

Houston Police Department

2012 Goldstein Award Submission



“BACK FROM THE BRINK”

**“Reclaiming the Antoine Corridor and the Development
of Problem Oriented Policing within the Houston Police Department”**

Agency Contact

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Summary

Scanning: The Antoine corridor in the north part of Houston, TX, was once “the place to live” in Houston. In the early 90’s the area began a slow downward decline until it became one of the most notorious area in all of Houston. By 2006, violent crime was out of control, and honest citizens refused to travel through the area, let alone live there.

Analysis: The Antoine corridor is a one square mile area of north which was home to 15 apartment complexes with approximately 4670 units in total. Most of the apartment complexes suffered from neglect and lack of maintenance; some had deteriorated into outright slum conditions. These complexes were populated by gang members, drug dealers and registered sex offenders. The area was further impacted in 2005 with the addition of Hurricane Katrina evacuees from New Orleans when the murder rate more than tripled.

Response: For several years, the Houston Police Department poured over \$100,000 per month using traditional policing programs. In 2005, HPD’s North Differential Response Team (DRT) began aggressive code enforcement, addressing life safety violations at all 15 of the apartment complexes. In 2007, HPD and the city were successful in litigation that resulted in the demolition of a 300 unit condominium project, the first of several sub-standard multi-family units to be razed in the targeted area. In 2009, HPD worked with the Houston City Council to enact the first apartment enforcement ordinance, which is a set of guidelines for evaluating high crime complexes to identify and implement corrective action. It also created a Blue Star Program whereby apartment managers could receive training in crime prevention and CPTED techniques, with the goal of becoming an HPD Blue Star Certified property. In 2010, the Management District, working closely with HPD and stakeholders in the community, commissioned a redevelopment study subsidized by grants to revitalize the neighborhood. The projects born of this collaboration caused a dynamic change in the neighborhood.

Assessment: The combined efforts of HPD, the Management District, and community stakeholders have resulted in a 57% reduction in Part One Crime since 2006 and a 62% reduction in narcotics cases over 5 years. Gangs and drug dealers have largely abandoned the area, apartments are attracting families back into the neighborhood, and developers and business have returned.

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SCANNING

There was a time in Houston when young urban professionals considered the area along Antoine Drive “the place to be”. It is a one mile stretch of Antoine drive with large apartments on major side streets. Situated between what were two very upscale neighborhoods, Inwood and Antoine Forest Estates, the Antoine corridor boasted a mixture of luxury apartment complexes and condominium communities.

During the late 1980’s, the occupancy rates began to decline. Apartment s owners responded by lowering rents and not properly screening tenants. This caused an over-saturation of vacant apartments for rent. With almost 4700 units in total between the 15 complexes in a one square mile area, hundreds of units remained vacant. Apartment owners lowered their standards to fill their complexes in order to make them more attractive to investors so that they could be sold to turn a quick profit. Convicted felons and drug dealers moved in to this “affordable” housing, and the law-abiding people moved out. New owners neglected maintenance of the complexes in an effort to maximize profits, and the self-destructive cycle began.

As the long-time residents who had built this community witnessed the influx of a new criminal element, they began an exodus. The new “residents” of the apartments now populated the local schools as well, and as the quality of the schools diminished and crime skyrocketed, those concerned about their

diminishing property values began to vacate. The prices single family residences plummeted, allowing more of the same criminal element to become more securely entrenched in this once prosperous neighborhood.

As was to be expected, businesses began shutting their doors and moving elsewhere. They complained of high crime and a lack of a qualified workforce from which to hire new employees. The area became a *food desert* as the major grocery chains left the area and refused to return. They cited the fact that thefts had impacted their bottom line so severely that the stores couldn't stay profitable. All that remained in the dilapidated strip centers were convenience stores, beauty supply and pawn shops.

By 2001, the area was approaching critical mass. Gunfire and open sales of narcotics had become so common that most citizens did not bother to report it to the police any more. Homicide detectives spent so much time there, they were on a first name basis with many of the residents and managers. De Soto Street, which housed five complexes, became so notorious that even police officers who worked on the other side of Houston knew of its reputation.

The Houston Police Department responded in typical police fashion by flooding the area with patrol units. It was not uncommon for the department to be spending over \$100,000 per month on just this small area of real estate.

Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005 and Houston was flooded with displaced evacuees from New Orleans. Like other cities that received these survivors, Houston inherited more than its share of drug dealers, gang members, robbers and murderers. Sadly, the apartment complexes in this area were more than happy to take large numbers of evacuees in order to maintain a high occupancy rate, with FEMA picking up all expenses.

Local news media ran stories daily about robberies, drive-by shootings, and murders which were so common along the Antoine corridor. The public complaints were validated by the Police Department's own crime statistics for a single square mile, exceeded those of some entire police districts. Something had to be done to bring this area back from the brink.

ANALYSIS

The city of Houston is fairly unique in that it is the only major metropolitan city which does not have zoning laws. Where other cities controlled and maintained development through zoning, the City of Houston addressed issues through municipal ordinances and more specifically Chapter 10 of the code of ordinances which promulgates rules and regulations for nuisance abatement and quality of life issues. This code is enforced by DRT officer and city code inspectors.

HPD street officers long held that area crime originated from the apartments. The department, however, was still largely following traditional policing methods targeting individual criminals, not the properties which harbored the criminals. Two shifts of overtime, seven days a week, cost the city about \$100,000 per month; however officers still had no substantial mechanisms for dealing with the underlying problem, the apartments themselves. It was just an assumed fact that the apartments had and would continue to shelter criminals, and officers would just have to follow the traditional model.

Although HPD had fledgling Problem Oriented Policing units called the Differential Response Teams in each patrol division, until 2005, DRT had mostly dealt with citizen's complaints and other small scale problems. They had used P.O.P. techniques to deal with crack houses and vacant lots, but never on large apartments owned by corporations.

When calls for service and Part One Crimes were at their highest in 2005, the North Division Captain directed the DRT officers to apply their small-scale techniques to the large complexes to bring the crime under control. DRT officers had been using code enforcement to solve small neighborhood problems for a few years already. However, no one had considered redirecting this strategy to bring large corporate apartments owners into compliance.

As a fundamental plan of operation, the DRT officers began with the premise that apartments in the Antoine Corridor were the crime nexus. At this point, however, DRT officers were in no way cognizant of the great impact they would actually have in addressing the area's problems.

Officers understood that neglected properties combined with poor tenant screening created an environment conducive to crime. Crime analysis identified the Candlelight Trails Condominiums as having the most Part One crimes, calls for service and narcotics activity. Patrol officers joked that they had to "step over the passed-out drug addicts" before they could respond to a call. DRT had identified its first project.

The DRT officers had never tackled such a multi-faceted problem, new solutions beyond traditional policing methods and expending millions of dollars on overtime were needed. After each step, DRT officers cycled through the SARA loop assessing the outcomes of their responses, which provided them with new tactics with which to use at other properties.

RESPONSE

First Attempt

Selecting Candlelight Trails Condominiums as a first project presented several problems initially. Because it was a 300 unit condominium development, each unit had a different owner. Officers had to

painstakingly research each owner. In some cases, owners had just walked away from their property when the crime escalated in the area and were unable to sell their investment. This fact would be pivotal in the later stages of the plan's implementation.

Officers and City of Houston Neighborhood Protection Inspectors began meticulous code enforcement of the complex, issuing citations for each and every violation they found. Citations quickly started numbering in the hundreds. Officers met with Candlelight Trails management and sought their help in addressing problems. At first, management was mostly unresponsive to the directives and citations issued by HPD for code violations. Undaunted, the officers redoubled their efforts, and consequently, the municipal court system became backlogged due to the overwhelming number of citations officers were generating. Later, the city created an entirely new Impact Court Docket to specifically handle the influx of DRT tickets.

Officers began to encounter problems with the municipal prosecutors. The types of violations officers were citing were sometimes obscure and very technical, and the prosecutors had little or no experience with these kinds of violations. Prosecutors were unclear about what officers were trying to accomplish, frequently dismissing cases to get an easy plea bargain rather than to obtain compliance on all the issues. Eventually, a handful of specialized prosecutors were assigned to Impact Court.

