

**LODI CITY COUNCIL
SHIRTSLEEVE SESSION
CARNEGIE FORUM, 305 WEST PINE STREET
TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 2015**

A. Roll Call by City Clerk

An Informal Informational Meeting ("Shirtsleeve" Session) of the Lodi City Council was held Tuesday, April 28, 2015, commencing at 7:00 a.m.

Present: Council Member Kuehne, Council Member Mounce, Council Member Nakanishi, and Mayor Johnson

Absent: Mayor Pro Tempore Chandler

Also Present: City Manager Schwabauer, City Attorney Magdich, and City Clerk Ferraiolo

NOTE: Council Members Kuehne and Nakanishi left the meeting at 8:07 a.m.

B. Topic(s)

B-1 Presentation and Discussion Regarding the Alarm Program and Ordinance (PD)

Police Chief Mark Helms introduced the subject matter regarding the alarm program and ordinance, stating that staff reported to Council two years ago that the Police Department spends the value of one full-time police officer responding to false alarm calls, and he estimated that over 90 percent of alarm calls are false. As a result of that meeting, staff researched the option of contracting with a vendor to monitor alarms for the City, which would cost in the range of \$40,000 to \$50,000; however, with staffing changes, the project stalled. Since that time, the volume of alarm calls has increased significantly, and staff will propose three alternatives to address the matter.

In response to Council Member Mounce, Chief Helms stated he was unsure if the lifetime permit would be eliminated and further explained that the current system is operated by volunteers who use an interface that was created in-house, which has been problematic. Police Management Analyst Paula O'Keefe added that only commercial businesses are required to pay an annual fee to renew an alarm permit, and that residential permits only need to be renewed if someone purchases a new alarm system or moves. In further response, Ms. O'Keefe stated residents typically receive notification from the City to update their personal information, but there is no renewal fee required.

Ms. O'Keefe provided a PowerPoint presentation regarding the alarm program. Specific topics of discussion included background, program overview, problems with false alarms, Police Department calls for service, alarm calls for service comparison, Police Department cost of response, Fire Department calls for service, Fire Department cost of response, three-year history of calls for service, obstacles, what other cities are doing, Manteca's alarm program, solutions, and recommendations.

In response to Mayor Johnson, Ms. O'Keefe stated that the department does not have paid staff to monitor the alarm system, which is why it is managed by a volunteer.

Council Member Mounce stated that, if a volunteer is able to manage the system, she was unsure why the department needs to hire someone to monitor the program. Chief Helms responded that the current system is antiquated and unreliable and that there is greater accountability with a paid employee monitoring the program, either on a full-time or part-time basis, as the program can be labor intensive at certain times.

In response to Council Member Mounce, Chief Helms explained that a verified alarm program

requires additional verification, other than the alarm itself, to determine if there is a problem at the location, such as a listening device to pick up the sound of breaking glass or a call from a neighbor. Chief Helms further explained that an alarm company manages commercial and residential alarm systems and, after an alarm is triggered, the company is responsible for determining the validity of the alarm and whether or not the Police Department should be notified. The Police Department is hoping to close that gap in order to reduce the number of false alarms that are dispatched to the Police Department.

In response to Council Member Mounce, City Manager Schwabauer stated that buyers should be mindful of whom they contract with to monitor their alarm system because the City does not regulate the contractual relationship between the individual and the company. A qualified company typically takes responsibility for equipment failures that cause false alarms. Council Member Mounce suggested that the ordinance include an appeal process to allow the City to pursue fines against an alarm company, instead of the property owner, if it is responsible for faulty equipment. Chief Helms assured that the City is not interested in punishing individuals who have issues with their alarm companies or billing violators as a revenue source, stating the goals are to educate citizens on properly managing their alarm systems and to decrease the number of false alarm calls.

In response to Council Member Mounce, Mr. Schwabauer stated staff will research other communities to see how they address the contractual relationship between property owners and alarm companies and the burden placed on property owners when companies do not take responsibility for their equipment.

In response to Council Member Kuehne, Ms. O'Keefe stated that the sample Manteca alarm program does not include a permit fee for an alarm; however, if an alarm sounds and there is no permit on file with the department, the property owner will be fined.

Council Member Kuehne stated he was supportive of the option to purchase a computer-aided design interface and contract with a company to manage the program externally with a 50/50 split. He further requested information regarding the verification process, to which Ms. O'Keefe explained that when an alarm is triggered, the alarm company will contact the property owner. If they receive no response, they will reach out to the numbers on the contact list on file and ultimately contact the Police Department if no one can be reached to verify the situation.

Dana Buck with Alamo Alarm Company further explained that his company uses the enhanced call verification process on all alarm calls. The first call is placed to the property owner and, if no one answers, the company calls the numbers on the list until someone is reached. That individual is given a choice to check the site or have the Police Department dispatched. Typically, the property owner or those on the call list know the issues associated with the home and the system to determine which course of action to take.

Mr. Schwabauer explained that the challenge for the Police Department is it receives over 2,000 calls a year and 90 percent of the calls are for false alarms. Officers spend time responding to these calls instead of promoting public safety. Many of the false alarms are driven by user error, and he stated the desire is that users contract with reputable alarm companies who would be the first level of response before dispatching an officer. He stated the verification process includes the alarm company making those initial calls and determination before sending an officer to respond and that most ordinances urge people in that direction.

Council Member Mounce stated she was in support of educating users first before penalizing them and identifying a solution among those who are causing the most significant problems. Chief Helms stated that the Department provides education to property owners on false alarms, equipment issues, and reputable companies, but there is a segment of the population that purchases audible alarms off the shelf and self-installs the equipment.

