

Graffiti Management Strategy Update

Background

Council approved Graffiti Management Strategy Report PW17078/PED17198 on November 22, 2017. Recommendation (b) directed staff to report back on the progress of the Graffiti Management Strategy through the Clean and Green Strategy annual report, which staff did September 2018 (Clean and Green Strategy Annual Report PW110521). Below is an update on the work relative to the Graffiti Management Strategy that has been completed since PW110521.

A follow up report to PW17078/PED17198 on the outcomes of the proactive enforcement pilot project is planned for Q1 2020 and will include recommendations and comprehensive costing.

Information

A cross-departmental staff working group meets bi-annually to review the Graffiti Management Strategy and implement components of the action plan to address Council’s requests for: 1) a victim assistance program; 2) a proactive approach to graffiti management; 3) additional CCTV cameras; and 4) a counter social media campaign encouraging citizens to participate in assisting police in catching graffiti vandals.

1. Victim Assistance Program
 - (a) Paint removal/graffiti block vouchers

In the spring of 2018, funding from the *Keep Hamilton Clean & Green Committee* (KHCG) was used to purchase hardware store gift cards to support victims of graffiti. To date, 100 gift cards have been distributed by the Municipal Law Enforcement (MLE) proactive graffiti enforcement students to private property owners who have been victimized by graffiti on multiple occasions and/or who self-identify as income-eligible (i.e. meet low income criteria). Offering the gift card eases the burden on the property owner removing the graffiti and improves relationships with the City enforcing its by-laws by recognizing and treating the public as victims of this type of vandalism.

- (b) Youth engagement

City staff identified and discussed solutions for the elderly who are unable to complete the removal of graffiti from their property due to physical or financial constraints. In collaboration with the Snow Angels program, Licensing and By-Law Services staff is exploring and holding preliminary discussions with various internal and external agencies to establish a “Graffiti Angels” program

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for 2019 to provide a similar service to assist the senior population victimized by graffiti.

- (c) Street art
 - i) Legal walls/Graffiti safe zones

Due to the culture of skateboarding and graffiti, City staff has decided not to actively remove graffiti at the six (6) outdoor skateparks in the City. These areas have essentially become “graffiti safe zones”. Graffiti will be permitted within the confines of the skatepark however, they are not permitted on peripheral buildings/features; offensive graffiti (hate, political, racist) will be investigated by Police and removed.

In the coming year, the Landscape Architectural Services section will introduce the concept of “graffiti safe zones” during the design and planning phase of new skateparks throughout the city. These “graffiti safe zones” will be incorporated into the projects public engagement process to allow the community an opportunity to provide feedback on the new initiative and also allow staff to address any related concerns the community might bring forward.

A legal wall pilot project at Woodlands Park (Ward 3) is set to begin in July 2019 in conjunction with the Concrete Canvas festival. The pilot will feature eight (8) foot high wooden panels along a fence line in the park to act as an open canvas for street artists to be free to express themselves. The location will be closely monitored by Parks staff. If, at any time, the street art migrates past the confines of the legal wall, staff can remove the wall.

- ii) Murals

Currently, the City of Hamilton provides funding for murals through Urban Renewal’s Commercial Property Improvement Grant Program (C.P.I.G.) and the B.I.A. Commercial Property Improvement Grant Program (B.I.A.C.P.I.G.).

Staff are investigating additional options for how the City can support property owners who are interested in murals for their building and investigating other dedicated sources of funding for mural projects.

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iii) Anti-graffiti wraps

Utility boxes are often plagued with graffiti. Artwork on the boxes (either painted or vinyl wraps) can assist in deterring graffiti and allow it to be more easily removed. The Tourism and Culture Division are leading a Call to Artists to install artwork on approximately 35 traffic signal and street lighting boxes in the Downtown Hamilton Community Improvement Project Area (DHCIPA). A focus group has been completed and has identified themes and goals to inform the project statement for the Call. The Call to Artists was issued in May 2019 and will be awarded Q3 2019 with installation in the late summer/fall of 2019.

(d) CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design)

CPTED is a design method for constructing the built environment to create safer neighbourhoods.

Hamilton Police Service’s Crime Prevention Branch provides information to property owners about how they can implement CPTED techniques to eliminate crime (including graffiti) in, on and around their properties. Hamilton Police Services will be presenting CPTED practises to the Business Improvement Area Advisory Committee at an upcoming meeting in Q2/Q3.

