



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:

Department No.:

For Agenda Of: June 19th, 2018

Placement: Departmental

Estimated Time: 30 minutes

Continued Item: No

If Yes, date from:

Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Department
Director(s) :
Supervisor Das
Williams
Contact Info:
Emilie Elzein,
805-568-2155

SUBJECT: False Alarm Cost Recovery.

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Other Concurrence: Sheriff Bill Brown

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

- a) Direct staff to work with the Sheriff's Office and other involved departments to develop cost recovery options associated with law enforcement response to false alarm calls including but not limited to feasibility of an alarm permit ordinance, alarm permits fees, and "verified response" implementation; and
- b) Determine that the above actions are organizational or administrative activities of governments that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines section 15378(b)(5).

Summary Text:

As a part of the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office's obligation to protect public safety, the SBCSO regularly responds to alarm activations throughout the County for both private and commercial owners of alarm systems. The need to respond to these calls constitutes a considerable amount of staff time and resources, which the Sheriff's Office has no way to recoup. With no fee structure or permitting process for alarm system users, the need to respond to thousands of alarm calls can mean that Deputies are unable to respond to other calls for service throughout the County.

Many other jurisdictions including the cities of Santa Barbara and Santa Maria currently use alarm system permits and fees to recover the costs associated with responding to alarm calls. Implementing a “verified response” technique, which utilizes alarm system features to verify that an alarm activation is non-accidental, is an additional method used to decrease the resources expended on false alarm responses. It is to the benefit of the whole County to quantify the cost of providing alarm call response services, determine the feasibility of implementing a similar permitting and fee structure for alarm users in the unincorporated County or a method for “verified response”, and consider other options to provide cost recovery for false alarm calls.

Background:

The Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Office regularly responds to calls from alarm system activations. In 2016, the Sheriff’s Office responded to 5,599 alarm activations between their Dispatch and Patrol personnel (Attachment A). In 2016, of the 3,271 activations that a patrol Deputy responded to, only 32 reports were written (Attachment A). In 2017, the number of alarm activations grew considerably to 6,124, with 3,770 being respond by a patrol Deputy and only 35 reports being written. (Attachment B).

In addition to the large volume of alarm calls that result in no reports being written, individual addresses can present a major burden to the Sheriff’s Office due to the repeated false alarms from these locations (Attachment C). In 2016, of the 105 alarm activations between the “Top 5 Addresses with a Patrol Unit Assigned”, 65 were handled entirely through Dispatch, and 30 were responded to with a Patrol Deputy. Of those 30 patrol responses, 15 alarm calls were found to be accidental (Attachment C). These numbers have grown dramatically in 2017, with over 10 additional accidental activations at multiple locations in just the first half of the year (Attachment C).

In response to similar problems, the cities of Santa Barbara and Santa Maria have implemented alarm permitting ordinances. Both cities require annual renewal of the permit. Santa Barbara charges a \$40 fee for alarm registration and Santa Maria charges \$13.70 for registration (Attachments D & E). Santa Barbara charges a \$55 penalty for each of the first three accidental alarm activations (waiving fees for the first two for registered accounts), \$100 for the fourth, and \$250 for each accidental activation over that (Attachment D). Santa Maria allows three false alarms every year and charges \$86.10 for each false alarm over that amount (Attachment E).

Other jurisdictions have implemented a “verified response” protocol in addition to an alarm fee and permit system. “Verified response” utilizes alarm features such as manually activated panic buttons, sound, video, or an eyewitness account of a crime in progress to verify the need for Dispatch and Patrol assistance. The cities of Fremont and San Jose have adopted false alarm ordinances incorporating “verified response” to redirect resources currently used to handle false alarm responses towards other needs in their counties (Attachments H and I).

However, the administration and management of a fee, permitting system, and a “verified response” method for all alarm users has the potential to present significant costs to the Sheriff’s Office, which already has limited administrative resources to pursue a new program like this. It is important for the Sheriff’s Office to determine if the implementation of an Alarm Fee, Permit Program, and “Verified Response” method would result in recovery of costs and revenue for the Sheriff’s Office or result in

additional expense and to examine what other options are out there that may help in full cost recovery. The work group will return to the Board of Supervisors with recommendations by August 21st.

Attachments:

- Attachment A – Alarm Activation Call Statistics for Jan-December 2016, and Jan-Jun 2017
- Attachment B – 2017 Alarm Call Numbers
- Attachment C – Alarm Activation Calls for Jan-December 2016, and Jan-Jun 2017 for the Top 5 Addresses with a Patrol Unit Assigned
- Attachment D – City of Santa Barbara Alarm Abatement Program Frequently Asked Questions
- Attachment E – City of Santa Maria Alarm Program Questions and Answers
- Attachment F – City of Santa Barbara Municipal Code Chapter 9.100
- Attachment G – City of Santa Maria Chapter 5-2 Alarm Systems
- Attachment H – City of Fremont Alarm Permit Program/False Response Ordinance
- Attachment I – City of San Jose Verified Response Protocol

Authored by:

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