

# TORONTO STAFF REPORT

---

May 16, 2006

To: Planning and Transportation Committee

From: Lenna Bradburn, Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards

Subject: Analysis of the City's Capabilities to Address Graffiti

Purpose:

To provide an analysis as to whether graffiti has increased throughout the City, and what measures the City has, and the capacity of staff to respond to complaints for the removal of graffiti from public spaces.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications arising from the adoption of this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

Background:

At its meeting on May 1, 2006, the Planning and Transportation Committee, in response to the recommendations outlined in Report 3, Clause 3 entitled, "Graffiti Transformation Investment Program: 2006 Recommendations", from the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning (April 6, 2006) requested the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards Division, to report to the Planning and Transportation Committee for its June 1, 2006 meeting:

- (a) An analysis as to whether graffiti has increased throughout the City, and the capacity of staff to respond to complaints; and
- (b) What measures the City has and the capacity for the removal of graffiti from public spaces.

Graffiti has been identified by many jurisdictions across North America as being a nuisance that can adversely affect property values, business opportunities and the enjoyment of life. The presence of graffiti on property has a detrimental impact on the use and enjoyment of property in the vicinity of the “graffitied property” and leads to urban blight.

The presence of graffiti results in additional graffiti on the property and in other properties becoming the target of graffiti, unless the graffiti is quickly removed from public and private property.

The presence of graffiti is inconsistent with the City’s property maintenance goals and standards for preserving the City’s public assets and fostering the current and future economic, social and environmental well-being of the municipality.

Graffiti is counterproductive to Council’s goals of a “Clean and Beautiful City.” It has become the norm for people to see graffiti in the most common of public places in Toronto. Over the past few years, many City divisions have implemented programmes in an attempt to eradicate graffiti.

#### Comments:

In order to assess whether the incidences of graffiti has increased throughout the City, comments and input were requested from a number of sources, including Facilities and Real Estate (F&RE), Transportation, Toronto Parking Authority (TPA), and Municipal Licensing and Standards (ML&S). Other interested stakeholders contacted include the Toronto Police Service (TPS) and Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC).

In consultation with these groups, there was no consensus on whether the incidences of graffiti have increased throughout the City. This may be due to many factors, including the fact that quantitative data has not been kept, and that some groups base their graffiti abatement work on the receipt of complaints, while others maintain a proactive approach. However, it was generally agreed upon that, although graffiti abatement is currently under control, it is far from being eradicated. In fact, removal of graffiti from one area forces it to another location; this becomes a vicious cycle. Maintaining the status quo on graffiti removal requires a degree of vigilance; this becomes difficult when other priorities demand attention.

Once an area of graffiti has been identified, steps are taken to remove it. This process varies with the different City divisions and stakeholder groups. However, once identified, graffiti is generally removed within 24-72 hours, sometimes even sooner if it is located within priority neighbourhoods or targets specific communities.

#### Toronto Police Service

Depending on the location of the graffiti, the TPS may refer the issue to the appropriate City division for resolution. Their response to graffiti is reliant on community need, and its recognition for graffiti abatement. In the matter of hate graffiti, or graffiti targeting specific

communities, the TPS relies on graffiti removal specialists who offer their services gratis. In these instances, graffiti is removed in less than 24 hours. To date, the TPS estimate that they have addressed over 1.5 million square feet of graffiti within the City of Toronto.

#### Toronto Parking Authority

The TPA contracts out all major graffiti removal projects to graffiti removal companies. The TPA has an annual budget of \$100 000 dollars dedicated for graffiti and poster removal from its properties. It also has five dedicated cleaning crews, which regularly inspect its properties and deal with more manageable issues. The TPA is also considering anti-graffiti resistant coatings on its machines and using materials on its parking lots that may aid in graffiti removal.

#### Facilities and Real Estate

F&RE relies on other divisions to inform it of graffiti on its properties. Once an area has been identified, removal generally occurs within 24-48 hours. Depending on the scope of the removal, which former municipality the graffiti is located in and the collective bargaining agreements, removal is either done in-house with large projects contracted out, or all projects are contracted out exclusively.

#### Transportation

Transportation's South District has two dedicated trucks equipped with power washers and graffiti removal solvents and paints. Staff proactively identify and remove graffiti from public spaces (this includes hydro poles, sidewalks, bridges, city-owned street furniture, underpasses, and sound barriers) for immediate removal and cover-up. Transportation has recently acquired a golf cart equipped with solvents and paints to deal with graffiti on bridge pillars and areas accessible only via bike paths.

#### Municipal Licensing and Standards

ML&S deals with graffiti matters on private property. Once graffiti is identified, the property owner is issued a Notice of Violation requesting removal. ML&S staff engages a contractor to remove the graffiti if the property owner fails to comply. The cost of the removal is applied to the property owner's tax bill. Since the introduction of the Graffiti By-law in February 2005, 4,393 inspections have been carried out and 1,578 Notices of Violation have been issued to property owners. ML&S has reported that with the established Graffiti Abatement Strategy, involving education and awareness of the negative impact of graffiti within the community, they have been able to achieve a voluntary compliance rate of 85 per cent at locations and sites attended. It should be noted, however, that over time graffiti usually returns to these locations.

Of those consulted, many are equipped to remove graffiti on a small scale. Large-scale removals are normally contracted out to graffiti removal specialists. Transportation is the only division equipped to remove graffiti on any scale.

Graffiti removal continues to be a priority. Each agrees that the manner and resources available to them currently are sufficient. However, suggestions have been made to enhance graffiti abatement. The TPS suggested increased focus on an education and empowerment programme to enhance the awareness of graffiti as a form of vandalism and to promote a sense of civic pride in Toronto residents. Transportation commented that its time would be better utilized in graffiti removal if there was a city-wide co-ordinated graffiti identification unit. It is suggested that staff of such a unit would locate areas with graffiti and delegate responsibility to the appropriate division and district creating a more efficient response strategy.

Most graffiti is responded to on a complaint basis. Based on current staffing levels, an increase in staff resources would be required to establish a primarily proactive city-wide programme or existing staff resources assigned to other services would have to be reallocated.

Conclusions:

Over the past few years, graffiti removal and abatement has been identified to be a priority within the City of Toronto. Through consultations with divisions within the City of Toronto, and various stakeholders, there is no consensus as to whether or not graffiti has increased throughout the City. This may be due to many factors, including the fact that quantitative data has not been kept, and that some groups base their graffiti abatement work on the receipt of complaints while others maintain a proactive approach. Also, the City's mandate on graffiti abatement and the implementation of the Graffiti By-law may aid in increasing civic awareness of graffiti (that is, the frequency of graffiti itself may not have increased but people's awareness of its presence has increased).

The City responds to graffiti, primarily, on a complaint-initiated basis resulting in subsequent voluntary compliance, in-house removal or contracts with graffiti removal specialists.

Contact:

Frank Weinstock, Manager  
Policy and Business Planning Unit  
Municipal Licensing and Standards  
Tel: (416) 392-0404 Fax: (416) 397-5463  
Email: fweinst@toronto.ca

---

Lenna Bradburn  
Executive Director  
Municipal Licensing and Standards