

City considers grassroots group to fight graffiti

Crime and Criminals - Graffiti

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The city is hoping to build an anti-graffiti army out of local volunteers, following in the footsteps of a San Jose tagging-abatement program.

The head of that city's anti-graffiti efforts, Rob Boyle, will speak at a meeting held by the Santa Cruz Redevelopment Agency at 10 a.m. Thursday in the Civic Auditorium's ABC Room.

The key to fighting graffiti is removing it as quickly as possible to discourage vandals from striking again, said Julie Hendee, an administrative analyst working for redevelopment director Ceil Cirillo.

"But it's impossible for a city to take care of all graffiti in a timely manner," Hendee said.

The Redevelopment Agency hopes local residents will "adopt" pieces of the city — a single stop sign, a wall, a stretch of road, part of a city block — and pledge to keep it clean, with help from solvents and materials supplied by the city. The goal is to eradicate the graffiti within 48 hours.

Richard Donnelly, owner of Donnelly Fine Chocolates on Mission Street, said his store was getting hit "every two or three days. We'd get it, wipe it off and they'd be back, sometimes five or six squiggles on the side of the building, all the windows on the front, all the sides are scratched."

The city hopes the volunteer graffiti-fighting program will be part of a countywide effort.

"We want to really try to develop some champions in graffiti abatement," said Cirillo, who has requested \$15,000 in annual redevelopment funds to fight graffiti.

Pacific Avenue pedestrians often complain about ugly paint squiggles, stickers and acid-blotched windows. "But it's not just downtown," Cirillo said. "It's citywide. The East-side is always violated and so is the West-side, and along the river."

She said there have been graffiti-fighting programs "but that kind of thing always takes someone to be responsible for it. There just hasn't been the person-power to commit."

Cirillo said she's confident the volunteer program will finally help the city and other communities "get our arms around the problem. Some of these conditions are jeopardizing the health of the city."

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