BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name:	CEO & Sheriff
Department No.:	012 & 032
For Agenda Of:	9/11/2018
Placement:	Administrative
Estimated Time:	
Continued Item:	No
If Yes, date from:	
Vote Required:	Majority

TO:	Board of Supervisors	
FROM:	Department Director(s)	Mona Miyasato, County Executive Officer Bill Brown, Sheriff-Coroner
	Contact Info:	Jeff Frapwell, Assistant CEO
SUBJECT:	**False Alarm Cost Recovery Options**	

County Counsel Concurrence	**Auditor-Controller Concurrence**
As to form: Yes	As to form: N/A

Other Concurrence: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

a) Receive and file a report outlining false alarm cost recovery options;

b) Refer the implementation of a Verified Response protocol, as described in Attachment A, to the Sheriff's Office; and

c) Determine that the above actions are not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15378(b)(4) of the CEQA guidelines.

Summary Text:

The recommended action refers the implementation of a Verified Response protocol to the Sheriff's Office, with the goal of decreasing the amount of time Sheriff dispatch and law enforcement staff spend on false alarm calls. Verified Response requires a specified level of verification from the caller to dispatch that a break-in is likely in progress, or has occurred, before patrol deputies are dispatched to the scene. Subject to Board approval, staff will track the results of Verified Response and return to the Board for further direction if the goal of reduced time spent on false alarms is not realized.

<u>Background:</u>

On June 19th, the Board of Supervisors directed staff to develop cost recovery options associated with law enforcement response to false alarm calls, in an effort to identify a cost effective way to reduce staff time spent responding to false alarms. Of the 6,124 alarm activations in 2017, 3,770 were responded to by a patrol deputy, and only 35 (0.6%) resulted in a written report. A workgroup was established among staff from the CEO's Office, Sheriff, County Counsel, and Auditor-Controller, with the goal of researching the feasible options, identifying the steps necessary to implement and administer the options, and putting together some estimates of the costs (in both staff time and services and supplies) associated with each option. While the group initially considered three options, Verified Response, Penalty Fines, and an Alarm Permit Ordinance, the group ultimately concluded that the process for implementing the Penalty Fines option was approximately the same as implementing an Alarm Permit Ordinance (e.g., ordinance development and adoption, public outreach, collections), but with less beneficial outcomes, and so left it off the final list.

Verified Response

As mentioned above, the implementation of a Verified Response protocol is staff's recommended option. The Sheriff's Office would implement the protocol, requiring a specified level of verification from the caller, prior to responding, that either a break-in is likely in progress, or has occurred. Verification could be provided by a caller monitoring either audio or video systems, or by someone calling from the scene. The effort required to implement a Verified Response protocol would be minimal, consisting of Sheriff staff researching existing policies in other jurisdictions and crafting one to suit the County's needs, internal training on the new protocol, public outreach and communication with the contract cities, and using data already collected by the Sheriff's Office to track results. Sheriff's staff has spoken with other jurisdictions that have implemented Verified Response, and believe a substantial reduction in calls is possible through this measure alone. It's important to note that while this is not a revenue-generating option, the primary goal is not revenue generation, but reduced staff time spent on receiving and responding to false alarm calls, which will free patrol and dispatch staff up for more critical duties. Further details on Verified Response can be found in Attachment A.

Alarm Permit Ordinance

An Alarm Permit Ordinance would require owners of an alarm to pay an annual fee to register their alarm with the County. It would also establish fines for responses to alarms that turned out to be false, and could provide a registered owner with a pre-established number of "free" false alarms per year. Responses to unregistered alarms would receive no waiver and be subject to fines upon the first occurrence. This option would require substantially more staff time, both during development and implementation of the ordinance, as well as for ongoing administration of the program. Registration compliance would also prove challenging, particularly given the increasing popularity of web-based, non-monitored alarms that don't go through traditional alarm companies.

The cities of Santa Barbara and Santa Maria both have a permit ordinance in place, with Santa Maria using a contracted vendor to administer the permit program and collect fees and fines, and Santa Barbara using in-house staff. The City of Santa Barbara has approximately 3,000 registered alarms, has averaged about $160,000 in annual revenue the past four years, and has a dedicated staff member that spends up to 75% of their time administering the program. The City of Santa Maria has approximately 1,800 registered alarms with an average annual revenue of $56,000. They have a staff member provide monthly data reports

to their vendor. While this is not the initial staff recommended option, if the Verified Response protocol alone does not produce a substantial reduction in false alarm calls, staff can return to the Board for further direction, including development of an ordinance. Further details on an Alarm Permit Ordinance can be found in Attachment B.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: Yes

Fiscal Analysis:

The Sheriff's Office would use existing staff, valued at $70,000 to implement Verified Response, and to perform minor ongoing data collection; however, staff time would also be freed up for more critical duties if a reduction in calls is realized. For example, staff has calculated that a reduction between 1,000 and 1,500 false alarms to which patrol staff were dispatched (26% to 40% of 2017 totals) would free staff time valued between $60,000 and $90,000 annually, for other duties.

Attachments:

Attachment A – Option #1 Verified Response
Attachment B – Option #2 Alarm Permit Ordinance

Authored by:

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