



Date: March 8, 2018

To: Patrick H. West, City Manager *P.H. West*

From: *CB* Craig A. Beck, Director of Public Works

For: Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: **Bicycle Licensing**

On June 20, 2017, the City Council requested that staff report back on the feasibility of developing a voluntary, online application-based bicycle registry program to better enforce existing laws and to assist with the return of recovered bicycles to their legal owners.

Background

The California Vehicle Code (CVC 39000-39011) allows local agencies to create a mandatory program by participating in the State's bicycle licensing program utilizing the State's indicia and allows a maximum of \$4.00 to be collected per bicycle license. However, many bicycle-friendly cities in the United States (e.g., Portland, San Francisco, San Diego, and Los Angeles) have eliminated this type of bicycle licensing program. The primary reason for elimination of these programs has been inadequate resources or cost-prohibitive administrative requirements to maintain a license database supporting the California's CVC model, which does not adequately allow for cost recovery.

The City of Long Beach (City) used the State CVC model for its bicycle-licensing program and conducted bicycle licensing, primarily for children, via its fire stations where bicycles were licensed one Saturday a month. The program was eliminated in 2011.

As an alternative, many cities, including Long Beach, encourage bicycle owners to utilize free or low-cost online registration programs such as the National Bike Registry or Project 529. In February 2017, Project 529 acquired National Bike Registry and merged the two sites. Currently, the Project 529 database has over 400,000 bikes in the combined registries and is the largest such service in the Country. Project 529 offers a free online free bicycle registration, reporting and recovery service that allows cyclists to capture detailed information about their bicycles quickly and secure the information in the cloud. If an owner's bike goes missing, a few taps on any mobile device allows the victim to alert the local cycling community, their social networks and law enforcement agencies with real-time notifications. The Project 529 app can be downloaded for free via the Apple App Store or via Google Play. There is no cost to the user to register their bicycle in Project 529, but public agencies are charged a regular service fee between \$1,000-\$5,000 for annual access. Currently, the Long Beach Police Department (LBPD) is not tracking Long Beach

residents' bicycles because there is not a system in place, like Project 529, that can assist in verifying ownership of self-registered bicycles.

In San Francisco, SAFE (Safety Awareness for Everyone), a community-based 501(c)(3) non-profit that works directly with San Francisco Police Department (SFPD), offers a free online bicycle registry that it established and maintains. This program was initially created through the actions of a County Supervisor, with initial funding provided by the City/County. As SAFE was already working with the SFPD on a number of community-based programs, the bicycle registry was added to their existing programs. Currently, the SAFE program is exchanging data with Project 529 to offer better regional coverage to individuals who have had their bicycles stolen in the Bay Area.

Locally, Seal Beach maintains a free online bike registry that can be accessed by the public via its police department website. The program was developed internally, at no additional cost, by a department analyst who also maintains the site and checks for reported stolen and recovered bicycles. The site currently has 153 registered bicycles and does not allow for the verification of ownership of the bicycles registered.

Recommendation/Next Steps

After review of the various options, staff believes Project 529 offers the greatest ability to deliver a robust, low-cost bicycle registry program to residents.

Public Works staff will work with the LBPD to further evaluate Project 529 and determine if the system has enough veracity for use as the City's primary bike theft registry site, and determine what additional efforts should be included (i.e. community outreach and education). Currently, the City, including the LBPD, does not have access to the Project 529 registry. By participating in Project 529, Long Beach will have access to stolen bicycle data from many jurisdictions nationwide and will allow for law enforcement from those agencies to have immediate access to Long Beach data. The cost for the City's participation in the Project 529 bicycle registry program would be approximately \$1,000 to \$5,000 annually.

Staff inquired with the Technology and Innovation Department (TI) about an alternative to participating in Project 529. TI indicated that the typical cost for the initial development of a comparable in-house application may cost up to \$10,000, plus long-term maintenance costs. This option is not recommended given the significant time commitment, cost, and resources involved with such a development.

Moreover, the benefit of participating in a national registry over a local registrant is the expansive network of bicycle information at the City's disposal. Unlike a Long Beach-specific bike registry database, Project 529 has access to bicycle registry information

across the country and can conduct searches for stolen bicycles nationwide. Project 529 also allows Long Beach residents to alert other registry members of a stolen bicycle by sending a push notification to all Project 529 users within a ten-mile radius, asking them to keep an eye out. The City can take advantage of its social media following by posting notifications of stolen or located bikes to its various platforms, potentially reaching over 165,000 people. These features, and more, are available in Project 529 for a low annual cost. Creating a Long Beach database would limit our bicycle searches and take more time and money to implement.

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