Meanwhile, during the code enforcement initiative, HPD continued overtime programs focusing on a "zero tolerance" approach. DRT sought out help from Narcotics and Vice Divisions who ran around the clock buy-busts, stings and reversals. The divisional tactical unit actively enforced "No Trespassing" affidavits, arresting people who had come to the property only to commit crimes and deal drugs. The divisional Gang Unit documented every gang member they discovered, tracking which gangs were laying claim to which complex, and identifying specific apartment units where gang members were housed. Typically, these individuals were not named on the lease, and so the person harboring them could be

evicted by the apartment managers for lease violations. North Division also created a Warrant Execution Team to track down individuals with open arrest warrants. They arrested hundreds in the first few months, discovering that most of these arrests involved a small population of repeat offenders. Apartment buildings began emptying because many of the residents were either in jail, or there was “too much heat”.

Eventually, the City of Houston forced several complexes to appear before a Dangerous Buildings Hearing. Complex owners were given an order to repair or demolish their buildings. As expected, most owners failed to comply with this order. Several of the worst properties were condemned and the residents ordered to vacate the premises.

In the case of the Candlelight Trails Condominiums, City Attorney, David Feldman brought a lawsuit requiring that the owners demolish the now vacant complex. Again, due to its status as a condominium and not an apartment complex, the City faced difficulty serving the lawsuit to the more than 150 individual owners, let alone obtaining consensus. Eventually, the City leveraged the hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines and judgments against the owners and agreed not to seek collection of the fines in exchange for an agreement to permit demolition of the property. The City ended up having to pay the more than \$1,000,000 for demolition. Mayor Parker herself drove the bulldozer.

Initially, the residents of these complexes were displaced to other problem-ridden apartment complexes; however, each complex was systematically targeted and trouble-making residents in the Corridor soon had no place left to inhabit.

Continuing the SARA model, after each assessment of the team’s success, DRT moved on to the next apartment complex and began the same aggressive enforcement. Some owners still failed to comply, but some did cooperate and were able to revitalize their properties. Two complexes were purchased by new owners who brought them back into compliance and repopulated them with new

tenants, being careful to screen them thoroughly. Some of the apartment complexes yet to be targeted saw the “writing on the wall” and proactively began cleaning up their property without any prompting from HPD.

Legal Initiatives

As HPD continued addressing decaying multi-family complexes, it quickly became evident that the situation was being exacerbated because the City had no existing safeguards in place to identify those apartment complexes that were on the decline or that were already festering. Additionally, once problem complexes were identified, the officers needed more consistent and standardized methodology to ensure compliance with laws and ordinances.

In 2009, HPD worked with the Houston City Council and the Houston Apartment Association to adopt a Multi-Family Housing Ordinance. This ordinance laid out three sections redefining the city’s approach to apartments. As there was no accurate inventory of apartment complexes or numbers of housing units, the first section required that all apartment complexes in the city register with HPD. Registration held owners individually accountable, for the first time, in order to prevent “slumlords” from hiding behind the corporate veil.

The second section of the ordinance created a unit within HPD, the Apartment Enforcement Unit, tasked with categorizing all apartment complexes based on their crime rates per capita. Complexes deemed “remedial” are required by statute to immediately bring the property into compliance with all city codes. A CPTED survey is completed and owners are required to comply with the results of that survey and are required to employ on-site security as well. DRT is charged with the enforcement end of the remedial program.

The third section of the ordinance created a new “Blue Star” program. First apartment managers are trained in crime prevention techniques and CPTED. The multi-family properties are inspected and those exemplifying the highest standards receive recognition and certifications as “Blue Start Safe Communities,” making them more desirable for law-abiding residents.

Most recently in 2010, DRT officers sought help from Texas State Representative Sylvester Turner to deal with abandoned condominium complexes. His response was to write and help pass Texas House Bill 364, which was passed overwhelmingly by both houses of the Texas State Legislature and went into effect in 2011. This law provides processes for the City to be able to more easily demolish condominium complexes that have been abandoned and become a danger to the community.

Community Involvement

Code enforcement alone does not prevent crime. Community involvement is imperative. HPD has always held general community meetings, but now they needed to more specifically tailor the meetings to the needs of apartment management. HPD engaged the complex managers in monthly Positive Interaction Program (PIP) meetings held at the station. HPD provided additional training on crime prevention and community issues so that managers could make better decisions regarding safety for their residents.

In 2009, officers solicited the Near Northwest Management District to develop a plan to redevelop the Antoine area. The Management District was able to secure a grant from the Houston Galveston Area Council who contracted a study to investigate potential redevelopment. Titled the *Livable Centers Study*, it successfully engaged all the stakeholders in the area. Residents, local and state politicians, business owners and the police were surveyed to determine the direction in which the

community should proceed. To accomplish these ends, the study sought out involvement and partnerships from the City of Houston, Harris County Flood Control, the Houston Parks Board, Metropolitan Transit Authority, the Urban Land Institute, Aldine ISD, the Greater Inwood Partnership, Lone Star College and the Houston Galveston Area Council and others in the community.

This collaborative group explored the creation of a Town Center along the Antoine Corridor to attract business into the area as well as to increase the area's livability. It also studied integrating the bayou system into a central water feature, expanding parks, and creating a hike and bike path system to ultimately link up with the system already in place in downtown Houston. Additionally, the study examined the possibility of creating a transit center to convert the existing freight rail lines into a light rail system to tie into the expanding METRO rail system. The group identified "areas susceptible to change" and proposed new infrastructure, such as new street design, better signage, and transit shelters to better serve the community. Also included were botanical gardens, a new community college campus and urban farming areas. Developers are currently being recruited to take on these projects.

The creative and powerful ideas that sprang from this study have already yielded many positive results. Lone Star College built a new campus along the bayou which expanded the education possibilities of the community. The bike trail was built parallel to the existing bayou which was widened and transformed from a mere drainage ditch to a water feature that connects the area. Federal flood control money was obtained to bankroll this improvement. A complete "rebranding" of the area is now underway, diminishing the notorious reputation that the area held. Transit stops are being upgraded, and street signs now bear the new name. Instead of being identified as "Antoine," the regenerated area has now adopted the name of the waterway that runs through it, White Oak.

New Housing

The enforcement efforts that the Differential Response Team took against the apartment complexes, in effect, created a blank slate. The owners sought to remake their properties to reflect this new image. In the struggling economy, however, they lacked the resources and financing. As a result, three of the apartment complexes, along with the Management District worked with the City and HUD to obtain CBDG funding for complete rehabilitation. The owners were also required to invest significant amounts of matching funds to ensure that they too had equity in the outcome.

The goal of the redevelopment of the complexes was not to re-gentrify the area but to create affordable quality housing that would attract law-abiding families to the area. The rehabilitation essentially reclaimed and revitalized 1150 units which were all designed to be completely CPTED compliant. Where gang infested basketball courts once existed, now playgrounds and picnic areas exist. Because complex owners have an economic or vested interest in the outcome, the managers more closely screen future residents and more fiercely enforce the rules at the complexes.

ASSESSMENT

The results of this effort were not immediate, but they were profound. Over the six years of this initiative, crime statistics show a dramatic 69.7% decrease in violent Part One crimes, a 57% reduction in Part One crime overall and a 62% reduction in narcotics related arrests. Murders dropped from ten in 2006 to only one in 2011. However, statistics alone don't reflect the entire outcome. There is now a positive tenor in the community with families now unafraid to make use of the new parks and playgrounds.

On-the-Job Training

As mentioned earlier, officers dealing with the first multi-family complex, Candlelight Trails, had no experience to reference. The Houston Police Department had never attempted this type of enforcement on such a large scale, and in the beginning of this project, no strategies for rebuilding and redevelopment existed. The initial goal had only been to reduce the immediate crime threat at a particular property. As the officers assessed the success of their efforts at one complex, they continued to use Crime Analysis to analyze the situation to determine which property would be next. They were forced to stop and evaluate their effectiveness in order to identify their most successful strategies and were constantly running the SARA loop with no cohesive over-all plan of action. That came later when officers and community members realized that, through collaboration and cooperation, they were actually making real progress, and it might actually be feasible to revitalize the entire area.

As officers sought out new partners to help in their efforts, they gained new allies who brought with them new “tools” and resources HPD had never considered using before. This was an unexpected outcome of the initiative with officers no longer having to single-handedly tackle these issues. HPD made use of The Texas Department of Public Safety, the State Comptroller of Public Accounts, ICE and the IRS to help investigate apartment owners who had deeper criminal connections. Officers were able to seek assistance of the newly established Multifamily Unit within Public Works, which was created in 2009. The Multifamily Unit was a new group of code inspectors who partnered with DRT officers to proactively performed life safety inspections city-wide and instead of waiting for a citizen’s complaints. One of the biggest assets the DRT officers discovered was a partnership with the Management District, which was able to rally resources and political capital needed to start and fund large scale projects like this one. That collaboration would be crucial in maintaining the momentum forward that the officers had already achieved.

