

## **Assessment of the City of Seattle’s Anti-Graffiti Efforts: Best Practices and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

#### **Purpose and scope**

We conducted this performance audit of the City of Seattle’s (City) anti-graffiti efforts at the request of Seattle City Councilmembers Tim Burgess and Tom Rasmussen. Specifically, they asked us to examine how the City handles graffiti removal, prosecution of offenders, and public education efforts to discourage graffiti and litter. They requested this audit based on feedback from citizens who expressed concern about not feeling safe in their neighborhoods, and their concerns about “street disorder” in Seattle. According to recent academic studies, there is a connection between visible environmental disorder and higher rates of crime.

We were asked to compare Seattle’s efforts to best practices around the country in seven areas:

1. The sufficiency of current city ordinances and laws;
2. The frequency of arrest and prosecution of offenders and rates of re-offending;
3. Coordination of clean-up between different city departments;
4. Education of local residents and business owners;
5. City programs to encourage community involvement;
6. The effectiveness of private sector programs; and
7. Innovative efforts from other cities that Seattle might replicate.

#### **Methodology**

To answer these questions, we reviewed City ordinances and laws, interviewed officials from multiple City departments; reviewed relevant City policies, procedures and previous studies; rode-along with Seattle Public Utilities’ (SPU’s) Graffiti Rangers to observe their work, met with community representatives, attended a regional anti-graffiti conference, conducted a stakeholders meeting based on the logic model, performed a physical inventory of four geographic areas in Seattle; created, implemented and analyzed the results of an electronic survey that was sent to a broad range of community participants; asked SPU to create density maps of where graffiti incidents occurred in the City in 2009; researched best practices from other jurisdictions, non-profit organizations and academic research; and traced a sample of SPU Graffiti Hotline calls to verify abatement response times.

We conducted our work between February and May 2010, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

## **Acknowledgements**

We were able to produce this audit report in a relatively short timeframe due to the great cooperation that we received from City departments and through some creative collaboration with experts in the field and community stakeholders. So we would like to extend our thanks to:

- City staff contacts in Seattle Public Utilities, Seattle Parks and Recreation, the Seattle Police Department, the City Attorney’s Office, and the Seattle Department of Transportation;
- Community volunteers including Mike Peringer of Art Works and Laine Ross of Seattle Paint Out;
- Business Improvement Area representatives;
- Key contacts from other jurisdictions including Marcia Dennis and Detective Matt Miller from Portland, who hosted seven City of Seattle staff at their Portland Graffiti Summit, and Constable Valerie Spicer, from Vancouver B.C.
- Our research partners including Russ Lidman Ph.D., and Danielle Potter from Seattle University’s Institute of Public Service, Melissa Lewis Ph.D., University of Washington Center for the Study of Health and Risk Behaviors, and Deborah Lamm Weisel, Ph.D. North Carolina State University Public Safety Leadership Initiative.

## **Background - What is Graffiti?**

### **How graffiti is legally defined in the City of Seattle**

While there is much debate over whether graffiti has artistic merit and should be termed “street art,” the key concept in the legal definition is permission. Writing, painting, or drawing on public or private property without the owner’s permission is not permitted under the law in the City of Seattle. Specifically, Seattle Municipal Code 12A.08.020 (Property destruction) states that a person is guilty of property destruction if he or she:

1. Intentionally damages the property of another; or
2. Writes, paints or draws any inscription, figure or mark of any type on any public or private building or other structure or any real or personal property owned by another person.

### **Responsibilities of private property owners**

In addition to the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) referenced above, the City of Seattle also has a Graffiti Nuisance Code – SMC 10.07. Under this code, private property owners are held responsible for cleaning up graffiti on their own property. Private property owners who have graffiti on their property that has been reported to the City receive an informational letter from the City describing the nature and location of the graffiti and requesting that the graffiti be removed promptly. By law, the property owner must abate (clean and remove) the graffiti within

10 calendar days of receipt of the letter (except hate or gang graffiti must be removed within 48 hours). Property owners unable to abate the graffiti on their property may sign a Permission and Release form and request help from the City to obtain materials and volunteer assistance for this purpose. See Appendix B for a description of the private property owner’s duties, responsibilities and available resources.

### **Graffiti – Main types and what motivates graffiti vandals**

A 2002 graffiti study completed by the U.S. Department of Justice describes 6 types of graffiti and the different motives associated with each type. Chart I below summarizes this information.

**Chart I.**

<b>Type of Graffiti</b>	<b>Features</b>	<b>Motives</b>
<b>Gang</b>	Gang name or symbol, including hand signs Gang member name(s) or nickname(s), or sometimes a roll-call list of members Numbers Distinctive, stylized alphabets Key visible locations Enemy names and symbols, or allies’ names	Mark turf Threaten violence Boast of achievements Honor the slain Insult/taunt other gangs
<b>Common Tag</b>	High volume, accessible locations High-visibility, hard-to-reach locations May be stylized but simple name or nickname tag or symbols Tenacious (keep retagging)	Notoriety or prestige Defiance of authority
<b>Artistic Tag</b>	Colorful or complex pictures known as masterpieces or pieces	Artistic Prestige or recognition
<b>Conventional Graffiti: Spontaneous</b>	Sporadic episodes or isolated incidents	Play Rite of passage Excitement Impulsive
<b>Conventional Graffiti: Malicious or Vindictive</b>	Sporadic, isolated or systematic incidents	Anger Boredom Resentment Failure Despair
<b>Ideological</b>	Offensive content or symbols Racial, ethnic or religious slurs Specific targets, such as synagogues Highly legible Slogans	Anger Hate Political Hostility Defiance

### **Graffiti in Seattle – Where is it and what type is it?**

As part of our fieldwork, on May 18, 2010 we conducted a systematic, single-day, physical count of graffiti in four Seattle areas of approximately equal size (.7 mile) using a customized version of Keep America Beautiful’s Community Appearance Index.

During this count, we found 556 instances of graffiti among the four areas studied. Of these, 551 were “common tags” and five appeared to be gang graffiti.

We did not find any instances of what could be called artistic tagging (“street art”), nor did we find any instances of ideological graffiti.

### **Other physical inventory results**

We found that public property was nearly twice as commonly tagged as private property, with traffic/street signs, utility poles, and pay stations as common targets for tagging.

### **Chart II Physical Inventory Results: Nearly Twice As Much Graffiti on Public as on Private Property**

### **Chart III Physical Inventory Results: What Gets Tagged?**

In addition to our physical inventory count, we asked SPU to create GIS (Geographic Information System) maps of graffiti abated in 2009 by three major city departments: SPU, the Seattle Department of Transportation, and the Department of Parks and Recreation. We chose these three departments because they are responsible for the majority of the City’s graffiti abatement on public property. There are six maps altogether, representing different combinations of data, which can be found in Appendix C.

The most comprehensive map of Seattle graffiti hotspots is in Appendix C-3 of this report. This map contains data from the three departments for all graffiti they abated in 2009. This includes both reported graffiti-- graffiti that has been reported to the SPU Graffiti Hotline--and discovered graffiti--graffiti that city employees find in the course of their work, and abate or schedule for future abatement.

