



Corporate Report

NO: R025

COUNCIL DATE: February 25, 2008

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council** DATE: **February 22, 2008**

FROM: **General Manager, Parks, Recreation and Culture; General Manager, Engineering; General Manager, Planning & Development** FILE: **0350 - 06**

SUBJECT: **Graffiti Mitigation Update**

RECOMMENDATION

The Parks, Recreation and Culture, Engineering and Planning and Development Departments recommend that Council receive this report as information.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on ongoing efforts and intended action directed toward graffiti mitigation/elimination in Surrey.

BACKGROUND

The By-law Enforcement Section, Engineering's Traffic & Operations Divisions, Corporate Facilities Management, the Parks, Recreation, and Culture Department, and the RCMP all have specific mandates and a range of approaches in mitigating graffiti across the City. Presently, the City spends approximately \$400,000 annually to control graffiti. This figure does not include the value of staff time, including an RCMP officer dedicated to graffiti and By-law Enforcement Officers engaged in graffiti mitigation efforts.

The City's Beautification Coordinator has joined the Graffiti Task Force, which is addressing graffiti mitigation efforts. Through the sharing of information, a complete picture of the City's efforts to mitigate graffiti has been developed. Currently, the City uses seven separate anti-graffiti strategies:

1. Regulations

- The RCMP and By-law Enforcement staffs work with community stakeholders to facilitate the removal of graffiti using existing regulations.

- The RCMP identifies those involved in the painting of graffiti and takes enforcement action to ensure that the offenders are held accountable for their actions. The RCMP provides opportunities for vandals to follow a track of restorative justice where they learn about the impacts of their offences through the process of meeting with the people who are impacted by their action and through being required to clean up graffiti for which they are responsible.
- By-law Enforcement staff identify areas that have significant amounts of graffiti and work with the property owners to ensure they understand the requirements of the Property Maintenance and Unsightly Premises by-law and facilitate timely graffiti removal from private properties.

2. Reduction and Prevention

- Enforcement actions by the RCMP and By-law Enforcement staff establish an ambience where vandals are less likely to offend due to potential negative outcomes for the vandals (i.e., having to clean up the graffiti).
- By-laws Enforcement staff assist property owners and those involved in the sale of paint to better understand their responsibilities and how to prevent graffiti from occurring. City staff is working with businesses to educate them on the sale of products that are used in graffiti and provides them with a sticker indicating that the business is involved with the program to prevent the sale of these products to minors.
- City departments undertake consistent graffiti eradication, identification and implementation of anti-graffiti products and introduction of landscape designs to reduce and prevent graffiti on public and private properties.
- The City has entered into contracts to promptly remove graffiti from public property and the City provides grant funding to the Surrey Crime Prevention Society to assist with private property graffiti removal.

3. Assessment and Monitoring

- City staff in every Department, contractors and others that have direct responsibility to address graffiti are monitored to ensure that they are compliant with their contract requirements and are held accountable for their areas of responsibility.

4. Communication

- Information regarding the City's graffiti program and community partners graffiti strategies is available through the Parks Recreation and Culture Call Centre, on the City's Parks Division web-site, and on the Surrey Crime Prevention Society's website.

5. Education

- The RCMP is providing the justice system with information on the consequences of graffiti including the costs that are incurred by the vandalism and they are educating offenders on the impact graffiti has on victims.
- By-law Enforcement staff is providing the public with information on what is expected with respect to compliance with the Property Maintenance and Unsightly Premises by-law and methods for graffiti removal.

6. Community Involvement

- The Parks Division provides opportunities for citizens to become involved with stewardship activities including the removal of graffiti from parks facilities and structures, primarily through the “*Let’s Stop Graffiti*” program.

7. Collaboration

- The City has an interdepartmental Graffiti Task Force that meets on the first Thursday of each month to discuss strategies, concerns, problem areas, etc. and to set direction for actions to be taken by the various Departments/entities involved on the Task Force. The Civic Beautification Coordinator chairs the committee; other members include the Crime Reduction Strategy Manager, the RCMP member assigned to graffiti crime, a By-law Enforcement Officer and a representative from each of the Engineering Department, Corporate Facilities Division, and Parks Division.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the City continues to implement a combination of various strategies to address graffiti concerns, the Task Force has identified initiatives that would further augment graffiti mitigation efforts to with a view to eliminating graffiti in the City.

By-Law or Legislative Changes

City staff has recognized that to effectively address graffiti concerns requires the involvement of businesses that sell products that are used in graffiti. Currently, minors can readily access graffiti paint products. Numerous cities throughout Canada and North America are considering the adoption of a by-law to restrict the sale of graffiti paint to minors. Los Angeles has adopted such a by-law.

The By-law Enforcement Section is currently working with Legal Services on revisions to the Property Maintenance and Unsightly Property By-law No. 16393 to include provisions that will act to restrict the sale of graffiti paint materials to minors. A report on these amendments will be forwarded to Council in the near future.

Reduction and Prevention Measures

In 2007 Council approved the recommendations of the Beautification Task Force to apply vinyl wrap coverings on traffic signal boxes to reduce graffiti. Locations through the city have now been identified and the wraps will be installed over the next few months; these will complement those recently applied to the large kiosks in Holland Park. In March and April 2008 several traffic signal boxes will be wrapped with images representing natural, cultural, heritage, and active living themes. Telus has agreed to implement vinyl wraps on 4 of their utility boxes in the City Centre.

The City's Beautification Coordinator is working with the Engineering and Planning & Development Departments to determine how to revise development policies to ensure that utility boxes are not placed in the open but instead are situated underground or suitably screened from the street.