Sense of Community

Officers weren't the only ones who responded to the success along the Antoine corridor. Apartment managers and owners had now come together with the police to take back their properties. This was something entirely new; previously, management had called the police only to respond to calls for service. Now, officers were directly accessible and had city issued cell phones. Officers could now respond to concerns immediately without waiting for a problem to filter through the cumbersome chain of command. Often, by the time the Divisional Captain or Assistant Chief was apprised of a property manager's concern, DRT officers had already addressed it.

In this new positive environment, not only did the managers engage the police, but each other. They began a phone tree, calling each other with concerns about crime at their properties. Managers also stressed the importance of reporting evictions to credit bureaus, and also doing background checks for new tenants. New applicants who failed background checks were rejected community wide. Unfortunately, these undesirables had to go somewhere.

Displacement and Diffusion

DRT officers expected some displacement to occur. They believed that the criminals would stay within the general area and just move to other apartment complexes; which they did for a short time. However, with the newfound cooperation from the apartment managers, this didn't last for long. Displacement led to diffusion as apartment complexes quickly became unfriendly places for drug dealers and gang members to conduct their business. As they left the Antoine Corridor and moved out into the community, the criminal element was no longer a concentrated source of criminal activity. Without their refuge gone, and now in fewer numbers, criminals were afraid to commit the offenses that they had previously committed with impunity.

Statistics

Crime and violence peaked in the Antoine area in late 2005 and early 2006, just after the influx of Hurricane Katrina evacuees. Until that time, the crime rate had been fairly stable with only slight fluctuations. DRT officers did not see an immediate decline in crime rates for the area when they began enforcement efforts. This was due in large part to the initial displacement of the crime to other complexes in the corridor. But by 2009, with increased cooperation from the apartment managers and owners, the drug dealers began to abandon the area. From the peak in 2006, Part One crimes began a rapid decline, taking the rate down 57% by 2011. Violent Part One crimes had plummeted by 69.7%, and narcotics cases had diminished by 62%.

While the Antoine area enjoyed tremendous decreases, the rest of the City saw decreases in the crime rate as well, but nowhere near the significant gains made on Antoine. From 2006 to 2011 as a whole city, Houston showed a 15.5 decrease in violent Part One crimes and a 12% in Part One crimes overall. Narcotics cases decreased by a mere 3% citywide.

Legacy

The Houston Police Department was able to use this project to learn, mostly by experience, valuable POP strategies that would vastly expand the capabilities of Differential Response Teams. North Division DRT was able to pass along skills and strategies which were adopted city wide by every patrol division's DRT unit. The DRT Certification Course created by North Division officers is now being offered to DRT and patrol officers alike, with the goal of giving patrol officers some of the problem solving skills developed during this project for use on a daily basis in their beats.

The North DRT's partnership with the Management District has set the area on track to achieve the goals set out in the Livable Centers Study, far surpassing officers' expectations when they began enforcement seven years ago. The drastic reduction in crime has convinced developers and city leaders that this area is not a complete loss and can, in fact, be brought back from "the brink." The new redevelopment has caught the attention of more and more investors who are now willing to reinvest in the area, where ten years ago, they were running away from the area as fast as they could. The pace of the progress continues to increase at an exponential rate with a projected final completion of all redevelopment in the area by 2020.

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Key Project Team Members

Sgt. Edwin LaCourt North Division Differential Response Team
Off. David Eagan North Division Differential Response Team
Off. Chris Schuster North Division Differential Response Team
Off. Ryan Watson North Division Differential Response Team
Off. David Jones North Division Crime Analysis Unit
Mr. Wayne Norden Near Northwest Management District

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	TOTAL
MURDER	1	1	2	3	3	10	0	3	2	1	1	27
AGGRAVATED ASSAULT	137	102	115	127	129	155	138	140	110	112	48	1313
ROBBERY	93	71	89	73	90	121	113	110	122	67	34	983
SEXUAL ASSAULT	10	8	8	13	6	7	5	15	3	3	6	84
THEFT	216	192	189	213	210	224	229	199	221	187	119	2199
AUTO THEFT	271	227	224	181	133	114	101	107	60	46	35	1499
BMV	230	136	178	105	103	82	117	81	87	71	44	1234
BURGLARY BUILDING	71	96	63	72	84	76	61	63	39	35	39	699
BURGLARY HABITATION	183	204	203	226	234	250	308	225	264	234	127	2458
TOTALS	1212	1037	1071	1013	992	1039	1072	943	908	756	453	10496

Antoine Corridor Part One Crimes by Year

Appendix 1

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
MURDER	257	248	269	277	322	368	325	276	285	256	189
AGGRAVATED ASSAULT	11291	11399	10892	11012	10624	10701	10909	11751	11645	10986	10692
ROBBERY	10046	11261	11096	10299	11227	11383	11460	10595	11367	9499	8031
SEXUAL ASSAULT	1010	947	860	959	859	812	672	771	809	705	744
THEFT	37831	38234	36683	38030	36803	38675	39683	36238	38572	38553	35237
AUTO THEFT	25256	24990	22556	22513	21361	21782	20340	16022	15396	13474	12815
BMV	32680	35697	35696	37373	36325	34781	35198	32557	38399	36174	33148
BURGLARY BUILDING	8951	10121	9944	9886	8657	8610	9425	7620	6785	6179	5823
BURGLARY HABITATION	16483	16844	16660	17477	19130	18549	19513	19420	22428	21870	21588
CITY TOTALS	143805	149741	144656	147826	145308	145661	147525	135250	145686	137696	128267

City of Houston City-Wide Part One Crimes by Year

Appendix 2

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
NARCOTICS CASES	128	115	161	119	113	195	149	180	134	100	74

Antoine Corridor Narcotics Cases by Year

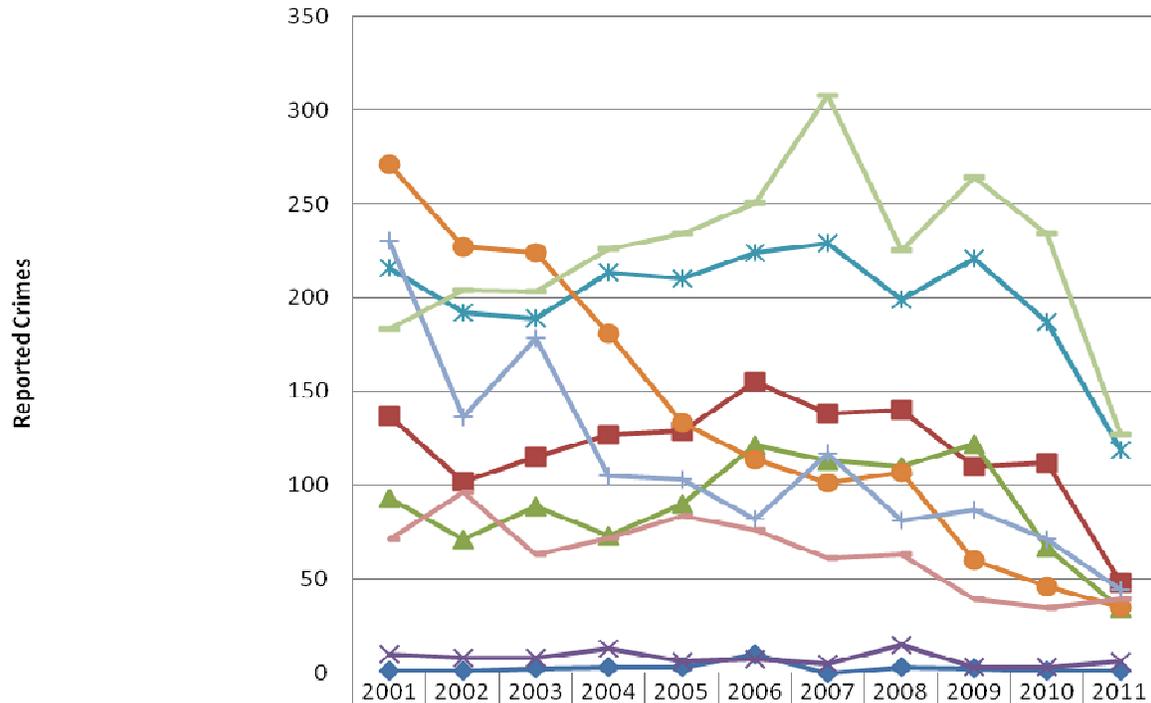
Appendix 3

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
NARCOTICS CASES	10882	11106	11471	11190	10301	13149	15917	17796	16274	13976	12762

