

Editorial: Manchester police proposal fits city needs

By The Bee Editorial Board

Taxpayer dollars are best used strategically with a goal of accomplishing multiple objectives.

A proposal to anchor the Fresno Police Department's Violent Crime Impact Team at Manchester Center meets that standard, which is why we recommend that the City Council give it the green light at Thursday's meeting.

As reported by The Bee's George Hostetter, Manchester would provide up to 8,000 square feet of rent-free space for five years. The city would be on the hook only for operating costs pegged at \$3,440 monthly. This meets an important objective: stretching taxpayer dollars.

At least 20 officers would be stationed at Manchester, which has fallen on hard times, as has much of the surrounding neighborhood. It's no secret that gang members have moved into the area and have been involved in drug sales, prostitution and violent crime. A strong police presence there would be a plus for law-abiding residents and send the message that City Hall cares about them.

In addition, an expectation that people can safely shop at Manchester and other Blackstone Avenue businesses is crucial to Mayor Ashley Swearingin's attempt to revitalize the urban core. Attracting new investment to the Blackstone corridor will only happen if developers and business owners believe they can succeed there and will be strongly support by City Hall

The success or failure of the city's Bus Rapid Transit system also hinges on public perception of the service. Are the buses safe to ride? Are gang-bangers hanging around the Manchester bus station and intimidating or even strong-arming passengers? Will riders see drug deals going down or pimps beating up young girls while they wait for the bus to arrive?

There are several other points to be made.

Though this proposal is from the mayor and Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer, neighborhood activists and District 7 Council Member Clint Olivier deserve credit for keeping a close eye on Manchester and the area around it. They have implored the police chief and mayor to address the increase in criminal activity there for several years.

The area is home to many blue-collar workers and retirees. They have great pride in their homes, their neighborhoods and their schools. And they have grown increasingly frustrated by what they see as City Hall indifference. Their pleas for help should have been answered sooner.

Finally, the owners of Manchester Center need to follow through on their recently announced improvements, which include a new mall entrance, food court, exterior shopping area and an events plaza. They also need to do a better job of keeping the mall clean and in good repair. It also wouldn't hurt to be more welcoming of the retirees and others who like to walk the mall early in the morning for exercise.

The key to Manchester's success will be positioning itself as a prime hub of activity for people living near the Blackstone corridor in central Fresno. If Manchester's owners do that, merchants' cash registers will sing.

An increased police presence at the mall and on nearby streets will position Manchester for success. Achieving success, however, is up to the mall's owners.