Call to Order: 6:05 p.m.

Roll Call: Mayor Pro Tem Martinez, Council Member West, Council Member Hamilton, Council Member Irish, and Mayor Stadherr.

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS
There were no oral communications.

SCHEDULED MATTER

1. GANG ACTIVITY STUDY SESSION

Mr. Longley introduced Chief Silver Rodriguez who presented the program on gangs.

Chief Rodriguez started the program by providing a specific definition of what the state and law enforcement view as an actual street gang: a group of three or more persons who have a common identifying sign, symbol, or name, and whose members individually or collectively engage in, or have engaged in, a pattern of criminal activity, creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation within a community. Chief Rodriguez presented a PowerPoint program that focused on information about gangs. Some of the highlights were:

- Reasons for joining gangs: a sense of belonging, identity, and the gang becomes their family.
- Reasons for gang crimes: initiation of new members, to gain prestige or status within the gang by committing crimes.
- In the Porterville area there are currently eight gangs of which five are active. The actual number of gang members in the Porterville area is approximately 800. Allegiance is to red versus blue, north versus south, 14 versus 13; there is no real turf war over territory. The main gangs in Porterville are VSP, ESP, and WSS. Officer Todd Lientz gave the names of gangs these letters stand for in response to a question from Council Member Cam Hamilton.
- Anti-gang efforts by Porterville Police Department include working closely with schools and sharing information because the majority of gang members are students at a school. The target age of gang members is 13 to 20-years-old. The Police Department also works closely with the Tulare County Probation Department. The Police Department is a member of the Tulare Gang Task Force and participates in gang sweeps. The Department is planning a meeting with area agencies to collectively form strategies to combat gang activity. The gang database is updated with information on suspected gang members, their tattoos, and vehicles. The STEP Act is used to serve
gang members notice that any further gang activity will result in arrest. The STEP Act can also require gang members to register with local law enforcement.

- To be successful in dealing with gangs, communities must rely on a three-prong approach of suppression, prevention, and intervention. Suppression efforts by Porterville Police Department include monitoring gang activities, surveillance of gang members, assignment of officers to special details to target gangs, increased training of officers to identify gangs and develop skills of asking correct questions, reading responses. Prevention tactics include the PAL program, presentations to the community at fairs, schools, PTA’s, and other events to provide education about gang activities, after-school activities provided by schools and community programs such as sports, band, etc. Chief Rodriguez said the Violence Reduction Program, that provided education to young people through an officer in the classroom, had been eliminated due to budget restrictions. Chief Rodriguez thinks we are lacking in intervention efforts in this area. Some efforts that are now in place are the PAL program, probation programs for “at risk” youths, and counseling/mentoring provided by the school system.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Chief Rodriguez invited those in attendance to ask questions.

Council Member Hamilton asked if the average age of gang members was 13 to 20, does that hinder the Police Department as far as what they can do to juveniles compared to adults?

Officer Todd Lientz stated that the juvenile court system is different, but enforcement is the same. If a crime has occurred, that person is arrested regardless of their age.

Mary Raborn, from the Tulare County Probation Department, said some intervention programs in Porterville are the Thunderbolt program and Neighborhood Accountability on the eastside of Porterville. She said there are many ways of handling juveniles, such as boot camp, group homes, etc., while adults just go to jail.

The questions were asked whether the Police Department could identify the leaders of active gangs, and how gangs recruit members.

Officer Lientz replied there was often no set leadership or hierarchy, that leadership in a gang can be fluid. He stated that as to recruitment, some are third generation members; some see the gang lifestyle and want to be part of it and start hanging around with gangs.

Council Member Irish asked if roadside checks for sobriety help in any way with gangs, and Chief Rodriguez stated that they really don’t help with gangs, that officers are checking briefly for impaired drivers.

