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OFFICE OF THE  
CITY MANAGER

CITY OF SACRAMENTO  
CALIFORNIA

CITY HALL  
ROOM 101  
915 I STREET  
SACRAMENTO, CA  
95814-2684

PH 916-264-5704  
FAX 916-264-7618  
TDD (ONLY) 916-264-7227

August 23, 1993

Neighborhood and Public Safety Issues  
Committee of the City Council  
Sacramento, California

Honorable Members in Session:

**SUBJECT: REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROGRAM TO CURTAIL  
ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES IN ALLEYS**

**LOCATION AND COUNCIL DISTRICT**

Citywide. All Council Districts.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

This report is for information only. Comments received during the committee meeting will be used to provide direction to staff.

**CONTACT PERSON:**

Gary L. Little  
Citizens Assistance Officer  
Anti-Drug and Gang Division Manager  
264-5704

**FOR COMMITTEE MEETING ON:**

September 2, 1993

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## **SUMMARY**

At the request of Council Members, staff has been seeking ways to help neighborhoods curtail illegal activities that are occurring in many alleys in Sacramento. The focus has been the development of a program to identify & inventory problem alleys, and to create a process to abandon alleys "en masse" where appropriate.

This is an informational report to brief committee members and the public on the initial draft of a problem alleys abatement program. In addition, this report provides information on the status of discussions between the Sacramento Municipal Utilities District (SMUD) and City Public Works Department staff on the expansion of a SMUD program, to include installation of lights facing City alleys.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Alleys have long been identified as problems in several Sacramento communities. There have been many reports of drug activity, prostitution, and other illegal activities in alleys. Alleys are being used by burglars to access properties with reduced risk of being detected. They are also used as convenient escape routes after crimes have been committed. Trying to keep illegal activities from continuing, residents are asking for alleys in their neighborhoods to be barricaded or eliminated.

In addition to being used for criminal activities, alleys also allow nuisances to occur in neighborhoods. Alleys have become sites for the illegal dumping of tires, sofas, used appliances and other materials. Motorists are frequently using alleys as thoroughfares or convenient "short cut" routes. When this occurs in alleys that are not completely paved, the vehicles "kick-up" dirt and gravel causing dust and debris problems for adjacent property owners.

Eliminating alleys through abandonment is a possible solution to the problems described above. However, some residents can get to their garages only by using the alleys, therefore, abandoning those alleys is not always feasible. In some areas, abandoning the alleys may also cause problems for police and fire personnel responding to emergencies. In these situations, solutions other than abandoning the alleys must be found to curtail the illegal activities.

## **INSTALLATION OF ADDITIONAL LIGHTING IN ALLEYS**

One tool used to curtail problems in alleys is the installation of additional lighting. This has been found effective in reducing problems in alleys in several communities.

SMUD has a program to install additional lights facing the resident's property at the customer's request. For parcels adjacent to alleys, SMUD normally installs the lights to face the property on existing alley utility poles located on the property line between parcels. The electrical costs are billed to one resident.

Public Works Department staff have been working with SMUD officials to establish policies and procedures to expand this program to also provide lights facing the alleys. Final negotiations with SMUD are expected to be completed soon. A staff report will be submitted to the Council asking for approval of the proposed policies and procedures for installing lights in alleys.

#### PROBLEM ALLEY ABATEMENT PROGRAM

Although additional lighting may significantly reduce illegal activities in dark alleys, it does not solve the problems in all alleys. Other more drastic steps may be needed to curtail some illegal activities.

At the request of Councilmembers, staff from the Police Department, Public Works Department, Planning Division, Neighborhood Services Department and City Council Office have been working on the development of a program to: 1) inventory problem alleys; 2) recommend actions to curtail illegal activities in the problem alleys; and 3) implement approved mitigation measures. This program is being designed to address several alleys at once. It has a community participation component for obtaining ideas on how individual problem alleys should be addressed.

At present, there are five elements of the program:

1. Inventory of problem alleys.

Normally, the City considers options like abandonment one alley or street at a time. The process usually starts with the residents whose properties adjoin an alley, filing an application for abandonment. However, this program would seek to address several problem alleys at once. It is proposed that individual Council Members would initiate the program by developing an inventory of problem alleys based on concerns raised by their constituents.

2. Police Department review and enforcement.

The inventory of problem alleys would be forwarded to the Police department for review and action. The department would investigate and proceed with enforcement when appropriate and as resources allow. Recommendations for

abating the problems would be developed by the department. If enforcement failed to eliminate the illegal activities, the recommendations for addressing the problems would be submitted to the appropriate Council Member. These recommendations could include physical changes to the areas (e.g., blocking alleys with gates, bollards, posts & chains or other devices at both ends or in the middle of alleys), community action and other measures.

