



CITY OF

PORTLAND, OREGON

OFFICE OF NEIGHBORHOOD INVOLVEMENT

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Graffiti Abatement

4747 E Burnside Street

Enhancing the quality of Portland's Neighborhoods through community participation

2017 Graffiti Abatement Program Report to Portland City Council

MARCH 8, 2017

From: Juliette Muracchioli

Introduction

The mission of the City of Portland Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI) Graffiti Abatement Program is to improve neighborhood livability by decreasing graffiti in Portland. This is achieved through partnership with neighborhood and business associations, non-profit organizations, youth groups and individuals interested in reducing graffiti's negative impacts on the communities of Portland, as well as enforcement of Chapter 14B.80.020.

The Abatement Program provides free and reduced cost removal services to resident through agreements held with two private contractors. These removals allow for small businesses, residents and non-profit organizations throughout Portland to receive one free or discounted graffiti removal per fiscal year. The contractors performing these removals function as consultants for victims and explain the importance of quick removal to reduce graffiti proliferation. Although the program historically worked with Portland Police Bureau personnel on enforcement against the most prolific taggers, those resources were cut in 2015. The program currently relies on a complaint driven reporting system. These reports include: requests for removal service from property owners, complaints from constituents about addresses negligent in addressing graffiti, and requests for publicly-owned locations to be cleaned.

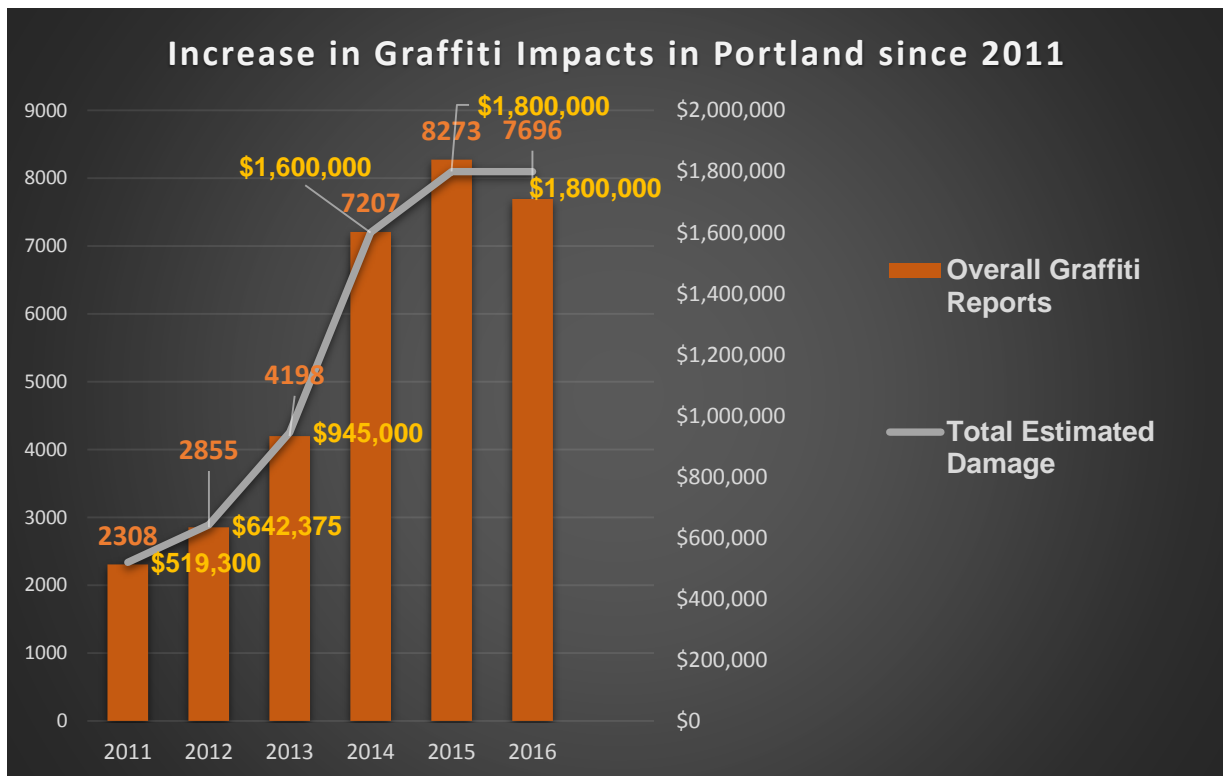
A more proactive abatement approach, as utilized in other similarly sized cities in the United States, would be more effective at reducing graffiti throughout Portland. Although thousands of volunteer hours are leveraged each year in cooperation with organizations, Portland is seeing a rapid increase in graffiti. The shortfall in effective abatement services is notable.

