Police Department personnel are issued. Police officers and Park Rangers receive specific and ongoing training to deal with tenuous and sometimes unsafe circumstances.

Based on our analysis, we have concluded that converting the approved Code Enforcement Officer position to an additional Park Ranger position within the Police Department will be the best long-term strategy to effectively address the ongoing issues related to our homeless population. There are several reasons that suggest this may be a more efficient and effective manner to address abandoned property.

Park Ranger personnel are often requested by police officers to assist with the collection and booking of abandoned personal property on public property. Additionally, all Park Rangers will proactively look for abandoned property and book it for safekeeping if it can be determined the property was permanently left unattended. This approach will apply to the entire Park Ranger program, as opposed to one specified position. All Park Rangers will be encouraged to perform this function outside the park environment as an associated expectation within the job classification.

Currently, Park Rangers receive specific training in property booking procedures and have privileged access to the Police Department's police reporting system. Park Rangers also receive mental health and self-defense training and are equipped to deal with situations and persons who may be dangerous.

Currently, there are five budgeted Park Ranger positions with one being vacant and a recruitment process pending. The four current Park Rangers work a 5/8 schedule with overlapping days across a seven-day week. Their work hours are staggered with coverage from 7:00am to 9:30pm. Generally, there are no more than two Park Rangers working throughout the city at any time, with the exception of slight midday overlap in shifts. Because parks see heavier usage in the afternoons, evenings and on the weekends, there is more Park Ranger coverage during those times. Given our current staffing structure, only one Park Ranger is scheduled between 7:00am and 1:00pm several mornings during the week. With the service demands of all of the parks, especially Lions Park and Wilson Park, and the driving distance between parks citywide, our Park Rangers spend a considerable amount of their time addressing the most prioritized needs and projects. Additionally, the time a Park Ranger spends assessing unattended property, and subsequently, inventorying and properly booking that property can be quite time consuming and take that Park Ranger out of the field for several hours. We believe that augmenting the Park Ranger ranks will mitigate these constraints and allow the Police Department to better serve the community.

Converting the Code Enforcement Officer position to a Park Ranger position will create a six Park Ranger staffing model, and increases opportunities to expand the scope and daily coverage of the Park Ranger program. Taking a programmatic approach to address abandoned property concerns and the enforcement of city regulations and ordinances in the community, should prove to be an effective and efficient model. With added staffing, added expectations can be placed on Park Rangers to spend more time each shift proactively canvassing for abandoned property and mitigating blight and public safety concerns. Simultaneously, increased collaboration can occur with the city's homeless outreach team, Code Enforcement, and other city and county resources to address homeless issues and improve the quality of life for our community.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Converting the Code Enforcement Officer position to a Park Ranger position will yield an annual savings of \$3,936. These savings will contribute to the city-wide salary savings.

LEGAL REVIEW:

The City Attorney's Office has reviewed this report and approved it as to form.

CONCLUSION:

The Police Department has determined that shifting the approved Code Enforcement Officer position to a Park Ranger position is a more viable solution to addressing the complex issues concerning the city's homeless. This staffing augmentation will help the Police Department to more efficiently use the Park Ranger program to tackle abandoned property and other quality of life issues collectively.

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