3. Community meeting to discuss recommendations.

After receipt of the Police Department's recommendations, it is recommended that the Council Member hold a community meeting to present those recommendations to the appropriate neighborhoods. The community meeting would be particularly important if the recommendations include the possible closure or abandonment of any alleys. Such measures may require the approval of all of the property owners whose properties are adjacent to the alleys.

4. Temporary closure recommendations to City Manager's Office.

In the event closure or blockading of any alleys are recommended, it would require Council action to temporarily close or abandon the alleys. Before January 1, 1993, the only way to close an alley for a long period was through the abandonment process. However, the City Council can now temporarily close an alley for 18 months (extendable an additional 18 months), as a way to combat significant and continual crime problems.

The temporary closure process starts with the Police Department sending a written request to the City Manager's Office to close an alley. For the purposes of this program, a list identifying several alleys would be submitted.

The Fire Department and Transportation Division would receive a copy of the request for their review. Their comments would be sent to the Public Works/Engineering Division, where the temporary closure request is processed. Assuming all of the above parties agree to the temporary closure, an item would be prepared for a public hearing before the City Council.

As stated above, the alleys would be temporarily closed for 18 months if approved by the City Council. An issue that would need to be addressed are the types of devices that would be installed to stop vehicular (and if appropriate, the pedestrian) traffic. Also, the funds needed to construct the devices would need to be identified.

5. Abandonment of alleys

In the event other measures do not eliminate alleys being used for illegal activities, abandoning the alleys is an option. This means the City would relinquish the "right of way" easement and allow the alleys to revert to the adjacent property owners. However, this option would generally be recommended last because abandonments are usually not reversed.

Under this program, the Neighborhood Services Department would be the applicant. Working with the appropriate Council Member and Public Works Engineering Division staff, an application would be completed and submitted to the Planning Division for processing. (To abandon the alleys, public notices would have to be sent to all property owners within a 500-foot radius of the alleys being considered for abandonment. The Council Office, Public Works Department and Neighborhood Services Department are tentatively listed as being responsible for preparing the radius maps and mailing labels for the abandonment application.)

The abandonment process provides an opportunity for the residents, property owners, businesses, utility companies, police, fire and other interested parties to comment on the proposal. Those alleys deemed not feasible for abandonment (because of community or residents opposition; possible negative impact on police or fire emergency response, or similar concerns), will be removed from the list. The remaining alleys on the list would be submitted to the Planning Commission and City Council for consideration.

If abandonments occur, property owners would be asked to move any fences to reflect the new property boundaries.

As stated previously, the details of this program are still being developed. When completed, staff will recommend testing the program on a pilot basis. Since an inventory of problem alleys is being developed in District 5, that area is a probable location to test the program.

#### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

A major financial consideration is identifying the funds to pay the abandonment application fees normally charged to the applicant. Also, any fences, gates or other items used to block the alleys would have to be financed. Engineering design work may additionally be needed.

However, curtailing illegal activities in alleys may result in long term costs savings to the City, as funds would not be expended on removing illegally dumped junk and debris from

alleys. In addition, a financial impact analysis should be conducted to determine if abating problems in alleys will result in savings through a reduction in "calls for service" to the police and or fire department.

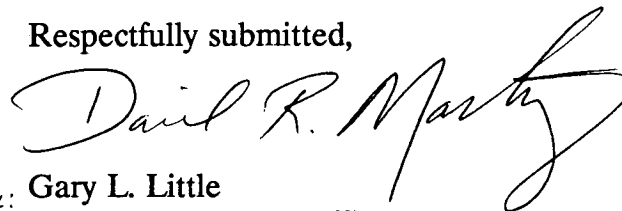
#### **POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

The temporary closure of alleys is consistent with City policy. The abandonment of alleys "en masse" would be a deviation from existing City procedures.

#### **MBE/WBE**

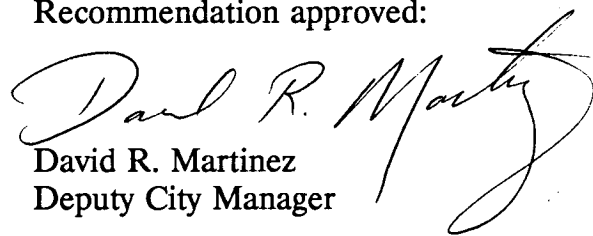
No applicable. No goods or services are being purchased at this time.

Respectfully submitted,



for: Gary L. Little  
Citizens Assistance Officer  
Anti-Drug and Gang Division Manager

Recommendation approved:



David R. Martinez  
Deputy City Manager