(e) Centralized resources

In the past, graffiti related information was not located in one centralized location making it difficult for property owners to access the information they needed on this topic.

In summer 2019, staff will launch a revised webpage on the City’s website that acts as a “one-stop-shop” for property owners to access graffiti-related resources such as removal tips/techniques, reporting and prevention, victim assistance initiatives, crime prevention tools and granting programs.

2. Proactive graffiti management

Licensing and By-law Services (LBS) response to graffiti related to private property has been on a reactive basis. Tagging or vandalism to City or other government property is directed to the appropriate department/agency. Graffiti

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that is gang or hate related, or where the LBS investigation identifies the vandal, the findings are reported to the HPS.

Since January 2018, Licensing and By-law Services employ two co-op students as Municipal Law Enforcement Officers (MLEO) as part of the two-year pilot that Council approved at its meeting on November 22, 2017 (recommendations (c), (d) and (e)). The MLE students are dedicated exclusively to a proactive, solution focused, graffiti enforcement strategy working alongside the victim property owners which is achieving great results.

The soft enforcement approach by the students is having a positive response from the public to build stronger relationships and increase community confidence for voluntary compliance. Although disheartened with the required clean-up, many victim property owners were appreciative receiving the support from the student MLEO and receiving the thank you cards when the work was completed. As part of their community outreach the students are:

- Providing information to residents and businesses about the importance of graffiti removal and how to prevent future graffiti vandalism
- Offering methods and tips for the rapid removal of graffiti
- Distributing gift cards for the purchase of paint, graffiti removal and graffiti prevention products, to those victimized by graffiti multiple times or self-identify as income-eligible
- Consulting with those affected to understand their view, solutions for clean-up, and to develop strategies to minimize opportunities
- Attending events, and community association meetings
- Gathering statistics and data beneficial to the community and City

During the winter season the incidents of graffiti are minimal, and any clean-up effort is hampered by the cold temperatures. Discretion is being used to extend the time for property owners to complete the remedial work as weather permits.

Studies conducted globally to examine spatio-temporal relationships and patterns in the urban environment suggests graffiti tags are associated to negative feelings of safety and reflects poorly on the market and tourism. Preliminary review of the data generated show results 7 to 8 times greater identifying graffiti through proactive efforts of the students compared to the reactive enforcement generated by public complaint; and a higher frequency to public (City) assets.

In addition to the soft enforcement approach to private property owners, the MLE students focus in 2019 will be City assets:

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- Inventorying graffiti and comparing data to the 2018 graffiti audit
- Identifying hotspots and trends to respond expeditiously and effectively this summer
- Meeting with external third-party government/institutions with assets in the City that have been vandalised with graffiti

Staff will continue to analyze and evaluate the data generated by the students to determine if the actions and initiatives meet the goals and objectives of the pilot project.

3. Security cameras (e.g. CCTV, FlashCam)

Council approved at its meeting on November 22, 2017 direction in the Graffiti Management Enforcement Strategy to a report back, accompanied by a presentation, to the Public Works Committee the costs of expanding the CCTV camera program (recommendation (g)). Further research and consultation is required to the advancing technology and alignment with Hamilton Police Services and the City's security policies and approach. Staff anticipate a separate report and presentation to the Public Works Committee by Q3 2019.

4. Crime Stoppers campaign

The following recommendation was added by Council to PW17078/PED17198:

(h) That the appropriate staff also report back on the cost of a counter social media campaign that encourages citizens to participate in assisting police in catching vandals and receiving a cash reward as well as the cost of a one-time City-wide graffiti clean-up.

The City led a Crime Stoppers campaign in 2009/2010 asking the public to report graffiti and known taggers. Hamilton Police Services confirmed that there was an increase in reported graffiti "tips" due to this campaign.

Staff will be launching a low/no cost social media campaign in early Summer 2019 which includes posts to the City's website, Instagram, Twitter accounts. This campaign will be evaluated for its effectiveness using the various methods. Any successes from this campaign will inform the development of a more comprehensive package that also incorporates data gathered through MLE's proactive enforcement pilot and resource requirements to be brought to Council in Q1 2020.