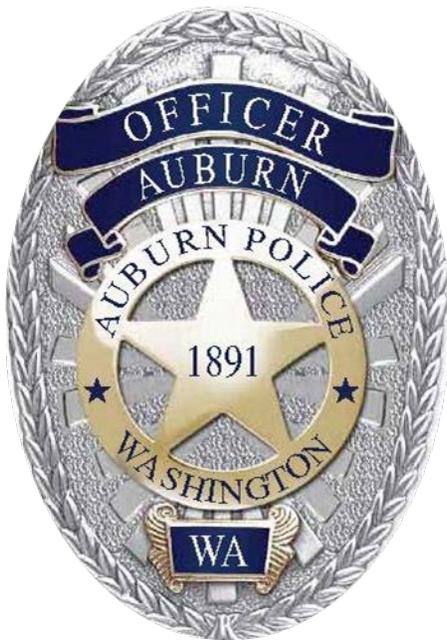


Auburn Police Department (WA)  
2016 Goldstein Award Submission

911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE



## **Summary:**

The address of 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE is situated on what used to be a quiet, typical middleclass neighborhood in the northeast section of Auburn. In 2013, things changed at 911, which began to draw the ire of the neighborhood, causing an increase in reports to the Auburn Police Department not only via 911, but also through our online reporting program.

The citizens of not only this neighborhood, but surrounding neighborhoods, found themselves becoming victim to a level and type of crime they had never experienced before. This neighborhood experienced a 360% increase in crime between 2012 and 2013, which included crimes of violence, narcotics, fraud/forgery, auto theft and residential burglary. Furthermore, they started noticing “drug addicts” and “sketchy looking” people beginning to frequent their neighborhood. Through information developed by neighbors, all of this increased activity was attributed to one house – 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE.

The increase in crime in this neighborhood continued into 2014. Crime reports continued to increase slightly, and police calls for service reached well over 100 calls for service – just at this one house!

The increased number of complaints from citizens and referrals from patrol officers were subsequently brought to the attention of the officers assigned to the Community Response Team (CRT) – Auburn PD’s version of a Problem Oriented Policing Unit. The CRT was tasked with

looking into this problem location and attempting to come up with a solution(s) to the problems there.

After looking at statistics and reviewing crime reports, as well as police calls for service, the CRT unit partnered with the Auburn Police Department's Special Investigations Unit (Narcotics), the City of Auburn Code Enforcement Office and the City of Auburn City Attorney's Office, as it was realized that this project would need to be addressed from multiple angles. Each unit or office played an integral role in this project and brought a special set of skills or capabilities to the table, but we knew we all had to work as a cohesive team and support the efforts of one another.

This project lasted for nearly ten (10) months. As a result of this collaborative effort, the house at 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE was condemned by the City of Auburn in October of 2014. In the remaining months of 2014, there were still a few arrests for the crime of Criminal Trespassing, but largely, the criminal activity plummeted. In 2015, the crime reports and calls for service at this address dropped by more than 300%. A sense of safety and tranquility returned to 17<sup>th</sup> St NE.

## **Scanning:**

In the northeastern area of the City of Auburn, there is the street 17<sup>th</sup> St NE. This street is on the smaller side, extending only approximately two blocks. This street exists in an area that is a true melding of various cultures, as well as various income levels. However, 17<sup>th</sup> St NE itself is predominately a middle class neighborhood, which experienced a level of crime that would best be described as at the lower end of the scale.

However, in 2013, the Auburn Police Department began receiving a higher than normal number of calls for service in this neighborhood, and the number of crime reports being taken by Auburn Police Officers appeared to be increasing at an equivalent rate. Noting the increase in calls for service, as well as crime reports, in this particular area, a referral was made to the Community Response Team (CRT Unit), which is staffed by two full-time officers, Officer April Clapp and Officer Jason Blake, who are charged with conducting Problem Oriented Policing duties for the Auburn Police Department.

Officers Clapp and Blake were asked to conduct some further work to determine the source of the problem and to also look at ways any identified problems could be addressed.

As a first step, Officers Clapp and Blake consulted with the department's crime analyst to look at crime trends, spikes in particular types of crime and whether or not any potential suspects had been identified, who may be potential contributors to the identified problem. Through this consultation, we noted the aforementioned spike in total crime and calls for service. However, these particular statistics didn't answer the questions of "why" or "who".

