



City Council Report

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Sacramento, CA 95814

www.cityofsacramento.org

File #: 2016-01256

Discussion Item 20

Title: Status Report on the Pit Stop Attended Restroom Pilot Program

Recommendation: Receive and provide comment on the Pit Stop Attended Restroom Pilot Program.

Location: District 3

Contact: Emily Halcon, Homeless Services Coordinator, (916) 808-7896, Office of the City Manager; Shannon Brown, Operations Manager, (916) 808-6076, Department of Parks and Recreation

Presenter: Emily Halcon, Homeless Services Coordinator, (916) 808-7896, Office of the City Manager

Department: Office of the City Manager

Attachments:

1-Description/Analysis

2-Pit Stop Attended Restroom Six Month Status Report

Description/Analysis

Issue Detail: The City is faced with competing challenges of providing public restrooms and protecting the public health and safety of the community. Despite efforts to clean and maintain public restrooms on a regular basis, the facilities are increasingly vandalized and the toilets are backed-up, causing flooding. The facilities are often occupied overnight and used for illicit activities and violent crimes have occurred. Many of these incidents resulted in restrooms being permanently closed, only open for events, or otherwise restricted for use.

In response to these challenges, and in an effort to offer a safe and sanitary restroom for people experiencing homelessness, in June of this year, the City opened the Pit Stop Attended Restroom as a pilot program in the River District area of the City. The Pit Stop was funded for six months, and Council committed to considering permanent funding and/or expansion of the program based on the effectiveness of the pilot program in curbing community impacts associated with unsheltered homelessness and the response of the homeless community. The attached report contains an assessment of the program after the first four months of operation.

The initial six-month pilot is expected to cost approximately \$174,000, exclusive of the cost of purchasing the facility. If the Council opts to continue or expand the program, staff expects there could be cost savings by contracting out the restroom maintenance costs and daily monitors separately. The Homeless Services Program (I02000200) has \$213,493 remaining from the FY2015/16 approved budget allocation. These funds were allocated for the local rapid re-housing and employment program, but, due to delays in starting the program there were savings. Allocating these funds to the Pit Stop Program supports the broader funding initiative in that the Pit Stop monitors assist in breaking down barriers for those who may be resistant to services and offer referrals to those in need.

Staff is seeking input and direction from the Council on the following related to the current Pit Stop Attended Restroom pilot program and potential expansion of the program:

1. Feedback and input on the attached status report; and
2. Direction for closure, continuation or expansion of the program at the end of the current contract (December 31, 2016); and
3. Direction on the number of sites, operating hours and any other changes that should be incorporated into the procurement process, if the Council wishes to continue or expand the program.

If Council opts to continue or expand the program, staff will return to Council prior to the expiration of the current contract with details on the procurement process, a revised contract, updated costs, and options for continued funding.

Policy Considerations: In general, the City has been focusing all funding for homeless programs to support “housing first” activities aligned with Sacramento Steps Forward (SSF). The Pit Stop Attended Restroom pilot program was intended to complement these broader efforts, recognizing that housing activities take significant time to fully develop and launch. The Pit Stop Attended Restroom pilot program aims to provide relief to the community while such housing activities are being established.

Economic Impacts: None.

Environmental Considerations: The portable restroom facility that is located in an area on a temporary basis is exempt from environmental review under the CEQA Guidelines section 15311(c).

Sustainability: None.

Commission/Committee Action: None.

Rationale for Recommendation: The City has been supporting SSF in their efforts to provide permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento. With the City’s support, SSF has been placing clients into permanent housing through the Coordinated Entry System based on vulnerability. While these efforts are producing good results, in the City’s 2015 report on the cost of homelessness, it was estimated that the City spends over \$7 million annually addressing the impacts of homelessness, including the cost of cleaning up human waste from encampments and along City streets.