City of Houston City-Wide Narcotics Cases by Year

Appendix 4

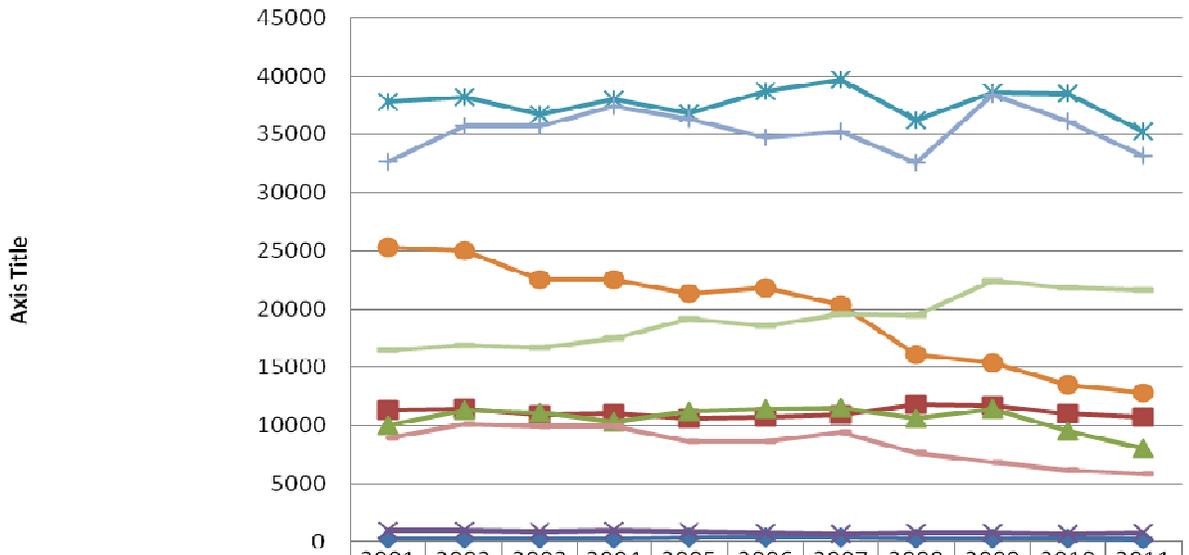
Antoine Part I Crimes



◆ MURDER	1	1	2	3	3	10	0	3	2	1	1
■ AGGRAVATED ASSAULT	137	102	115	127	129	155	138	140	110	112	48
▲ ROBBERY	93	71	89	73	90	121	113	110	122	67	34
✕ SEXUAL ASSAULT	10	8	8	13	6	7	5	15	3	3	6
✱ THEFT	216	192	189	213	210	224	229	199	221	187	119
● AUTO THEFT	271	227	224	181	133	114	101	107	60	46	35
+ BMV	230	136	178	105	103	82	117	81	87	71	44
- BURGLARY BUILDING	71	96	63	72	84	76	61	63	39	35	39
▲ BURGLARY HABITATION	183	204	203	226	234	250	308	225	264	234	127

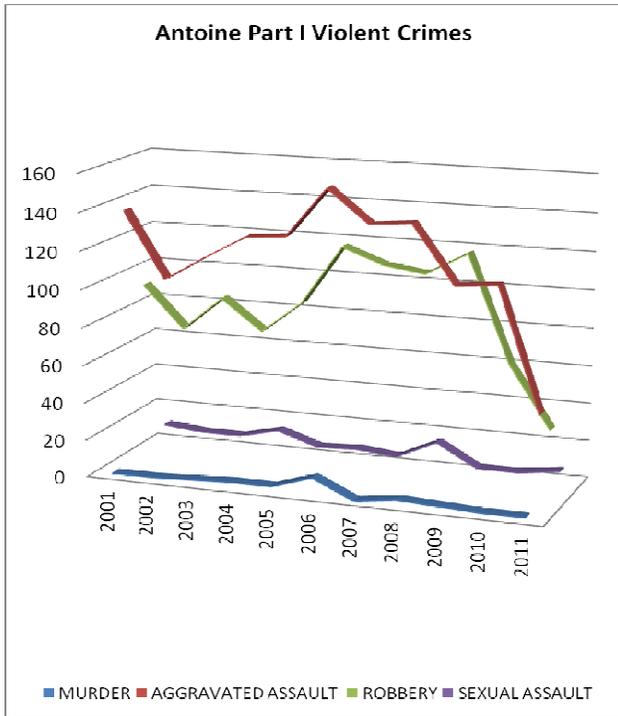
Appendix 5

City Wide Part I Crimes

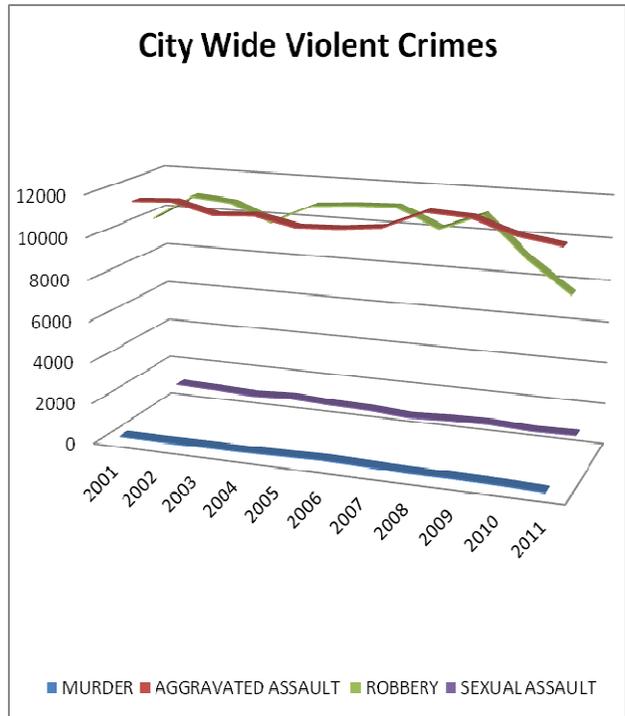


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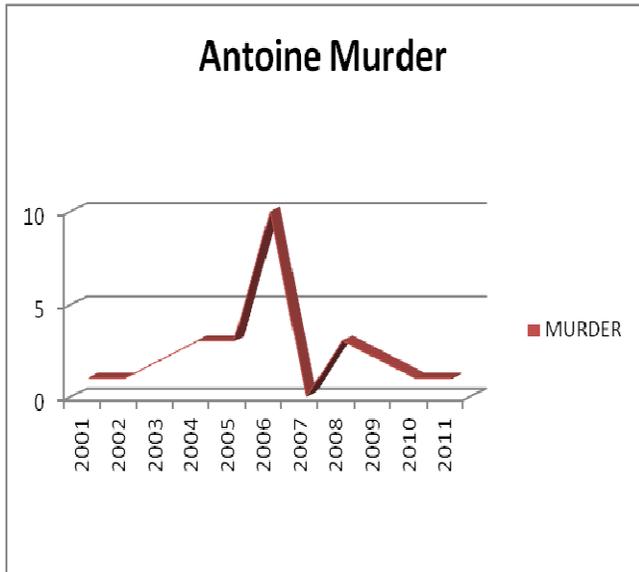
Appendix 6



