

STAFF REPORT
City of Lancaster, California

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Date: November 13, 2007

To: Mayor Hearn and City Council Members

From: Mark V. Bozigian, Assistant City Manager

Subject: **Consideration of a Partnership with the Antelope Valley Union High School District (AVUHSD) and the Center For Neighborhood Enterprise (CNE) to implement, on a pilot basis, the CNE Violence Free Zone Initiative (VFZ) at a Public High School within the City**

Recommendation:

1. Direct staff to negotiate with the Antelope Valley Union High School District (AVUHSD) and the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (CNE) to implement, on a pilot basis, the CNE Violence Free Zone Initiative (VFZ) at a public high school within the City;
2. Direct staff to return to Council with an agreement consistent with the above direction utilizing City funds not to exceed \$150,000;
3. Direct staff to explore grant opportunities jointly with AVUHSD and CNE to offset the cost to the City in implementing this program.

Fiscal Impact:

Not to exceed \$150,000 from available General Fund balance in the FY 2007-2008 Budget.

Summary:

The Antelope Valley Union High School District (AVUHSD) and the City of Palmdale are considering a partnership with the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (CNE), under the direction of Mr. Robert Woodson, to implement CNE's Violence Free Zone Initiative (VFZ) at Knight High School in Palmdale, possibly as early as December 2007. Mayor Hearn has been in several meetings and discussions regarding recent events at Knight High School, both as Mayor and as a community leader. At the October 9, 2007 Council meeting, the Mayor and the Council directed staff to report back on how Lancaster can be a partner with Palmdale and AVUHSD in working with Robert Woodson and the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise.

The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise is founded on the following guiding principles:

- 1) The principles of the market economy should be applied to the solution of societal problems;
- 2) Those suffering the problem must be involved in the creation and implementation of the solution; and
- 3) Faith-based and community organizations are uniquely qualified to address the problems of poverty.

The Violence Free Zone Initiative (VFZ) is an intensive, adaptable, school based initiative that makes use of youth advisors / peer mentors to identify and work with the approximate 10% of the school student population causing the most disturbance; these are often the informal “leaders” at the school. At full implementation, this is an on-going, year-round program that works in the schools when school is in session and in the immediate surrounding community when school is out of session. VFZ partners with community service providers and other local non-profit and faith-based organizations to provide services to the target students. Selection of 6 to 10 youth advisors and a Site Supervisor from the community is critical to the success of the program. **The goal of the VFZ is to reduce youth crime, violence, and gang activity within the specific target school and immediate surrounding area.**

The VFZ Initiative is an outcome-based program and, as such, is focused on gathering applicable data, establishing goals and tracking points, and reporting on results. The program has shown measurable results in the 21 schools and 6 cities where it is currently in place. The 6 cities are Atlanta, Baltimore, Dallas, Milwaukee, Prince Georges County (MD), and Washington DC.

The total cost to implement the VFZ Initiative for one year in one school is over \$375,000. Because of this substantial cost, it is recommended that the AVUHSD and the City implement the program on a pilot basis in one public high school in Lancaster for the remainder of the 2007-2008 academic year and potentially into the beginning of the 2008-2009 academic year. The program would then be evaluated for potential continuation / expansion based on results and City budget priorities and constraints. While it is possible that the City and AVUHSD could eventually secure government and/or private foundation grant funding to offset the cost of the program, program start up will likely require funding exclusively from the City and AVUHSD.

The AVUHSD Board is supportive of the CNE Violence Free Zone Initiative as they have already allocated up to \$150,000 to fund the program at a high school in Lancaster and up to \$150,000 to do the same in Palmdale. If Council were to approve funding for this program, the selection of the high school in Lancaster at which this program would be implemented would be a joint decision of AVUHSD, the City, and the Sheriffs Department. Staff has already had preliminary but substantive discussions with both AVUHSD and Palmdale on a VFZ pilot program in Lancaster. We are also attempting to schedule a presentation by Robert Woodson for the Council and the AVUHSD Board to further discuss this program.

The CNE Violence Free Zone Initiative is a proven program that is consistent with the City’s public safety program as well as the City’s community building focus through the Strong Neighborhoods Initiative. Implementing the CNE Violence Free Zone Initiative in Lancaster on a pilot basis will further the City Council’s crime reduction efforts, neighborhood building focus, and support improved educational achievement in a meaningful way through a strong partnership with the AVUHSD.