TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL
FROM: CITY MANAGER DEPARTMENT: CITY MANAGER’S OFFICE
DATE: DECEMBER 13, 2004 CMR: 517:04
SUBJECT: ADOPTION OF A PALO ALTO CITIZEN CORPS COUNCIL

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that Council adopt a resolution designating the existing Community Disaster Preparedness Group as the Palo Alto Citizen Corps Council.

BACKGROUND

In the 2002 State of the Union message, President George W. Bush announced the creation of the Citizen Corps as a means of mobilizing volunteer efforts among the residents of the United States. The Citizen Corps was designed to incorporate existing programs such as: Neighborhood Watch, Community Emergency Response Teams, Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS), and Medical Reserve Corps. The stated goal is to have all citizens participate in making their communities safer, stronger, and better prepared for preventing and handling threats of terrorism, crime, and disasters of all kinds.

The Citizen Corps effort is coordinated at the local level by Citizen Corps Councils, which bring together leaders from various sectors within the community. The purpose is to have key staff at the table to manage resources and effectively coordinate training efforts to enhance community awareness and response to emergencies.

Each state governor has appointed a state coordinator for Citizen Corps to facilitate the implantation of the program. The state coordinator also serves as a contact with the Director for Local Coordination from the federal Department of Homeland Security. The Director for Local Coordination oversees the program, however it is important to remember that the key premise of the program is that local elected officials, staff, and members of the community know best what risks their communities face.
A grant program to support Citizen Corps Councils is being managed by FEMA. In order for a community to receive FEMA funds, it must have a registered Citizen Corps Council coordinating the work of its various Citizen Corps components. FEMA will pass all the Citizen Corps funds through the states. In California the funds will go to the Operational Areas, where the Operational Area Council (Emergency Preparedness Council in Santa Clara County) will distribute the funds. Although the funds will be distributed to Operational Areas on a per capita basis, local agreements have to be made on the distribution of the funds to the City level. In order for the City to be eligible to receive its own grant funds, a Citizen Corps Council has to be designated as the grant application endorsement body.

**DISCUSSION**

The City currently operates three federal Citizen Corps programs: Neighborhood Watch, Palo Alto Neighborhood Disaster Activities (PANDA), and Volunteers in Policing (VIPS). A fourth program, the Medical Reserve Corps, is operated by the Pacific School of Psychiatry, Stanford University, and the Veterans Hospital.

**Neighborhood Watch**

Palo Alto's Neighborhood Watch (NHW) program began in 1981 and serves as a conduit between the community and the police. The police department reaches many of the NHW groups by way of neighborhood associations. Each association may have several members that play an important role as a liaison between their neighborhood and the police. The objective has continued to be to promote safety and security in neighborhoods. The basic crime prevention goals are to protect self, be aware of your surroundings and any suspicious people or activities, to be prepared and to know how to respond to home emergencies. NHW members continue to participate in a variety of related programs and become leaders in the Palo Alto community.

The Citizens Police Academy (CPA) is one of the most valuable programs that emerged as a result of residents and NHW members wanting to understand and work with the police. The Citizens Police Academy provides the opportunity for Palo Alto community members to learn more about the roles and responsibilities of local law enforcement. Both the NHW and the CPA groups continue to increase in numbers. As a rule, the NHW members and Citizen Police Academy graduates become supporters for the Palo Alto Police Department.

**PANDA**

Through the federally designed 20+ hour training program, PANDA members are equipped with the skills to begin providing leadership and hands-on response at the neighborhood level in the first 72 hours after a disaster, when professional first responders may be overtaxed. These skills include fire suppression, disaster medicine, light search and rescue, damage assessment, and disaster psychology. With their distinctive green vests, hard hats, and equipped command posts, they provide a crucial link between first responders and neighborhoods. The PANDA program began in September 1999. There are now almost 400 members. Courses are offered eight times throughout the year, training 80 to 100 new team members annually. Additionally, monthly refresher or advanced classes are offered. Approximately 30 to 50 members attend each monthly refresher/advanced class.
Staff from the Manager’s Office, Police and Fire Departments are working collaboratively to identify potential improvements to the Neighborhood Watch and the PANDA programs. The creation of a Citizen Corps will be incorporated into this review, to help reduce any duplication of efforts, which should result in stronger programs and increased public participation.