## **Graffiti - Who Does It?**

### **Regional Profile of Graffiti Vandalism**

Although the City of Seattle does not routinely analyze data related to the perpetrators of graffiti

in Seattle, some inference can be made about who creates graffiti from the data on graffiti vandalism that has been collected by Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

### **Portland, Oregon**

The Portland Police Department provided the following statistics about the graffiti that occurs in Portland:

- Tagger (80%)
- Gang (15%)
- Communicative/Political (3%)
- Hate (1%)
- Art (1%)

In addition, Portland’s graffiti detective identified, based on his following characteristics among “taggers” in the Portland area:

- 18 to 35 years old
- Generally Caucasian males
- Gang graffiti committed by juveniles
- Educated
- Computer literate
- Often organized into small groups, called “crews”
- View “ tagging” as extreme sport or game
- Most not discouraged by police contact
- Often feel there are no consequences for their actions
- No concern for victims
- Addictive personalities
- Chemical dependency
- Prone to violent behavior (carry weapons)



Source: Portland Police Department

### **Vancouver, B.C.**

A constable within the Vancouver Police Department conducted an in-depth study of local graffiti vandals. Her findings about Vancouver’s graffiti subculture include:

- It has internal ethics and guidelines that are similar to graffiti sub-cultures elsewhere in Canada and in the United States.
- Graffiti is learned first as a viewer, and then, the typical progression for viewers who move on is: young tagger (“toy”), accomplice (“crew member”), and finally, full participant (“king”).
- Hierarchical norms exist in the subculture. For example, young taggers tag to gain notoriety and acceptance, and are only permitted to tag in certain locations by taggers with more experience and status. If a young tagger writes outside of these acceptable locations his tags may be crossed out and labeled “toy” by more experienced taggers.

- Taggers who create larger more intricate “pieces” receive recognition in the subculture as “Kings”.
- There is evidence that graffiti vandals known as “Kings” in Vancouver travel to other cities to gain additional recognition (called “going on tour”).

The Vancouver Graffiti Suspect Dataset was created to provide more detailed information about the City’s graffiti vandals. It contained information on over 500 graffiti suspects. Its findings include:

- Graffiti suspects in Vancouver share certain consistent traits:
  - Caucasian males ages 16-24
  - Frequent alcohol and marijuana use is common
  - Anti-establishment mentality
  - May have learning disabilities and/or conduct disorders
- There were 27 suspects who had five or more graffiti-related contacts with the Vancouver Police. Among this group of persistent offenders:
  - 63 percent have police contacts related to violent offences
  - 29 percent have five or more criminal charges
  - 23 percent have a drug or alcohol related offence as their first offence

### **National Profile**

Some information, based on arrest data from 17 cities across the nation, has been compiled by the non-profit organization Keep America Beautiful. Based on their analysis, Keep America Beautiful has concluded that:

- Nationally:
  - About 78-80 percent of graffiti is "tagger" graffiti.
  - Another 5 percent are "pieces," or large visuals.
  - Gang graffiti makes up about 10 percent of graffiti.
  - The remaining 5-7 percent includes hate, message (e.g., Class of '09), political, and artistic graffiti.
- Arrest data from 17 major cities shows that 50 to 70 percent of all street-level graffiti is created by suburban adolescents, predominately males between the ages of 12 and 19.
- There are four primary motivating factors for graffiti vandalism: fame, rebellion, self-expression, and power.

### **Seattle**

Based on our analysis of 2007 and 2009 data on persons charged with graffiti vandalism in the City of Seattle, we found the following:

- Of the 18 offenders whose cases were closed in 2009:
  - 17 (94 percent) were male
  - 13 (72 percent) were white, 3 (17 percent) were black, 1 (5.5 percent) was Asian, and 1 (5.5 percent) was of unknown ethnicity
  - Their median age was 24 (ranging from 20 – 34 years old)

- Of the 40 offenders charged in 2007:
  - 23 (57 percent) had other criminal charges
    - 8 with charges before the 2007 charge
    - 5 with charges after the 2007 charge
    - 10 with charges both before and after the 2007 charge
  - 21 of the cases were closed as of May 2010, 12 were open but the defendants had suspended sentences, and 7 individuals had warrants out for their arrests

For the 23 out of 40 offenders who had criminal charges in addition to a 2007 graffiti vandalism charge, these charges included, among other things: property destruction-graffiti, assault, theft, obstructing an officer, carrying a concealed weapon, criminal trespass, reckless endangerment, harassment, and violation of a domestic violence protection order.

### **Graffiti - Who does it Impact?**

In order to assess how graffiti impacts Seattle residents, we interviewed representatives of community business organizations, conducted a focus session with major stakeholders who are either impacted by graffiti or have responsibility for cleaning it up, and sent an electronic survey to a list of over 300 individuals and organizations including district councils, neighborhood groups, local business organizations, and community blogs.

#### **Survey Responses**

The survey was also mentioned in media outlets including KOMO, the Stranger, and KUOW. Altogether, we received 913 responses. Not all of the respondents answered all of the questions. There was a wide geographic distribution of responses throughout the Seattle region (see Appendix D for distribution of responses by zip code).

The results about whether graffiti is a problem for respondents were mixed and appeared to reflect whether respondents had been victims of graffiti.

#### **Chart IV Do Survey Respondents Consider Graffiti a Problem?**

As Chart IV shows, 39 percent of survey respondents do not believe graffiti is a problem, while 40 percent categorize it as a medium to very big problem.

These results appear to reflect how often respondents have been the victim of graffiti (see Chart V below): 37 percent have never been victims, while 27 percent have been victimized anywhere from weekly or daily to several times a year.

#### **Chart V How Often Were Survey Respondents Victims of Graffiti?**

#### **Opinions of Major Stakeholders**

To obtain input from major stakeholders, we conducted a focus session to gather information on their perspectives. There were 28 participants, of whom:

- 15 were City of Seattle staff responsible for responding to graffiti
- 4 were representatives of community and business organizations
- 2 were other public agency staff
- 1 worked for King County
- 1 worked for an elected official and
- 5 did not identify themselves with any of these categories.

During this session, we used the logic model and anonymous, electronic voting to help us obtain answers to the following questions, which are provided below with the corresponding responses from the stakeholders:



**Chart VI – Do Major Stakeholders Consider Graffiti a Problem?**

**Chart VII: What do Major Stakeholders Believe Best Describes the Problem?**

**Chart VIII: What local Condition, Related to Anti-Graffiti Efforts, do Major Stakeholders Believe the City Has the Most Ability to Influence?**

**Graffiti - What Does Graffiti Cost?**

**Costs to private property owners**

To estimate the costs that private property owners in the City of Seattle are spending per year on graffiti abatement, we used data from our online survey. Four hundred and ninety-five people answered our survey's cost question. Of these:

- 43% (211) replied that they had spent zero dollars abating graffiti
- 57% (284) stated that they had spent some amount on graffiti abatement, from “unknown” to tens of thousands of dollars

The average cost per person for the 284 who responded that they had spent something on graffiti abatement was \$817 per year, with a median cost of \$200 per person per year.