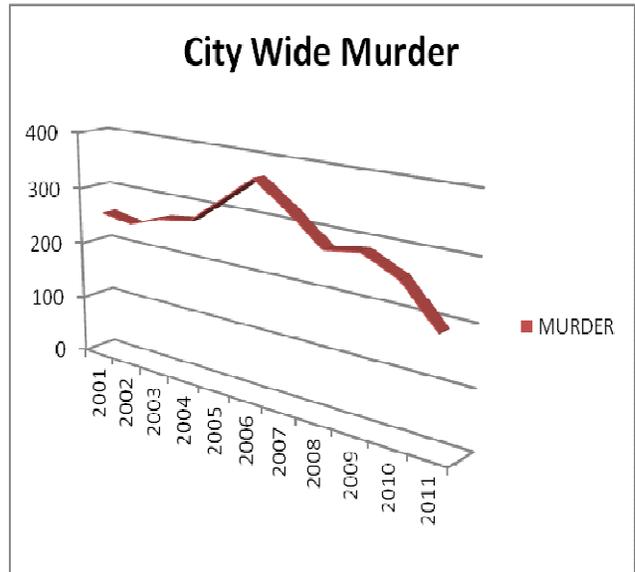
Appendix 7



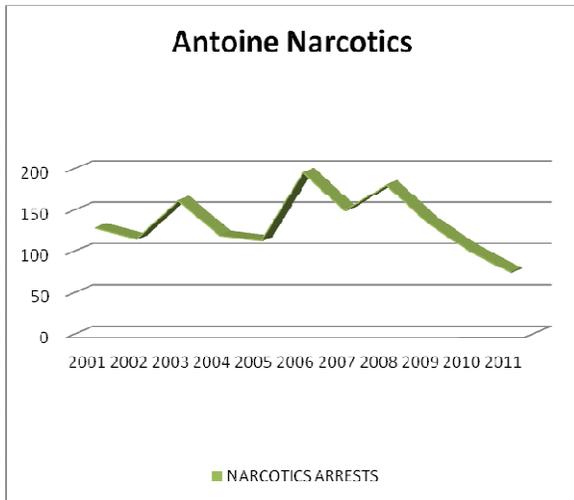
Appendix 8



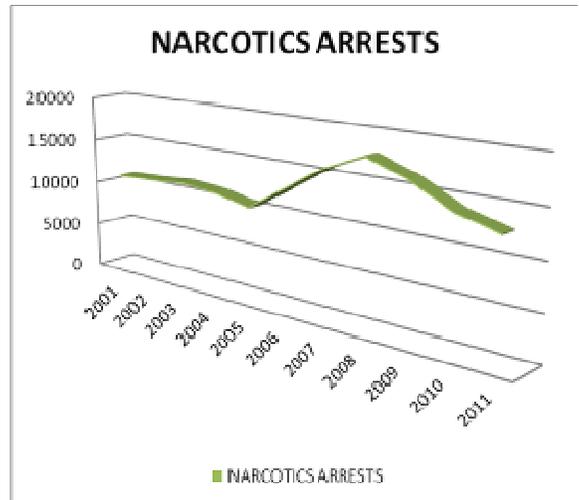
Appendix 9



Appendix 10



Appendix 11

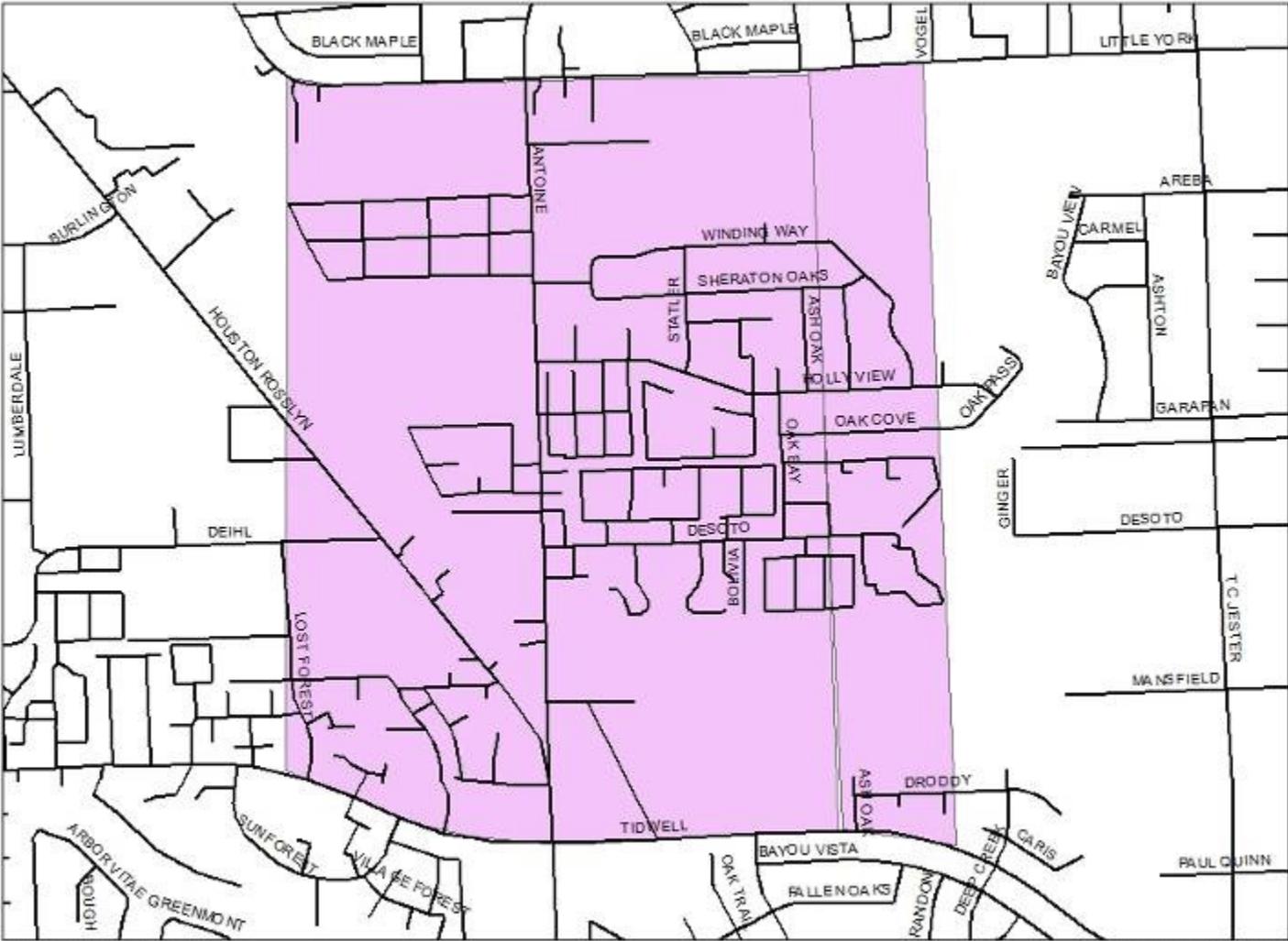


Appendix 12

<u>Complex Name</u>	<u>Capacity</u>
Diamond Ridge	499
The Falls	348
Northwest Pines	364
Pine Ridge	319
Aspen	225
Pepper Tree Manor	250
Candlelight Trails	296
Candlewood Glen	172
Oakbrook	222
Linda Vista	556
Hunters Cove	436
Sterling Grove	346
Hollyview Apartments	324
The Gables	165
Park at Live Oak	148
Total	4670

Appendix 13

Antoine Project Area



Source: Crime Database

Created by: D. A. Jones

Appendix 14

Crime Tracker finds Houston's deadliest street

Monday, September 18, 2006

Andy Cerota

By Andy Cerota

(9/18/06 - KTRK/HOUSTON) (KTRK) -- A mother is heartbroken -- her son is one of six people killed on the same street, in just the past six months. It's an area of town that's quickly become one of Houston's most dangerous.

Residents there aren't the only ones worried -- so are the police. Our Crime Tracker showed a half-mile area in northwest Houston is seeing a dramatic rise in all types of crime.

Michelle Harris said, "I don't go out at night at all. I don't even go to the store -- nowhere."

Two months ago, Michelle Harris' 15-year-old son Christopher was shot and killed outside a northwest Houston convenience store.

She said, "It's a hard pill to swallow, when a person loses their child. It's a hard pill to swallow."

It's even harder for the Harris family. They are evacuees who escaped New Orleans only to end up in one of Houston's most dangerous neighborhoods.

Christopher's murder was not an isolated incident. Using our exclusive Crime Tracker we can show you that in one quarter mile stretch of DeSoto, there have been six murders so far this year. That number goes up to seven if you include the one that occurred on the 3300 block of DeSoto - three quarters of a mile away.

Harris' grandmother -- still reeling from the loss -- doesn't know what to make of it.

Dorothy Harris said, "It's really sad, you know, that you got to escalate to violence. We're supposed to get along, I don't care where you're from."

It all started back in January.

- Quentin Williams, 19, the son of a New Orleans police officer was found dead inside his apartment.
- In July it was the murder of Christopher Harris, 15.
- In August, a man and a woman were shot to death in the parking lot of an apartment complex.
- On September 1, a man was killed after being shot twice in the chest.

- On September 10, a 23-year-old was gunned down at Highland Park, near the 3300 block of DeSoto.

Crime Tracker found the problem with crime in this half mile stretch of DeSoto goes way beyond murders -- 351 crimes were reported in the first seven months of the year. That includes three rapes, 17 robberies and 40 aggravated assaults.

A short term solution addressing the problem is already in the works. An overtime initiative in the area will put the equivalent of an additional 100 police officers on the streets. It will be that way for the next three months.

"We'll have to re-evaluate after 12 weeks where we are and how much more is needed, and see if funding is there for more over time for these officers," explained Johanna Abad with the Houston Police Department.

There's no doubt in Michelle Harris's mind that an increase police presence will be needed. Her hope is what happened to her son doesn't happen to someone else.

