



Agenda Item #: _____

Staff Report

City of Manhattan Beach

TO: Honorable Mayor Tell and Members of City Council

THROUGH: Geoff Dolan, City Manager

FROM: Rod Uyeda, Chief of Police

DATE: December 19, 2006

SUBJECT: Update of City Council's Work Plan Item for Staff to Look for Ways to Enhance Downtown Security, Including More Effectively Using the Office Space in the Metlox Parking Structure and Developing Cost Estimates for Installing Cameras in the Structure.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the City Council accept the Police Department's report on Downtown security and forego the installation of security cameras in the Metlox parking structure.

FISCAL IMPLICATION:

There are no fiscal implications associated with Staff's recommendations.

BACKGROUND:

As part of the City Council's 2005-2007 Work Plan, the Police Department was tasked with researching ways to enhance Downtown security, including more effectively using the office space in the Metlox parking structure and developing cost estimates for installing cameras in the parking structure.

DISCUSSION:

The Downtown Manhattan Beach Business & Professional Association currently lists over 250 businesses in the downtown area. The area has grown into a destination location where visitors come year round to enjoy the many retail stores and services by the beach. Local residents come to enjoy the many fine restaurants and nightlife.

In addition to new places to eat and shop, the recently built Metlox shopping center incorporates a two-level, underground parking structure. This structure was opened in January 2004 and includes a small office on the first level and 460 new parking spaces that are utilized by visitors and local businesses.

Manhattan Beach has enjoyed a reputation of being a safe place to visit and the downtown area is no different. Reported crime is low and incidents of violent crime are very rare. The construction of the underground Metlox parking structure did raise concerns of safety and the possibility of

crimes occurring below ground due to lower visibility and less lighting. However, this has not been the case and is likely contributable to the design of the structure which allows users to feel safe and comfortable. When reviewing specific crime statistics related to the Metlox Parking Structure since it opened in 2004, only four crimes have been reported to the Police Department.

08/19/04	Theft from Vehicle	Parking pass taken from open Jeep
11/26/05	Vandalism	Spray paint on building wall
9/14/06	Vehicle Burglary	Convertible car window unzipped-parking pass taken
10/12/06	Vehicle Burglary	Window smashed-IPOD taken

In 2006, the Manhattan Beach Police Department placed an extra priority on safety and security in the downtown area due to a change in leadership. Additional security checks and foot patrols were mandated as part of patrol’s everyday duties to enhance community policing and communication between business owners, visitors and the police department. In the downtown area alone, Officers have conducted over 1000 security checks and foot patrols during 2006.

Recently, Carol Rowe, President of the Downtown Business Owners Association and Helen Duncan, President of the Chamber of Commerce, were solicited for their ideas and concerns regarding downtown security issues. There were very few responses from their constituents, other than everyone supporting having more police presence throughout the day and night, especially during closing times.

Statistically, reported crime is very low in Downtown Manhattan Beach, especially violent crime. There have been no reported assaults this year, down from only six last year and there has only been one successful robbery this year, down from only two last year. There are occasional fights (battery) associated with our local bars and domestic disputes (16 in two years). Commercial burglaries are also down from last year (9 vs. 13). There are occasional automobile burglaries (13 in two years) and vandalism cases (32 in two years). Theft is the highest reported crime (74 in two years), but most of those are shoplifting cases, things removed from unlocked vehicles and unsecured property such as bicycles and furniture.

Enhancing Downtown Security

Staff believes that continuing to build on existing partnerships is a key element to enhancing security in the downtown area. Ongoing use of foot patrols, bicycle patrols and perhaps Electric Personal Assistive Mobility Devices (EPMAD - Segways are once such model) can provide a high level of visibility which is a significant deterrent to criminal behavior. These patrols also create an opportunity for personal interaction between officers, residents, visitors and business owners which further promotes information sharing and opportunities to become better acquainted.

In the past few months, the police department has used a loaner Segway to patrol the Downtown area, including the Art’s Festival, Halloween Night Out, Holiday Open House, Holiday Fireworks Show and the new Farmer’s Market. On each occasion, the officer on the Segway has been warmly received by the community with more than just pleasantries being exchanged. The Segway really promotes engaging with the police officers instead of just a casual greeting.

The police department has also sought opportunities to provide additional training for business owners and employees regarding the latest crime trends and sharing of crime statistical data through their Crime Prevention Office and Detective Bureau. Examples of this include training involving underage drinking and contacting businesses regarding fraud and identity theft. This allows business owners to be better prepared to identify suspicious activity or criminal behavior and alert the Police Department before crimes occur.

Use of Office Space in the Metlox Parking Structure

Currently, the small office on the first level of the Metlox parking structure is vacant and has recently been refurbished and ready for use. This office is clearly visible to motorists entering the structure off of Morningside Drive and is likely a clear deterrent to crime with “Manhattan Beach Police Department” clearly visible on its windows.

