

Community Livability: Reducing Neighborhood Conflicts in a College Town

Corvallis, Oregon Police Department

1. Summary:

The City of Corvallis is home to Oregon State University (OSU), a public land grant school offering undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degree programs. OSU has the largest total student enrollment in Oregon. Corvallis is a city of about 56,000 residents located in the Willamette Valley, an hour and a half south of Portland.

Over the past several years, Oregon State University has seen explosive growth in student enrollment, growing from 20,320 students in 2008 to 29,576 students in 2015, a 31% increase in seven years. This expanded the number of college students living off campus in Corvallis and created a shortage of rental housing.

The influx of students living off campus directly impacted police calls for service as a demand for student housing sprawled into neighborhoods that were primarily middle class family based neighborhoods. The demographic conflict resulted in an explosion of loud noise, party, littering, fighting, and disorderly conduct complaints. While university enrollment increased, police department staffing remained at levels unchanged since the 1990s. The city, which has the motto “Enhancing Community Livability”, was peppered with complaints from citizens regarding strain on city infrastructure and decreasing quality of life in neighborhoods.

By 2011, Corvallis and OSU teamed up to create “Collaboration Corvallis”, a committee dedicated to analyzing and resolving conflicts between the revolving student population and long

term residents. This committee was where recommendations for extra city police officers and OSU staff dedicated to off campus livability issues was first discussed.

In 2013, Corvallis voters passed a property tax increase allowing funding for “three additional police officers, supplies, and equipment focusing on community livability”. After backfilling patrol openings, the Corvallis Police Department introduced the Community Livability Officer program in August 2015. These three officers are dedicated to community livability concerns and directly apply long term problem oriented policing strategies to address the root cause of concerns. Through the use of creative, original projects and by developing partnerships, community relationships, education strategies, and proactive enforcement efforts, officers assigned to this program have had a direct impact on behaviors impacting community livability. The program has been highly successful and has garnered additional support from the university which recently pledged grant monies to expand the program over the next several years.

2. Description

A. Scanning:

Conflicts between students and the rest of the Corvallis community are nothing new. As with most college cities, “town and gown” issues rise and fall depending on the social culture of college students at the time. Unlike other cities with more stable population bases, cities with universities cycle through new groups of student residents every year.

In 2008, the Oregon State student population began increasing dramatically, leaping over eight percent a year at times [Figure 1]. This sudden increase in student population growth occurred when rental housing for off campus living was already in short supply. Students began living further away from campus in neighborhoods where the long term residents held different priorities, values, and habits.

Community complaints and local media focused on how Oregon State’s growth was negatively impacting the community quality of life. Negative public commentary persisted for many years, demanding more participation from university and city leadership to address issues ranging from the criminal issues addressed in this document, to zoning, parking, and trash pickup problems related to the expanding population [Figure 12].

Complaints to the police regarding off campus student behavior remained consistently high with no signs of improvement. CPD identified repeated calls for issues such as loud noise, amplified music, parties, littering, fights, public urination, vandalism, and alcohol use. Using data as a baseline, six types of computer aided dispatch call types were identified as directly impacting “community livability”. These call types were: Disturbance, Fight, Liquor Law, Minor in Possession, Music, and Party complaints. Complaints of this nature peaked in 2007

with a total of 2,207 “livability” related calls for service but remained consistently high for many subsequent years [Figures 2, 3]. Other types of complaints to city officials included a lack of parking, violations of code enforcement and ineffective housing occupancy rules.

In 2011, a committee titled “Collaboration Corvallis” was formed consisting of members from OSU, Corvallis city government, and the community. The committee was tasked with tackling the multifaceted issues of university growth. In regards to law enforcement the collaboration gave the police department a foundation to respond to livability issues by revamping municipal code with updated fines and penalties, giving teeth to a previously underutilized civil penalty process for repeated offenses, and helped demonstrate the need for more police officers to proactively address livability issues.

B. Analysis

Based on past practices, the police department recognized that traditional methods of responding after a received complaint and issuing warnings or citations to address the issue was not sufficient to resolve the problem. Officers found themselves responding to “party” houses every weekend for the same issues over and over, with the repeat offenders having little incentive to change their behavior [Figure 10]. Previous approaches involving community policing practices were more successful but were lacking in consistency and follow through, primarily due to a lack of staffing and other tasks taking priority for patrol officers. Also due to a lack of staffing, proactive enforcement did not occur consistently, often allowing parties and gatherings to reach unsafe levels before someone called police. When police did respond, it was commonplace for a single officer to deal with complaints involving hundreds of individuals. This drastically reduced the effectiveness of enforcement and the safety of officers.

At the beginning of this project the Corvallis police already had programs in place stemming from previous problem oriented policing projects. Most notably is the Greek Liaison Officer Program, where participating patrol officers are assigned to specific fraternity and sorority houses every year. The goal of this program is to reduce issues between the houses and nearby residents by providing an officer as a point of contact and educational resource for students involved in Greek programs. This program is still being implemented with continued success. Other previous efforts included increasing staffing and strict enforcement of alcohol and noise statutes on “high incident” weekends, referred to as “Tactical Action Plans” or TAPs.