Mayor Johnson suggested that a requirement be included in the ordinance that alarm purchasers must contract with a qualified alarm company from an established list in order to reduce the number of self-installed alarms. Mayor Johnson further stated he was not in favor of Manteca's

practice of placing liens on properties for non-payment of citations.

In response to Council Member Kuehne, Ms. O'Keefe explained that the alarm program operates on a six-month cycle, the first two false alarm calls are free, and the third false alarm call is a \$50 fine.

Council Member Mounce stated she was opposed to hiring an outside contractor to handle the program because the City would be unable to control customer service and instead she supported the in-house solution. Chief Helms stated that the vendors in this area have a strong reputation in public safety and do very well managing programs, billing, recovering costs, and reducing false alarm calls. To handle the program in-house, Chief Helms stated the Department would need to hire employees and the program would remain behind current practices.

Council Member Nakanishi expressed support for outsourcing the service because he does not wish to increase the number of City employees and opposition to placing liens on properties for non-payment. He believed, as an owner of an alarm system, it is worthwhile for the Police to respond, regardless if it was a real or false alarm, and that the property owner should pay for the Police to be dispatched. He stated that education will be accomplished through fee waivers on first false alarm calls and fines on subsequent false alarm calls.

In response to Mayor Johnson, Mr. Schwabauer stated that a false alarm ordinance can mandate that alarm companies call the property owner for confirmation and security code, in which case an officer would not be dispatched to the scene. The ordinance can also include certain scenarios on when to fine individuals for false alarms and when to waive fines.

Ed Miller questioned why staff had no clear estimate on the amount of revenue lost to the City, to which Ms. O'Keefe responded that staff knows how much the program is costing the City; however, it does not know how much it is recovering because of the six-month cycle that does not cross fiscal year lines, the first two free false alarm calls, and the use of a collection agency to attempt recovery of non-payments. Mr. Miller summarized the Department's goal of reducing false alarm calls to zero and ensuring the program pays for itself, stating that he believed those who cause the problem should pay the cost. In regard to outsourcing the alarm program, he stated the City must still monitor the firm to ensure it is providing adequate service.

Jon Sargent with the Security Industry Alarm Coalition stated he has worked with jurisdictions for 12 years on reducing false alarms and has written ordinances in California on the subject. He stated he had an opportunity to review Lodi's draft ordinance and commented that it is a model ordinance, includes best practices, and if enforced would likely show an 80 percent reduction in false alarms. He suggested that the Police and Fire alarm ordinances not be combined, but that the program be run together successfully, and suggested that the City outsource this service to a company on the approved list through the False Alarm Reduction Association. These organizations have a 90 percent collection rate and work well with alarm companies. Mr. Sargent stated that alarm companies are regulated and licensed by the state and that, if a consumer has an issue with an alarm company, complaints can be filed with and resolved by the State of California. He strongly encouraged the City include an enhanced call verification requirement in the ordinance, but suggested against pure verified response, which means that a crime in progress must be verified before the Police Department is dispatched by either contracting with a private security guard company or checking the premises themselves.

Dan Stocking with PM AM Corporation explained that his firm manages false alarm programs and stated he agrees that the draft ordinance is consistent with other communities' programs. He suggested an education process for users in which first-time false alarm violations require the property owner to take an online class to educate them on reducing future false alarms or include informational fliers in the utility bill to educate individuals who buy off-the-shelf alarms that they need a permit. Further, Mr. Stocking stated his firm has an educational CD on how to prevent false alarms and suggested Police Officers visit one or two high-volume violators a month to provide them with the CD and further educate them. Those who routinely have false alarms should be held financially responsible; however, he strongly believed in educating people up front so they do not have the opportunity to have false alarms. With the steady increase in the number

of alarm users and "smart" homes, he believed it was prudent to have an ordinance in place to identify the issues and handle them on a professional basis.

Dana Buck with Alamo Alarm Company agreed that the draft ordinance includes best practices and that it should include enhanced call verification, which will greatly assist in decreasing the number of false alarms. Mr. Buck stated that some companies subcontract alarm monitoring in order to set their own policy, but with an ordinance, all of the companies would have to comply with the City's regulations and make more than one phone call when verifying an alarm. He stated that all alarm companies offer a full-service program or warranty on equipment, but not all users want to spend the extra money for that service. Additionally, some alarm companies take over old equipment or monitor a different company's system and they do not want to pay for repairs. He suggested that companies who do this should be fined or be placed on a non-response list. Mr. Buck stated that 10 percent of alarm users represent 90 percent of the problem and that this ordinance will help toward decreasing the false alarms and alarm self-installations.

Gene Stoddart, City of Lodi Fire Marshal, expressed support for the ordinance, stating it will go a long way toward reducing the number of false alarm calls, thereby, freeing firefighters to respond to valid calls and reducing the strain on the fire apparatus.

Alex Aliferas expressed support for outsourcing the alarm program, looking at efficiencies, and education awareness on false alarms and self-installation of alarms.

Council Member Mounce expressed concern that many of the audience members indicated they reviewed the draft ordinance, yet it was not provided to Council. City Attorney Magdich stated there is a current ordinance on the books and that her office only recently began its review of the draft ordinance to compare it to the proposals and review language; the draft ordinance has not been circulated to her knowledge. Council Member Mounce stressed that Council is the decision-maker on this issue and must ensure the ordinance suits Lodi and its citizens, because a one-size-fits-all approach is not wise. She further stated she was strongly supportive of an education component because she felt that many citizens were unaware that they need a permit to have an alarm.

C. Comments by Public on Non-Agenda Items

None.

D. Adjournment

No action was taken by the City Council. The meeting was adjourned at 8:12 a.m.

ATTEST:

Jennifer M. Ferraiolo
City Clerk