Council Member Irish asked what the parallels were between hard-core gang members in Porterville and graffiti.
Sergeant Becky Swartzlander said most graffiti is not related to gangs, it is produced by tagging crews. Gang graffiti is isolated to certain neighborhoods and is used for marking territory, as a challenge to other gangs.

Bob Perez, from the Porterville School District, said the attraction to a gang can be for protection, a feeling of power, control, or a way out of poverty.

Council Member West asked how many home invasions were related to gang activity.

Lieutenant Eric Kroutil said the vast majority of home invasions are not related to gangs but, rather, are drug related. The target house might be a “stash house” where drugs or money are kept. It was noted that there are few home invasions in Porterville.

Chief Rodriguez invited Bob Perez, who has been designated by Porterville School District as their gang liaison, to share some of what he is seeing in schools related to gangs. Mr. Perez reiterated that the average age of gang members is 13 to 20 and most of these are in schools. He said when something happens in the schools, it spills over into the community. Mr. Perez said gang activity is presently at the highest level he has ever seen and that young people are more sophisticated now and faced with a high degree of exposure to violence. He said gangs are not just in the barrio, they are in every segment of society.

Council Member Irish said Porterville seems to be about five to eight years behind in crimes seen in Los Angeles, San Francisco, so what we see in large cities will be here, it’s just a matter of time.

Mr. Perez said in 1982 there were 12 prisons in California, in 1992, 24 prisons, and that now there are 33 prisons operating in California. Meanwhile, the tenth UC campus still awaits completion. Mr. Perez said quick repairs won’t work, and they needed funding to take care of youth. They could pay now or pay later. He said it takes $5,000 a year to educate a youth, but $25,000 a year to house a prisoner.

Gilbert Ynigues asked for a solution to stop the recruiting of gang members.

Mr. Perez stated that the common denominators of gang members was a lack of reading comprehension, causing frustration with school so they go in a different direction, also breakdown of the family unit. He said some hard-core gang members need to be locked up forever while we can reach others. Mr. Perez said youths need a connection from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m.

Jim Perrine, Director of Parks and Leisure Services, stated that schools have lost programs this year that served as a prevention, and alternate funds were needed to keep programs going.

Ms. Raborn added that placing a youth in a group home costs $30,000 per year and then they go back to homes where the parents are the same. She said parent education programs are needed.
Mr. Perez said too often youths are out of the control of parents, that parents do not set parameters for them. He stressed that parents need to listen to children 15 minutes a day and provide positive reinforcement and encouragement. He said the excuse, “There is nothing to do,” is not true because there are gangs in Los Angeles also.

Council Member Hamilton thanked Mr. Perez for his input. Council Member Hamilton asked if they were budgeted to combat this situation facing the City, or if there was something they could do to provide funding.

Chief Rodriguez said their resources have to grow because they must provide services to an increasing number of people. At present, they must prioritize calls for service. As the demands on the Police Department grow, they will at some time reach capacity. Their resources are stretched, but they still make every effort to respond. Chief Rodriguez said that if the Department had three or ten more officers he was not sure it would solve gang problems, but it would slow it down. He added that during unobligated patrol time, officers can go out and focus on specific problems.

Council Member Hamilton said that Fresno has an injunction against a specific gang that prevents them from loitering in certain areas. He asked if this tactic would be feasible in Porterville. Julia Lew, City attorney, said it is something Porterville could consider.

Council Member Hamilton asked if we had more officers couldn’t we have increased suppression?

Chief Rodriguez said the average number of police officers outside of California is 2.1 per 1,000 populace, but the ratio in California is 1.2 per 1,000.

Council Member Hamilton stated that the Council wants the City to grow, but when it grows there must be an increase in law enforcement.

Mayor Pro Tem Martinez asked if the county pockets within Porterville were more prevalent in gang activity.

Chief Rodriguez replied that none of them could say that was true; sometimes crimes just happen to be within those pockets.

Mr. Yningues said we should identify gang members and get them jobs; that’s how to break up gangs.