**City of Seattle Costs**

We asked nine City departments how much they spent in 2009 on graffiti abatement on their property, including direct labor costs and the cost of administrative support, equipment, and materials. In total, the City of Seattle spent approximately \$1.8 million dollars abating graffiti from public property in 2009. However, the \$1.8 million figure does not include hidden costs such as:

1. The opportunity cost of having City painters and maintenance workers abate graffiti rather than work on other needed maintenance and repair projects. According to the Department of Parks and Recreation’s Paint Crew Chief: “Graffiti has become our maintenance. We use three Parks paint crew staff full time every day for this purpose, which is a third of our paint staff.”
2. The potential future cost involved in restoring vandalized property to its original condition. According to one City Paint Shop manager, their unit’s abatement efforts often consist only of “touching up” surfaces that have been vandalized (i.e., they only paint over the graffiti portion). As a result, the manager noted that:

“Touch-up of these surfaces may leave behind demarcation lines that appear as rectangles or squares in the middle of a wall. This attracts additional tagging over these areas. At some point, the walls need to be totally repainted. This is a hidden cost of the vandalism as it does not happen during the original occurrence but sometime after.”

3. Damage done to historic buildings, which can be complicated, expensive and/or impossible to restore.

### **What Prevents Graffiti? Lessons Learned from Other Jurisdictions**

During our research of other jurisdictions, we identified three jurisdictions that stood out as “Best Practice” cities based on the following criteria:

1. They use a multi-faceted approach to graffiti including:
  - Eradication
  - Enforcement
  - Engagement/Education.
2. They measure quantifiable data-supported outcomes (increase or reduction in graffiti) through a physical graffiti inventory, **and** they have measured a significant decrease in graffiti over time:
  - **Gwinnett County, Georgia** 70 percent decrease,
  - **Vancouver British Columbia** 80 percent decrease,
  - **San Jose, California** 59 percent decrease.

3. They are comparable in population size to the City of Seattle.

**Eradication: Gwinnett County, Georgia (Greater Atlanta) population ~800,000**

Gwinnett County conducts an annual graffiti survey, which is a point in time “snap shot.” It is conducted each year during a two-week period in February and covers more than 1,000 miles of roadways, including all major primary and secondary roads as well as targeted neighborhood streets in Gwinnett County.

Gwinnett County experiences a much higher than national average percentage of gang graffiti – approximately 96 percent is gang-related whereas nationally it is only 10 percent. However, they have seen a sharp decline in surface area tagged – this is 70 percent less than it had been in 2003.

Gwinnett County officials attribute this reduction in surface area tagged to their approach which includes a close relationship with the police gang crime investigations unit, strong engagement of community volunteers through an affiliation with the Keep America Beautiful program, and rapid eradication within a response time of 48 hours.

Gwinnett County has leveraged a successful public/private partnership with the Georgia State Department of Corrections (DOC) to provide eradication services. The County’s DOC contract with the State covers graffiti eradication on walls, pavement, and private property (with the owner’s permission). Gwinnett County officials report that their DOC contract has consistently achieved a 48 hour response time during 2008-2010.

**Enforcement: Vancouver, British Columbia population ~600,000**

Vancouver, B.C. utilizes an approach to graffiti comprised of five elements: leadership, education, eradication, enforcement, and empowerment. They were able to reduce their graffiti by 80 percent since 2002, as confirmed through physical inventories that are conducted every six months by city workers from the Graffiti Management Team. Although Vancouver Police officials indicated that all of the elements of their approach contributed to the reduction in graffiti, they cited enforcement as a particularly important element of the overall approach.

The Vancouver approach to enforcement includes the following components:

1. **Police Graffiti Unit** – This unit includes two full-time police graffiti investigators who maintain the suspect database, investigate graffiti cases, and maintain contacts with known suspects within the graffiti subculture. The graffiti unit also makes contact with the parents of known graffiti vandals and obtains warrants to search for evidence including graffiti supplies and graffiti sketchbooks.
2. **Vancouver Graffiti Suspect Dataset** – This dataset was created to provide more detailed information about the city’s graffiti vandals to assist in investigations and prosecutions. It contains information on over 500 graffiti suspects including a subset of suspects who had five or more graffiti-related contacts with the Vancouver Police.

3. **Targeted Investigation of Chronic Graffiti Vandals** – Within the database, the graffiti investigators have been able to identify suspects who are frequent perpetrators of graffiti. These suspects often travel to other parts of Canada or the west coast of the United States. Vancouver’s graffiti investigators work collaboratively with a network of graffiti investigators in other jurisdictions to apprehend and prosecute these suspects.
4. **Prioritization of Graffiti Calls** – Part of Vancouver’s approach to enforcement was a change in the prioritization of 911 calls related to graffiti. Previously these calls were categorized by police dispatch staff as “Be on the Look Out For...” calls and received lower priority. Now graffiti related calls are categorized as “Mischievous in Progress,” which receive a higher priority for patrol response.

#### **Engagement/Education: San Jose, California population ~950,000**

San Jose has a nationally recognized anti-graffiti program which includes:

- Rapid abatement by City crews and community volunteers,
- Education and outreach including public service announcements and commercials,
- Community mobilization through affiliations with Keep America Beautiful and Keep California Beautiful,
- An ordinance for minors that revokes their driver’s license after three graffiti-related arrests or citations, and
- A graffiti enforcement team that includes two dedicated plain clothes officers who maintain a graffiti database and perform investigations.

San Jose has performed an annual physical inventory of graffiti since 1999, which allows them to measure their progress in each of ten districts over that period. Based on the 2010 inventory data, San Jose has seen an overall 59 percent decrease in graffiti since 1999. San Jose’s community mobilization is one of the most successful examples in the country. The City has leveraged its affiliations with state and national organizations, and as of April 2010, they report a database of 3,752 active community volunteers who are trained and given supplies to remove graffiti on their own property as well as light poles, utility boxes, and sound walls.

#### **Responses with Limited Effectiveness**

The U.S. Department of Justice has identified ten responses to graffiti used in jurisdictions around the country that have not been demonstrated to be effective by rigorous research. These include:

1. Controlling graffiti tools
2. Channeling behavior into more acceptable activities (graffiti boards and walls)
3. Providing alternative activities and services
4. Involving youth in developing graffiti prevention programs
5. Expanding applicable laws
6. Holding parents accountable
7. Increasing sanctions for offenders

- 8. Applying new technologies
- 9. Establishing juvenile curfews
- 10. Warning offenders

Some of these responses are difficult to enforce and do not change the behavior of chronic graffiti vandals. Below we discuss three of these potential responses to graffiti that were frequently mentioned by stakeholders during our interviews and by respondents to our survey. These are responses that the City could certainly pursue; however, we did not include these in our set of recommendations because of the current lack of research-based evidence about their efficacy.

**Graffiti Walls/“Free Walls”**

These are designated walls or spaces where people are encouraged to express their artistic or political views. Expressions are often in the form of graffiti, but can also be in the form of murals, posters, or other forms of art. The walls are often located in public spaces, such as parks, streets, or public buildings. The walls are often used to express community concerns or to promote social change. The walls are often used to express community concerns or to promote social change. The walls are often used to express community concerns or to promote social change.



indicates that free walls are expressive and are a type of judgment that the community should not have to bear. They are also a way to express community concerns or to promote social change. The walls are often used to express community concerns or to promote social change. The walls are often used to express community concerns or to promote social change.

**Mural**

Some communities create murals on walls and fences that are beautiful, colorful, and fun. They are often used to express community concerns or to promote social change. The walls are often used to express community concerns or to promote social change. The walls are often used to express community concerns or to promote social change.