From there, Officers Clapp and Blake began visiting daily shift briefings and sending out inquiry emails to officers in the Patrol Division and discussing the noted increase and crime and calls for service and further asking officers to began conducting more field interviews (FI's) in the area and forwarding any information to them for further analysis. During these shift briefing visits, patrol officers began to bombard Officers Clapp and Blake with information that wasn't really noted anywhere else. The information came as a result of officers talking to people who lived on 17<sup>th</sup> St NE, as well as conducting field interviews. One prevailing theme began to emerge, that the address of 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE had become a "doper house" and a "flop house", and that there were people in and out of the house all the time. Officers even began to provide names of well-known offenders who were reportedly seen coming from and going to the house on a regular basis. Things began to make a lot of sense.

From there, Officers Clapp and Blake brought up the house during a monthly meeting they attended, which was also attended by the City of Auburn Code Enforcement Officers, Jason Arbogast and Chris Barack. These meeting were also attended by one of the city's assistant city attorneys. When this house was brought up during this meeting, the Code Enforcement Officers indicated that they too had been receiving complaints about this same house, ranging from excessive garbage and debris to grass and weeds that were allowed to grow too tall. It was during this meeting that it was agreed that the Police Department and Code Enforcement would tackle this project together, and that the efforts of one, would be the efforts of all.

## **Analysis**

As indicated earlier in this document, Officers Clapp and Blake recognized the importance of utilizing statistics to address this problem in an effective manner. Not only did the

officers need or want to know the overall increase in crime for the area, but they knew the importance of knowing the types of crimes that had experienced an increase. Earlier in this document, it was suggested that the department's crime analyst provided information showing a 360% increase in overall crime in the neighborhood, but that analysis showed that the increases in crime showed most notably in the crimes of narcotics, fraud/forgery, auto theft, stolen vehicle recoveries and residential burglary. However, not only was important to note the increase in specific crimes, or crime reports, we also felt it was important to note any increases in calls for service that did not rise to the level as being reported as a crime. It was noted that there was a significant increase in calls for service that were labeled as "Suspicious Person/Vehicle" and "Drug Activity" through our computer-aided dispatch (CAD) program. All of these reports either specifically named the address where this was occurring as "911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE", or described the location as a residence that perfectly matched the physical description of 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE.

Aside from numbers and statistics, we believed the most important information to analyze was information that captured the names of the people involved. Officers Clapp and Blake scoured through a mound of police reports and CAD incidents, seeking the names of people who had either been contacted, arrested or noted in each of these reports. Soon, a few names began to stand out amongst all the rest; all local, well-known people who were heavily involved in various forms of crime (i.e. Auto Theft, Burglary, Fraud and Forgery, Theft and Narcotics) throughout the City of Auburn. It became very clear to us where the source of the problem lived.

Officers Clapp and Blake began attending shift briefings held multiple times per day in an effort to poll the officers who have been responding to these increased number of calls to determine what sort of information they had heard or developed about the problems in the

neighborhood. Through these visits to shift briefings, officers began to offer the same names we learned through analysis of the calls for service and police reports. However, new information that Officers Clapp and Blake learned is that 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE had become a “flop house” for the criminal element and drug addicts. In fact it became so prevalent, officers indicated that anytime a suspect ran from them on foot from anywhere within a couple of blocks of 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE, they always chased the person to, or in the direction of 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE.

At the end of their visits to shift briefings, Officers Clapp and Blake encouraged patrol officers to provide their names and phone numbers to anyone in the neighborhood who called to file any sort of complaint about the house. In response, Officers Clapp and Blake began receiving multiple phone calls from multiple residents of this neighborhood who wanted to give their perspective on the troubled house at the end of the block. Through these phone calls, Officers Clapp and Blake were able to learn that much of the activity that occurred at 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE happened during the night time hours, extending through the early morning hours of each day. The activity that was described was a lot of short-term foot and vehicle traffic, as well as multiple people who would bring various types of property to the house, but leave without the property. In short, this neighborhood grew very tired of the activity at 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE and just wanted it to go away.

## **Response**

After conducting analysis of the problem, in early 2014, Officers Clapp and Blake met with their Sergeant to try and come up with an approach to deal with this problem house. Many of the normal police responses were considered (e.g. buy-bust, use of informants, surveillance, etc.), however, the officers knew that these were normal responses that would not necessarily

solve the problem, or make the problem go away. It was decided at that time, an “out of the box” approach would be necessary to deal with this house with the goal of making the problem go away completely, or at least as much as possible, and give the neighborhood back to the good, hard working people.

