

**CITY OF ALBANY
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: 09/02/08

Reviewed by: BP

SUBJECT: Recruitment of a Temporary, Part-time Community Engagement Specialist

REPORT BY: Mike McQuiston, Police Chief
Marc McGinn, Fire Chief
Beth Pollard, City Administrator

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Authorize the City Administrator to proceed with recruitment and hiring of a temporary, part-time Community Engagement Specialist to assist in neighborhood based community organizing.

BACKGROUND

The Loma Prieta earthquake of 1989 raised community awareness of the importance of disaster planning, and spurred a widespread interest in community preparedness and organizing. One such group of Albany residents started a grassroots level disaster preparedness organizing effort, which became the very successful Albany Earthquake Preparedness Program (EQPP), later renamed as the Albany Local Emergency Response Teams (ALERT) program.

During the 1990's, the City of Albany employed a local Ph.D. candidate part-time to perform as a Disaster Preparedness Coordinator and helped the community organizers reach a peak in 1997 with 70% of the city (125 residential blocks) organized and prepared to respond to a community wide emergency. In addition to increased levels of preparedness, these organized residential blocks also benefited from the effect of having built a "neighborhood of relationships." Organized blocks also facilitated the quick and easy dissemination of non-emergency information (i.e. crime prevention presentations).

Unfortunately, public interest in disaster preparedness typically wanes as time passes and the immediacy of potential disaster fades. Following the departure of the part-time Disaster Preparedness Coordinator, community interest diminished, despite emergency response training support from Fire Department personnel. By the spring of 2007, the number of organized blocks in Albany had dwindled to thirty-eight.

The Albany Disaster Policy Advisory Group (DPAG) began aggressively addressing the issue of neighborhood preparedness with the appointment of Vice-Mayor Atkinson as the

Chair of this group; however, the ideas and efforts that have been put forth have not had a significant impact on the number of community members willing to participate in this type of program. Today, approximately forty residential blocks are organized and a vacuum exists where neighborhood organizing used to take place.

DISCUSSION

The Police Chief has begun planning to initiate a formal Neighborhood Watch program in the City of Albany to address the goal of establishing a citywide residential crime prevention effort however, he is concerned that the community apathy displayed regarding previous efforts to organize neighborhoods might undermine this program goal. Meanwhile, the fire department staff remains frustrated in their disaster preparedness efforts having an impact on the number of organized neighborhoods.

Staff (including the Fire Chief, Police Chief and City Administrator) has studied the problem and has consulted with City of Oakland Neighborhood Services Manager Claudia Albano. Ms. Albano has extensive experience in community social organizing and teaches Community Organizing as a faculty member of the UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare.

After several discussions and meetings with Ms. Albano, staff has come to believe that door-to-door, community engagement, performed by a talented, motivated individual with an interest and education in community organizing may be the best solution to the lack of community interest in organizing for self-sufficiency during a large scale emergency. Police and fire field personnel are not equipped to perform this role and the limitations inherent in government prohibit effective community organizing by anyone other than a dedicated "community engagement specialist."

A specially trained employee can quickly identify neighborhood issues around which residents are motivated to organize. The initial concerns will not necessarily, or even likely, be disaster preparedness. However, by encouraging and nurturing small social networks, quality of life in the neighborhoods improves, disaster preparedness, crime prevention, and other "value added" effects of community empowerment come to pass, and the identification and development of local leaders takes place.

Staff recommends immediately commencing recruitment of candidates for this position. Potential applicants include graduate students or others with a background in community organizing. The position would work approximately 20 hours per week, primarily late afternoon/evenings and weekends.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The 2008/2009 police department budget contains funding for a Police Dispatcher position that is currently vacant. By leveraging the time delay between the position authorization and the time anticipated to hire a suitable candidate, sufficient funds should be available to support the proposed part-time, temporary position for the 2008-09 fiscal year. A

somewhat comparable position at the City of Hercules was advertised at between \$24.51 and \$28.42 per hour.

Attachments:

Draft Job Description