Financial Considerations: The Pit Stop Attended Restroom pilot program was funded with \$100,000 in General Funds and approximately \$74,000 in staff costs. Should the Council wish to expand or continue this program beyond the pilot period, additional funding will be required and the program will need to be competitively bid for qualified operator(s). If the Council wishes to take this approach, the \$213,493 originally identified for the rapid re-housing effort in the Homeless Services Program (I02000200) can be used to extend the current contract by four months to ensure no lapse in availability and to procure a new operator(s) for the program. However, if Council decides to continue and/or expand the program, a long-term funding plan needs to be approved.

Local Business Enterprise (LBE): The City’s 5% LBE participation requirement was included in the request for proposals to select the current operator and will be included in any subsequent solicitations.

Pit Stop Attended Restrooms

Six Month Status Report

1 Overview

In June 2016, the City of Sacramento launched the Pit Stop Program, a six-month pilot of an attended mobile restroom program. The program, modeled after a similar program in San Francisco, was created to provide safe and clean restrooms for people experiencing homelessness and, by doing so, reduce the community impacts of unsheltered homelessness. The Pit Stop has been operational since June 20th, and the initial pilot period of six months will end at the end of December. This report provides details on the use, efficacy, and cost of the program for the initial pilot as well as recommendations for potential expansion and/or continuation of the program.

2 Program Description

The Pit Stop Program is an attended restroom program, serving the River District area of the City. This area has a high concentration of people experiencing homelessness and lacks a public restroom in a City park, community center, library or other such public facility. The businesses in the immediate area often complain about human waste on the streets, sidewalks, and parking lots that creates challenges to operating a business in the area. Advocates for people experiencing homelessness similarly complain that there are no alternatives for people living outdoors and that providing adequate restroom facilities would restore some dignity to this vulnerable population. Having seen the similarly operated Pit Stop program in San Francisco, Sacramento sought to replicate the success of that program in one of the City's most impacted communities, with the hopes that lessons learned locally might translate to a broader program with multiple facilities throughout the City.

2.1 Restroom Facility

One of the hallmarks of the San Francisco Pit Stop program is that the facilities are safe, clean and comfortable. The facilities are not "port-a-potties"; they are fully flushing units with lights, running water and air conditioning. The unit used in the Sacramento Pit Stop contains three stalls, one of which is ADA accessible. Air conditioning and lights for the unit are run by a generator. In addition to the restroom facility, the program also offers a trash receptacle, sharps disposal and pet waste bags. The Pit Stop is open from 8 am to 6 pm, seven days a week, parked on the west side of Ahern Street between North A and North B Streets.



2.2 Attendants

Key to the success of the Pit Stop is the use of restroom attendants, called monitors. During each shift, there are two monitors on site. Monitors are responsible for a number of activities, including:



- ✓ Greeting customers
- ✓ Cleaning the restroom after each use
- ✓ Re-stocking supplies in the restroom
- ✓ Collecting usage data
- ✓ Informally surveying clients and recording feedback on their experiences
- ✓ Offering referrals to homeless outreach, police and other services as needed
- ✓ Collecting trash from the block immediately surrounding the Pit Stop

Over time, the monitors have developed relationships with many of the frequent customers, as well as with the service providers in the immediate area. These relationships have created new opportunities to engage the homeless population in services. Some of the customers have offered to assist the Pit Stop monitors with collecting garbage and general upkeep of the streets.

2.3 Role of the City

When the City initially sought bids for the Pit Stop program, we envisioned contracting with one entity who would both rent, stock and store the facility and provide the monitor staffing. Unfortunately, there was only one responsive bid that was received, with a cost of \$80,000 for transportation, servicing and rental of the restroom (6 months), and \$162,000 for the attendant services. This proposal far exceeded the budget for the pilot program, and, given the interest to implement the pilot program as soon as possible, the City assumed most of the roles related to the restroom facility (transportation, servicing, purchase of unit).

The initial budget for the six-month pilot was \$100,000, to be inclusive of the facility and the cost of the monitors. Given that the bids were above this budget, the Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks) decided to purchase the (used) ADA restroom facility for \$35,425 using General Fund resources. Purchasing the unit was determined to be more cost efficient than renting.¹ Should the Pit Stop Program end, Parks can rent the facility to community groups for events, re-cooping the initial cost of the purchase.

