

GRAFFITI ABATEMENT REPORTIF YOU WISH TO SPEAK TO CITY COUNCIL, **PRINT** YOUR NAME, ADDRESS, AND EMAIL.

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01/11/12

City Council Presentation
PPB Graffiti Investigation Unit
Officer Matt Miller
Officer Tony Zanetti

Mr. Mayor and Commissioners, My Name is Officer Tony Zanetti and I am the second member of the Police Bureau's Graffiti Investigation Unit. My position was funded by the Council last year, and I transferred to the unit in May 2011. During my short tenure, Officer Miller and I have worked diligently to prove that (A.) My addition to the unit has increased our efficiency and effectiveness, and (B.) Tangible results can be directly attributed to my acquisition.

Investigating graffiti crimes is incredibly time consuming, and requires an officer to divide their attention between several major responsibilities that include: investigations, documentation, prevention, arrests, abatement, home visits, training and education. Statistically speaking, each one of these areas carries equal importance because one cannot effectively impact the graffiti problem without addressing all of these factors. A team of two officers can much more easily handle these tasks without neglecting any one of these areas.

Officer Miller has led the fight against graffiti over the last seven years as the only graffiti investigator for the city. He told me his greatest frustration has been the amount of time he was required to spend behind a computer, instead of on the street, making arrests and taking preventative action to curtail the problem. Another roadblock he faced was being required to assist other officers with unrelated investigations while his work remained in limbo. My acquisition to the unit has assured that if Officer Miller is temporarily reassigned to assist with other tasks, I will continue our important investigative work. The community is much better served when their needs are met in a timely fashion.

In an attempt to accurately record our progress, Officer Miller and I took the initiative to document our daily activities so that our efforts could later be reviewed and evaluated. Since this type of information wasn't previously maintained, we don't have comparative statistical data in all cases.

A healthy prevention strategy is key to slowing the progression of the graffiti problem, and Officer Miller and I have made this our top priority. By sharing our daily documentation and clerical responsibilities, we freed up valuable time to conduct 30 home visits of known and suspected graffiti vandals who were new "taggers," or had recently begun re-offending. Where applicable, these visits involved the offender's parents or legal guardians and resulted in commitments from both parties to work together to change the criminal behavior. Visits like these are a proven effective tool in the fight against graffiti vandalism, but were almost totally absent when Officer Miller was forced to triage his responsibilities as a solo investigator.

As a unit, we made 32 citizen contacts and 59 business contacts for the primary purpose of educating citizens on how to avoid becoming victims of graffiti vandalism, and the available methods of reporting such crimes. (*These numbers completely exclude contacts where citizens called-in to report new graffiti applications.) This is a dramatic shift in our preventative strategy because we now have the time to educate citizens before they are victimized, rather than at the scene of a crime when a report is being taken.

My addition to the graffiti unit has enabled us to conduct 80 follow up investigations that were initiated by street officers or Deputy District Attorneys. These investigations helped us identify and arrest suspects for probation violations, and lead to the discovery of additional graffiti victims who might never have reported the crimes on their own. Our number of investigations almost doubles that of last year's numbers up to this point.

Of the 67 graffiti related arrests made by the PPB since May 1st, 2011, 25 of those arrests were the result of our investigative efforts. This number doesn't include the significant number of felony cases submitted by us to the District Attorney's Office for prosecution, and the outstanding arrest warrants associated with those cases.

6 undercover missions were conducted over the last 8 months which resulted in 7 Field Contact Reports, and the execution of a search warrant and subsequent arrest of an adult offender who was responsible for "tagging" hundreds of Portland area locations over the last two years and causing tens of thousands of dollars in damages.

Aside from our investigative responsibilities here in Portland, we regularly train and provide valuable graffiti related information to other in-state police agencies. Our unit also aided the investigations of several out-of-state law enforcement agencies in Atlanta Georgia, Victoria BC, Boston Massachusetts, San Jose California, the Union Pacific Railroad and the B.N.S.F.

*It should be noted that these numbers were affected by a one month reassignment to the Occupy Portland encampment security detail and other Occupy related events.

From a purely statistical standpoint, we believe the quality of our investigative work over the last 8 months would compare favorably to that of any police agency of equal size in the U.S. The real question is whether or not we've been effective here in Portland. Our answer to that question is "yes." The most significant sign of our success has been the gradual decrease in graffiti written by our embedded, "old school" "graffiti" vandals and their "crews." The veteran writers that inspired a new crop of up and coming "taggers" over the last 6 years, have dwindled over the last 8 months due to arrests and prosecutions. The tone of the graffiti scene here in Portland is much more reserved, with many writers in the community distrustful of each other and fearful of arrest.

What we are left with is a disorganized group of younger graffiti writers and "crews" that are "battling" to gain status and respect from others in the "tagger" community. Although the demographic has changed, the potential for damage has not.

When I talk to citizens, they tell me the presence of graffiti creates fear in the community and casts a shadow of doubt regarding the safety and livability of their neighborhoods. As a team, Officer Miller and I believe we can positively change this perception through quality police work and frequent communication with our community members.

We would ask the Mayor and Council members to strongly consider the re-funding of my investigative position within the Police Bureau's Graffiti Investigation Unit. Our successes and gains will be short lived if we don't continue to pressure these destructive vandals who have little respect for public and private property.

Thank You,