Artworks officials told us that some tagging occurs on the murals on a quarterly basis. Artworks officials told us that some tagging occurs on the murals on a quarterly basis. Artworks officials told us that some tagging occurs on the murals on a quarterly basis. Artworks officials told us that some tagging occurs on the murals on a quarterly basis.

**Restricting Sale of Graffiti Supplies**

While some communities restrict the sale of graffiti supplies, the U.S. Department of Justice’s Graffiti Guide indicates that this is difficult to enforce and the effectiveness questionable because it is easy to obtain materials elsewhere, such as through the Internet. The California

Penal Code, for example, has prohibited businesses from selling spray paint, wide markers, and etching materials to individuals under the age of 18 since 2002. However, within the state there is considerable variation in the effectiveness of graffiti efforts among the cities. San Jose experienced a decline in graffiti after this legislation was implemented, while Los Angeles official reported an increase in graffiti from 2005-2008. This would indicate that the strength of other elements of the overall graffiti program including eradication, enforcement, and education, might outweigh the impact of restricting sales of graffiti supplies.

## **Overall Recommendation: Seattle Needs to Establish a Graffiti Policy**

Following a summary of our specific recommendations (below), we provide data and analysis to answer the questions posed to us by members of the Seattle City Council (see Appendix A for the letter that contains the City Councilmembers' questions). For each question, we offer at least one recommendation for how that particular area could be improved. However, it is important to note that before any of these recommendations are implemented, City policymakers need to decide what the overall City policy on graffiti will be. Key questions policymakers need to consider include:

1. Do they believe that graffiti is an inevitable part of the urban landscape or a type of vandalism that should be addressed through concentrated effort?
2. Do they find the evidence for the theory of street disorder compelling? In other words, do they believe that keeping Seattle neighborhoods free of graffiti and litter will have an impact on low level crimes in those neighborhoods and/or on the perceptions of public safety?
3. Do they consider graffiti a "gateway" crime – i.e., one that leads to other criminal activity?
4. Are they willing to allocate, on a trial basis, the resources necessary to support a comprehensive anti-graffiti program, including improvements in the three key areas of rapid abatement, enforcement, and community involvement and public education?

Based on our interviews with key City personnel, who have been involved in developing and implementing the City's current anti-graffiti program, we believe that even a comprehensive, coordinated approach to address graffiti will not succeed without clear policy guidance from City leaders. Therefore, in addition to the nine specific recommendations listed in the next section, we developed five overarching recommendations.

### **Overarching Recommendations for the City Council and Mayor**

**Develop a clear policy statement on graffiti;**

**Establish clear directives about who in the City is authorized, responsible, and accountable for the program;**

**Develop specific outcome goals for the key components of Seattle's anti-graffiti program (e.g., a fifty percent reduction in graffiti in three years);**

**Require departments to gather baseline data against these measures before new policies and procedures are implemented; and**

**Require an annual physical inventory of the graffiti in Seattle to evaluate the effectiveness of the City's efforts (outcomes).**

These five recommendations, if implemented by City leaders, will provide direction and momentum for City departments and community stakeholders to work together to implement the nine specific recommendations described in the next section.

### Summary of Specific Recommendations

These recommendations were formulated in response to the specific questions posed to us by the Seattle City Council. A detailed explanation of the data and findings that support each recommendation can be found in the sections following Summary Chart IX.

**Chart IX. Summary of audit recommendations and related costs, potential benefits and outcome measures**

<p><b>Council Question 1</b>  <b>Are any changes needed to current city ordinances to facilitate rapid abatement of graffiti and prevent further occurrences?</b></p>	
<p><b>Recommendation 1</b>                  Amend SMC 12.A.08.020 (Property destruction) to include stickers in the list of prohibited materials under A.2</p> <p><b>Recommendation 2</b>                  Amend SMC 12.A.08.020 (Property destruction) to add a clause stipulating the elements that should be included in calculating restitution for violations of the code.</p>	<p><b>Additional Costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of staff time to draft ordinance changes, City Attorney time to review and City Council time to consider.</li> <li>• Cost of staff time to draft ordinance changes, City Attorney time to review and City Council time to consider the changes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Potential Benefits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows City to prosecute one of the most common forms of tagging (use of stickers), potential deterrence effect.</li> <li>• Provides guidance to help private and public property owners ensure that they are fully compensated for their damages.</li> <li>• Potential deterrence effect.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Council Question 2</b>  <b>How frequently are graffiti vandals arrested and prosecuted and what are their rates of recidivism?</b></p>	
<p><b>Recommendation 3</b>                  Strengthen recording by having Parking Enforcement Officers (PEOs) and other City employee photograph and report graffiti they discover in the course of their work.</p>	<p><b>Additional Costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PEOs could use current hand-held devices, which are already equipped with GPS mapping capability.</li> <li>• Cost for GPS equipped digital cameras for Parks and other personnel.</li> <li>• Cost to set up and maintain photographic database (see below).</li> </ul>



<p><b>Recommendation 4</b> Strengthen the Seattle Police Department’s ability to analyze graffiti crimes by creating and maintaining a photographic database</p> <p><b>Recommendation 5</b> Strengthen the City’s ability to apprehend, and prosecute graffiti vandals by creating a two year pilot program with a dedicated graffiti detective.</p> <p><b>Recommendation 6: Work with the City Attorney’s Office prosecutors familiar with the Community Court’s Diversion program and chronic graffiti offenders to develop diversion programs that are effective for this population, based on their knowledge of the population and the results of evidence-based research on effective programs.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$5,500 annually for an AmeriCorps volunteer (provides 1,700 hours).</li> <li>• Seattle Police Dept would need to evaluate whether additional software is needed.</li> <li>• Opportunity cost of deploying a Seattle Police Officer to this duty, rather than other duties.</li> <li>• Staff time to develop program and cost of implementing program. Would need to be weighed against potential cost savings from lower rates of recidivism.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Potential Benefits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive, timely and accurate reporting of graffiti events in the City.</li> <li>• Enhanced ability to track graffiti incidents in the City of Seattle to support investigative work and apprehension of offenders.</li> <li>• Enhanced ability to investigate, track, apprehend, and prosecute first-time and chronic offenders.</li> <li>• Possible deterrence effect of enhanced enforcement.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Council Question 3</b> <b>How well are the different City departments responsible for graffiti clean-up on public property coordinating with one another? Should these efforts be centralized in one department or office?</b></p>	
<p><b>Recommendation 7</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reassign responsibility for abating graffiti on parking pay stations to the Seattle Department of Transportation’s (SDOT) Signs and Signals Maintenance Shop.</li> <li>• Redeploy 1 FTE position from SPU’s Graffiti Rangers to SDOT’s Signs and Signals Maintenance Shop.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Additional Cost</b></p> <p>Staff time to develop protocols, Memorandums of Agreement, and operating procedures.</p>