In addition to purchasing the facility, staff from both Parks and Public Works' Fleet Management Division (Fleet) were relied upon throughout the pilot to transport, re-stock and maintain the facility. Every day, Parks staff is responsible for transporting the facility from the City's North Area Corporation Yard (NACY) to the Pit Stop location on Ahern Street by opening time at 8 am and back to NACY after

¹ Monthly cost for renting and servicing (cleaning, dumping) the ADA unit was \$12,349 per month, for a total rental cost of \$74,098 over the six month pilot. There were also challenges in finding an ADA unit available for on-going rental in the Sacramento area.

closing at 6 pm. Given the size of the facility, this task can only be managed by certain staff, and can take up to an hour, twice a day.

3 Program Costs

The one-time cost to purchase the portable restroom facility was \$35,425. The purchase was paid out of Parks operations, and removed from the program costs detailed below to better estimate the on-going costs of operating the program. Depending on the design of the program moving forward, there could be facility costs for purchasing or renting additional units.

Over the course of the six-month pilot, it is estimated that the total cost for the Pit Stop (exclusive of purchasing the unit) will be \$173,599. This is the total combined cost of purchasing and servicing the facility and the contract for the monitors. It can be assumed that, if this project was brought to scale, the cost per site/facility would be less than the initial pilot period, as the costs for supervision and data could be spread.

The estimated costs for the six-month pilot are detailed below.

	Contract Costs	Costs to Parks	Total Costs
Portable Restroom Unit			
Staff cost to transport restroom	-	\$47,203	\$47,203
Supplies	-	\$29,888	\$29,888
Average monthly maintenance	-	\$6,051	\$6,051
Operations			
Monitors (salaries)	\$39,713	-	\$39,713
Program Management (salaries)	\$29,040	-	\$29,040
Data & Evaluation (salaries)	\$7,904	-	\$7,904
Supplies & Uniforms	\$3,800	-	\$3,800
Indirect-Accounting & Overhead	\$10,000	-	\$10,000
TOTAL	\$90,457	\$83,142	\$173,599

4 Program Outcomes

The initial goals of the Pit Stop Program were both to provide a safe, dignified place to use the restroom for persons experiencing homelessness and to alleviate some of the issues related to lack of access to restrooms in the surrounding neighborhood. To measure the success in meeting these two goals, the Pit Stop monitors collected daily data on use of the facility and recorded information shared by customers and businesses on their experiences with the Pit Stop. A summary of the outcomes from this effort is detailed below.