Underlying conditions for the problem appeared to be:

- 1) A lack of community ownership by many students who felt they had no responsibility to neighbors as they were only living in the neighborhoods long enough to get a degree and move on.
- 2) An embedded party culture where alcohol abuse was not seen as a problem (“I’m here to party, that’s what you do in college”).
- 3) Long-term residents moving away to avoid the conflicts, turning their single family residence into a multiple student housing rental in neighborhoods not accustomed to college aged residents.
- 4) A lack of student accountability with OSU for off-campus conduct.
- 5) Landlords and Property Managers having a lack of knowledge of persisting problems occurring at properties under their control.
- 6) Inadequate police staffing to effectively address livability related complaints.

The “Collaboration Corvallis” committee began tackling many underlying issues between the city, the university, and community members. Some of the non-law enforcement projects included a new landlord and property management association with regular meetings, and new positions within the university to address student conduct and community relations. These achievements were recognized by police officials as an opportunity to capitalize by growing relationships and partnerships with other stakeholders in a large scale community policing effort.

C. Response

The police department began with the broad goal of reducing livability related offenses (defined as calls listed as Disturbance, Fight, Liquor Law, Minor in Possession, Music, and Party complaints). This was to be achieved through partnerships with other stakeholders, community relationships and education, and proactive enforcement.

In 2010, the police department re-vamped a civil redress procedure referred to as a Special Response Fee Notice. The notice, referred to as an SRN, was served to the tenant of a residence found in violation of a municipal code or state law. If law enforcement responded to the same location more than once for the same type of issue, the city was then enabled to bill the tenant for the costs of repeated police response including the salaries for officers on scene and the use of equipment over the duration of the multiple responses. This program was modified to increase the time between occurrences from 48 hours to 30 days [Figure 7]. Additional language was added to label houses with continually recurring issues as a “Chronic Nuisance Property”, requiring the property owner to address and abate the issue. If the issue continues without owner intervention, this also allows the city to condemn the residence for a period of time spanning ten days to six months, effectively ending the issue through forced eviction [Figure 8].

The police department worked proactively with the newly formed Property Managers and Landlords Group, creating a process of notification to the property owner if an SRN was issued to their property. This enabled the owner to proactively address the issue with their tenant before further occurrences led to a Chronic Nuisance designation and created another layer of accountability with student residents regarding their off campus behavior.

This effort was highly successful. With rental housing at a premium, the added accountability to students led to reduced recidivism due to the fear of being evicted. Property owners were happy to partner with law enforcement to avoid the financial impact of having a house empty of renters due to a chronic nuisance designation [Figure 6].

Oregon State University and Corvallis Police Department officials collaborated on how off campus behavior could be addressed through the OSU Student Conduct Office. The police department began information sharing with the university by providing summaries of police reports taken. OSU was able to cross reference offenders named in the reports with their enrollment listings to identify those who were students and to address the behaviors that were a violation of the OSU Student Conduct policies. In 2013, the OSU Student Conduct Office began a structured process to enforce university rules on students engaged in inappropriate off-campus behaviors. This became another effective tool in reducing repeated livability offenses [Figure 4]. Also in 2013, the OSU Community Relations Office began educational campaigns for off campus life, including how to be a “good neighbor” and how to “party smart”, in an effort to prevent community/student conflicts [Figure 11].

These partnerships between law enforcement, property owners, and the university became an effective tool to change behavior and increase neighborhood livability. Moving

forward, the police department wanted to repeat this process with all other community stakeholders. As momentum gathered in the ongoing effort, the police department gained community understanding that staffing levels were too low to maintain a consistent effort on livability related issues. In response, in 2013 voters approved a three year tax increase allowing funding for “three additional police officers, supplies, and equipment focusing on community livability”. This demonstrated the continuing commitment of the police department to effectively address the problem, and the desire of the community to see continued progress.

In August 2015, the Community Livability Officer (CLO) patrol group was introduced to address crimes impacting community livability. This patrol group consists of three full time police officers competitively selected for the special assignment [Figure 9]. Because these positions are funded with tax dollars on a time-limited levy, expectations were high regarding results and measureable outcomes. At the inception of the program the following goals were given to the team:

Goal 1: Provide safe neighborhoods

Objective 1: Increase uniformed officer presence on foot and on bike.

Action: 25% of patrol time will consist of foot and bike patrol

Objective 2: Increase public perception of frequency of police in their neighborhood by 10%.

Action: Conduct survey of program stakeholders to determine current level of perception versus perception after 1 year of CLO deployment.

Goal 2: Improve harmony, livability, and safety in neighborhoods.

Objective 1: Reduce loud party, people and music calls by 10%

Objective 2: Reduce signal crimes (graffiti, litter, abandoned bicycles, etc.)

Action: Create and implement at least 1 Tactical Action Plan (TAP) a quarter (3 months) with focus on community and stake holder participation.

Goal 3: Create partnerships with community members and students.

Objective 1: Provide presentations that will increase the public's knowledge of the law and the mission of the Corvallis Police Department.

Action: Conduct at least 6 community presentations each quarter.

Objective 2: Attend community/school events.

Goal 4: Impact crimes which effect community livability.

Objective 1: Identify residences which act as hubs for criminal activity

Action: Work in cooperation with uniformed patrol officers, SCU (Street Crimes Unit) and community members to address livability issues. Document these activities.

