



City Council Agenda Item

City Council Meeting Date: February 18, 2020

TO: City Council

FROM: Jim Throop, City Manager
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SUBJECT: Discussion of Santa Ynez Riverbed Current Status / Clean-up / Homeless Encampments / Ongoing Maintenance and Security Required to Defray Re-Encampment and Littering

Recommendation:

Staff recommends City Council receive staff's report; and provide direction if it deems necessary.

Background:

Lompoc, like many other communities throughout the County of Santa Barbara and State of California, continues to struggle with the various effects of homelessness in the community. Unauthorized homeless encampments have been prevalent throughout the City, exposing homeless persons to traffic hazards, crime, risk of death, injury, exposure to weather, lack of adequate sanitation services, and other conditions that are detrimental to their health and safety. Most prevalent have been those encampments within the Santa Ynez Riverbed (Riverbed).

In Fall of 2018, the Police Department had identified 60-75 encampments and 60-80 individuals illegally camping in the Riverbed. Official 30-day notices to vacate the Riverbed were given by law enforcement, and those notices were continued (21-day, 14-day, 7-day and 72-hour). The individuals were relocated in September 2018 to a 30-day triage center to receive services and be placed either in homeless shelters, substance abuse residential programs, reunified with family, housing, and in some cases, they refused services and moved on while vacating the Riverbed. In many cases, law enforcement action was necessary to remove individuals from the Riverbed encampments.

The 2018 clean-up of the Riverbed was comprised of:

Phase I Clean-up, including sanitation of waste areas, tarps and sharps collection. This was done to make the riverbed more sanitary and to reduce risk during Phase II Cleanup.

Phase II Clean-up, including take-down and removal of structures and trash. Vegetation management and mowing of lesser protected vegetation, as permitted by the US Army Corps of Engineers and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, using the “Forester” mulching machine. This opened up the brush to gain visibility in and around the riverbed and assist law enforcement with enforcing trespass violations. Larger trees and shrubs were removed from the Airport property in areas determined to be unsafe for use of the Forester.

September 2018 to January 2019.....Clean-up effort totaled \$488,613

30-Day Triage Center comprised of:

City staff as the Triage Center Coordinator, Park Division staff for maintenance, set-up and other services as needed at the site, as well as Administrative staff for oversight and coordination of the center.

A team of specialists in each field of service to assist those suffering with homelessness to move towards finding shelter. Non-profit community partners including: Good Samaritan Shelter, County Housing Authority, Planting A Seed, Micah Mission, United Way, North County Rape Crisis, Home for Good, Transitions Mental Health Association, Coast Valley Substance Abuse & Treatment Center, Prepare 2 Care, Helping Hands of Lompoc, Lompoc Valley Medical Group and Family Service Agency. Also coordination with County Public Service Agency staff including: Behavioral Wellness, Public Defender’s Office, Public Health, Animal Services, Probation, Adult Protective Services, 4th District Supervisor’s Office and Social Services.

Other incidental costs beyond staffing included fencing material, portable restrooms, fuel for portable lights, office supplies, lights, signage material, and security staffing.

The cost for the center had been estimated at \$35,000. However, from September 10, 2018 to October 11, 2018 the Triage Center costs totaled \$70,000.

Environmental Impact

The City consulted with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and received the determination that under certain conditions, a permit would not be required. The City provided an Emergency Notification to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and was then required to apply for a Streambed Alteration Agreement (SAA). That agreement was granted by operation of law and covered conditions under which the City could enter its property in the Santa Ynez Riverbed, for the purpose of vegetation management and clean-up of trash. The agreement continues through December 2023, and requires:

- Use of rubber-tired vehicles and equipment only;
- Spill kits available at all times equipment is used;

- Removal of invasive plant species using hand tools, mechanical methods and roдео herbicide, where indicated by the biologist;
- A biologist present to advise the operator of the Forester what plants to avoid;
- Mowing, where okayed by the biologist, to a height of one foot (islands in river);
- Trimming of larger vegetation using hand tools;
- Use of goat herds to reduce vegetation and fire danger;
- All work must be accomplished when there is no water in the Riverbed;
- Trash, waste and sharps will be sanitized, collected and removed for proper disposal, as necessary;
- Police patrols, on foot, with the Polaris and trailer or the pick-up truck, and with a drone or drones may occur as often as daily; and
- Access is to be obtained from the first parking lot gate at River Park, the gate at Central Avenue and A Street, and the gate at McLaughlin Road to the multi-use trail.

Discussion:

Until December of 2023, as money becomes available, the activities identified in the SAA permit described above can be conducted on City property within and adjacent to the Santa Ynez River.

Some of the challenges, in addition to funding, include: ensuring safe access for contractors, adequate numbers of police officers to safely and effectively patrol the Riverbed, and if goats are utilized, then a qualified goat herder, along with goats, herding dog and movable fencing.