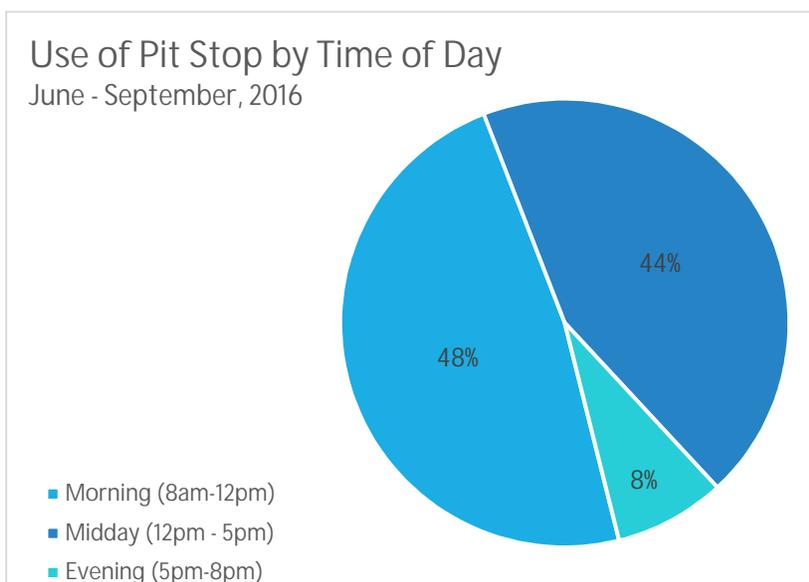
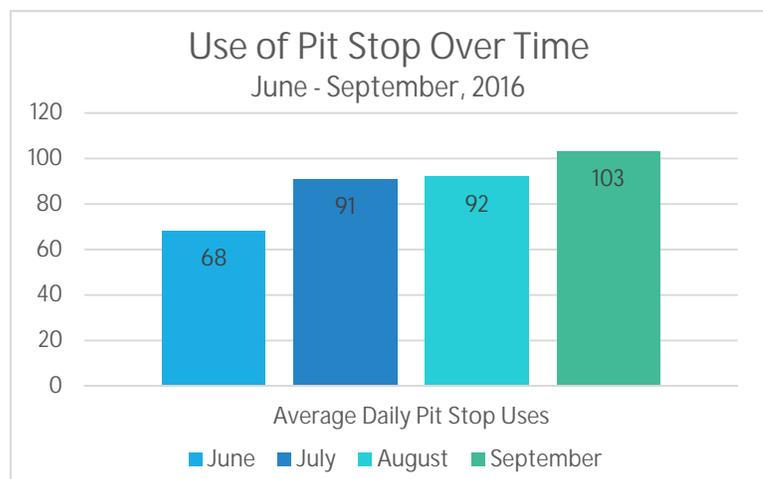
4.1 Usage Data

	Restroom Use			Needle Disposal	Doggie Bags
	Male	Female	ADA		
June	433	208	42	3	36
July	1,767	963	75	201	48
August	1,624	1,011	123	427	112
September	1,768	1,330	-	18	99
Total	5,592	3,512	240	649	295

Over the course of the first three and a half months of operation (the Pit Stop was opened half of June), there were 9,344 uses of the Pit Stop facility, 649 used needles collected and 295 dog waste bags distributed.

Almost 60% of the uses of the Pit Stop were in the men’s restroom, and approximately 38% of the uses were in the women’s restroom. The ADA restroom was available for anyone, regardless of gender or disability status, but, due to maintenance issues, was unavailable for much of the month of September.

Use of the Pit Stop has increased steadily since opening, with an average daily use of 68 in June and 103 in September. While the Pit Stop was open daily from 8am to 6pm, the most popular time for using the Pit Stop was in the mornings, from opening at 8 am until approximately noon. It had been expected that the late afternoon hours would be the most popular times, in that Friendship Park closes around 2:30 pm on weekdays. In addition to more frequent use in the earlier parts of the day, usage on the weekends also was almost twice that of average daily use on the weekdays. Average daily use on weekdays was approximately 72 uses per day, while average daily use on weekends was approximately 143 uses per day.



Average daily use on weekdays:
72 uses

Average daily use on weekends:
143 uses

In addition to data on overall usage, the Pit Stop monitors collected data on where customers travel from to use the Pit Stop. This information was collected via conversations with users, and, therefore, does not reflect the total users of the Pit Stop. In general, it appears that the users of the Pit Stop are “local” to the area – e.g. staying near the Pit Stop or accessing a service near the Pit Stop. It does not appear that the Pit Stop is attracting people from outside the immediate surrounding areas. From a preliminary evaluation by Financial, Analytical, and Strategic Services for Nonprofits and Government Agencies (FAS), the operator of the Pit Stop:

In interviews conducted with the monitors in August, the monitors said they were now familiar with the names and faces of the homeless in the area, and their sense was that almost all of the users of the facility were homeless individuals who stayed overnight in the River District. Between 9/28/2016 and 10/2/2016 (a 4-day time period) the monitors asked each user of the facility “where they were staying.” The customers responded whether they were staying in the area or not. Our data shows that during that time period there were 469 uses. Out of the 469, 6 individuals (1.2%) responded that they were not from the area; those who reported they were not from the area were then asked what brought them to the area. Responses were: 1 – in the area to go to Loaves & Fishes, 2 – unknown/no response, 1 – individual working in the area, 1- individual passing through and 1 – in the area to serve the homeless. If we take away those who reported that they were in the area for work, the number who were not from the area was under 1%.

