


Office of the City Manager

May 12, 2015

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Christine Daniel, City Manager 
Subject: Council Referral: Stolen Vehicle Recovery

This memo is to provide information relating to a September 30, 2014 Consent Calendar referral from the City Council regarding reducing or eliminating fees imposed upon stolen vehicle victims.

The referral expresses concerns that a victim of auto theft may have to pay towing and storage fees associated with the recovery of their stolen vehicle, in circumstances wherein the victim could not be reached at the time of the discovery of the vehicle in the field. The concern is that the tow and storage fees place an additional a significant burden on the vehicle owner, who has already suffering due to the theft of their vehicle. As a remedy, the referral suggests the city consider "the issue of fees imposed upon stolen vehicle victims by towing companies upon the next round of contract negotiations."

When a concern about an improper or unfair tow arises, a tow hearing is conducted by the Traffic Bureau -- generally by the Traffic Bureau Sergeant.

It is staff's experience that it is a rare circumstance for the victim of a stolen vehicle to not be contacted upon the recovery of their vehicle. Typically owners are reunited with their vehicles without incurring any tow or storage fee.

In any case, the Traffic Bureau is sensitive to the plight of a community member who potentially could incur tow and storage fees. In the instance of a particular complaint or issue, the Traffic Bureau Sergeant would research the case to determine the factual circumstances. Once confirmed, the Traffic Bureau Sergeant has (and uses) the discretionary authority to have the City pay for tow and storage fees, at the City rates as specified in the tow contracts when it is in the public interest to do so. The Traffic Bureau Sergeant has on those rare occasions had the tow company bill the city, so that the vehicle owner is not charged.

Reliable systems and processes are currently in place to ensure that owners of recovered stolen vehicles are not burdened with additional tow and storage costs, and that these existing processes eliminate the need to negotiate new elements into City tow contracts in the future.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

cc: Dee Williams-Ridley, Deputy City Manager
Mark Numainville, City Clerk
Ann-Marie Hogan, City Auditor
Michael K. Meehan, Chief of Police
Matthai Chakko, Public Information Officer
Police Review Commission