Objective 2: Identify fraternities and sororities with ongoing issues and assist Greek Liaison Officers with education, enforcement and behavior modification.

Action: At minimum conduct 3 educational responses to OSU Greek Life houses each semester the houses are occupied.

The Community Livability Officers immediately began building on the relationships and partnerships already in place from the previous collaboration. The CLO operational philosophy adopted early on was to address chronic criminal behavior negatively impacting community livability through relationships, partnerships, education, and enforcement. The ultimate goal for CLO was to address the root cause of identified concerns for long term solutions. In sum, to turn the multifaceted issues facing the community into one large problem oriented policing project consisting of many smaller projects working together.

CLO Officers began work on several projects, many before the beginning of the 2015 school year. Some of these projects included:

- Additional SRN Follow-up. Residents receiving an initial SRN would receive a letter from CLO regarding their behavior, education on community expectations, and contact

information if they needed further assistance to resolve neighborhood conflicts. A second SRN within the school year results in an in-person visit from a CLO to speak about the issues.

- Partnerships with the Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC). Inspectors with the OLCC started riding along with a CLO to help enforce state liquor law. CLO Officers have assisted OLCC with minor compliance checks at alcohol retailers.
- Partnerships and information sharing with Oregon State University. CLO Officers have assisted with on-campus activities and have created open avenues of communication with student conduct officers and joint projects with community relations.
- Neighborhood canvass. In partnership with OSU Community Relations, officers and students teamed up and went door to door in neighborhoods to speak with residents about community expectations and tips on how to be a good neighbor.
- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. A CPTED certified CLO Officer has conducted site audits for several properties and a city park to reduce criminal activity.
- Coffee with a Cop. CLO has created a recurring Coffee with a Cop program based on the Hawthorne California model to increase communication avenues with the community.
- Tactical Action Plans. CLO has developed and implemented several plans entailing increased police staffing, enforcement, and educational efforts surrounding high incident weekends such as Halloween and OSU football home games. Partnerships were also showcased during these increased enforcement efforts by inviting stakeholders to accompany officers during the efforts.

- Educational presentations. CLO has presented to student groups, youth organizations, college classes, neighborhood associations, and local businesses in an effort to open communication lines, increase partnerships, and develop solutions [Figure 13].

CLO Officers balanced these projects with community meetings, student outreach, and proactive enforcement efforts on foot and bicycle.

D. Assessment

Since the inception of the Collaboration Corvallis committee, the police department has kept close track of the previously identified “livability” related offenses. Despite a steady increase of OSU student enrollment, offenses have continued to decline since efforts began in 2011. The identified offenses totaled 2,069 in 2011, 1,993 in 2012, 1,668 in 2013, 1,361 in 2014, and 1,089 in 2015 [Figure 3]. These numbers not only show a consistent decline, but average a reduction of 15% per year, with a total reduction of calls for service over four years of 47%. Additionally, local media noted the progress and improved community sentiment [Figure 13].

Efforts made by Oregon State University have had similar success on reducing livability crime rates within the city. OSU Student Conduct started sanctions for off campus student conduct in the 2013 school year, the same year the Corvallis Property Manager’s Group began meeting. Both groups receive crime reports and SRN information from the Corvallis Police Department and act on that information independently. Since 2013, a steady decline in disturbances, fights, open containers of alcohol in public, minors in possession of alcohol, music, noise, and party complaints has been noted. Overall calls for service related to these types of incidents have decreased a total by 35% from 2013 to 2015 [Figure 2]. University sanctions against students for off-campus behavior were effective as well. The OSU Student Conduct office reported that 93% of student issues were resolved without repeated problems [Figure 5].

At the end of 2015, an initial analysis of the Community Livability Officer program was conducted. A year end review showed success in the implementation of projects, partnerships, and problem response. Small changes were made to CLO goals and objectives to better reflect extra actions taken and to restructure the format to showcase relationships, partnerships, education, and enforcement. An initial assessment of the impact on livability related crimes showed a 4% decline in community initiated calls for service over the fall 2015 term compared to 2014, plus an 11% increase in officer initiated activity.

While implementing the initial response, student reactions to CLO efforts were noted. What officers found most commented by offenders was that they were not primarily concerned with law enforcement action resulting in a citation and a court date and possible fines. Student offenders were concerned with having to report to university student conduct and getting phone calls from their landlords. CLO altered their approach by increasing the number of special response notices to first time offenders as a means of warning to the student and a means of communication to landlords and student conduct officers about the behaviors.

In February 2016, OSU and Corvallis Police administration met to discuss program successes and future collaborations. Due to the assessment of actions taken and the continued downward trends of livability related crime and issues, Oregon State University pledged grant monies to the Corvallis Police Department to increase the CLO program and further collaborative efforts to improve community livability and increase public safety. These funds will start in the 2017 fiscal year cycle and are pledged at \$400,000 each year for three years (\$1.2 million total). CLO collaborations, ongoing projects, and future initiatives are still in progress and are continuing to make positive impacts.

