

THE JEFFERSON AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE
Community Clean-Up/ Revitalization Project

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OVERVIEW:

The target area was a local business district located in the City of Buffalo, NY on Jefferson Avenue, which is completely surrounded by residential areas and numerous community schools and churches.

The business district consists of a shopping plaza, which can house up to eight businesses and an approximately two-mile long business strip. The area was described as crime-ridden and losing business with the increased blight, lack of community interest, knowledge of available city services, input by city government and the impact of drugs. The Police considered addressing the problem through arrest, but then identified the underlying conditions.

A. SCANNING:

The problem was identified through observation by the Police while on patrol and through a limited number of citizen requests. The outlined area was neglected and in a state of decay, filled with trash, broken bottles, needles and various types of drug paraphernalia. Up and down the business strip there exists a number of unsecured abandoned vandalized buildings with broken windows and dilapidated conditions. Derelicts, vagrants, alcohol and substance abusers and illegal vendors frequented this area, which bred crime and had run out of control, since the late 1980's.

The project was initiated with others to spark community interest and to create energy in a hopeless neighborhood. There was a problem with disorder in a neighborhood that was neglected by city services and the community. The project would spot light the area, in which drug addicts/dealers, derelicts and vagrants felt comfortable. We, the Police wanted an increased interest in the neighborhood by the community and city services that would make the derelicts, drug addicts, illegal peddlers and vendors feel uncomfortable.

Those who frequented this area were mostly black males ranging in age from 35-60, loitering for the purpose of using and selling drugs. Most had substance abuse problems and suffered from addiction. They were not homeless, but utilized many of the abandoned buildings as shooting galleries for heroin and cocaine use.

Initially this project was seen solely as a drug problem. It was soon realized, there was a community decay problem and a great lack of interest in the area.

B. ANALYSIS:

In order to analyze the problem, observations were made by patrols, informal interviews were conducted with the community and a number of the private businesses while updating their business files. The early crime analysis revealed, there were few calls or complaints for Police assistance that came from the area regarding drug activity, which was out of control and with little concern or interest in becoming involved in the area.

This area was once very active. There were thriving businesses from private to big chains and a movie theater. This was an area where special community events, such as festivals and parades were held. In the late 1980's deterioration began due to the influx of drug activity. Businesses began to close and move out of the community. Crime was rampant with burglaries, robberies and assaults. Many of these reported crimes were related to drug activity and citizens were fearful in becoming involved.

The problem worsened and continued to spiral out of control, until December of 1995, when the City Police Department implemented Neighborhood Initiatives. This program which is an additional aspect of community policing was designed to address problems in a specified area, based on demographics, wants and needs of a particular community.

Offenders such as peddlers who were apparently selling clothing items as a cover/ front for selling drugs, derelicts and panhandlers felt no police action would be taken felt safe in this area.

The victims were business owners and residents in the surrounding area who shopped in the plaza. Businesses were obstructed, shoppers were harassed, robbed, assaulted. Customers were very uncomfortable coming into the area and were forced to go elsewhere to shop. Businesses lost revenue or closed. Children were not safe in the specified area. They could not use the local library and it was unsafe to go to the stores, which were once the heart of the community. Young children were lured into drug trade; there were drive-by shootings stemming from the drug activity in

the plaza area, which increased gang and graffiti riddled neighborhood. Police were aware of the drug problem in this area for a number of years.

Before the project was initiated, there was very little Police response, as well as, a lack of community interest and input from city services in this area. Police response was visible in light of a 911 call or complaint. There were not many calls or complaints for Police service due to lack of community and business willingness to become involved. The decay and crime increased.

The extent of the problem went beyond drugs. Crime was caused and fed by continued disorder, decay and neglect in this neighborhood. There was a lack of trust or confidence in police, whose image was poor. It was expected that the police should take sole responsibility for problems that plagued a community, which remained silent and inactive to it's problems, whereas, no one seemed to care. The analysis revealed that the community was unaware of what they could do to take back their streets.

It was necessary for officers to better understand the problem beyond the scope of drugs. Therefore, not only was time of occurrence of drug runner activity and drop-offs were noted and investigated but other issues were pointed out; city ordinance violations in regard to peddling and vending were researched, as well as, the required documents for licenses and permits needed to conduct such business and fees for same; random targeting of offenders was conducted to maintain the element of surprise in; research of the New York State Vehicle and Traffic laws were conducted to utilize minor offenses for selective enforcement in the area. It was further determined what age groups were involved in drugs, as far as distribution and abuse were concerned. The most active days of activity centered around public assistance and social services check delivery. Officers set a hours to target the area from 12 noon to 9 PM. As the activity shifted, police shifted their response. More attention and time was focused on reported crimes, such as stolen cars and robberies for similarities and patterns in narratives in an effort to deter falsely reported incidents.

Open discussions amongst the community and the Police were held about this particular problem. At community meetings a few residents complained about the target and surrounding neighborhoods. Meetings amongst business owners were held to meet with the Police, but there was very little response. It was better to speak with them on a more personal level, as officers updated district business files.