The Fiscal Year 2017-2018 Budget proposal package proposes eliminating the Graffiti Abatement Program completely. If accepted, property owners would be left with greater accountability to address incidents of graffiti on their own. Additionally, from November 2016 through February 2017, we had received more than 25 reports of hate/bias graffiti. In the five years prior to 2016, our program received no reports of hate/bias graffiti during the same three-month period. The consequences of eliminating

free removal services will most heavily have an impact on Portland’s most vulnerable community members. If the ability to immediately address graffiti of this nature is further limited, it will also send a message of empowerment to those whose greatest desire is the continued oppression of the historically oppressed in Portland.

Graffiti Trends in Portland 2011-2016

Graffiti reports to the program have increased significantly over the past six years. This is a reflection of an increase in incidents as well as an increase in reports received. The proportion of graffiti that were deemed as ‘high priority removals’ in our database have increased notably since 2011. Any graffiti identified as hate, gang or politically motivated is considered high priority. Currently, only an estimated 5 percent of all graffiti in the city is reported for removal; the most obvious lack of reporting being in East Portland. The average cost per incident for professional graffiti removal is \$225. As graffiti increases, these cost burdens fall more heavily onto small businesses or residents already strained by the increasing costs of doing business and living in Portland. These removal costs increase significantly if power washing or glass etching repairs are needed, as effective graffiti removal often requires a professional with the right tools.

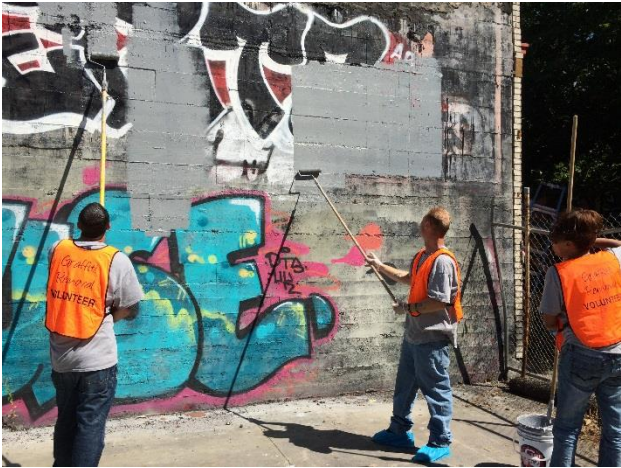


Program Partnerships, Community Support and Volunteer Cleanup Events

In 2016, the Graffiti Abatement Program partnered with volunteers on 26 cleanup events with more than 325 volunteers leveraging nearly \$50,000 in removal cost savings. These partnerships range from single volunteers trained and supplied with paint and removal kits who do work on an ongoing basis to sweeping cleanup events with more than 50 participants. The program has an ongoing partnership with Central City Concern’s volunteer group, Community Volunteer Corps (CVC). During the ‘busy season’ of April – October, we partner on twice-monthly cleanup events on private and public property with 15 CVC volunteers.

This exchange allows participants in the CVC program to gain service hours toward graduation, while learning about graffiti’s impacts on the community and helping provide free removal services and litter cleanup for areas in need of assistance. Often times, graduates of this program move on to become employees of Downtown Clean & Safe. This partnership with Community Volunteers Corps is one that could be duplicated with other organizations throughout Portland. However, without additional staff capacity to do so, we are unable to increase these opportunities.

Coordinating trainings and service days with volunteers is an integral part of the graffiti program’s outreach function. Regardless of whether graffiti is viewed by an individual as detrimental or artistic expression, once a person has been involved in removing graffiti, they will undoubtedly have a better understanding of its lasting impacts on a community.



In FY 2015-2016, the Graffiti Abatement Program provided \$10,000 to local businesses and muralists for paint and anti-graffiti coatings. These murals were placed on walls with ongoing graffiti problems to deter tagging. Because the murals were being

partially funded by ONI, a people-centered bureau, the subject matter of each mural sponsored was reflective of the local community and painted by local artists.