3. Agency and Officer Information:

Key Project Team Members:

- Jon Sassaman, Chief of Police
- Dan Hendrickson, Captain
- Dave Henslee, Captain (*Now Chief in Klamath Falls, OR*)
- Jef Van Arsdall, Lieutenant (*Retired*)
- Ryan Eaton, Sergeant
- James Dodge, Police Officer CLO
- Luke Thomas, Police Officer CLO
- Trevor Anderson, Police Officer CLO
- Patricia Neet, Crime Analyst

Project Contact Person:

Trevor Anderson

Police Officer, Community Livability Group

Corvallis Police Department

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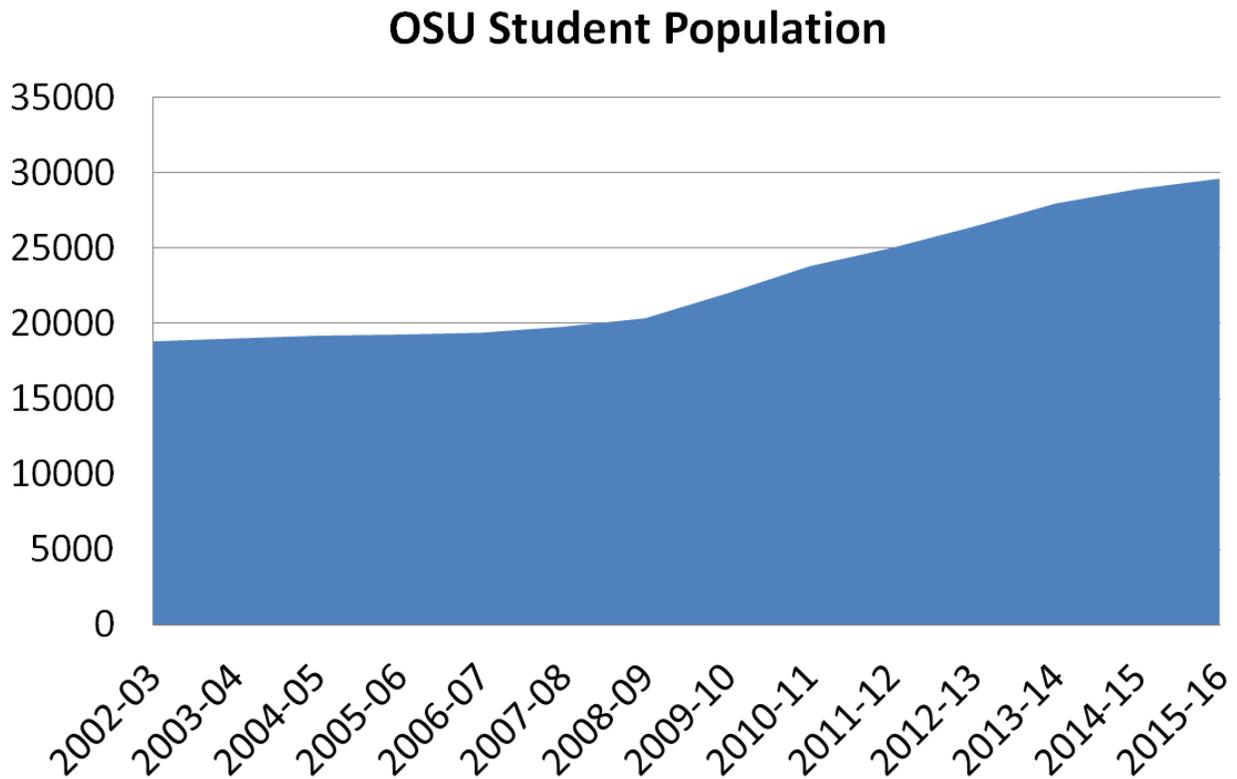
Corvallis, OR 97331