She said, "Whether it's my child or somebody else's child, that's a horrible thing to do, to take somebody's life like that."

No one has been arrested or charged in Christopher Harris's murder. We'll continue tracking crime in that northwest Houston neighborhood.

Houston police tell us Hurricane Katrina evacuees have been either victims or suspects in 76 of the 390 murders that occurred between September 1 of last year to August of this year.
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Appendix 15 cont.



Houston Chronicle Archives

Condo residents told to move out of seedy complex / City inspectors declare property uninhabitable

MATT STILES, DALE LEZON, CAROLYN FEIBEL Staff

Thu 08/16/2007 Houston Chronicle, Section B, Page 6, 3 STAR Edition

The city on Wednesday moved to close a northwest Houston condominium complex, declaring the buildings uninhabitable and forcing residents to move.

Residents in at least 34 units at the Candlelight Trails condos at 5626 De Soto were notified Wednesday morning that they must be out by Monday afternoon, city officials said.

Inspectors found exposed wires, broken windows and faulty sprinkler systems at the property. "This is the worst that I've seen," said Juan Chavez with the city's housing department, who is to help residents find new places to live.

Chavez said the city was spending federal grant funds to give the residents two weeks' rental assistance and help with deposits at their new locations.

City officials said the 240-unit property had many vacancies, and that "squatters" had burglarized others, smashing windows and breaking down doors.

On Wednesday, paint peeled from the outside of the three-story building. Lobby glass doors had been pulled from their hinges and shattered.

Unit hallways smelled of urine and the walls were spray-painted with graffiti. Light fixtures dangled from ceilings and broken glass and beer cans littered the floors. Black stains spread across the carpet.

Most apartment doors were closed, locked and plastered with red vacancy notices, which warn tenants that the power will be turned off Aug. 21.

"I'm mad at the management company," said Randy Lively, who lives in one of the units with a friend. "I think it should have done a better job of taking care of the property."

Other people declined to talk about the closure.

Shirley Gonzales owns units with a financial partner. She has been fighting for several months to get other owners, many of whom live out of town and rent to Houston tenants, to pay their dues for property maintenance.

She described myriad problems, including stolen appliances, residents running electric extension cords to share power, and one owner operating a halfway house.

"We could barely keep the lights on and the insurance paid and so forth," she said.

Complaints prompted the city's "FAST" unit, which seeks to close problem properties over patterns of code violations or criminal activity, to investigate.

This is the third property in recent months in which the city forced residents living in substandard conditions to move.

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KIAH

Demolition Starts On Abandoned Candlelight Trails Condos

Katishia Cosley

KIAH

September 16, 2010

Demolition is underway on an abandoned condominium complex in Northwest Houston. The City of Houston was finally given permission to tear down the Candlelight Trails apartments. This is a day many have been waiting years to see.

Mayor Annise Parker had the best seat in the house. From behind the wheel of the bulldozer she tore into the abandoned building once known as the Candlelight Trails Condos.

Across the street, residents congregated. Watching as the eyesore and magnet for squatters and crime finally came tumbling down. "I think it's about time," said Donald Williams who lives across the street. Williams grew up in the area and has seen this complex go through a series of changes. He told 39 News that firefighters were just out last week battling another fire. "When it was good the apartment complex was nice, but when it went down it went all the way down," he said.

In 2007 the 240 unit complex was shut down because of its horrible living conditions. But getting rid of the building all together wouldn't be so easy - the city had to sue some 150 owners before getting to this point.

"We're glad because this is going to reduce our call load for both guys on patrol and the ones on Neighborhood protection," said M.L. Curran the Assistant Chief of Neighborhood Protection.

The complex sits on 11 acres. The assistant chief said it will take several days to knock down all nine buildings and a couple more weeks to clear up all the debris. But the Mayor said just because the heavy equipment is gone - it doesn't mean their fight against blight is over.

"This is one more step in a long process to clean up the City of Houston," she said.

"This is a major victory for homeowners and in revitalizing this entire area," said State Representative Sylvester Turner. This is just the beginning in the City's plan to revitalize the Antoine Corridor.

Plans are to build more single family homes and attract new businesses to the area.

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<http://blog.chron.com/houstonpolitics/2008/06/houston-apartments-what-happened-at-candlewood-glen-updated/>



Houston apartments: What happened at Candlewood Glen? (Updated)

Chronicle: Stiles

How about a swim?

Last month we published satellite photos of the Candlewood Glen apartments in Northwest Houston. The pictures showed that tenants had deserted the complex — and left a bunch of trash in their wake.

We've finally finished our story about the property, in the 5400 block of De Soto. We learned that Candlewood Glen filled with Hurricane Katrina evacuees, a temporary boon for out-of-state owners, but ultimately the place deteriorated into the dilapidated, abandoned mess it is today.

As the story details, the complex has numerous problems: Unsecured units, broken glass, trash piles, squatters, bootleg electricity, and more. Code inspectors from the Public Works and Engineering Department recently asked Center Point Energy to cut electricity to any buildings that didn't have lawful renters. A few months ago, the Neighborhood Protection Corps' inspectors issued 81 notices of non-compliance with codes related to dangerous buildings, neighborhood nuisances and minimum standards for multi-family dwellings.

Appendix 18

SSW Swamplot Blog

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2010

Houston's Chief Demolition Officer Takes Her Turn

MAYOR PARKER, AFTER a stint behind the controls of JTB Services' excavator at yesterday's demolition of the Candlelight Trails condominium complex north of Tidwell:

My most fun day yet as Mayor. Make all the jokes you want. I operated a giant backhoe as we demolished an abandoned property off Antoine!



THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2010

Candlelight Trails Is Going Down

The demolition of the 11-acre Candlelight Trails empty-condos-and-crime site could begin as early as today. Officials at city hall tell 11 News reporter Sherry Williams that a judge approved the demolition of the abandoned complex — in the 5500 and 5600 blocks of DeSoto, off Antoine north of Tidwell — this morning: “The city recently sued about 150 of the condo owners to get them to sign off on the demolition. Some of those lawsuits added up to hundreds of thousands of dollars in penalties. . . . ‘As long as they agree to sign over their title to the city, then we’re not going after them for money,’ said Houston City Councilwoman Jolanda Jones. ‘It’s really sad that they bought into a place where the people who ran it absconded with their money, but I’m thankful that we are not further, I don’t know, kicking them while they’re down.’” Update: The demolition is now scheduled to begin at 1:30 pm, according to the Near Northwest Management District. [KHOU; previously on Swamplot] Photo: Matt Stiles

MONDAY, JUNE 15, 2009

Registered Agents for Condos

—

A bill recently passed by the Texas Legislature — inspired by problems encountered in contacting the **150 separate owners** of Candlelight Trails in northwest Houston — would make it a whole lot **easier** for the city to **demolish decrepit condo complexes**. “The bill by Rep. Sylvester Turner, D-Houston, applies only to Houston. It requires **every condo development** to maintain a **registered agent** to accept service of legal papers; if any development fails to do so, the Texas **secretary of state** automatically becomes the agent. The law will take effect Sept. 1 if Gov. Rick Perry signs it or allows it to become law without his signature. Perry will review the measure carefully before deciding, spokeswoman Katherine Cesinger said. Current law requires each owner to be served either in person or through a **legal notice** in a newspaper. Defendants served through publication have **two years** to file a motion for a new trial. ‘It is extremely time-consuming, expensive and allows the substandard and often **dangerous conditions** to continue while the city struggles to obtain personal service on each owner,’ Ann Travis, Mayor Bill White’s governmental affairs director, said in a background document explaining the bill.” [Houston Chronicle]

SWAMPLOT BLOG

TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2009

Comment of the Day: Candlelight Trails, Dimmed

“My family lived there for **17 years** (1985-2001) and we watched this place transform from a **luxury conodo complex** into a complete **waste**. We frequently revisited the complex on several occasions and it stayed just about **the same** from the **late 1980s** until now. The danger of living there really showed its true colors when we went onto the abandoned property last January and **discovered a murder scene in our old condo**. For many reasons I want this place **torn down**, but for the most reasons, I **don’t** want this place down mainly because that used to be **my home** and where I grew up and seeing it go into the

Appendix 19 cont.

ground might be **too much** of a sight **to bear** on my part. Despite this, I rest easily knowing that the complex will **never** be torn down because it was one of those **'take action for a day and feel good about it but forget about it the next day'** types of situations so there is **no doubt** in my mind that the buildings will **remain standing** as long as I live." [John, commenting on Lights Out for Candlelight Trails?]

