

DATE ISSUED: March 14, 2002

REPORT NO. 02-047

ATTENTION: Honorable Mayor and City Council
Docket of March 18, 2002

SUBJECT: Maintenance of Acorn Street Lights for Historic Districts in High Crime
Areas

REFERENCE: Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee
Meetings of June 20, 2001 and January 23, 2002
City Manager Reports 01-128 and 02-021

SUMMARY

Issue - Shall City Council authorize as a special benefit funding of energy and maintenance (E&M) of acorn street lights for City-designated historic districts in high crime areas where the installation of the lighting is provided from Council discretionary funds?

Manager's Recommendation -

1. Authorize as a special benefit City-funded E&M of acorn street lights for City-designated historic districts in high crime areas, where the Council discretionary funds are used for installation. Reserve the right to discontinue funding if changes in crime statistics drop the area from "high crime" status.
2. Revise the Street Design Manual to include these criteria for exempt projects from maintenance districts where they (the criteria) are met.

Other Recommendations -

1. On June 20, 2001 the PS&NS Committee recommended designating traditional single and double “acorn” lights as a City standard for the purpose of supporting their maintenance from the City’s General Fund in existing Maintenance Assessment District or communities that are pedestrian-oriented or of historic nature.
2. On January 21, 2002, the City’s Historic Resources Board recommended support for City funding of energy and maintenance of pedestrian oriented or ornamental lights in Historic Districts.

Fiscal Impact - A total of 266 existing acorn lights fall within this proposed policy. Average annual E&M cost is \$157 each or a total cost of \$41,762 per year. Additionally, there is a project underway to install 17 acorn lights on 19th Street between Imperial Avenue and Market Street. This would be an additional E&M cost of \$2,669 per year for a total fiscal impact of \$44,431 per year.

BACKGROUND

Typically, ornamental street lights, including acorn street lights, are neither installed nor maintained by the City because they are considered an extraordinary benefit above and beyond the basic infrastructure required. Instead, assessment districts are formed for their installation and maintenance. In 1997, then City Manager McGrory approved an exception for two projects in the Sherman Heights Historic District where the E&M of ornamental (acorn) street lights would be paid by the City. This was done on the basis that they were in a Historic District, within defined high crime census tracts, the spacing design was efficient with respect to the number of lights to be included, and grant funds paid for the capital costs of the installation. The Manager recommends this rationale be carried forward for policy regarding acorn street lights in this and other similar areas.

DISCUSSION

The basis for City-wide funding to pay for the energy and maintenance of these lights, under these circumstances, is that crime severely reduces the quality of life in neighborhoods, lowers property values and requires heavy presence of patrol officers. (High crime census tracts are identified by the San Diego Police Department as census tracts in which the crime rate against persons is greater than or equal to 1.5 times the City average for two or more consecutive years.) While it is not a proven fact, it is nonetheless acknowledged that lighting in high crime areas provide the communities with a greater sense of security and assist in deterring people from engaging in illegal activity. Decorative lighting also assists in enhancing the aesthetic features in high crime areas which directly supports stabilization of these fragile areas and helps to restore

the value of property. Also, Historic Districts in the City provide “special benefit” due to their special character, historical interest, cultural and aesthetic value. The decorative lighting enhances the historic nature of these areas in addition to increasing the sense of security.

There are fifteen current City-designated historic districts (see attached location map). In overlaying these districts with the high crime area census tract information, we have determined that there are currently 266 additional assessment district acorn lights that satisfy the three criteria of Historic District, high crime and where the Council office provided discretionary or grant funds for their installation. The pending 19th Street project in Sherman Heights will provide 17 additional eligible acorn lights for a total of 283. Therefore, the manager recommends that the annual E&M cost of \$44,431 for these 283 acorn street lights be paid by the City rather than assessment district.

The total future fiscal impact can not be assessed at this time as the areas qualifying for designation of Historic Districts are not finite nor is the high crime census tract data static. Over time, the City Council may wish to revert these costs to assessment district if the areas experience high revitalization such that the crime rates no longer are significantly higher than other parts of the City. Therefore, the Manager additionally recommends that the City Council reserve the right to discontinue City funding if high crime status is no longer applicable, and E&M costs would revert back to the assessment district.

At this time, the Manager does not recommend that energy and maintenance for all decorative street lights be paid by the City due to the substantial fiscal impact resulting from such an action.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Direct the City Manager to return to the PS&NS Committee with the fiscal impact of City-funded E&M for acorn street lights under conditions other than, or in addition to, those that are recommended.
2. Do not authorize City-funded E&M for acorn street lights.

Respectfully submitted, D. Cruz Gonzalez Director, Transportation Department		Approved: George I. Loveland
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Note: The attachment is not available in electronic format. A copy is available for review in the Office of the City Clerk.

Attachment: City of San Diego Historical Districts Map