(541) 243-3321

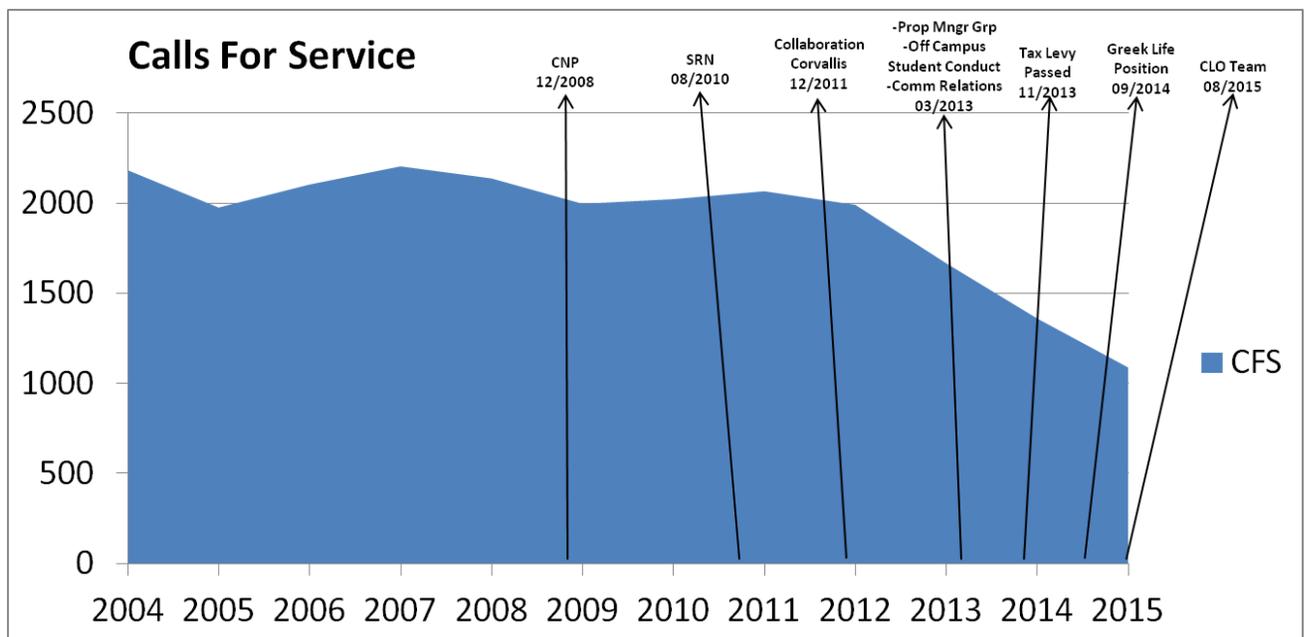
Trevor.Anderson@CorvallisOregon.gov

4. Appendices:

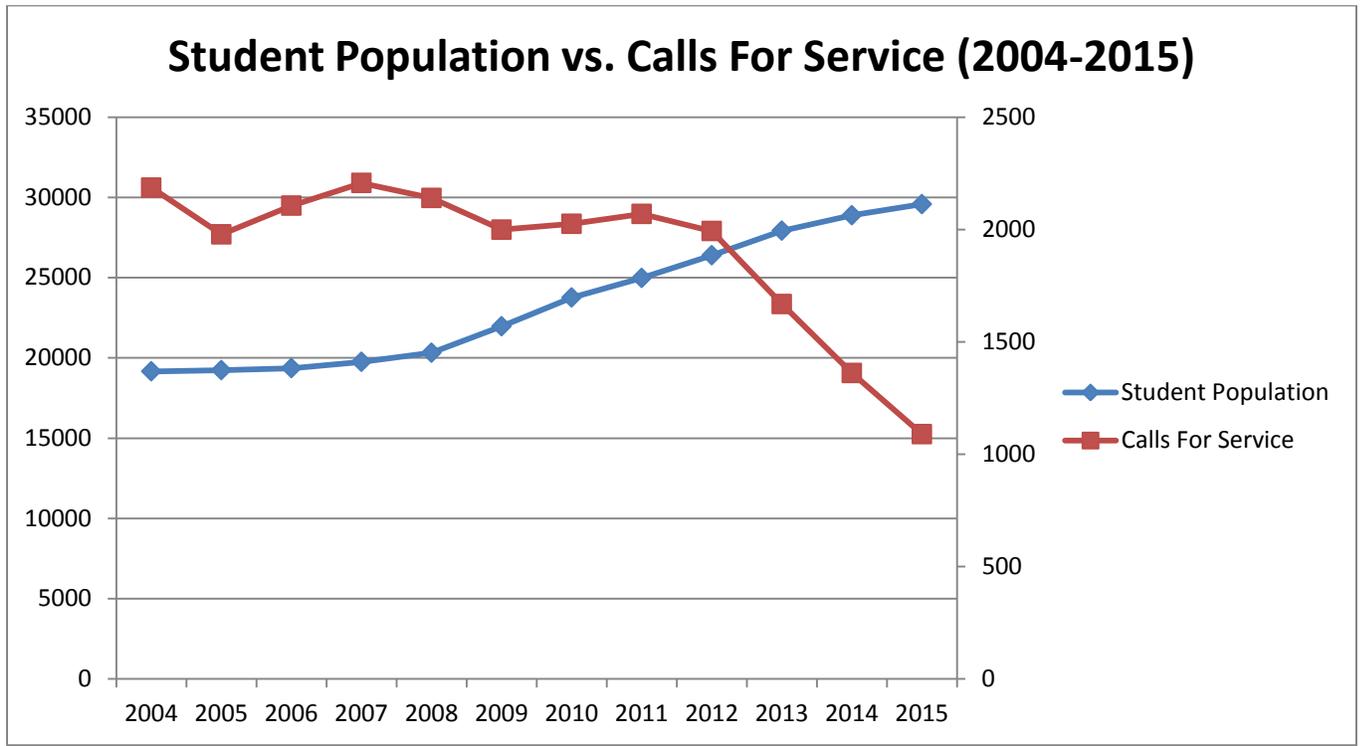
[Figure 1] OSU Student Enrollment 2002-2015. Source: www.oregonstate.edu