<p><b>Potential Benefits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should allow SDOT to achieve goal of abating graffiti within 6 days of reporting. This could be verified during the pilot program.</li> <li>• Frees SDOT Parking Meter and Pay Station staff to focus on revenue-enhancing activities.</li> <li>• Better controls over worker health and safety.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Council Questions 4 and 5</b></p> <p><b>What is the City doing to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate local residents and business owners about their legal responsibilities, the negative effects of graffiti and the positive benefits of clean neighborhoods?</li> <li>• Encourage community organizations to involve themselves in the effort to prevent and clean-up graffiti? Could the City be doing more?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Recommendation 8</b></p> <p>Implement a three-part model to enhance community involvement and public education, consisting of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A broadly-based coalition of City and other public employees, community organizations, businesses, and private citizens;</li> <li>2. A comprehensive community outreach plan and</li> <li>3. A strategic plan for public education about the costs and impacts of graffiti.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Additional Cost</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately \$8,000 one-time fee to join Keep America Beautiful.</li> <li>• Opportunity cost of dedicating SPU Public Education Specialist’s time to creating and establishing the coalition. Would need to be weighed against potential long-term benefits of leveraging substantially greater community resources for graffiti abatement.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Potential Benefits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A comprehensive, coordinated approach to community mobilization that empowers community members and considers their needs.</li> <li>• Ability to leverage a significantly larger volunteer base.</li> <li>• Ability to use existing tested curriculum and public education materials.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Council Question 6</b></p> <p><b>How effective are the private sector programs that target graffiti and litter removal, such as the program run by the Metropolitan Improvement District?</b></p>	
<p><b>Recommendation 9</b></p> <p>Further study needed. Could:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Start by defining areas similar in size and commercial activity to existing Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), and then conducting physical inventories of these areas to gather baseline data;</li> <li>2. Expanding SPU grants and use of DOC or Community Court participants to abate graffiti in the</li> </ol>	<p><b>Additional Costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff time to plan, conduct and analyze the results of a physical inventory, including recruiting community volunteers to assist with the count.</li> </ul>

BIAs that are not active (using University District BIA model); 3. Conducting another physical inventory of the BIAs and their control sites after a pilot period has ended to determine effectiveness.	
<b>Potential Benefit</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• City would have data on the overall and relative effectiveness of anti-graffiti efforts, both comparing the effects of different strategies, and assessing their effectiveness over time.</li></ul>	

**Responses to the Specific Questions Posed by the Seattle City Council**

**Question 1: Are any changes needed to current city ordinances to facilitate rapid abatement of graffiti and prevent further occurrences?**

Based on our review of City of Seattle anti-graffiti ordinances, our research of best practices from other jurisdictions, our review of final dispositions for a sample of graffiti vandalism cases, and discussions with the Seattle City Attorneys most experienced at prosecuting graffiti vandalism cases, we concluded that the two City of Seattle ordinances governing graffiti are adequate, with two exceptions.

**Exception one pertains to the need to add stickers to the list of materials used to deface property. This recommendation is based on our physical inventory count of graffiti in four Seattle neighborhoods, during which we found that 40 percent of the graffiti consisted of stickers.**

**Chart X: Types and Frequency of Graffiti Products Used in Seattle**

**Recommendation 1: Amend SMC 12.A.08.020 (Property destruction) to include stickers in the list of prohibited materials under A.2**

**Exception two pertains to the calculation of restitution – one of the consequences imposed on violators of Seattle’s graffiti code.**

Under current City law, graffiti vandalism is categorized as a gross misdemeanor. Under State of Washington law (RCW 9.92.020), the maximum penalties for a gross misdemeanor,

unless otherwise prescribed by statute, are 365 days in jail and /or a \$5,000 fine. Our review of the case dispositions of 18 individuals who were charged with property destruction-graffiti in Seattle found that none were given sentences close to the maximum penalties.

However, our analysis of case dispositions, and our discussions with Seattle City Attorneys and other City officials, suggest that improvements could be made in how restitution for graffiti cases is calculated. For example, in our case disposition analysis, we found that two of the seven individuals (29%) sentenced to pay restitution to the victims of their property destruction-graffiti crimes were excused from payment because the victims did not submit supporting documentation for the cost of repairing the damage. Furthermore, one city Paint Crew Chief told us that he does not believe that the restitution amounts paid to the City of Seattle for graffiti damage to Parks properties cover the full costs of abatement. Finally, we found in our physical inventory count that 12% of the graffiti we identified consisted of etching on large glass windows. Since these windows are very expensive to replace (and in our observation, are rarely replaced by small business owners), we believe that it would be more equitable if there were a mechanism in place to ensure that the full cost of replacement is covered by the restitution paid to the victim.

**Recommendation 2: Amend SMC 12.A.08.020 (Property destruction) to add a clause stipulating the elements that should be included in calculating restitution for violations of the code. For example, restitution should include, at a minimum: 1) the costs of materials used to clean or remove the graffiti or replace the surface vandalized, if necessary, 2) the labor costs, using the State of Washington’s hourly minimum wage as a base, for the total amount of time used by all persons who are needed to purchase materials and clean, remove, or replace the surface, and 3) the relevant property insurance deductible amount, in the event the victim’s insurance covers the cost of abatement.**

**Question 2: How frequently are graffiti vandals arrested and prosecuted and what are their rates of recidivism?**

#### **Arrests and Prosecutions of Adult Graffiti Vandals in the City of Seattle**

According to Seattle Police Department records, 234 arrests were made in 2008 and 41 in 2009 for violations of SMC 12.A.08.020 (A) (2) Property Destruction – Graffiti. Arrest data for violations of the Property Destruction – Graffiti ordinance is not available for years preceding 2008 because before this date SPD did not track arrest data for vandalism by type. As a surrogate for arrest data, we obtained and analyzed data on the number of Seattle Police Department Incident Reports filed for Property Destruction –Graffiti for the years 2003 – 2009. See XI below for a summary of these data.

**Chart XI. Seattle Police Department (SPD) Incident Reports for violations of Seattle Municipal Code 12.A.08.020 (A) (2) sent to the Seattle City Attorney’s Office for the years 2003-2009**

Year	SPD Incident Reports for property destruction-graffiti offenses	Percent change from previous year in number of incident reports filed	SPD Incident Reports sent to the City Attorney for prosecution	Percent change from previous year in reports sent to the City Attorney for prosecution	Variation from average in reports sent to the City Attorney for prosecution
2003	815	unknown	55	unknown	+12%
2004	774	-5%	60	+9%	+22%
2005	687	-11%	50	-17%	+2%
2006	825	+20%	60	+20%	+22%
2007	938	+14%	41	-31%	-17%
2008*	1246	+33%	32	-22%	-35%
2009	857	-32%	43	+34%	-13%
<b>7 year average</b>	877		49		

Source: Seattle City Attorney’s Office

\*Transitional year for SPD technology (new software and officer-direct data input implemented)—figures may not be accurate

**Analysis**

The area highlighted in gray in Chart XI shows the years when the City did not have a Seattle Police Department (SPD) detective dedicated to graffiti investigations. Before this time, SPD had a full-time detective (1 FTE) dedicated to this work. This individual retired in January 2007, and was not replaced. Note that although the number of SPD incident reports relating to graffiti vandalism increased in 2007 by 14 percent (the year the graffiti detective retired), the number of cases forwarded to the City Attorney’s Office for prosecution decreased by 31 percent that same year.

A similar pattern is found in 2008, but due to the implementation of new SPD software that year, the data may not be accurate. As a result, we cannot draw reliable conclusions based on it. A more reliable analysis examines the relationship between the number of SPD incident reports forwarded to the City Attorney’s Office for prosecution and the average number of reports forwarded annually over the seven year period. This analysis reveals that the number of reports forwarded was increasing from 2003-2006—when the City had a dedicated graffiti detective on staff—and decreased from 2007-2009 when the City did not.