David Carmack Lewis, 825 N Cook



Jesse Hazelip, Hanoi Kitchen at NE 80th and Glisan



Adam Friedman, N Interstate & Bryant

Police Bureau Partnership

In November 2015, the one officer dedicated to investigating graffiti cases in the Portland Police Bureau was reassigned to patrol, hobbling the Graffiti Abatement Program's original structure as a partnership program with police. ONI Graffiti Abatement staff continue to track the monikers of Portland's most prolific tags, and will continue should the graffiti investigator role be re-introduced in the future. However, it has become clear that the most effective strategies for abatement include proactive removal and outreach, allowing us to better serve the community and further track the varying nature of graffiti throughout Portland in a more equitable fashion.

In the meantime, police reports for victims of graffiti incidents need to be more accessible. While the current limitations of PPB in responding to all property crimes are understood, victims of graffiti vandalism should be able to get the necessary documentation for insurance claims that they are not currently able to access.

Other Cities' and Jurisdictions' Approaches

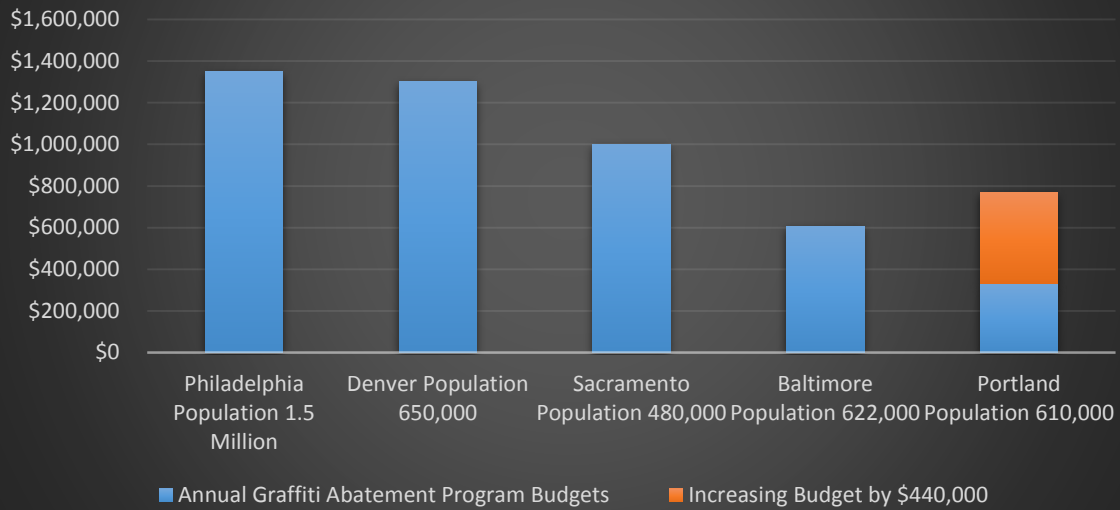
In January, Juliette Muracchioli, program specialist for the Graffiti Abatement Program, and Marco Mejia, program assistant, visited Philadelphia and Baltimore to gain insight on their approaches to addressing graffiti and other livability issues. While both of these cities have a large number of abandoned properties that makes them attractive targets for taggers, their ability to respond to graffiti is more effective. They

employ a proactive cleaning strategy on city property. Philadelphia removes graffiti on private property within three days through a 311 service request that can be made over the phone or online. Baltimore also responds to 311 requests, but can only perform removals on public property. Baltimore is nearly identical in size to Portland, yet it dedicates six full-time staff to graffiti removal on city property. The city is able to perform more than 100,000 removals per year. Philadelphia, while nearly three times the size of Portland, dedicates \$1.3-1.5 million to property cleanup efforts. In 2016, they cleaned or provided supplies for cleanups at more than 132,000 locations (graffiti removal is one aspect of the program, which completed 113,000 of those cleanups). Both of these cities, like Portland, have established murals programs. The city of Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program is an international leader in public art and community engagement. While its budget now outsizes the graffiti removal budget of Philadelphia thanks to fundraising efforts, until 1996 both graffiti removal and Mural Arts were under the umbrella of the city's 'Anti-Graffiti Network.' The programs split and became individual entities in 1996. However, they retain a closely tied partnership in promoting livability and public engagement through their individual and joint efforts.