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2008

Lights Out for Candlelight Trails?

CITY BUILDING officials closed down the **Candlelight Trails** condo complex in northwest Houston 14 months ago, citing **substandard living conditions**. But neighbors have **still been**

complaining about **squatters and crime**. Now the *Chronicle's* Matt Stiles reports that city attorneys have **filed a lawsuit** asking a judge to allow them to **demolish it**:

the complex technically is a **condominium property**, so the city has to **sue 150 owners** to get **authority** to tear the property down. The City Council is set to **vote this week** to hire a law firm for those cases.

Candlelight Trails sits on **11 acres** in the 5500 and 5600 blocks of DeSoto, off Antoine north of Tidwell.

Appendix 19 cont.

LIVABLE CENTERS VISION STATEMENT



The original focus of this Livable Centers Study is to explore the creation of a Town Center along the Antoine Corridor from West Tidwell Road to Victory Drive that would attract business into the area as well as increase the area's livability for its residents. The Livable Centers Study was intended to help to define practical ways to improve the area's accessibility, increase venues for community activities and generally improve the area through projects like the creation of pedestrian and biking thoroughfares, providing bike parking at bus stops, adding beautification elements, revitalizing vacant shopping centers, improving existing parks and adapting the vacant golf course into a community center and wellness park.

The consultant and design team commenced in February 2010 by studying the area to become familiar with existing conditions and the opportunities and challenges. The District formed an Advisory Committee to provide input to the consultant team. An initial Stakeholders Meeting was held February 23, 2011 at Advent Lutheran Church at which a preliminary Vision Statement and "Big Ideas" was presented for input and feedback.

Transform Antoine into a destination intertwined with the waters of White Oak Bayou and Vogel Creek, linked to the heart of Houston by waterside trails and enhanced transit, punctuated by unique parks and community gardens, to be reborn as a walkable, bikable mixed-use corridor anchored by landmark buildings and lively public spaces.

"Big Ideas"

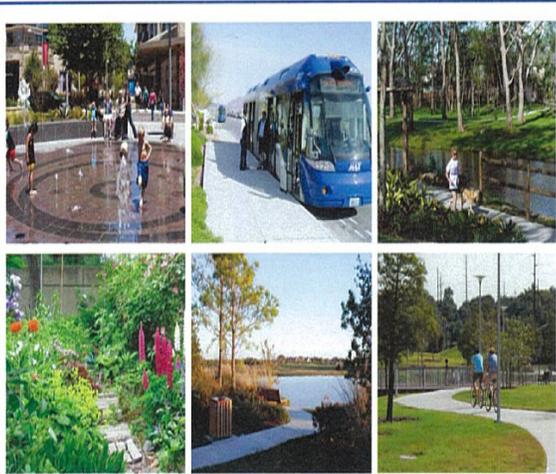
- Refine our relationship to water
- Make parks and gardens a priority
- Create a place that is a destination
- Transforming an auto-centric strip into a street for people
- Leverage strategic location with upgraded transit connections

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE WORKSHOP

A three-day, charrette-style workshop was conducted April 26-28, 2011 at the Advent Lutheran Church at which more than 500 people attended. The Public Open House Workshops were promoted via 4000 postcards mailed to businesses and residents, more than 2000 flyers distributed to homeowners, ads in The Leader, articles in the GIP e-newsletter and a story on KUHF. The offices of elected officials representing the Near Northwest Management District were also invited.

On the first day, April 26, community input was solicited in an "open house" where the public could "drop-in" any time at their convenience. Attendees were asked to identify with dots on maps where they live/work, traffic and pedestrian "hot spots", and most/least favorite places in the Study Area. A Community Vision Survey allowed participants to help evaluate and select images to help guide the creation of the concept plan.

The second day of the workshop consisted of work sessions to translate community input from the open house into the plan. The third day of the workshop involved refining the vision and design concepts followed by a presentation where the public was invited to see how the conceptual plan was shaping up. This format made it easy for the public to follow the evolution of their input, the vision and concept plan.



Help Imagine a "Livable Center" along the Antoine Corridor

You are invited to share your thoughts and vision at two special public "open house" workshops.

Tuesday April 26th, 4 - 8pm: Open house to share your best ideas
 Thursday April 28th, 6pm: Presentation to see how the plan is shaping up
 Location: Advent Lutheran Church, 5820 Pinemont

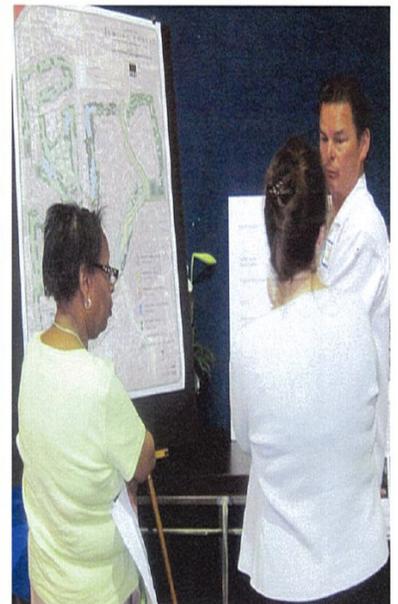
The public is invited to drop by our workshop and presentation to create the vision for the Near Northwest Management District Livable Centers Study for the area along Antoine Dr. from Pinemont Dr. to Victory Dr.

- Tell us the kind of new development you would like to see.
- Share how we can expand and enhance our trails to become the "best hike and bike network in the region."
- Learn about better ways to manage traffic by creating more travel choices and access.
- Describe how our streets can be safer for walkers and cyclists of all ages.
- Help Envision the "Town Center" for the Antoine Corridor.
- Generate the "Big Idea" that makes our Livable Center a destination in Houston.

We value and appreciate your insights and ideas regarding this exciting project.

For more information, call Wayne Warden at (713) 895-8021 or email wwarden@nearnorthwestdistrict.com.

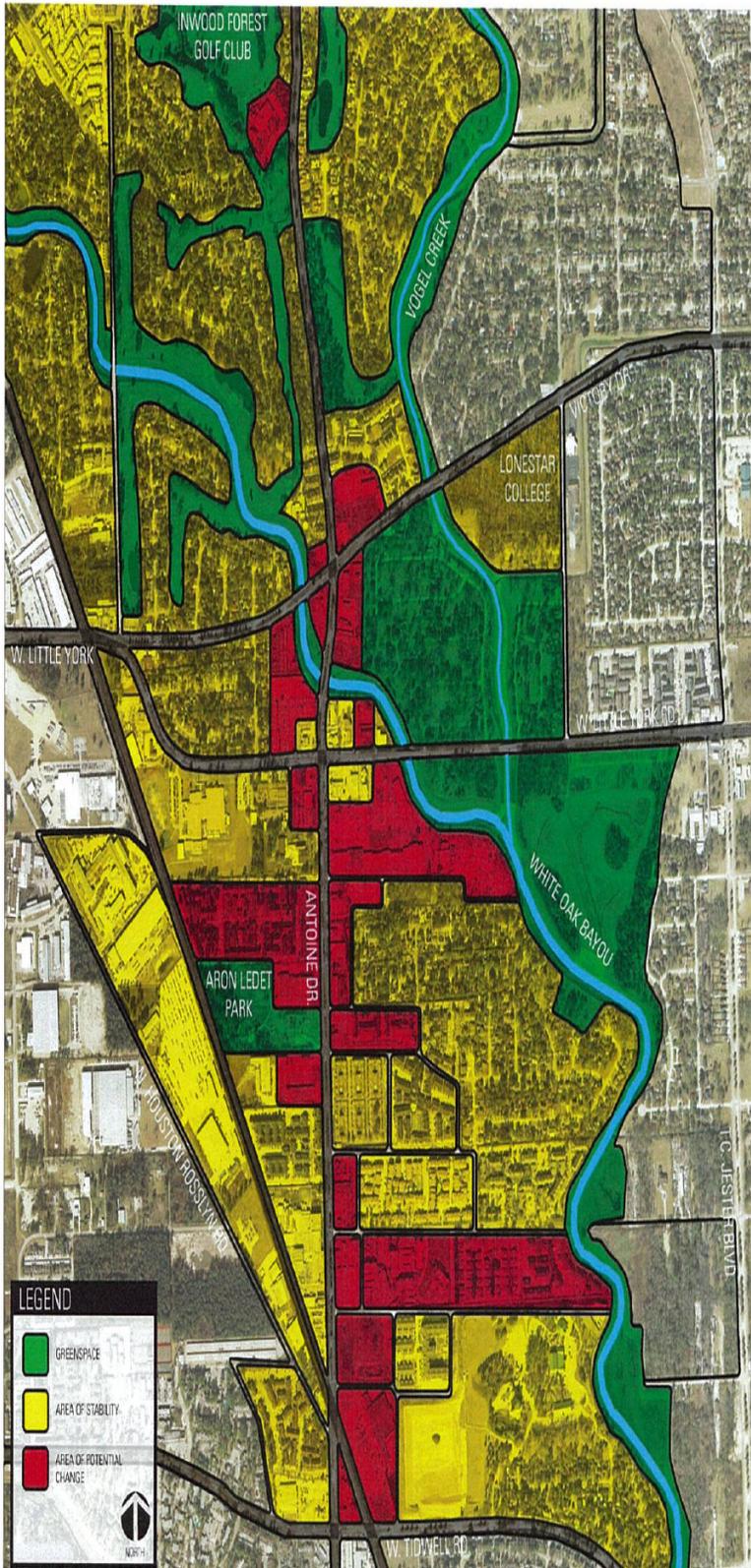
www.nearnorthwestdistrict.com



"Farmers Market with associated community farms and community garden plots available for rent. Gardens can also be a place to gather as a community..."