This apparent correlation between graffiti vandalism cases sent for prosecution and having a dedicated graffiti crimes detective on staff was substantiated in our discussions with

representatives from the Seattle Police Department and the City Attorney’s Office who have experience investigating and prosecuting graffiti vandals. According to these individuals, a dedicated graffiti detective is necessary for the successful prosecution of graffiti vandals because, among other things, a graffiti detective can:

1. Conduct the investigative work that is necessary for successful prosecutions of graffiti vandals, but that city attorneys have neither the capacity nor authority to conduct;
2. Gather and analyze data that allows for targeted enforcement of repeat offenders; and
3. Gather and analyze data that supports multiple charges for one individual, thereby resulting in greater penalties.

### **Rates of Re-offense**

To determine rates of recidivism for graffiti offenders, we examined the case histories of 18 individuals who were charged with property destruction-graffiti whose cases were closed in 2009. Of these 18 individuals, 5 (28 percent) had criminal charges after the case we examined. Of these 5, 1 individual was charged with graffiti vandalism only, 1 was charged with a criminal violation not related to graffiti vandalism, and 3 were charged with both. The final dispositions for these 18 cases were as follows:

- 8 were dismissed with prejudice because all the conditions of sentencing were met
- 3 were dismissed with prejudice because of compromises of misdemeanors
- 3 were dismissed with prejudice because of negotiated pleas
- 1 was dismissed with prejudice in the interests of justice
- 3 were dismissed without prejudice – 1 for no witness, 1 in the interests of justice, and 1 for incompetency

All 8 of the graffiti offenders whose cases were dismissed due to meeting all their sentencing conditions completed community service hours, ranging from a high of 200 hours to a low of 48. These 8 individuals were also the ones who did not have any subsequent criminal charges. In addition, 5 offenders paid restitution to their victims, ranging from a high of \$710 to a low of \$150. Two offenders were sentenced to pay restitution but the victim did not respond to the court, so restitution was waived in both cases.

These data, along with our analysis of 40 graffiti offenders charged in 2007 (57 percent of whom had other criminal charges on their records) suggest that there are two main categories of graffiti vandals in Seattle:

1. Those who comply with sentencing and do not repeat their offenses, and
2. Chronic violators who are involved in repeat graffiti offenses and other criminal activity.

This information, combined with our best practice research from other jurisdictions, suggests that if City policymakers are serious about enforcing anti-graffiti laws, more police resources should be dedicated to this task, at least on a short-term basis. To that end, we would

recommend a three-part approach:

**Recommendation 3: Strengthen recording by having Parking Enforcement Officers and other City employees photograph and report graffiti they discover in the course of their work.**

**Recommendation 4: Strengthen SPD's ability to analyze graffiti crimes by creating and maintaining a photographic database. This could be accomplished by a .5 FTE administrative position, possibly staffed by an intern or AmeriCorps volunteer.**

**Recommendation 5: Strengthen the City's ability to identify, apprehend, and prosecute graffiti vandals by creating a pilot program with a dedicated graffiti detective. This person would perform intelligence gathering, crime investigation, coordination with other city departments and outside agencies, conduct training for law enforcement and court officials on the costs and impacts of graffiti vandalism and the profiles of chronic offenders and work with the City's Anti-Graffiti Public Education Specialist on outreach to community organizations and schools.**

**Recommendation 6: Work with the prosecutors from the City Attorney's Office who are familiar with both the Community Court's Diversion program and chronic graffiti offenders to develop diversion programs that are effective with chronic offenders. The program would be based on both on the City Attorney's knowledge of the population and the results of evidence-based research on effective diversion programs.**

To determine the impact of this approach, baseline data on arrests and prosecutions of graffiti vandals should be gathered before the implementation of this recommendation, and again once the pilot program has ended.

**Question 3: How well are the different City departments responsible for graffiti clean-up on public property coordinating with one another? Should these efforts be centralized in one department or office?**

#### **Background and overall organization**

Currently, all City departments are responsible for removing graffiti from their own property. These departments include the Fleets and Facilities Department (FFD), the Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks), Seattle Center, Seattle City Light (SCL), the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), the Seattle Public Library (SPL), and Seattle Public Utilities (SPU). In addition, SPU has responsibility for managing and running the Graffiti Hotline, one employee dedicated to public education and outreach, and a policy analyst whose duties include policy direction and interdepartmental leadership for anti-graffiti programs.

Over the last six years, SPU and other City departments have supported multiple efforts to improve the City's anti-graffiti efforts, including a 2004 program evaluation conducted by SPU's Asset Management Committee, a 2006 SPU anti-graffiti program benchmarking study conducted by an independent consultant, and an interdepartmental graffiti team that was

part of the former Mayor's Customer Improvement Project, which culminated in a summary memorandum dated July 16, 2008. A brief history of the City's efforts in this area can be found in Appendix E.

Our review indicates that the largest improvements have been made in the areas of: 1) the adoption of standard reporting metrics for all departments, and a monthly reporting schedule; 2) the organization of public property abatement by geographic area; 3) the formation of an interdepartmental working team that meets monthly to share information on current challenges and successes in public property graffiti abatement; 4) the creation in 2008 of a full-time anti-graffiti public education and outreach coordinator within SPU; and 5) the creation of a Private Property Anti-Graffiti Task Force, whose recommendations were summarized in a April 4, 2010 memorandum (see Appendix F).

Given these successes, especially the improvement in interdepartmental cooperation due to the work of the task force and working group, we do not believe that there is a need at this time to centralize Citywide graffiti abatement in one department or office. This is consistent with the conclusions drawn by the Mayor's Customer Improvement Project Graffiti Team, which concluded:

After careful analysis of each department's graffiti abatement process map and discussion with managers and crew chiefs, the Task Force has determined that departments are as effectively organized as possible and are utilizing staff as efficiently as they can in order to meet abatement performance metrics within current financial resources.

However, our analysis of workload, staffing and response times within the three departments that perform the majority of the abatement on City property suggests that efficiencies could be gained from redeploying personnel both within and across departments. See the next section for more information on this point.

### **Comparison of Graffiti Abatement Response Times for Three Major Departments (SPU, Parks and SDOT)**

The Graffiti Task Force on Performance Measures finalized citywide standards and definitions for measuring and reporting on graffiti abatement during a September 11, 2008 meeting. Most important among these were the definitions of reported graffiti, discovered graffiti, and tag units, as follows:

- **Reported graffiti** – Graffiti is considered 'reported' when a customer contacts a City department to abate graffiti and this contact is documented as a request. This contact may be received through various means and includes, but is not limited to, emails, phone calls, faxes, walk-ins, and written correspondence. A customer may be anyone internal or external to the City of Seattle, and including graffiti discovered by City staff that could not be abated the same day.



- Discovered graffiti – Graffiti is considered ‘discovered’ when a graffiti abatement crew and/or maintenance laborers find and remove graffiti during the course of their route or work.
- Tag unit – Discovered graffiti is measured in ‘tag units’ to gauge the effort exerted by crews when removing graffiti. A tag unit is based on size (1 square foot = 1 tag unit) and includes a multiplier to compensate for especially-difficult-to-remove graffiti. SDOT, SPU and Parks crew chiefs have standardized the ‘tag unit’ across City departments.

