



City Council Agenda Item

City Council Meeting Date: February 2, 2021

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

FROM: Jim Throop, City Manager
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SUBJECT: Discussion of Riverbed Clean-up Suggestions

Recommendation:

Staff recommends the City Council review, discuss, and provide direction regarding the possible suggestions for the continued clean-up of the Santa Ynez riverbed (Riverbed).

Background:

At the February 18, 2020, City Council meeting, a presentation was made to the City Council on the current status of the clean-up, homeless encampments, ongoing maintenance, and security required to defray or deter re-encampment and littering of the Riverbed.

During the City Council discussion on the agenda item, a request was made to bring the item back for more discussion and possible ideas on how to handle the additional costs related to staffing and other operational costs related to the Riverbed.

A quick review of the clean-up from 2018 follows:

In the 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 public health services and be placed either in homeless shelters, substance abuse residential programs, reunified with family, or housing. In some cases, the individuals refused services and moved on while vacating the Riverbed. In other 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 \$527,660

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 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 rodeo herbicide, where indicated by the biologist;
- A biologist present to advise the operator of the Forester what plants to avoid;
- Mowing, where approved 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:

From January 2020 to August 2020 the Police Department received 96 calls for service for issues related directly to the Riverbed. The breakdown is as follows: (continued on next page)

<u>Type of Service Call</u>	<u>Riverbed</u>	<u>Robinson Bridge</u>	<u>River Bend Park</u>	<u>River Park</u>
Domestic Violence/Other	1	0	2	5
Fires	2	0	0	1
Follow-up	3	1	1	1
Medical Assistance	0	0	1	5
Missing Person	0	0	0	0
Mutual Aid	4	1	0	2
Person with gun	0	1	0	1
Reckless Driver	0	0	1	0
Smoke Reported	4	0	1	0
Special Detail	2	0	0	0
Suspicious Person/Circumstances	3	3	8	2
Theft	1	0	0	3
Traffic Problem	0	3	0	1
Vandalism	0	1	0	1
Welfare Check	0	4	1	3
Other	<u>7</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>9</u>
	<u>27</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>34</u>

The above calls for service are only for the Riverbed, River Park, River Bend Park, or Robinson Bridge area. Police have also been called out to the neighborhoods that border the Riverbed, due to possible homeless issues, however it is more difficult to pull exact data. Neighborhoods along the Riverbed have seen increases in theft and other criminal acts that may be related to the individuals living within the Riverbed.

The number of calls for service by the Fire Department between January 2020 and October 2020 are as follows:

- Fires – 20
- EMS – 2
- Hazardous Condition – 2
- Service Calls (including smoke investigation) – 20

Total calls for service = 44

Both the Police and Fire Departments are in a position of staff shortages. Having to respond to such a large amount of calls for service to the Riverbed has put a substantial strain on the public safety resources.

Financial Impact:

Staff met and discussed what would be necessary to continue with the maintenance and patrol of the Riverbed. The following is a breakdown of the costs:

Initial Clean-Up

The estimated cost for clean-up of the Riverbed at this point in time is estimated to be a minimum of \$130,000, given preliminary review of the current state of the riverbed; but that does not include a triage center as previously utilized in the 2018 clean-up.

- The Forester (mulching machine) and biologist conducting vegetation management, cost approximately \$1,700 per day. Estimating 10-14 days for vegetation management to get the current overgrown vegetation under control = \$24,000.
- 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 (there may be more, once active removal begins), and clearance of the overgrown vegetation = \$56,000. Actual camp count is not known at this time, but appears to be growing.

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.

Ongoing 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	\$ 273,000 (salary/benefits)
2 FTE Police Officers Estimated Overtime (OT)	13,000
Safety Equipment	5,000
Vehicle Maintenance & Repairs	<u>10,000</u>
Total Estimated Costs	\$ 301,000

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. However, if a goat herder was hired by the City to manage a City-owned herd, it might come in at a lesser cost. It is estimated to be \$25,000 for goats, herding dogs and equipment. The annual salary for the goat herder is estimated to be \$50,000.
- There might be funding available from FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program for vegetation management. The City 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 \$1,700 per day, and can clear considerable amounts of brush per day.
- If the City were to purchase the Forester/macerator equipment, (estimated cost for a used machine is \$85,000) the cost could be spread across all four utility funds, as each utility has a need for such equipment. The machine could be operated by City staff, which would help to reduce the overall cost of the brush/plant removal. However, the biologist would still be necessary for work in the Riverbed.
- Trash, structure and tarp removal costs in 2018 ran approximately \$4,000 per day inclusive of equipment, labor, sanitation and disposal costs.

The previous clean-up included a 30-day triage center. That center was designed to allow individuals living in the Riverbed to meet with County Public Health staff, with the hopes of finding temporary housing, abuse assistance, reunification with family, and other services.

This current update does not include the costs for such a triage center. If the City Council were to move in that direction, staff suggests that the County Public Health Department take the lead on the triage center, as that falls under their purview. The City could again offer the location at River Park, as it did last time, but the cost for operating the triage center would fall to the County Public Health Department.

The costs for the original clean-up and triage center were paid for by the Water Enterprise Fund, with the nexus being that the large amount of hazardous waste and debris would have an extreme detrimental impact on the City's only potable water source – the groundwater aquifer underlying the riverbed.

The current poor condition of the City's General Fund would not allow for any assistance in costs related to the Riverbed clean-up, however, the same reasons for using Water Enterprise Funds for the clean-up still remain.

Conclusion

The costs for an ongoing Riverbed clean-up and patrolling are estimated at a minimum of \$431,000 per year. The General Fund is not in position to contribute to the clean-up, but given that the Riverbed sits directly over the City's potable water source, funding the ongoing costs for clean-up and patrolling from the Water Enterprise Fund would be a legitimate use.

Without any type of ongoing clean-up or patrolling of the Riverbed, it is assumed that the issues with individuals living in the Riverbed will continue to grow, and the debris and hazardous waste will continue to present a risk to the safety of the City's potable water.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Throop, City Manager