The first people Officers Clapp and Blake spoke with were Jason Arbogast and Chris Barack who are both Code Enforcement Officers with the City of Auburn. The topic of 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE came up during a month joint meeting with Code Enforcement and low and behold, it was determined that Code Enforcement had also received multiple complaints about the same house. The complaints received by Code Enforcement included garbage and debris that had piled up in the back yard and on the side of the house and unmanaged vegetation. Since receiving these complaints, the Code Enforcement officers had driven by the house and confirmed that there was validity to the complaints, but they had not yet addressed them with the homeowner. It was decided during this meeting that the Code Enforcement Officers would go to the house with the intent of serving the homeowner with notices to correct the observed violations, and that Officers Clapp and Blake would accompany them to try and gain some further knowledge of what was going on at the house for the law enforcement perspective.

A couple of days later, Officers Clapp and Blake went to 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE with Code Enforcement. Upon making contact at the house, with someone who wasn't the actual homeowner, nor a permanent resident, the name of the homeowner was learned, but it was also learned that the homeowner couldn't be at the house as there was a protection order against him, protecting his estranged wife who was currently living in the house. Through this same person, it was also learned that the estranged wife's son (from her first marriage), was also living there, but he was living in the garage, which had been converted without the proper permits or

permission from the city – yet another code violation. At the time, Code Enforcement wasn't able to speak to anyone with authority at the house, so the "Notice to Correct Violations" was left with the person who answered the door. The notice gave them 15 days to correct all of the noted violations.

The initial 15 days came and went and the violations had not been corrected. Code Enforcement, along with Officers Clapp and Blake again visited the house to discuss the violations. During this visit, the Code Enforcement officers were able to talk to the estranged wife and she assured them that she was attempting to address the violations, but needed more time due to the large number of violations. It was decided that the estranged wife would be given more time. It was during this visit that the estranged wife also confirmed that her son was living in the house, and that he tended to have a lot of visitors, some of whom would stay overnight.

After this initial set of visits, there was some compliance with the "Notice to Correct Violations" that was issued by Code Enforcement. There wasn't 100% compliance, but enough that Code Enforcement could not issue violations.

Over the course of the next few months, additional complaints were lodged with Code Enforcement concerning the same sorts of violations as noted above. Code Enforcement and Officers Clapp and Blake continued to go to the house and confirmed that the grass and weeds were getting too tall again, and garbage began to accumulate in the back, and on the side of the house. Code Enforcement would a "Notice to Correct" each time, and each time, the people living in the house would comply just enough to satisfy Code Enforcement. However, the criminal activity continued to exist at the house and several arrests were made at the house,

mostly for outstanding arrest warrants and narcotics, and there was at least one SWAT stand-off at the house with a subject who had been loosely involved in an incident where shots were fired at officers of a neighboring police jurisdiction. More or less, we were trying to send a message that this house was not the house to hangout.

In June of 2014, code violations began to mount at 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE again. Again, Code Enforcement and Officers Clapp and Blake went to the house to address the violations. However, this time, the violations were far worse than they had ever been and during the visits to the house, it was always full of the who's who of the criminal element. Code Enforcement again issued notices to correct the multitude of violations, but these were continually ignored. Finally, in early July, Code Enforcement began an abatement action against the property and posted the property with a notice of the abatement action. This prompted people inside the house to voluntarily comply with correcting the violations that were provided in the notice, but not until early August of 2014. Ultimately, Code Enforcement did not have to follow through with the abatement order as voluntary compliance was gained prior to the abatement order being approved by city council.

In early October of 2014, it was learned that the water service to 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE had been turned off for non-payment. It is a violation of Auburn City Code to occupy a dwelling that has no water service. Upon learning this, Code Enforcement and Officers Clapp and Blake went to the house and posted an order to vacate the house due to no water service, which gave everyone inside the house 48 hours to vacate. On October 16, 2014, Code Enforcement, Officers Clapp and Blake and Probation Officers from Washington State Department of Corrections (WA DOC), went back to the house and forced everyone to gather the belongings they could and leave the house. Those who were on active probation status were contacted by WA DOC to determine

if they were violating their probation. Those who were in violation were arrested, those who were not, were sent on their way. By afternoon on this day, the entire house was cleared of any people, and then the house was boarded up and posted as “Do Not Occupy” by Code Enforcement. There were literally people in the neighborhood standing on their front porches or front grass cheering and clapping.