Equally important are the performance metrics this group agreed the three major departments would report on monthly, including, but not limited to:

- Year-to-date contacts requesting removal of graffiti from the department’s property;
- Percent of year-to-date graffiti abated within 6 business days (10 business days for roadway structures) from the time the responsible department first documents an abatement request

To test the Graffiti Hotline call response rates for each of the three major City departments involved in graffiti abatement, we traced a random sample of 90 calls (30 for each department) made to the hotline in 2009. Chart XII below summarizes the results of our analysis, compares our verified response percentages to those reported by the departments, and provides information on the staff and budget resources available to each department for graffiti abatement. Since graffiti abatement by SDOT is divided between two different SDOT units — 1) Parking Meters and Pay Stations and 2) Signs and Signals—we reported the data for this department both as an overall average and broken out by unit.

**Chart XII. Comparison of 2009 Graffiti Incidents Abated, Available Staff, Budget and Abatement Response Times for Three Major City Departments**

	Seattle Public Utilities (SPU)	Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT)	Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks)
<b>2009 graffiti incidents abated, by department</b>	Reported = 3,161 Discovered = 5,104 Total: 8,265	Reported = 9,524 Discovered = 12,075 Total: 21,599	Reported = 263 Discovered = 3,680 Total: 3,943
<b>Staff available for abatement</b>	6 FTE	1 FTE	2.96 FTE**
<b>Budget for graffiti abatement</b> (labor, materials and equipment)	\$535,902	\$300,174***	\$317,396
<b>Reported abatement response time</b> (percent completed)	99%	91%	91%

within 6 days)			
<b>Office of City Auditor verified abatement response time for sample of hotline calls</b> (percent completed within 6 days)	90%	Parking Meters and Pay Stations: 0%  Signs and Signals: 70%  Overall: 53%	73%

\*1 square foot = 1 tag unit

\*\*Equivalent of: 1 FTE Maintenance Laborer, 1.8 FTE Painter, 0.01% FTE Carpenter, 0.15% Installation Maintenance worker

\*\*\*Does not include the costs related to abating on parking meters and pay stations.

As Chart XII reveals, there is a fairly significant difference between the three departments in the resources allocated for graffiti abatement. Furthermore, these differences clearly affect each department’s ability to meet the performance standards for graffiti abatement (within six days of when the department receives the graffiti abatement request). The City may want to reallocate one FTE from SPU to SDOT to assist them in meeting the City’s response time goals.

In addition, we found that SDOT’s Parking Meter Shop is not adequately staffed, nor are their staff properly trained or equipped, to perform the kind of graffiti abatement required on parking pay stations. Rather, their priorities are to service existing pay stations—including repairing broken ones, downloading software program changes, and troubleshooting as needed—and to install new pay stations. According to two SDOT managers we interviewed, SDOT’s Signs and Signals Maintenance Shop is better positioned to perform this work. Based on our discussions, we concluded that their maintenance crew has the training, experience, and equipment to do this work safely and efficiently, and their administrative staff has a system in place to assign graffiti abatement work orders to the crew in a timely manner.

**Recommendation 7:**

- Reassign responsibility for abating graffiti on parking pay stations to SDOT’s Signs and Signals Maintenance Shop.
- Redeploy 1 FTE from SPU’s Graffiti Rangers to SDOT’s Signs and Signals Maintenance Shop, perhaps through an interdepartmental Memorandum of Agreement.
- SDOT managers should develop:
  - A template for how to safely abate (remove or paint over) graffiti from parking pay stations, and train and equip staff in the Signs and Signals Maintenance Shop to do this work, and
  - A communications protocol for SDOT’s Signs and Signals Shop to communicate with the Parking Meter Shop on a regular basis, so that information about broken meters that need to be repaired is communicated quickly and accurately.

**Questions 4 and 5: What is the City doing to:**

- Educate local residents and business owners about their legal responsibilities, the negative effects of graffiti and the positive benefits of clean neighborhoods?
- Encourage community organizations to involve themselves in the effort to prevent and clean-up graffiti? Could the City be doing more?

SPU's Graffiti and Education and Outreach Program began in May 2008. This was when the Public Education Specialist position was added to develop and maintain a volunteer corps develop and disseminate technical assistance materials, and conduct education/outreach events at schools, youth groups, block watch groups, etc. The program was designed to promote community stewardship through the use of volunteers to abate graffiti from private property. Notable accomplishments in the first year the position was filled (2009) include, among others: 1) working with Seattle Municipal Court Community Court participants and the King County Juvenile Division to abate graffiti on private property, 2) conducting eight presentations to community organizations, 3) providing supplies for Seattle Paint Out events, 4) working with Department of Neighborhood District Coordinators to increase volunteer access to supplies, and 5) working with Seattle Police Department's Crime Prevention Team and Coordinators to disseminate information about the program.

As mentioned earlier in this report (see pages 11-13), we found that community involvement and public education are key to any successful anti-graffiti program. Based on our research of best practices, we concluded that successful anti-graffiti community outreach programs include the following three key elements:

1. **Anti- Graffiti Outreach Coalition** - This coalition would bring together key stakeholders from government entities, businesses, non-profit organizations, and the community for the purposes of: 1) coordinating efforts, 2) building capacity for anti-graffiti activities, and 3) leveraging community resources. The coalition would have a lead organization that serves as the convener and umbrella organization for the coalition stakeholders. The lead organization could be the City or a partner non-profit or business organization. Based on our interviews, coalition members might include:

- City departments
- King County Metro
- The Washington State Department of Transportation
- Seattle Paint Out
- Seattle Works
- Art Works
- Seattle Community Court
- The Washington State Department of Corrections
- Seattle School District
- Business Improvement Districts Associations
- Seattle Neighborhood Group
- Other community or business organizations

Every best-practice city that we studied has an active anti-graffiti coalition. The leadership can either be housed in the city government (San Jose) or in a partner non-profit organization (Milwaukee). Nearly all of the best practice cities use the coalition framework provided through an affiliation with Keep America Beautiful (see Appendix H for a summary of the Keep America Beautiful program). Among the cities we studied, Portland, Oregon is the only city that has established an anti-graffiti coalition without an affiliation with Keep America Beautiful.

2. **Comprehensive Community Outreach Plan** – This would include the development of community outreach strategies that are based in proven best practices and are designed to achieve specific measurable outcomes. Goals of the community outreach plan would be to educate the public about the costs and impacts of graffiti, recruit and train a volunteer base to assist with abatement on private property, and involve community members in clean-up projects in their neighborhoods.

This is consistent with the governmental best practice of developing a data-supported logic model for a city’s overall anti-graffiti effort. The development of a logic model was the subject of our April 19, 2010 Graffiti Stakeholders Meeting.

3. **Public Education Program** – This would include public education programs targeted to children, youth and adults.

Many of the best practices jurisdictions that we studied utilize the public education tools and materials provided at no charge by Keep America Beautiful’s “Graffiti Hurts” program. This program also offers curriculum materials for grades K-6, which are used as is or tailored for use by many cities. In addition, Portland, Oregon and Phoenix, Arizona have developed their own elementary grade curriculum materials.

Because the model described above relies heavily on leveraging community resources, and because the City has already started to move in this direction by creating SPU’s Education Specialist position, we believe it is a good fit for the City’s current budget situation.

