



**City of Santa Barbara**  
Downtown Parking Committee

**Memorandum**

**DATE:** June 14, 2018

**TO:** Downtown Parking Committee

**FROM:** Rob Dayton, Transportation Planning and Parking Manager

**SUBJECT:** DOWNTOWN AMBASSADOR UPDATE

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Downtown (DPC) Parking Committee receive an update from staff on the status of the Downtown Ambassador Program.

**DISCUSSION:**

In order to enhance the experience on State Street, Council appropriated \$150k annually to provide an additional presence on State Street. The Community (CSO) Service Officer program was initiated, managed by the City's Police Department. The CSO's were recruited, hired and trained to perform many of the duties of a regular police officer, but were not armed, to maintain a consistent presence on the street.

However, because of unexpected and significant recruitment, retention and cost issues experienced by the Police Department, Council authorized the transfer of the CSO program to the Public Works Department's Transportation Planning and Parking Division, beginning July 1 of 2017. Scope of work for staff for the Downtown Ambassador Program would no longer include an enforcement element, instead an emphasis on observing and reporting. With this change, the City will be able to provide a more consistent and visible presence, providing hospitality for visitors, regular interaction with businesses, and the ability to monitor and report on conditions in the downtown area to the appropriate department or agency. The \$150,000 funding of the program was transferred from the General Fund Police Department budget to the Downtown Parking Fund to reflect the shift of responsibility.

Starting July 1, Downtown Parking began recruitment, hiring and training and was able to deploy the first Ambassadors patrols in mid-September of 2017. The Ambassadors are hourly employees, limited to working a maximum of 999 hours per fiscal year.

Since the mid-September launch, the Ambassador Program has been fully staffed and has maintained a consistent presence on State Street, from Sola Street to Cabrillo Boulevard, also checking parking lots and paseos, assisting visitors with hospitality, making regular contact with the businesses, engaging transients and relaying problems with infrastructure to the appropriate work groups. Although the Ambassadors do not have enforcement authority, they do issue verbal warnings to people, advising them as to when they may be violating the City's Municipal Code.

Working in pairs, every day from 9am until 6pm, the Ambassadors have been able to communicate effectively with City maintenance crews and Downtown Organization maintenance when observing problems with infrastructure, including uneven bricks, broken bike racks, plugged drinking fountains and issues with signage.

The Ambassadors have collected a great deal of data, including the number of businesses contacted, warnings issued to individuals skateboarding on the sidewalks, warnings to smokers, number of calls for service to the Police Department and documentation of service-resistant transients

Calls for service to the Police Department have decreased as the Ambassadors have been able to provide intervention for businesses when they've observed questionable behavior at their store fronts. The businesses simply call the Downtown Parking offices or email the Ambassador address for a prompt response.

When responding to trouble calls related to transients, most of the time the Ambassadors are able to quietly re-direct behavior by referring the individual to a social service organization or offering a calming moment of empathy or other advice to avoid a call to the police.

Recently, Downtown Parking, working through the umbrella of the United Way, has contracted with Americorps to provide additional social service staffing on State Street. Americorps staff, working in close coordination with the Ambassadors are case worker who focus on individuals living on the street and work to connect these individuals with the many available services provided by nonprofits.

Coordination with Police has been ongoing and effective when addressing unacceptable behavior. Downtown Parking staff has been meeting regularly with the police in order to improve communications and to provide back-up for the Ambassadors when engaging aggressive individuals. Ensuring the safety of the Ambassadors is our top priority.

In conclusion, the pilot program seems to be working as intended. Community response has largely been positive. However, we are exploring new strategies to address the transient population that seems to be service or help resistant