

Officials hope new lights will help curb crime in Richmond's Iron Triangle

By Katherine Tam, Staff Writer

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Streets in Richmond's Iron Triangle neighborhood are so poorly lit that many residents don't feel safe walking at night. Some streetlights burned out long ago but have not been replaced. Others just don't throw off enough light.

"The neighborhood is too dim and too dark," said Otheree Christian of the Iron Triangle Neighborhood Council. "We do need brighter lights in the area."

Change could be coming soon.

City officials are partnering with PG&E to shed more light on the Iron Triangle with the hope that it will help curb crime. PG&E crews will swap the 70-watt streetlights for 150-watt lights in the area bounded by Lucas Avenue to the north,

Pennsylvania Avenue to the south, Fifth Street to the west and 10th Street to the east, said Rich Davidson, city engineer. Street corners, Peres Elementary School and Lucas Park will be even brighter and get 250-watt lights.

"With more lighting, we hope to mitigate crime, make it difficult to conduct any criminal activity," said Yader Bermudez, public works

director.

The city and utility company are finalizing plans; the date for when the 30 brighter streetlights will be installed hasn't been set.

Richmond is the first city in the Bay Area to partner with PG&E on brighter streetlights with an eye toward safety, said David Eisenhauer, PG&E spokesman. The utility also is talking to city leaders in Oakland.

The Iron Triangle is Richmond's highest crime area. Twenty-three percent of assaults with a firearm and 37 percent of homicides in 2006 occurred there, according to a city report.

Residents, fed up with the violence and battling to take back their neighborhood, have teamed up with Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization to launch the "Save the Iron Triangle" campaign aimed at working with city officials to deal with issues such as blight, trash, youth programs and community policing.

Streetlighting is high on their radar, and the group met with officials last month to discuss brighter lights in a pilot project. "The 150 watts will definitely be brighter," Christian said.

Elsewhere in West County, including along parts of Macdonald Avenue in Richmond where streetscape projects have provided new lights, police have reported fewer people lingering at street corners and on streets, Davidson said.

If the Iron Triangle's pilot project is successful, city officials will look at boosting the wattage of streetlights throughout the neighborhood, Davidson said.

Upgrading the street lights for the higher wattage will cost the city about \$300 per light fixture, he said. Officials will be monitoring how the project affects the electricity bill.

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