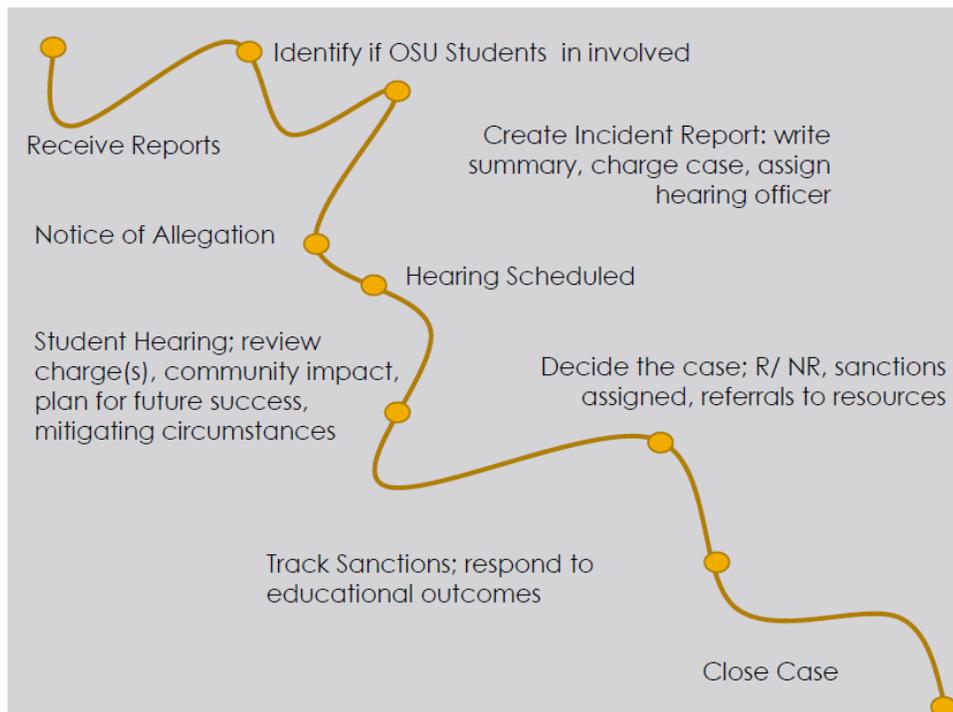
[Figure 2] Corvallis Police Livability Calls for Service, with Response Item timeline



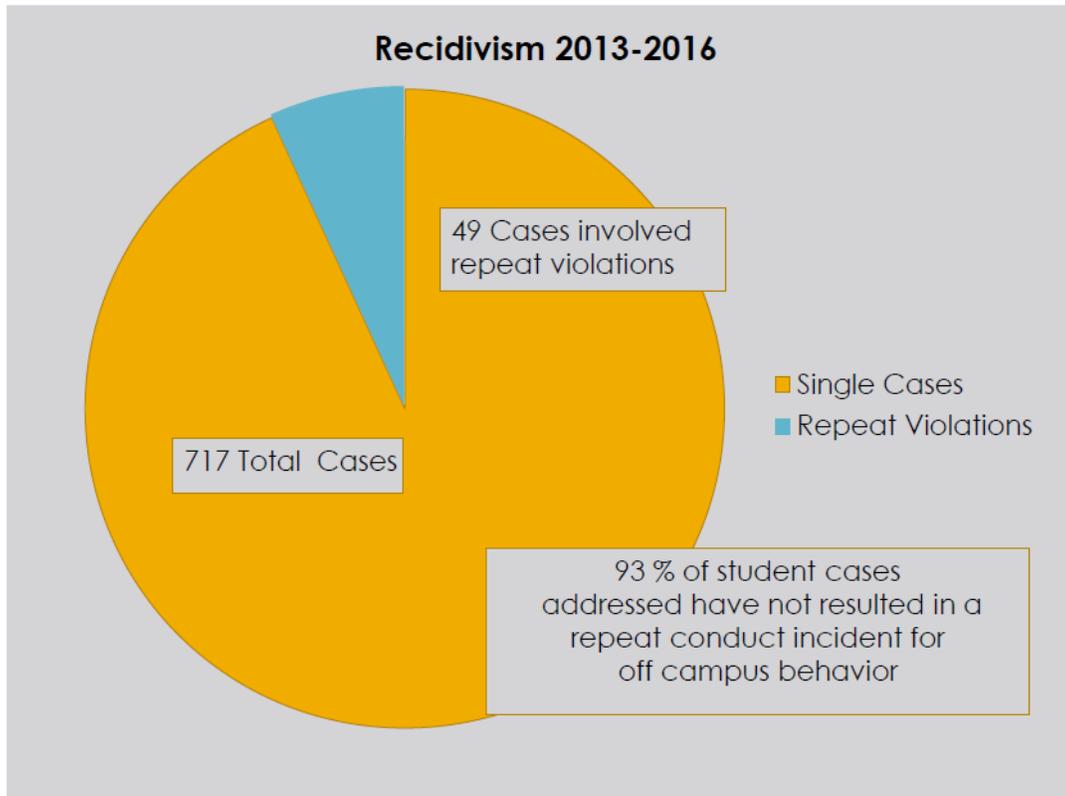
[Figure 3] *Student Population vs. Corvallis Police Calls for Service*