**VIPS**
The Palo Alto Police Department’s volunteer program was established more than 20 years ago with the goal of involving the public in crime prevention activities. Today, volunteers provide valuable support to police officers and staff, thereby enhancing the quality and range of service the department provides to citizens. The 22 volunteers currently on staff help maintain patrol cars and equipment, assist the Alarm Permit Program, license bicycles, assist detectives, give station tours, assist with data entry and filing, participate in community events, provide clerical assistance, and assist with the Citizens’ Police Academy. Police department staff continuously looks for ways to bring citizens into the department to provide support and assistance. Last year, volunteers provided more than 2,000 hours; nine volunteers received the President’s Volunteer Service Award for donating more than 100 hours in a 12-month period. The Animal Services Division of the department operates a separate volunteer program. The Palo Alto Police Department registered its volunteer program with the Volunteers in Police Service Program (VIPS) in 2003. Volunteers in Police Service provides support to state, county, and local law enforcement in establishing and maintaining volunteer programs.

**Medical Reserve Corps**
Following the events of 9-11, the National Center on the Psychology of Terrorism (NCPT) identified a need for a Medical Reserve Corp focused on treating the psychological emergencies resulting from natural disasters and traumatic events caused by individuals or terrorist groups. The NCPT applied for and received a grant through the United States Department of Health and Human Services to begin work on creating a network of volunteers within the Palo Alto community that is trained and certified in providing up-to-date emergency mental health services. The Palo Alto Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) is unique in the nation for its emphasis on the provision of mental health services. The Palo Alto MRC provides training to licensed mental health professional already serving as emergency mental health responders through establishing response organizations. Treatment, services and additional training opportunities will be offered to the community, first responders, and local leaders. Because of its unique positioning, this program may eventually help to set national standards, which are both empirically based and real-world tested, for psychological service provision during and after major disasters.

The Palo Alto MRC is a cooperative endeavor that involves many members and organizations within the community. The City of Palo Alto, Veteran’s Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System and many others have expressed both their interest and commitment to this program. Doctoral students from the Pacific Graduate School of Psychology also work collaboratively on this project with the NCDPT Directors and the community.
Citizen Corps Council

The City organized the Community Disaster Preparedness Group in 2003. This group is comprised of 37 participants from 22 different organizations. It meets on a quarterly basis, and fulfills all necessary requirements to be the Citizen Corps Council for Palo Alto.

Upon City Council approval of the Citizen Corps Council, staff will register Palo Alto with the federal government, enabling Palo Alto to develop grant proposals through the Citizen Corps program. In addition to being eligible for grant funding, the Citizen Corps Council will:

- **Match the needs of first responders** with the skills and abilities of volunteers to make their families, their homes and their communities safer from the threats of terrorism, crime and disasters.
- **Educate the public on safety**, help citizens take an active role in protecting themselves from harm, and teach citizens what to do in the event of a crisis.
- **Spearhead efforts to offer citizens new and existing volunteer opportunities**, educational information, and training courses to address crime, terrorism, and natural disaster risks.
- **Promote all Citizen Corps programs** and activities across the community.
- **Capture innovative practices** and report accomplishments that can be replicated in other communities nationwide.
- **Survey the community** to assess increased awareness and Citizen Corps participation.

**RESOURCE IMPACT**

The adoption of a Citizen Corps will not add any additional impacts to current City operations.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

This report does not represent any change to existing City policies.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

This staff report does not represent a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Resolution Supporting the Adoption of a Palo Alto Citizen Corps Council

PREPARED BY:  
Chris Mogensen, Assistant to the City Manager  
Barbara Cimino, Disaster Coordinator  
Susie Jones, Community Services Officer
CITY MANAGER APPROVAL:

Emily Harrison, Assistant City Manager