Chief Rodriguez asked Ms. Raborn how the Probation Department has been impacted by budget cuts. Ms. Raborn replied that the impact has been felt in the screening process. There are only so many detention beds; they just keep the worst of the worst. Others are released with detention anklets, and others are given a straight release and beat the officer home. She said they have a department in Probation specifically assigned to gangs. They try to identify gang
members to monitor and try to intervene. She said they have to deal with an increasing number of adult gang members.

Mayor Pro Tem Martinez asked if they have any female gangs in Porterville, or just females involved in gangs, if there was a different method for females to join a gang, and how gang members get out of the gang.

Sergeant Swartzlander stated that females are involved in, or are associates of, male gangs, and they get “jumped in” just like a male member. Sergeant Swartzlander said they can get “jumped out,” which involves a more severe beating than getting “jumped in,” or some gangs have a “blood in, blood out” code, which means a member gets out by their death. When other gang members have families, they are allowed to retire or be inactive.

Mayor Pro Tem Martinez asked what was the youngest age of gang members in Porterville, and was told that 12 and 13-year-olds were not uncommon. Mayor Pro Tem Martinez asked if there were more gangs in certain schools. For instance, where schools didn’t have uniform policies or offer more activities for their students.

Sergeant Swartzlander said that they have not observed a set pattern.

Bob Perez said the school district is doing “soul searching” about mixing students affiliated with gang colors or making some schools more gang color dominant by shifting students.

Mayor Pro Tem Martinez asked from how far away are gangs having an effect on our community.

Chief Rodriguez said gangs from Delano and Visalia have been noted during traffic stops. Officer Lientz said the outside gangs are a factor; we get lots of Delano gang members on the weekends.

Mayor Pro Tem Martinez asked if Porterville was giving them a green light by having more lenient cruising laws, or did they know we have less police?

Chief Rodriguez said people were not allowed to loiter in parking lots, that the Department tries to keep people moving to avoid incidents.

Council Member Irish said he wanted to address the other Council members to ask if they could have an open meeting between the Council and School Board to share problems encountered with gangs.

John Longley said he had written to Superintendent Jim Maples, and the superintendents of the schools, to arrange meetings between them and the City, and he was working toward that.

Gilbert Ynigues stated that they should be talking to the teachers since they have direct contact with the students.
Jim Perrine, Director of Parks and Leisure Services, said approximately 140 kids who participated in after school sports are now unable to do so because these programs have been eliminated due to budget cuts.

Milt Stowe, from Parks and Leisure Services, stated the programs we really need, like DARE, have been eliminated because of budget cuts.

Rebecca Treadwell asked about the possibility of getting a Big Brothers/Big Sisters program going. She stated that most young people lack a male role model.

Mr. Stowe stated that the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program was not feasible because of the funding and volunteers required by the program. He said that they need more than volunteers, because volunteers were here for a week and then find something else to do. He said they needed funding to add paid personnel.

Mayor Pro Tem Martinez asked if they had a program that educates parents and schools about gangs, and, if so, if that program was available in Spanish.

Chief Rodriguez said he gave such a program at Olive Street School within the last year where most parents were Spanish speaking.

Mayor Stadtherr thanked everyone for coming and said gangs were a major issue the Council would continue working on, but if the answer was easy, someone would have already done it. He again extended an invitation for any oral communications, but there were none.

John Longley said this meeting would be followed up with a meeting between Supervisor Jim Maples, the superintendents of Burton and Porterville School Districts, and the City Council.

After some audience discussion, it was decided Alta Vista School District would also be invited to participate in the meeting. The audience was invited to write any additional comments regarding this subject and send them to City Hall for the Council’s consideration.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Stadtherr adjourned the meeting at 7:35 p.m. until September 16, 2003.

Georgia Hawley, Deputy City Clerk
By: Debbie Salter, Clerical Asst. III

Richard M. Stadtherr, Mayor