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT QUOTE





DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC & MARKET TRENDS

more heavily weighted toward lower ranges than the distribution for the City overall with the estimated 2010 median income at \$39,290 versus \$44,923 citywide.

The Study Area has more multi-family units (56.3%) and more renter-occupied units (56.7%) than citywide multi-family units (44.1%) and renter-occupied units (52.3%). A comparison of home values reveals that on a median basis the Study Area is rather evenly matched with the City of Houston overall. However, compared to Houston the Study Area has nearly twice the share of housing units within the \$100-149,000 range and nearly double the share built within 1970-1979. This lack of diversity means a large portion of the housing stock is simultaneously aging and is potentially an indicator of a stagnant housing market.

The existing multi-family occupancy is low, partly the result of intentional application of more strict tenant selection policies at some complexes. Historical multi-family absorption in the Study Area has fluctuated significantly with an obvious downward trend over time and rental rates that are relatively low and stagnate in comparison to the City overall. Most properties were built in the 1970's and 1980's and while some have been renovated, many are likely to deteriorate unless the market improves enough to justify capital expenditure for upgrades.

Similar to multi-family, the majority of commercial space was built in multi-tenant retail centers in the 1970's and 1980's and have an average overall occupancy of 82.7%; however, rates of 85-90% would indicate a healthy market. The retail market is functioning moderately well from an occupancy and absorption standpoint, but at a depressed level in terms of rent and quality of tenants. Rent levels have fallen at grocery anchored centers suggesting that retailers are less concerned with proximity to brand anchors as they are with affordable space. Some older properties that have not been updated suffer from very high vacancy. Another factor affecting the retail market is the presence of competitive, more strongly anchored retail properties along US 290.

The current income base in the Study Area is a challenge when trying to attract national credit tenants for retail and to justify upgrades to multi-family properties. The physical condition of both commercial and multi-family properties along the Antoine corridor acts as a deterrent for more risk-averse tenants.

The map at left strategically analyzes the Study Area from the standpoint of identifying those areas most stable and those most susceptible to change based on a variety of physical, environmental, socio-economic and market conditions and/or trends. In this case, the potential for certain places to change can be viewed as an ally in creating focus areas as part of a plan for the future.



Five Bridges



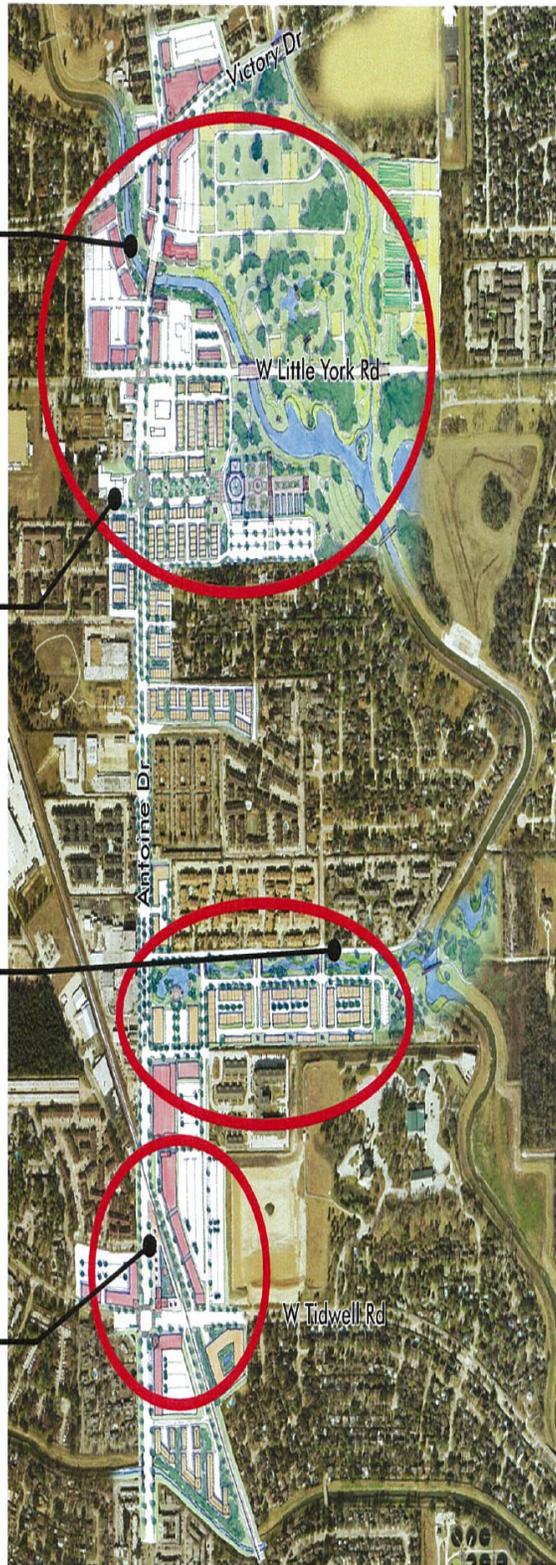
White Oak Gardens



Bayou Boulevard at White Oak



White Oak Station



TRANSLATING THE VISION

The Public Open House Workshop schedule was established in a charrette-style to enable the consulting team to focus intensely on the design of the concept plan immediately following gathering community input at the April 26 Open House. Two days later, the concept plan was then presented for public feedback at the April 28 Open House.

The charrette allowed the consultant team to listen to the community and translate their input as follows:

Within a compact area, Antoine, West Little York and Victory cross over White Oak Bayou and Vogel Creek at five locations, giving rise to – **Five Bridges**. The current bridges are functional for vehicular traffic; the vision is to enhance these crossings to celebrate the waterways and new trails underneath and to identify the value of water as a focus of this community. Five Bridges is a place where the heavily travelled Antoine corridor, the bayou/greenway trails, the future “town center”, the regional “destination park”, and a series of public spaces all culminate.

A long-term centerpiece of this plan is the creation of a public-private partnership to develop a regional “destination park” – **White Oak Gardens** – established in association with the bayou trails and Lone Star College. With a location backing up to **White Oak Bayou**, this project has the ability to leverage the trail and greenway system while establishing a regional landmark on Antoine that draws visitors from near and far.

Coordinate redevelopment of property formerly occupied by deteriorated and abandoned multi-family projects and transform De Soto Street into a linear water channel – **Bayou Boulevard at White Oak** – that connects a proposed park at White Oak Bayou on the east end with a proposed plaza and water feature visible from Antoine at the west end. This project has the ability to achieve numerous goals from replacing deteriorated multi-family seen as a blight on the area to extending the park/trail system from White Oak Bayou to Antoine in order to give the greenway a visible identity on Antoine.

The significant existing bus transit ridership in the Antoine corridor is envisioned to be enhanced with the introduction of signature express bus service that ultimately could transform into – **White Oak Station** – a multi-modal hub with future rail transit on the Burlington Northern line. Located around the intersection of Antoine and West Tidwell, the hub should take the form of a multi-purpose public space, and the immediately surrounding blocks provide long-term opportunities to promote dense, transit-oriented development that will activate the hub 24/7 and generate riders living near the station.

IMPLEMENTATION



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IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES BRING A PLAN TO FRUITION

Appendix 20 cont.



6240 Antoine before block grant



6240 Antoine after block grant redevelopment and rebranding



5555 Hollyview before block grant



5555 Hollyview after block grant redevelopment





5600 Hollyview before and after action



Candlelight Trails Condominiums before and after action