4.2 Customer Input

The monitors regularly engage customers on their impressions of the program, unmet needs and other issues they wish to share. These comments are very telling of the value of the Pit Stop to unsheltered homeless people in the River District. The comments are wide and varied, but the vast majority are positive, thanking the monitors for their work and appreciative of the services available.

“Thanks for all the good work you are doing to keep the community clean.” June 28, 2016

“Good job! The place is so clean and fresh. Thank you for being here.” July 1, 2016

“I don’t know what I would do without the Pit Stop.” August 15, 2016

“Thank you, it’s very nice for the City to have these units for everyone.” Sept. 7, 2016

4.3 Community Input

In addition to seeking the input of the people using the Pit Stop (the majority of whom are homeless), the Pit Stop monitors and management staff have also reached out actively to surrounding businesses to get their input on the impacts of the Pit Stop. While there is no “baseline” data regarding the conditions in the community before Pit Stop, the anecdotal input from the businesses offers some subjective measures of the broader community value of the Pit Stop.

To date, FAS has spoken with multiple non-profit organizations in the area (most which serve people experiencing homelessness); all have given very positive feedback and support. Additional comments from owners and operators of businesses in the area found a much more skeptical view of the program. Some of the comments from nearby residents and businesses include (paraphrased):

“Thank you for being a positive influence in the neighborhood and for keeping the block clean.” Residents from Quinn Cottages

“I’m not sold on the concept. Not operating 24 hours a day seems pointless. My business opens early in the morning, and I am still picking up feces and trash that are left during the night.” Business Operator

“I have seen less litter, fewer feces and urine smell on the street and on private property, and there has been a drastic change from what I was seeing a year ago. The homeless are not as much of an intrusion as they were, which is great. [When asked if they would recommend this service to other districts/business owners]: Yes, especially the way that the monitors are acting and the rapport and interaction I’ve seen between the pit stop monitors and the homeless.” Business Owner

“I would have loved to tell you that it is working, but unfortunately it is not. Our building / property is still being used for a bathroom designation. I have witnessed bushes on McCormack street being used for a bathroom. People would rather wait in line for ten minutes (at a nearby public building) instead of walking the half a block to use the portable restroom. I have witnessed buildings on the corner of North C and Ahern being used for a bathroom, when they can clearly see the restroom a block away.” Business Operator

“[I am] happy that the program is around. Since the program has been around, [I] no longer finds feces around the building.” Operator of Social Service Program

“As a property owner of several parcels in the River District, we have not seen much of a change in the problems we have with the homeless. I’m not against the pit stop operation but as I said we still have the same problems.” Property Owner

“[I am] glad to hear what Pit Stop monitors are doing to help keep this entire area clean.” Operator of Social Service Program

5 Lessons Learned

The six-month pilot period of the Pit Stop has given the City a better understanding of the partnerships necessary should the program be continued or expanded. The presence of monitors ensures that the public restrooms are clean and safe, and the monitors can also be good stewards of the larger homeless system of care for those most in need. However, while the value to the clients is clear, it is not as clear that the Pit Stop addressed the community impacts of unsheltered homelessness as originally hoped. Additionally, while using City Parks staff to maintain and transport the facility was manageable for the pilot, it is not a sustainable approach for an on-going program.

If the Pit Stop Attended Restroom program is extended or expanded, the City should seek partnerships in the community to both maintain and transport the restroom unit and provide monitor staffing and oversight. Given the City’s experience with the pilot and additional research on potential local vendors, it is unlikely both of these roles will be found with one organization. The City should additionally look for opportunities to foster new relationships, especially with organizations who seek to use the Pit Stop as a transitional employment program for people experiencing homelessness.