

PLANNING FOR INCREASED DOWNTOWN SAFETY

SUMMARY

It is well known that downtown Santa Rosa has experienced financial difficulty in recent years. Currently, there is a widespread perception that downtown is unsafe. To encourage shoppers and business employees to feel secure in the area, greater attention must be made to the perception of safety in the parking garages and on the streets.



BACKGROUND

This report is the result of a citizen complaint that raised a broad range of issues concerning parking in the garages in Santa Rosa's downtown shopping area. For the purpose of this report, the Grand Jury chose to focus on safety and security in the downtown parking lots and parking garages. The focus area was the shopping area from Third Street to Seventh Street and between Wilson Street and E Street (excluding the privately owned Santa Rosa Mall).

The complainant described difficulty in obtaining permit parking in a garage near her employment. Because she had additional distance to walk from the nearest available garage to her work which sometimes started before 8:00am, she felt uneasy about her safety.

The City's Parking Division previously employed senior citizens to collect parking fees in the garages. The physical presence of garage attendants offered the perception of security in the garages.

Permit parking for employees and business owners using the public parking garages is limited at some garages. The existing permits for the 3rd Street garage appear not to be awarded in a timely manner.

INVESTIGATIVE PROCEDURES

Interviews were held with the following:

- Santa Rosa police officer in charge of downtown patrols
- Assistant director of parking and traffic for the City of Santa Rosa
- Director of Information Technology for the City of Santa Rosa

Other sources of information

- Outreach meetings of SR Department of Economic Development and Housing
- Crime Mapping statistics from the Press Democrat newspaper

FINDINGS

F-1 The Parking division of Santa Rosa oversees 5 garages and 7 metered parking lots with a total of 3,374 combined parking spaces. All downtown businesses are within the Downtown District and have minimal private parking. There are 1519 garage permits (215 reserved and 1304 non-reserved) sold for 2798 total garage spaces. The assumption is that not all permit holders will use their space at the same time. Permits are readily available except for the 3rd Street garage.

F-2 Permits may be issued in multiples (that are monthly billed to the business) or as individual permits. Business permits may be reassigned to employees as staff turns over, while individual permits are returned to the city and made available to the next person on the waiting list. The waiting time for an individual permit is 3-12 months at most garages, except except the 3rd Street garage, where it may be as long as 15 years. The order status for permits may be checked on an individual basis. Reserved space violations are monitored on a basis of complaints received. This investigation found that permits were being handled in accordance with the planned process.

F-3 Senior citizen temporary workers were used to collect parking fees until unionization of the workers and the cost to create permanent positions became too expensive. The seniors were replaced by automated ticketing machines and a contracted security patrol service. The automated ticketing allowed the city staff to patrol throughout the garage levels instead of being limited to the toll booth. In July 2009, the Parking Division replaced the private security service with full time employees. The facility staffing typically operates from 8am to 10:30pm weekdays, with extended evening hours on Friday and Saturdays.

F-4 Currently, garages are patrolled on a 24 hour basis seven days of the week with one or two mobile patrols utilizing a random patrol pattern. There is camera surveillance at the entrances, exits and toll paying areas of each garage.

F-5 There is minimal garage mobile patrol coverage between 2am and 8am weekdays and on Saturdays and Sundays. The response time from the garage patrol during minimal coverage hours and between the most distant points is approximately five minutes if a call is made. Routine garage patrols use random patterning and may be at intervals of two to thirty minutes to pass any given point. Garages have checkpoint validation confirming patrol occurrence.

F-6 Camera surveillance is used to protect property and monitor toll collection points in the parking garages and the transit mall. Camera surveillance for public security is available in Courthouse Square and outside the 3rd Street garage and the 7th Street garage. Santa Rosa has 87 video surveillance systems in use (19 video systems are used by SRPD).

F-7 Santa Rosa Police Department (SRPD) has two bicycle patrols (two officers each) in the downtown area six days a week at peak use times. Currently, there is no coordination of patrols between SRPD and the Parking Division. Both have their fewest patrols in the early morning before 8am.

F-8 Crime statistics for the first four months of 2010 in the downtown shopping area reveal 13 assaults, 4 robberies and 16 thefts. The majority of these incidents occurred in the Railroad Square area. During the same period, there were 19 recorded thefts at Santa Rosa Plaza. In contrast, there have been only two reported assaults in the city garages in the past four years. Incidents which occur in the city garages are reviewed monthly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R-1 That the SRPD and SR Parking Division coordinate patrols within the downtown shopping district with "real time" communication.

R-2 Acknowledging budget constraints, camera surveillance of alleys in the downtown shopping area should be increased.

R-3 Increased patrol of the parking lots and garages near the SRJC Brickyard culinary campus should be increased during the late evening hours when classes are being dismissed.

R-4 Increase patrol presence in the early weekday mornings beginning no later than 6am.

R-5 Installation of an emergency call system on each level in the garages connected to SRPD.

R-6 Measurable check points for patrols in lot parking (the garages already have check points).

R-7 Increase the visibility of patrol cars by distinctively marked and colored vehicles.

R-8 Formation of a permanent group to study parking issues in the downtown shopping area.

Required Responses:

City of Santa Rosa Parking Division: R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7

City of Santa Rosa Police Department: R1, R2, R3, R4

City of Santa Rosa IT Department: R2

Requested Responses:

2010-2011 Grand Jury may wish to explore whether parking garages are cost effective.