



# Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR AND  
CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** MAYOR LICCARDO  
COUNCILMEMBER DIEP  
COUNCILMEMBER DAVIS  
COUNCILMEMBER JIMENEZ

**SUBJECT:** A BOOST IN OUR BATTLE  
AGAINST BLIGHT

**DATE:** SEPTEMBER 14, 2020

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**APPROVED:**

**DATE:** 9/14/20

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

Direct the City Manager to expedite trash pickup and blight by:

1. Significantly expanding the budget within the Emergency Operations Center for cleanups and blight remediation by adding up to an additional \$3,000,000, to be completed on or before December 31, 2020.
  - a. Where legally possible, prioritize the supplemental funding for those bids for clean-up contracts under the pending Request for Bids to contractors hiring unemployed and homeless residents.
  - b. Notwithstanding prior efforts, prioritize the most needed and most highly visible, high-traffic locations—those “sore spots” that have had the greatest impact on our residents’ perception of their community— for cleaning with this supplemental funding.
2. At the September 22<sup>nd</sup> public Council hearing, inform the Council about the status of various areas for which partner agencies have responsibility, including:
  - a. Freeway and highway trash:
    - i. The response of Caltrans to City inquiries regarding the geographic allocation of District 4 funding for trash pickup and litter abatement. Please determine, in particular, whether funds for cleanup on freeways in Santa Clara County appear proportionate (based on the population and lane miles) to that of other Bay Area counties, including any supplemental state funding from the most recent budget year.

- ii. Whether the public response of Caltrans spokesperson Matt Rocco to Caltrans' inability to respond adequately to blight at the 280 /Almaden Caltrans-owned site in the September 11, 2020 *Mercury News*—that the agency “takes the health and safety of its employees very seriously” reflects whether the agency is actually declining to deploy Caltrans staff for cleanups for health-related reasons. Further determine—and invite Caltrans to explain—why the health risks for trash abatement outdoors should be considered more serious than the risks undertaken by the thousands of taxpaying San Jose residents working daily in busy kitchens, hospitals, laundries, and driving buses.
    - iii. Whether San Jose Conservation Corps has additional capacity to undertake a larger share of the cleanup work on freeways, to compensate for shortfalls in Caltrans understaffing.
    - iv. Whether San Jose Conservation Corps are being deployed disproportionately outside of the City of San Jose under the SJCC contract with the County of Santa Clara. Further determine Whether the City of San Jose can and should contract directly with the SJ Conservation Corps and other similar agencies to ensure more equitable service.
    - v. Whether and when Santa Clara County will resume its probationer work program to clean county freeways, and whether that work is being allocated equitably in San Jose vis-à-vis other County locations.
  - b. Railroads
    - i. The anticipated Memorandum of Understanding governing scheduled cleanups by Union Pacific Railroad in San Jose, and the current cleaning schedule currently undertaken by UPRR.
    - ii. The schedule for UPRR's cleaning and clearing the large illegal dumping debris field in South San Jose near Bailey Road.
    - iii. An update on code enforcement activity for adjacent properties, with an emphasis on properties with multiple violations.
    - iv. An update on the use of technology and other strategies to help deter future illegal dumping, trespassing, and other activity at the Monterey Road at Emado Ave illegal dumping site.
  - c. Creeks
 

Waterway and clean-up collaboration of Valley Water with the City of San José, and planned outreach and cleaning efforts.
- 3. During the planned December Study Session, report to Council regarding:
  - a. the status of long-overdue efforts to eliminate barriers to more widespread and frequently usage of the 311 app—including repeated sign-in requirements—and an update about how changes to the app have adversely affected public usage.
  - b. the steps that the Emergency Operations Center is taking to verify the quality of the work and the effectiveness of our efforts—including that of private contractors— in cleaning and beautifying San Jose neighborhoods.
  - c. whether opening public bidding to other tow operators outside the City of San Jose will enable more responsive service in clearing abandoned vehicles from our neighborhoods.
  - d. an update on code enforcement activities, including how many staff are actively conducting code enforcement inspections and the percent of code enforcement services that have been fully restored to pre shelter-in-place levels.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The pandemic, economic fallout, chronic homelessness, wildfire smoke, and budgetary challenges have created a perfect storm for rising levels of trash and debris on our roads and in our neighborhoods. While some culprits are obvious—illegal dumping by irresponsible contractors and residents has long been a sore spot—other challenges have arisen as well, such as the inability of cleanup crews to work outside during times of unhealthy air quality.

While some eagerly look to point the finger at one culprit or another for the rapid increase of trash and blight in San Jose in recent months, the culprits are many—and are ourselves. Cities throughout the nation have seen a spike in illegal dumping from residents and local businesses, as evidenced by media reports from [Baltimore](#) to [Dallas](#) and anecdotal accounts of mayors throughout the country. Part of the challenge emanates from a phenomenon that's becoming known as "Covid Cleaning": homebound residents are spending more time cleaning their garage and basements, and often disposing of the junk in irresponsible ways. Illegal dumping of appliances in San José is at 160% of what it was before the Pandemic. Problems also arose from the City staff's decision to suspend the operation of illegal dumping crews for several weeks during the pandemic, and more work has piled up than can be addressed with existing staff. The City's free junk pick-up service has seen an increase of as much as 38% in monthly service requests compared to 2019 request levels. City staff currently collects more than 45 tons—yes, tons—of trash and debris from City streets each week. Our Emergency Operations Center has also introduced a trash and debris management program in areas where we have unhoused residents, including adding dumpsters and trash service.

On our freeways, CalTrans reports that their capacity for freeway cleanup has slowed since the suspension of the Sheriff's work program as a result of COVID-related issues at the jail. Our recent communications with the CalTrans Director has focused both agencies on finding ways to help them better address the mess on our freeways, and we are pushing on several options now.

Chief among our obstacles—given San Jose's distinction of having the most thinly-staffed City Hall of any major U.S. city—is the lack of resources. With this memorandum, we urge that the City triple funding for trash and blight relief, with a focus on immediate results. When staff present their larger trash-reduction strategy at a Council Study Session in early December, we will have had a couple of months to assess the impact of an expanded program, with some clear metrics that will help us better understand where we should target our scarce resources in the months ahead.