Since the evictions, relocation and clean-up that concluded in October 2018, the Riverbed became a place where recreation, walking, biking, trail walking and scenic enjoyment could occur again. The City received many compliments from residents and business owners regarding the safety of the Riverbed and surrounding area following the clean-up.

In April 2019, during the budget discussions, staff requested funding for enforcement, maintenance and ongoing patrols of the riverbed, but a funding source was not identified during the budget process.

Due to lack of investment in enforcement, unfortunately, the Police Department and homeless service outreach providers have reported the Riverbed has been re-inhabited with illegal campsites.

In January 2020, the Police Department conducted a preliminary canvassing of the Riverbed to determine to what degree re-inhabitation and pollution has occurred. There were approximately 10-15 camps of which 10 were actively inhabited, with approximately 20 homeless persons illegally residing in those encampments. There were large amounts of debris to be removed and cleared. While not as bad as when the City began the clean-up in September 2018, it is progressing in that direction.

Since January 2019, there have been 15 fires, 5 smoke / odor investigations, and 6 medical responses. Many community members have reached out asking what can be done. Another clean-up would require the same efforts as before. The planning, noticing, coordination, triage center or alternative, vegetation management and debris-clean-up, and lastly the ongoing maintenance and law enforcement presence to deter re-encampment.

The benefits of those activities include watershed protection and drinking water source protection from pollutants, reduction in fire hazard from wildfire or human ignited fires, assistance to law enforcement in providing better access and additional visibility in heavy vegetation to observe or apprehend trespassers and other criminals, and increased public safety.

Fiscal Impact:

Initial Clean-Up

The cost for clean-up of the Riverbed at this point in time is estimated at \$128,820; but that does not include a triage center as previously utilized in the 2018 clean-up.

- The Forester and biologist conducting vegetation management cost approximately \$1,630 per day. Estimating 10-14 days for vegetation management to get the current overgrown vegetation under control = \$22,820
- Trash, structure and tarp removal costs ran approximately \$4,000 per day inclusive of equipment, labor, sanitation and disposal costs. Estimating that it would take 10-14 days for removal of 10 – 15 encampment debris, and clearance of the overgrown vegetation = \$56,000

Notice and Abatement

There will be overtime costs for law enforcement to properly notice and abate the unlawful campsites. Subsequent to cleanup, the sites will be monitored daily to prevent the return of the homeless. Those personnel will be on overtime, as they would have other primary duties to accomplish during their normally scheduled workday. The approximate cost for such overtime is estimated at \$50,000.

On-Going Maintenance & Patrol

The Police Department would require additional police staffing to carry out an operation such as the clean-up conducted in September 2018, even if it was of a smaller scale. The geographical area has not changed, nor has the litigious nature of the operation, which makes it imperative to utilize staff who understand the sensitive nature of the situation.

2 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Police Officers	\$ 272,862
2 FTE Police Officers Estimated Overtime (OT)	12,448
Safety Equipment	5,000

Vehicle Maintenance & Repairs	10,000
Total Estimated Costs	\$ 300,200

There are various options in regards to maintenance of the vegetation in the Riverbed, including but not limited to the following:

- Use of goats to manage vegetation is estimated to run approximately \$1,100 per acre. The goat herder would require access for a trailer and a water source. I have asked if temporary water would work and if they have rubber tires, they might be able to do a good amount of work near River Park, Riverbend Park and potentially in the rest of the Riverbed. If a goat herder could be hired to manage a City-owned herd, it might come in at a lesser rate. It was estimated \$25,000 for goats, herding dogs and equipment, in addition to the cost of a goat herder.
- There might be funding available from FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program for vegetation management. We would need to consult with OES/FEMA.
- There may be some lower cost hand labor available through the California Conservation Corps (CCC). A biologist may also be required to be present with the CCC members. The biologist fee in 2018 was approximately \$7,000 a month. The CCC fee is approximately \$2,500 a day for 12 persons. This includes an 8-hour day, minus travel time, breaks and lunch. Prior City experience using the CCC was not as efficient as expected due to the 1.5 to 2 hours travel time, breaks and lunch.
- The Forester and biologist conducting vegetation management cost approximately \$1,630 per day.
- Trash, structure and tarp removal costs in 2018 ran approximately \$4,000 per day inclusive of equipment, labor, sanitation and disposal costs.

Conclusion:

There are many moving parts in regards to the cost of eviction of the current unlawful inhabitants of the Riverbed, the clean-up of any remaining debris, and clearing of vegetation. Following the clean-up, there is the on-going maintenance and patrols to deter re-inhabitation and vegetation management that will need to be conducted. However, the benefits of watershed and drinking water source protection, reduction in fire hazard from, assistance to law enforcement and increased public safety outweigh those costs. Ultimately, the costs will be dependent on the approach the City Council chooses to take.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Throop, City Manager