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East P.A. to hire police for war on crime

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Three or four additional police officers will be on the streets of East Palo Alto within the next month, beginning a full-scale war on drugs declared Thursday by city and San Mateo County officials.

The new officers will be part of a multifaceted attack on crime which was organized in the past week and unveiled at a news conference Thursday by East Palo Alto Mayor John Bostic, Vice Mayor War-nell Coats and San Mateo County Supervi-

sors Tom Nolan and Tom Huening.

"There have been a bunch of punks terrorizing the community," Nolan said, "and we can beat 'em." Nolan began the effort last week by asking for a meeting with city officials.

This latest effort to help troubled East Palo Alto was prompted by the death of police Officer Joel Davis in June. He was shot, allegedly by a local drug dealer, in the parking lot of the former Nairobi Shopping Center on Bay Road.

The additional police will be paid for by

a recent increase in the city's utilities tax. Other measures include:

- ✓ A four-year property tax increase in East Palo Alto to help pay for better law enforcement, which will be proposed to voters on the November ballot. The measure would add \$60 to \$80 to each property owner's tax bill, and would raise an estimated \$500,000 for the police department's current \$2.1 million budget. The money would be used to hire more officers.

- ✓ Asking the state attorney general for

state police to help with heroin and "crack" cocaine arrests.

- ✓ Community anti-drug education programs.

- ✓ Donation of more time from San Mateo County criminal investigators to help the county district attorney's office prosecute East Palo Alto cases. "Just having more officers on the street isn't going to make this work," Nolan said.

- ✓ Asking state parole board officials to

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City-county coalition offers several ideas to fight crime

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review the number of parolees assigned to East Palo Alto.

- ✓ Consideration by San Mateo County of building a jail or sheriff's substation in East Palo Alto with county jail bond money.

San Mateo County officials also will help the city organize meetings with local, regional and state officials to try to marshal other resources.

East Palo Alto has 26 full-time officers to serve its 18,000 residents, a ratio four times higher than the average in neighboring cities. Salaries for the new police officers to go on duty this month will be paid from a utility tax recently passed by the city council.

"If the resources are there, we can address this problem," Coats said.

"We've seen a change already in

the willingness of the community to come forward and help," Bostic said. "The spotlight on us now will help us."

Sixty percent of the homes in East Palo Alto are owner-occupied, Bostic said. When homeowners were asked about the proposed property tax increase, "they have indicated they would support the tax," Coats said.

The city-county group will hold a meeting next week of all county law enforcement officials to make sure efforts are coordinated. Another meeting is planned with state legislators, congressional representatives for the area and officials from Santa Clara and Alameda counties, Menlo Park, Palo Alto and Atherton.

Churches, schools, civic groups, neighborhood associations, homeowner groups, businesses and labor organizations will also be asked to

help with ideas and energy, Coats said.

Lack of commercial development has kept East Palo Alto from providing adequate community services, Coats said, adding that the city will get help from San Mateo County to move some of the projects along.

"People have to feel secure so solving the drug problem is essential," Coats said. "We need to regain control of the streets."

"The blessing we have is that we are a small community," Bostic said. "If this were Oakland or Los Angeles, we would be less excited about our plans."