In terms of difficulties that were encountered during this whole process was that we clearly learned that normal police investigative measures (i.e. informants, controlled buys, etc.) were not effective as no one wanted to be a “snitch” on this particular house because there were many violent criminals who were frequenting and staying at this house. Potential informants were afraid to be an informant or tell us too much information in fear of serious harm coming their way.

In the months that followed, there were a few people who would come back to the house, but we took a “zero tolerance” policy and those who returned to the house to stay were quickly arrested for criminal trespassing. After a period of about four months, the word got around that if anyone returned to the house, they would be arrested. Soon, people quit coming back to the house.

## **Assessment**

In the months that followed October of 2014, Officers Clapp and Blake continued to monitor the house and would check it at least weekly to ensure no one was at the house. As noted above, for about four months either Officers Clapp and Blake, or district patrol officers, would find people staying in the detached buildings on the property, or found that they had broken in to the house, and they were quickly arrested. Furthermore, neighbors would watch the

house very closely and would call any time they saw anyone at the property. Eventually, it got to the point no one was ever found at the house and neighbors were not calling as they had previously. Furthermore, evidence that people were staying at the house ceased to exist for the most part. However, to this day, Officers Clapp and Blake still check on the house periodically and no arrests for criminal trespassing at the house have been required since the summer of 2015. Also, the house still remains vacant and Code Enforcement periodically has to hire a landscaping crew to come out and clean up the property and mow the grass. Furthermore, they hired a cleaning company to come and clean up the entire property of all trash and debris, which has all but eliminated the complaints of rats infesting the houses surrounding 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE.

In terms of impact these efforts had on the neighborhood, as you will see in appendix A, the calls for service went from 100 in 2014 to 19 in 2015 to zero so far in 2016. In appendix A, you will also see that police reports went from 18 and 17 in 2013 and 2014 respectively, to four in 2015, and again zero so far in 2016.

Not only was there a positive impact in the number of calls for service and police reports, but there was the response from the citizens who call 17<sup>th</sup> St NE their home. Officers Clapp and Blake, and their supervisor, received emails and phone calls thanking them for their efforts, but also thanking them for giving them back their home. In fact, there was one woman who sold her house right next door to 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE and was moving out in October of 2014 who mentioned that she now wished she hadn't sold her house because the neighborhood had improved dramatically once the house was condemned.

In terms of concerns about displacing this problem to other areas, we have found no evidence that this group of people moved to another area and continued to victimize another

area. In fact, we have it on good authority that once this house was closed down, many of the people who had been involved with the house had moved to multiple other cities. Ironically, we also noted that there was a noticeable decrease in the crimes that were noted as being tied to this group that went down in neighborhoods that surround 17<sup>th</sup> St NE, which suggests to us that this same group was affecting surrounding neighborhoods.

This is a house that both Police and Code Enforcement continue to monitor, only to ensure that the house does not become a problem again. However, we have no evidence to suggest that this house will be a problem ever again as the homeowner, who still has legal authority over the house, has said that he does not want anything to do with the house and is considering selling it to an investor to have the house “flipped” and re-sold. However, when that occurs, there are in excess of \$35,000 worth of liens, placed by the City of Auburn, that must be paid before a new owner can take over the house.

All in all, we feel that this project was a huge success, not only in decreasing crime numbers and statistics, but also by being able to give back a neighborhood to those who rightfully deserved it and who still calls 17<sup>th</sup> St NE home.

## **Agency and Officer Information:**

### **Key Project Team Members:**

- Officer April Clapp
- Officer Jason Blake
- Code Enforcement Officer Jason Arbogast
- Code Enforcement Officer Chris Barack

**Project Contact Person:**

Officer Jason Blake

Police Officer – CRT Unit

340 E. Main St, Auburn, WA 98002

(253) 931-3087

[jblake@auburnwa.gov](mailto:jblake@auburnwa.gov)

**Appendices**

Appendix A – Graphs of 911 calls and Police Reports

Appendix B – Photographs of 911 17<sup>th</sup> St NE