Graffiti on private properties that face on to main arterial and collector roads continues to be a concern. Approximately \$100,000 from the approved Beautification Budget will be used to address these areas through environmental design strategies that may feature the planting of landscape materials on City land in front of private fences to discourage graffiti and to hide it when vandals apply graffiti to these fences.

City staff has also determined that a paint-over program will further reduce the impacts graffiti on the city and will augment the good work of the Surrey Crime Prevention Society¹. Other local cities have sponsored paint-over programs where citizens receive vouchers that allow them to obtain paint and brushes from participating paint suppliers at no cost to paint out graffiti in the vicinity of their property. Staff are identifying ways to integrate a similar paint voucher incentive program into the existing Graffiti Kit provided by the Parks Division's volunteer-based "*Let's Stop Graffiti*" program.

Assessment and Monitoring Efforts

The City has various contracts with different graffiti removal companies that are managed by different departments. Staff acknowledges that contracts must be consistently assessed and monitored to ensure accountability. More concerted efforts in this regard are being undertaken and any contractor who is found to be in default or breach of their contractual obligations will be served notice to meet the conditions of the agreement or lose their contract.

Current graffiti removal contractors provide a routine inspection of broad areas of the City. The City of Ottawa has established two zero tolerance street sections and five zero tolerance zones that receive extra vigilance by the City for graffiti removal. City staff will likewise identify areas of Surrey that will have a more concentrated focus for graffiti removal. City staff and the public will be encouraged to regularly report incidences so that action can be taken promptly by the City to remove any graffiti that is discovered.

¹ Note that Council provided a grant of \$29,000 to the Surrey Crime Prevention Society in 2008 to provide graffiti removal programs throughout the year.

Communication

The City provides the Graffiti Hot Line number for the Surrey Crime Prevention Society on its *Partners in Parks* website. At the same time, the Society's web site directs the public to call City staff to report graffiti incidents. This situation has led to some confusion amongst residents who are trying to get help in reporting and/or removing graffiti. To take responsibility for graffiti on City-owned property, and to act as a "one-stop" graffiti control centre within the boundaries of Surrey, the Beautification Coordinator is working to develop and publicize one central phone number and web-based contact area for the public to use in reporting or seeking help in relation to graffiti.

Education

Education in schools at the elementary age levels is a critical element to discouraging individuals from becoming involved in graffiti proliferation at later stages of life. Winnipeg Police Service has implemented a one-hour Graffiti Awareness Educational Presentation to grades 4-6 students throughout Winnipeg that covers topics such as what graffiti is, why people do it, how it affects a community, and what can be done about it. The City of Surrey By-law Enforcement staff is working with the Surrey School District in developing a similar program for Surrey. It is expected to be implemented in schools in 2009.

Community Involvement Approaches

Engaging community members in graffiti mitigation efforts builds capacity and creates a sense of community empowerment and ownership. City staff has identified a number of ways to encourage citizens to become involved with graffiti mitigation initiatives.

Mural art programs are an effective way of including community groups in graffiti mitigation efforts. The City of Surrey has had success with mural projects through coordinated efforts with the Surrey School District and the Surrey Crime Prevention Society. Vancouver, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg continue to promote mural art projects as an effective outreach opportunity for youth at risk and graffiti offenders. These programs provide youth with resources and mentoring opportunities that allow them to make valuable and worthwhile connections.

The Beautification Coordinator has connected with the Engineering Department, Surrey School District, Pacific Community Resources Society, and Kla-how-eya to explore opportunities to implement mural art on traffic signal boxes. The RCMP Graffiti officer will work through the restorative justice program that will operate in partnership with the Pacific Community Resources Society toward directing graffiti offenders to the mural program. The facilitation and implementation of these projects will be through the Community Art Matching Program, the Surrey School District, Kla-how-eya, and the Pacific Community Resources Society.

Collaboration Initiatives

The Graffiti Task Force will consistently involve external stakeholders such as the Surrey Crime Prevention Society, the Surrey School District, Downtown Surrey BIA, Cloverdale BIA, and others to collaboratively mitigate graffiti pressures. Utility companies and the Ministry of

Transportation are also included in discussions to heighten communication between stakeholders and to coordinate efforts in order to more effectively address graffiti concerns.

Graffiti Program Coordination

Addressing graffiti concerns through collaborative efforts requires the establishment and maintenance of stakeholder relationships and coordination of processes and activities. The objective of collaboration across multiple stakeholders is to create a greater capacity to address graffiti. A Graffiti Elimination Coordinator position may help to build collaboration and ensure the consistent application of graffiti control efforts across the City. Other cities in the region have implemented a Graffiti Elimination Coordinator. Staff will review this approach in more detail and provide a further report to Council on this matter in due course.

CONCLUSION

Through a combination of approaches, the Graffiti Task Force will continue to implement the seven critical graffiti mitigation strategies: 1) Regulations; 2) Reduction and Prevention; 3) Assessment and Monitoring; 4) Communication; 5) Education; 6) Community Involvement; and 7) Collaboration.

There are many important actions currently underway, as well as some proposed new interventions to mitigate graffiti. By-law Enforcement and Licensing will bring forward for Council's consideration a revised by-law to limit the sale of graffiti products to minors. Staff will be spending approximately \$100,000 from the Beautification budget to address graffiti on private property fences that face on to main arterial and collector roads, using environmental design strategies that may feature the planting of landscape materials on City land in front of private fences to discourage graffiti and to hide it when vandals apply painted products to these fences. Also, a number of aboveground utility boxes that have been repeatedly vandalized will be covered with decorative wrap or hand-painted murals to discourage further graffiti.

Staff will report back to Council on the success of a number of these initiatives in the next few months.

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