

NO: R216

COUNCIL DATE: November 30, 2009

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council** DATE: **November 27, 2009**
FROM: **Crime Reduction Strategy Manager** FILE: **7450-30**
Deputy City Manager
SUBJECT: **Actions to Address Graffiti in Surrey**

RECOMMENDATION

The City Manager's Department recommends that Council receive this report as information.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to provide information to Council on the City's efforts to address graffiti.

BACKGROUND

The Surrey Crime Reduction Strategy (CRS) contains 106 recommendations that are focused on reducing crime and improving perceptions about crime and thereby improving the quality of life for those who choose to live in, work in or visit Surrey.

One of the recommendations contained in the CRS is:

"Zero tolerance for graffiti"

That the City adopt a "zero tolerance" policy in relation to graffiti on both public and private properties and that the City adopt by-laws that result in the owners of all properties in the City being accountable to remove graffiti promptly from their property. Further, that the City work with the Ministry of Highways, the GVTA, BC Hydro, Telus, BC Hydro, Shaw Cable and Terasen to encourage these organizations to adopt a similar approach to addressing graffiti on the infrastructure that they own in Surrey.

DISCUSSION

In response to the Crime Reduction Strategy the City has developed strategies in the following areas to address graffiti throughout the City:

- Regulation and Enforcement;
- Reduction and Prevention;
- Assessment and Monitoring;
- Communication;

- Education; and
- Community Involvement.

A more detailed description of each is provided in the following sections.

Regulation and Enforcement

The RCMP and By-law Enforcement staff work with community stakeholders to facilitate the removal of graffiti.

Surrey RCMP employs one full-time officer whose portfolio is graffiti enforcement and education. This officer has developed a catalogue of photographic images of graffiti which assists in identifying vandals that are responsible for graffiti and supports their prosecution based on matching individuals with their unique individual “tags”. Surrey RCMP officers make referrals of individuals to the Restorative Justice or Youth Intervention programs to assist in building an understanding in these offenders of the harm associated with their actions. Youth are either expected to clean up the graffiti, pay for its removal or provide other agreed upon remediation.

A National RCMP E-mail Communication Group was established in 2009 for the purpose of information sharing and networking. The Surrey RCMP “Anti-Graffiti” Officer also participates as a member of local enforcement teams designed to increase collaboration on enforcement projects throughout the lower mainland. As a result, partnerships have been established with other RCMP detachments, the Vancouver Police Department, the Washington Police, the Delta Police Department, the Canadian National Railroad Police, and the Transit Police. Specialized RCMP target efforts have been successful in identifying prolific vandals in Surrey as well as in the lower mainland locations.

Graffiti clean-up on private property is managed under the City’s Property Maintenance and Unsightly Property By-law No. 16393. Upon receiving a complaint of graffiti on private property, a Bylaw officer attends the site within 2-3 days and issues a notice for clean-up. Residents and businesses that are unable to clean-up their property are referred to Surrey Crime Prevention Society for assistance. If action is not taken in a reasonable timeframe, the City can remove the graffiti and recover the costs through the property tax process.

Exploration of a possible ban of the sale of aerosol paint to minors referenced in the February 25 2008 report to Council was undertaken by Bylaw staff and the City Solicitor. It has been determined that it would be very difficult to enforce such a bylaw. At present, By-law Enforcement staff continues to assist those involved in the sale of aerosol paint to better understand their responsibilities and how to prevent graffiti from occurring.

A Paint Voucher program was implemented in April of 2009. Under this program private property owners can obtain vouchers from By-law Enforcement to purchase paint and supplies from certain retailers at a reduced rate for the purpose of encouraging graffiti removal. Since the program’s inception, approximately 500 vouchers have been distributed by Bylaw staff.

Reduction and Prevention

The City provides grant funding to the Surrey Crime Prevention Society (SCPS) to assist with private property graffiti removal and the development of intervention, prevention and education strategies. An example of this is the development of the Black Book Club. This program is a partnership between SCPS, the Newton Youth Centre and the RCMP Graffiti Officer for “at risk” youth who are caught

tagging and are considered to be artistically inclined. The Club provides the “taggers” an opportunity to redirect their energy towards positive art initiatives and to improve their creative skills.

For the past twelve years, the SCPS has operated a summer student work experience project called the “Spirit of Youth Mural program” in partnership with the Sullivan Secondary School art program and Human Resources Skills Development Canada. Research demonstrates that areas displaying public art such as murals are less likely to be tagged. The North Surrey Recreation Centre Mural was restored over the summer of 2009 under this program. Also, a celebration in recognition of student artists was held at the Bell Centre for Performing Arts on October 30, 2009 for the “Unveiling of the Winter Games Banner and Mural” project.

The number of volunteers involved in the graffiti removal program within the Parks Division has increased significantly in this past year. This volunteer program has been achieved through “Partners in Parks” recruitment efforts and is promoted on the City’s website and by City staff on an on-going basis.