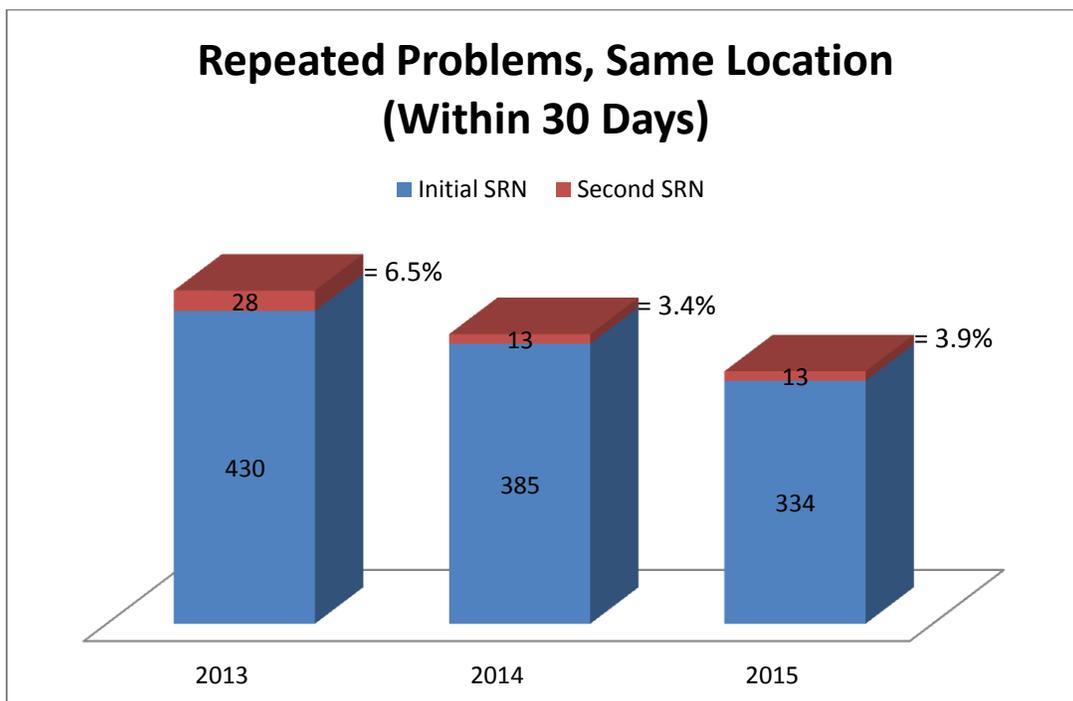
[Figure 4] *OSU Student Conduct Process*



[Figure 5] OSU Student Conduct Recidivism Rates



[Figure 6] SRN2 Stats



[Figure 7] *Special Response Notice. Source: Corvallis Municipal Code*

• **Section 5.03.150.010 - Notice provisions.**

1)

When a police officer determines that one or more persons are engaged in an activity or conduct which violates the provisions of the Corvallis Criminal Code [Municipal Code [Chapter 5.03](#)] or the Criminal Code of Oregon, the police shall give written notice to one or more of the persons who are engaged in, or who are in control of, such activity or conduct that the activity or conduct must immediately cease.

2)

Notice recipients shall be liable for special response fees if a subsequent police response arising out of the activity or conduct is required within thirty (30) days following such notice. A special response fee will be charged to each person identified in subsection [5.03.150.020](#) of this Section. Separate fees shall be charged for the original and each subsequent police response. The special response fee is defined as the total cost incurred by the City in connection with such response, including but not limited to, police officers, equipment, dispatch and supervisor time.

(Ord. 2013-08 § 7, 06/03/2013; Ord. 2010-17 § 1, 08/16/2010; Ord. 82-77, 1982)

[Figure 8] *Chronic Nuisance Property. Source: Corvallis Municipal Code*

• **Section 5.07.010 - Declaration of purpose.**

1)

Repeated unlawful activities (specifically enumerated in [Section 5.07.030](#), below) occurring on, or resulting from the use of, certain real property within the City create unreasonable disruptions of the peace and may create unsafe conditions in the neighborhoods where these real properties are located;

2)

These repeated unlawful activities degrade neighborhoods;

3)

Existing state criminal statutes and City ordinances are inadequate to address, control, or remedy the adverse impacts of chronic unlawful activity occurring at these specific real properties;

4)

Civil regulation of these real properties will provide a remedy to the problems caused by these chronic behaviors and will promote and protect the public health, safety and welfare; and therefore

5)

Real properties where those chronic unlawful activities specifically enumerated in [Section 5.07.030](#) below occur, or where those chronic unlawful activities result from the use of the real property, are hereby declared to be public nuisances, and are subject to the abatement procedures and other remedies set forth within this Chapter.

(Ord. 2008-22 § 1, 12/15/2008)

• **Section 5.07.020 - Chronic nuisance property.**

1)

Any property within the City that becomes a chronic nuisance property, as defined herein, is in violation of this Chapter and subject to its remedies.

2)

Any person who permits property under his or her ownership or control to be a chronic nuisance property, as defined herein, shall be in violation of this Chapter and subject to its remedies.

(Ord. 2008-22 § 1, 12/15/2008)

[Figure 9] *Community Livability Officers: Anderson, Dodge, and Thomas*



[Figure 10] *Large College Party (Church and Senior Living Home across the street)*



[Figure 11] 2014 OSU Off-Campus Living Guide

College Life: Corvallis
Corvallis Collaboration 2013-14

YOUR OFF-CAMPUS
Living Guide

2 Tips for a legal and safe party

4 Creating lasting relationships with your neighbors

6 City ordinances and information

Welcome to the Community

The Corvallis community is a great place to live, with friendly neighbors, beautiful tree-lined streets and a variety of people of all ages and backgrounds living close together. To help you navigate community living, we have created this handy guide. The City of Corvallis and Oregon State University work together to promote good relations and a healthy community among residents, both student and non-student. You can help by getting to know your neighbors and respecting your community.