### **Recommendation 8**

Implement a three-part model to enhance community involvement and public education, consisting of:

1. A broadly-based coalition of city and other public employees, community organizations, businesses, and private citizens;
2. A comprehensive community outreach plan directed toward engaging community members in volunteer clean-ups; and
3. A strategic plan for public education about the costs and impacts of graffiti, particularly directed toward late elementary and middle school children and youth.

We believe the City’s Graffiti Public Education Specialist should be involved in the formation of the Anti-Graffiti Coalition. However, in terms of resources needed to implement this recommendation, policymakers should be aware that during the transition period, when the Education Specialist is busy forming and organizing the Anti-Graffiti Outreach Coalition, he will not be available to organize and lead other volunteer abatement efforts. Unless another City employee, intern, AmeriCorps or community volunteer assumes these duties, there will likely be a gap in services before the new structure is in place. We believe this opportunity cost is worth the much higher level of service that could ultimately be provided through more efficient and effective use of community resources.

**Question 6: How effective are the private sector programs that target graffiti and litter removal, such as the program run by the Metropolitan Improvement District?**

**Background**

The City of Seattle currently has seven Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) in the following neighborhoods: Capitol Hill, Chinatown/International District, Downtown (Metropolitan Improvement District or MID), University District, West Seattle Junction, Pioneer Square and Columbia City. Seattle Public Utilities provides annual grants, which totaled \$58,000 in 2009, to the BIAs to assist their graffiti abatement efforts. Some of these BIAs, including Broadway, Chinatown/International District, the MID and the University District, are very proactive about graffiti abatement in their district. Chart XII below provides a summary of the seven BIA’s efforts to clean and remove graffiti in their areas.

**Chart XIII. Summary of BIA Efforts to Abate Graffiti**

<b>BIA</b>	<b>Graffiti abatement</b>	<b>By Whom</b>	<b>2009 Cost</b>	<b>Funding</b>
<b>Broadway</b>	Abates graffiti on both public and private property	Contracts with CleanScapes	\$7,500	BIA funds only
<b>Chinatown/International District</b>	Abates graffiti on private property and sidewalks.	In-house unless on brick or mortar, then contract out.	\$13,300	BIA funds plus \$3,000 SPU grant
<b>Columbia City</b>	Does not abate.	N/A	N/A	Report graffiti to City due to lack of funding to abate on their own
<b>MID</b>	Abates graffiti on private property if owner provides paint and on all public spaces	In-house staff (Cleaning Ambassadors)	\$100,000	BIA funds and SPU grant of \$20,000

	in the MID except parking pay stations (for example: light poles, mailboxes, and signs, through a MOA with SDOT.			
<b>University District</b>	Abates graffiti on both public and private property	16 hours week for volunteer coordinator + volunteers	\$12,000	BIA funds and \$10,000 SPU grant.
<b>West Seattle Junction Association</b>	Abates graffiti on private property and light poles.	On-call worker during summer 5 hours a week, contract out for hard-to-reach work, occasional volunteers	\$3,500	BIA funds plus SPU grant of \$1,400
<b>Pioneer Square</b>	Supplement what MID does, on private property only.	Staff coordinate volunteer events.	\$7,500	BIA funds plus SPU grant of \$1,833. Materials provided by SPU Red Wagon Paint Out Program.

The largest of the City’s BIAs, the Metropolitan Improvement District or MID, abates graffiti on private property and, through a Memorandum of Agreement with the Seattle Department of Transportation, also on light poles, mail boxes, and other public property in the right-of-way (excluding parking pay stations). Under this agreement, the MID pays for labor costs and the City subsidizes material costs. The MID estimates that they spent over \$100,000 in 2009 on graffiti abatement, which does not include the cost of graffiti removal on private property, which is done primarily by private property owners. The MID estimates that from 2008-2009 their cleaning ambassadors removed approximately 17,000 graffiti tags from public property and another 300 from private property in their district.

Chart XIV compares the number of tags abated by the MID’s Cleaning Ambassadors for the years 2005 and 2009 by neighborhood. Clearly, all the neighborhoods in the MID experienced an increase in graffiti over the four-year period, ranging from 17 to 540 percent.

**Chart XIV**

<b>Downtown Neighborhood and MID Sectors</b>	<b>Graffiti tags abated by MID Cleaning Ambassadors on public property in 2005</b>	<b>Graffiti tags abated by MID Cleaning Ambassadors on public property in 2009</b>	<b>Percent change over four-year period</b>
<b>Denny Triangle</b> Sectors 15, 16, 17, 21, 22	2,703	3,155	+17 percent
<b>Financial District</b> Sectors 5, 11, 20	346	1,284	+271 percent
<b>Pioneer Square</b> Sectors 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	1,133	3,363	+202 percent
<b>Retail Core</b> Sectors 2, 3, 4, 12, 13, 18, 19	2,646	9,011	+241 percent
<b>Waterfront</b> Sector 1	55	352	+540 percent

The University District BIA is also proactive in graffiti abatement, although they do not abate on public property. Currently, they use a grant from Seattle Public Utilities to fund a 2-day-a-week volunteer services coordinator, who in turn supervises crews of Community Court participants who abate graffiti. A University District BIA official reported that this system is working well.

To assess how effective private sector programs in the City of Seattle have been at abating graffiti, we conducted a systematic, single-day, physical count of graffiti using a customized version of Keep America Beautiful’s Community Appearance Index. We selected four areas of approximately equal size (.7 mile); two areas were within BIA’s, and two were not. We captured data on each instance of graffiti including: street address, property description, visibility, graffiti location, graffiti size, type of graffiti, surface, and medium. We found:

**Chart XV Results of Physical Inventory Count: Graffiti by Area**

As Chart XV demonstrates, the results from our physical inventory count related to the impact of BIA abatement programs are mixed. On one hand, the Broadway BIA (Area 3) had a third less graffiti than its matched geographic area, Capitol Hill (Area 4); alternatively, the Downtown MID (Area 1) had almost 3 times the graffiti as its matched geographic area, First Hill (Area 2).

However, we realized after conducting the inventory that the comparison of Area 1 to Area 2 may not be valid due to the difference in commercial activity in the two areas, because it is possible that more graffiti occurs in more highly trafficked areas. Given the MID Cleaning Ambassadors abated over 17,000 graffiti tags in the MID in 2009, it seems safe to say that there would be a lot more graffiti in the MID without their program. However, further study is needed to determine the relative effectiveness of the BIA's efforts, both compared to government abatement efforts and various private sector models, such as those employed by some of the BIAs (i.e., in-house cleaning ambassadors versus contracting with CleanScapes versus use of volunteers).

**Recommendation 9**

City leaders should direct Seattle Public Utilities, as the lead department for anti-graffiti efforts, to:

1. Define areas similar in size and commercial activity to existing BIAs (control groups),
2. Conduct physical inventories of these areas and the BIAs to gather baseline data (our office has already performed this for the Broadway BIA);
3. Continue supporting BIA graffiti abatement through SPU grants and consider expanding this support by using part-time volunteer coordinators and DOC or Community Court participants for graffiti abatement (the U District model); and
4. Conduct subsequent physical inventory counts of graffiti in the BIAs and the control sites to compare the effectiveness of the BIAs' programs.