Due to the recent move of the police back to the new facility, the need for this office less than 100 yards away from the police station has diminished some. However, the office could be used as a suitable location to store and deploy police bicycles and EPAMDs and to write reports, all the while, being highly visible to people entering and leaving the parking structure. The office could also be used to schedule appointments to have child safety seats checked, children fingerprinted and photographed in case of emergencies, and other public relations type of events. The office would be used by all sections of the police department on occasion, including Parking and Animal Control personnel as well as Detectives. However, we encourage field personnel to remain active in the field as much as possible so the use of the office would not be regular.

Security Cameras for the Metlox Parking Structure

Video surveillance throughout the Metlox structure would require a complete security camera system. This would involve the purchase of a sufficient number of cameras, digital video recorders, monitors, software and hardware to monitor and record activity in the structure. Ongoing maintenance and equipment replacement would also need to be considered.

The recording device and digital storage unit would need to be placed in the small office located on the first floor of the Metlox structure. Storing the recording device in the Police Department computer room would not be feasible due to the fact that additional cable and/or fiber optics would need to be installed between the Police Facility and the Metlox structure. The current two-inch pipes under 13th Street would not be capable of maintaining all the additional wiring according to several vendors. Larger pipes would need to be placed under the street requiring 13th Street to be dredged at a significant expense.

Monitoring cameras in the Metlox structure would be very difficult with existing City personnel. Currently, the Police Department has four 21-inch television monitors located at the front desk. These monitors show fifty-three camera views in and around the police facility and are only watched occasionally by front desk personnel between their other duties. The front desk is staffed by a Records Technician who is responsible for receiving all customers arriving at the front desk or calling the police department. The Records Technician also assists officers who are in the field with data requests. Due to the demands on the lone front desk person, continual monitoring of these additional cameras would be virtually impossible.

Further, it must be noted that it would be very challenging for anyone to constantly monitor cameras that do not capture any “out of the ordinary” events on a regular basis. It may also lend itself to a false sense of security if people believe they are being constantly monitored. With this in mind, it is recommended if digital video recorders are installed, they will capture incidents occurring in the Metlox Parking Structure to be reviewed at a later time as necessary. If this option was pursued, the recorded data would need to be held for one-year pursuant to state law which would require a substantial recording device with ample memory.

Staff contacted two vendors to obtain preliminary estimates for security cameras and recorders in the Metlox parking structure. Proposals ranged from 23 cameras which would provide minimal coverage of only the exterior ingress and egress areas, to 58 cameras providing full coverage throughout the interior of the structure. Preliminary cost estimates range from \$50,000.00 to \$160,000.00.

The \$50,000.00 cost estimate would include the installation of recording equipment, monitors, and twenty three (23) cameras located at the ingress and egress points of the parking structure. This would include eight (8) cameras to cover the stairwells, six (6) cameras to cover the escalators, two (2) cameras to cover the elevators and six (7) cameras to cover the driveway ramps.

The \$160,000.00 cost estimate would include the installation of recording equipment, monitors, and fifty eight (58) cameras throughout the structure. This would include sixteen (16) cameras in the stairwells, four (4) cameras to cover the elevators, eighteen (18) cameras on level one and twenty (20) cameras on level two to cover the escalators, vehicle entrance and exits, and selected parking lanes.

As an alternative to a security camera system, staff considered the installation of Emergency Call Boxes. Emergency Call Boxes, also called “blue lights”, are currently located at various points in the City, including Sand Dune Park, Polliwog Park, Marine Park and along the Green Belt. Call boxes placed in high visibility areas, when activated, will alert the Police or Fire Department of persons in need of assistance. The call boxes are directly linked to the City’s dispatch center for quick response by emergency personnel.

However, the far majority of the calls that have been received by the police department on these “blue lights” have been “prank calls” which have amounted to hundreds of calls since they were installed many years ago. In polling the command staff of the police department, only a few calls come to mind as ever being “real”. One was a traffic collision, one was a medical and the other involved a possible assault.

However, there is no doubt that these “blue lights” would enhance the safety of the structure and are a “peace of mind” to many. Staff recommends that if this alternative is considered, a “blue light” phone be installed on the lower level and one installed at the office space, especially if there is an expectation that the police department is utilizing that space. Preliminary cost estimates to place a “blue light” phone is approximately \$1,000.00 each.

CONCLUSION:

The Manhattan Beach Downtown area is a great place to visit because of its unique shops and

restaurants. With the expansion of the Metlox center, more people have come to enjoy the area. The Manhattan Beach Police Department is committed to providing a safe environment for all by continuing foot beats and security checks, deploying officers on bicycles and possibly EPAMDs to continue enhancing partnerships within the business community. Through these partnerships, the Police Department provides education and training to employees and business owners in the areas of crime prevention, problem solving, better communication and strong working relationships.

Although there may be some benefits regarding the installation of a security camera system in the Metlox parking structure, the cost of the project and the impact on staff to monitor and maintain the system must be considered. In light of the low incidents of crime reported, Staff does not recommend pursuing the installation of cameras at this time. Additionally, cameras may give citizens a false sense of security as city staff will not likely be able to continually monitor the system. As an alternative, the installation of emergency call boxes (“blue lights”) may be considered at a fraction of the cost.