Assessment and Monitoring

City staff monitors for graffiti and takes immediate action to remove it where it is found. The public are also encouraged to report incidents of graffiti through the City’s website or via a hotline telephone number. City departments currently report that they are managing the graffiti within their respective areas within reasonable timelines.

Graffiti on civic facilities is removed within 48 – 72 hours of being reported.

It is estimated by the Bylaw Department that clean-up of private properties takes an average of 10- 30 days and requires follow-up inspections by By-law officers to ensure it is completed.

Communication

As mentioned previously, a “one-stop” graffiti HOT LINE has been developed and is managed by the City’s Bylaw Department. This centralized service commenced on October 16, 2008 and is publicized on the City’s website. The website also contains an area for the public to report or request information in relation to graffiti.

The following table documents the graffiti clean-up activity over the last year by agency:

Agency	# files	% Concluded
BC Hydro	372	4%
Canada Post	80	99%
Engineering Traffic	156	94%
City Facilities	7	86%
Parks	727	100%
Private Property	760	95%
Shaw	5	80%
Surrey School District	10	90%
Telus	77	78%
Terasen	2	100%
Translink	13	100%
Total	2209	Average 81%

As is evident in the above table, the only agency that is not responding effectively to graffiti removal is BC Hydro. BC Hydro has advised that it is unable to provide the required maintenance to remove graffiti from their property; however they have committed to provide a one-time clean-up to numerous municipalities in support of the upcoming Olympics and Surrey is on the list for this service.

The City has a Graffiti Task Force, led by the Beautification Coordinator that meets regularly to review issues related to graffiti and make adjustments to better address graffiti throughout the City.

Education

Most of the strategic initiatives described within the reduction and prevention section and the communication section of this report include an education component. For example, the Black Book Club is an intervention strategy which is delivered in conjunction with an educational element designed to inform vandals of the impact and negative consequences of their actions and healthier more productive options for using their time and applying their talents. Similarly, the City website which outlines the reporting process also includes an education component.

The Surrey RCMP Crime Prevention Coordinators provide graffiti education and prevention through community safety presentations and the Block Watch program. A downloadable graffiti prevention document is currently being developed for placement on the Surrey RCMP website.

The City of Surrey website currently presents information to the public on the City's *Let's Stop Graffiti* program and provides information on stakeholder responsibilities as well as involvement opportunities. The "Partners in Parks" Program, in partnership with the Surrey Community Crime Prevention Society supply clean-up kits to volunteers dedicated to removing graffiti in parks. Kits contain an assortment of products to combat graffiti and also provide instructions for removing the most common types of graffiti.

Community Involvement

Between January 2006 and August 2009, the Surrey Crime Prevention Society contributed over 3,000 hours of volunteer time to graffiti eradication, intervention, removal and education within the City. As a key community partner, SCPS has been instrumental in developing unique community based approaches to address the issue. The Society employs an Anti- Graffiti Coordinator, provides clean up kits to the Parks department for the Partners in Parks program, and supplies the public with kits in support of informal neighbourhood clean-up efforts.

Other Specialized Initiatives:

City departments continue to undertake graffiti identification and eradication. The City is introducing landscape designs in public spaces to reduce and prevent graffiti on public and private properties.

- **Products and Techniques:** The Parks department is currently running trials on citrus based removal products to reduce environmental impact caused by graffiti removal efforts. These products are more costly to procure but are proving to be quite effective. Parks staff has piloted a program utilizing different shades of paint to demonstrate that paint in the middle of the colour spectrum provide a less attractive target for graffiti vandalism. This strategy is being further investigated and applied in appropriate areas.

- **Bus Shelters:** Engineering is undertaking a replacement program for bus shelters in the City in the next few months. The new shelters are comprised of materials which are more resistant to flame and breakage making them less prone to overall vandalism, including graffiti. The new bus shelter contract stipulates an inspection and maintenance schedule that will assist with graffiti control on shelters. Plans are for 230 new shelters to be installed prior to the Olympics.
- **Landscaping:** Under the City Beautification Program private-public interface fences and sound barriers are identified for specialized landscaping applications to deter graffiti.
- **Cabinet Wrapping:** Civic Beautification efforts are underway to wrap traffic cabinets throughout the City beginning with high profile and high traffic locations. The following table provides a summary of cabinet wrapping plans:

Install Phase	Install Date	Cabinets	
Phase I	Fall 2008/Summer 2009	19	<i>(completed)</i>
Phase II	Fall 2009	35	<i>(underway)</i>
Phase III	Spring 2010	40	<i>(scheduled)</i>
Phase IV	Fall 2010	20	<i>(scheduled)</i>
Total Planned Cabinet Wraps:		114	

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Graffiti management supports the development of civic pride, lengthens the useful life of civic infrastructure and assists in enhancing the perceptions of safety and security in the community.

CONCLUSION

In accordance with the City's Crime Reduction Strategy the City is working with partners to eliminate graffiti throughout the City. The collective efforts of the City and its partners to date are showing commendable results.

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