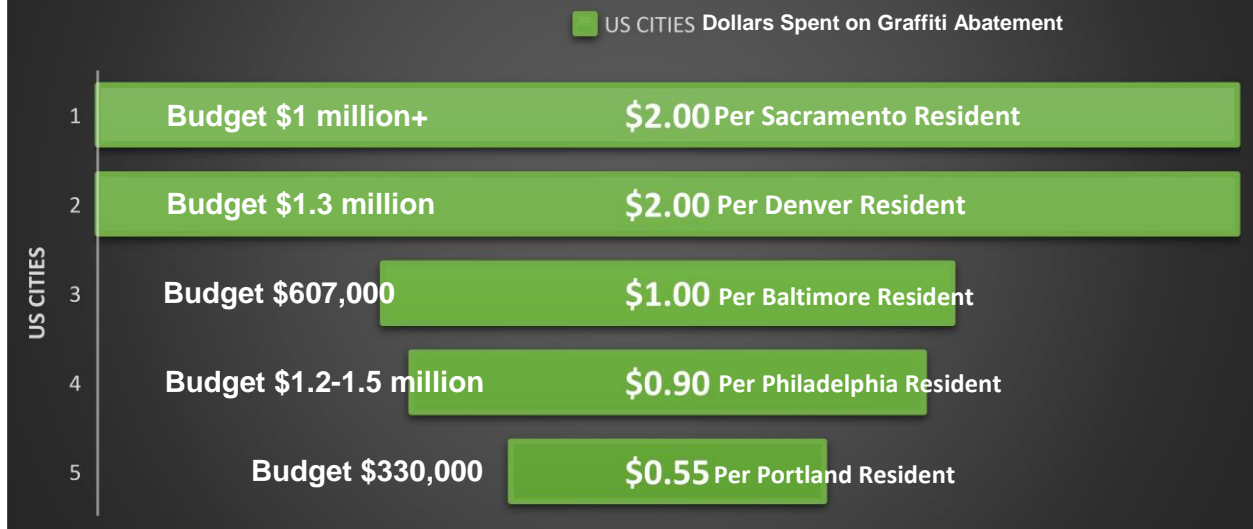
Beside the two cities we visited, other cities' efforts in graffiti removal and prevention also prove themselves to have much larger budgets and greater impacts than Portland's current Graffiti Abatement Program. The city of Denver, which is nearly the same size as Portland, has a graffiti removal program budget of approximately \$1.3 million for enforcement of their abatement code and property cleanup. The city of Sacramento, with a population of 480,000, spends more than \$1 million per year on graffiti abatement.

None of the above jurisdictions rely heavily on police enforcement as a mechanism for deterring or abating graffiti. Despite creative solutions by Graffiti Abatement staff, the graffiti problem in Portland will continue to outpace abatement efforts unless these workable models employed by other cities are duplicated in Portland. In short, to make gains on the explosion of graffiti in Portland, our abatement services and outreach capacity must increase.

US Cities Graffiti Abatement Program Budgets



Graffiti Removal Services Provided Per Capita in US Cities



Conclusion

The ONI Graffiti Abatement Program requests that these startling statistics be considered seriously as the City continues discussion about the direction of the Graffiti Program. Any reduction in services is a reduction in our collective ability as city staff to demonstrate that Portland is committed to empowering our most vulnerable while continually improving the livability of our communities.

The Graffiti Abatement Program, while proud of our accomplishments during a difficult period of increasing graffiti, is lacking the necessary resources to make it a successful city service.

- Our ongoing partnerships with community organizations, city bureaus, other public agencies private organizations, volunteers and community organizers are an integral part of our program’s functionality.
- Moving forward, we hope to increase these partnerships and expand our program.
- We believe that the best way to move forward in addressing increasing graffiti in Portland is to invest more city resources into a proactive removal model, combined with more rigorous outreach and communications strategies. We are researching multiple means of implementing this model, including tactics like Business improvement districts and increased external partners and shareholders. As we devise plans, we will be consulting with key community stakeholders for deeper input and feedback.
- While we understand the dire staffing shortages within the Police Bureau, we hope that the bureau will have the means to improve the online reporting system so it allows for victims to file electronic police reports for graffiti vandalism. We are grateful for the continued support from Council and the Community and look forward to all of the work ahead.

We recommend that Council accept the report.

TO THE COUNCIL

As Commissioner-in-Charge of the Office of Neighborhood Involvement, I concur with the information in this report and

RECOMMENDS:

That the Council accept the report.

Respectfully submitted,

Chloe Eudaly

Commissioner In Charge of the Office of Neighborhood Involvement