[Figure 12] 2011 Livability Article. Source: Corvallis Gazette-Times

Campus planning turns to livability issues

- By BENNETT HALL, Corvallis Gazette-Times
- May 27, 2011

Area residents concerned about how OSU's growth affects nearby neighborhoods

About 55 people filled a conference room at Oregon State University's LaSells Stewart Center on Thursday night for an update on the campus master plan.

Campus planning manager Patty Katz and facilities director Vincent Martorello gave a data-rich slide presentation packed with information about progress toward the vision laid out in the plan, which was last revised in 2004.

They covered the university's historic preservation district (established in 2008), construction projects (nearly 600,000 square feet built in the past seven years), entry portals (a new north entrance finished, a new south entrance in the works) and parking utilization (it averages 74 percent on campus, 79 percent in two nearby city parking districts).

But it quickly became evident that what most of the audience wanted to talk about was how the university's rapid growth is impacting life in the surrounding neighborhoods.

A number of people who live near OSU said it has become increasingly difficult to find on-street parking as enrollment has soared to more than 23,000 students, most of them living off-campus.

"I live at 16th and Polk," one man said. "On any given day I drive around and I cannot find a parking space. I see students pull up with bikes in the back of their pickup trucks, park their truck, take out their bike and ride to class."

Several people noted that parking can be even harder to find just outside permit-only parking districts.

"The kids get very smart about where the district starts and where it ends," one woman observed.

Another woman said she doesn't mind the parking congestion during the day as much as the wild behavior at night.

"It's the screaming, it's the yelling, it's the bellowing, it's the smashing bottles, it's the bass music and all of that," she said. "I can live with parking. I can live with my friends not being able to park in front of my house — it's the sleep."

Both OSU officials acknowledged the frustration in the room and tried to assure the audience that university and city officials are working on solutions to some of those problems.

"We are currently looking at a number of different strategies to try to address the concerns of the community," Katz said.

Martorello added that a series of public meetings would be scheduled in the future to air those concerns more fully.

"I don't think the city and OSU are on opposite sides of the fence at all," he said, "in terms of trying to address these issues in the best way possible."

But not everyone was satisfied with those assurances. Several people in the room repeatedly questioned the wisdom of growth projections that anticipate OSU will enroll up to 35,000 students by 2025.

"If you're going to bring in another 10,000, and you're not going to do something drastically different than you did for the last 10,000, then five years from now we're going to be having the same stupid conversation," one man said.

"I know you're trying, but it's not working out for the community very well."

Contact Bennett Hall at 541-758-9529 or bennett.hall@gazettetimes.com.

[Figure 13] Portion of 2015 Livability Article. Source: Corvallis Gazette-Times

Student conduct: Livability on the rise

- [JAMES DAY Corvallis Gazette-Times](#)
- Oct 24, 2015



Corvallis Police Department officer James Dodge talks to Garfield Neighborhood Association members about student conduct issues in the community on Tuesday, Oct., 13, 2015. Dodge and two other officers are part of a new Corvallis Police Department community livability patrol.

See a trend for a month and it's too small a sample. Spot one for a year ... and you may conclude it's a statistical anomaly. Maybe it was the weather. Or cosmic ions. Three years in? Maybe it really IS a trend.

The Corvallis community started a conversation in 2012 about solving problems in the neighborhoods near the Oregon State University campus that were awash in "livability" issues such as parties, trash, binge drinking, infill development, parking, congestion and traffic.

OSU growth — Corvallis campus enrollment surged 20 percent from 19,900 in the 2009-10 school year to 24,383 last fall — and the attendant concerns led the city, university and community to embark on the Collaboration Corvallis project.

Actions resulting from the initiative included increases in OSU staffing to address student conduct, new city ordinances that stiffened the penalties for livability crimes, a cooperative effort on the part of property managers and landlords to hold tenants accountable for their actions and the addition of a livability patrol by the Corvallis Police Department.

The livability officers, paid for by a levy passed by the voters in 2013, are new — they debuted in August — but the other efforts have been hacking away at the problems since 2012.

And the results, in this fourth annual Gazette-Times special report on livability trends, are impressive:

- Police data (see chart above) show that "quality of life" crimes (disturbances, fights, alcohol violations, loud music and parties) have been on a downward trend the past three years.
- Police issuance of "special response notice" warnings also has declined. Most significantly, the second SRN for repeat offenders, which results in residents being charged for the police time, have dropped for 38 to 13 in the past three years (see chart at right).
- OSU, which began holding students accountable for off-campus conduct two years ago, saw its off-campus caseload drop 45 percent from 379 in 2013-14 to 234 in 2014-15.
- The property managers speak with pride at the fact that next-morning police notification of tenant citations and other police calls enables the landlords to tackle problems immediately.

No one is declaring victory, but there is a sense that things ARE getting better.

"The results are positive and substantial," said Carl Yeh, director of OSU's office of student conduct since the fall of 2013. "It's a fact that livability crime continues to decline. These are all good signs. And it's a testament to the work that OSU, the city and the CPD are doing to educate students on what is appropriate behavior off-campus."

(article edited: shortened for brevity)