C. RESPONSE:

Strict Enforcement, High Visibility, Increased Communication

Officers first considered arrest for illegal peddling, panhandling and loitering, as an alternative to deal with the problem. But, if frequent arrest were made this would take the officers off the street and away from the target area possibly for extended periods at a time. It was necessary to maintain high visibility in this area. Warnings were given out and followed up with arrest of frequent violators of city ordinance codes.

Officers thought businesses would be more cooperative in trying to solve problems in the area, but it was soon realized after one on one conversations that they were afraid. An invitation to business owners was extended for them to call or visit the Police station, as they were more willing to talk over phone or in private. The Community Police Officer and other officers assigned to this initiative met each and every business owner and spoke with them on a first name basis. Business owners began calling to request Police assistance, forwarding information, and a few began to chase robbery suspects and shoplifters. They became dedicated in protecting their businesses. Business owners began to trust and have confidence in officers because of their availability and consistency in being in the area.

Officers maintained high visibility, strict enforcement and improved communication in the area by making themselves available to those business owners and community residents, who needed their assistance and provided a secure atmosphere to same.

Thirteen officers, who volunteered were assigned to the area, who were on patrol, walked beat and responded to all calls in the area. This became the Jefferson Avenue Neighborhood Initiative.

increased communication with the community at-large from the Police Department, assisted in finding an anchor - a person in community who shared a vision with a few others for revitalization of the area. Officers for months, had solicited residents in the area and business owners to clean

business fronts and the business strip itself, but there was very little response.

Officers were harping to business owners, not to wait for city services, take responsibility and start on your own. The project goal was intended to form a clean-up committee from a business watch organization. The anchor in the community was a business owner, Valeria Cray- Dihaan, who was not afraid to come outside of her business and work for the betterment of the community.

With the assistance of the Community Police Officer, a clean-up committee was started and named 50 Women with a Vision. This organization grew to consist of more than 100 women and men, who had a desire to save their community and demand the attention of city services and enlist others who could provide assistance. All parties realized area crime stemmed from disorder and decay, not only drug activity.

The project goal in the Jefferson Avenue area was to increase statistics, in reference to the number of area 911 calls for service. The Police Department wanted to see an increase that would assure the community had become involved with the Police in taking back their neighborhood from those who engaged in illegal activity and preyed on decay. The Police intended to increase their line of communication with citizens, in order to establish trust and a partnership in taking responsibility for this area. They also intended to decrease calls that centered around frequent community complaints, for example loitering around deli's in area..

The Police implemented their response plan by increasing involvement of and communication with the community. We reached out to the business owners for the revitalization of business area, worked on eradication of fronts for selling drugs and at reducing crime and disorder and at promoting the image of the Police Department.

Thirteen Police Officers volunteered to be dedicated to the targeted area on two separate shifts for half of their assigned tour of duty along with a number of community members, committed time and energy to clean up area every Saturday for three month period. The Community-Oriented Police Satellite station /community center was used as meeting location at scheduled clean-up times. A community business leader, Mr. Herbert Bellamy became the primary contact between the community and the police.

Donations of paint and cleaning supplies were accepted from many of the larger businesses outside of the area. The Mayor's Impact Team assisted in boarding up buildings, assisted in building inspections and conducted heavy trash pick-ups in the area. A city government council member living in the neighborhood became involved and helped secure clean-up supplies and assisted in providing information to community members of available city services. The formulation of a Community Prosecution Unit, to address problems with community nuisance complaints assisted officers in obtaining Orders of Protection to keep persons away from area after arrest were made. The project implemented the assistance of the City Police Department's Narcotics Unit and previously established Career Criminal Task Force and sparked interest and involvement of the State Police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Officers assigned to the Initiative outlined all of the area problems necessary to attack and prioritized their list. They also researched city services available to address these issues. Most officers were unaware of available city services and resources available or needed to improve the area, but were provided with same. The Community Police Officer, assigned to the Initiative served as contact for this information and met with all officers frequently to relay information.

The response to the problems in this area enlisted the assistance of 13 police officers, city services, community members and a business leader.

D. EVALUATION:

The community has begun to come together with cohesive efforts to clean-up and maintain the area. The clean-up project has grown into an area revitalization project, which has generated energy amongst area residents, block club members, community leaders, city services, business owners and the Police to have a common vision, which is a goal to see the Jefferson Avenue business district grow. The project set the pace for the first return of an art festival.

New businesses are beginning to move into and show interest in the area and another major chain store is expanding in the plaza. The level of community and city government services has increased dramatically. For example, the Mayor's Impact Team has done heavy cleaning in the area on a more frequent basis and has also assisted the Police formulating block clubs and community organizations and provides assistance in maintaining neighborhoods. The Common Council has given more attention to the area, bringing in increased city services from departments such as, Streets and Sanitation to work more in the targeted location.

The number of calls for police service has increased by 50%. Previously, few calls came from the target area due to a lack of trust and confidence in the police and a lack of community concern by residents and lack of interest on the part of city government. The community is now showing a marked degree of concern for the area and want to maintain control and do away with disorder in their neighborhood, by formulating a partnership with the police and city services for their commitment to the revitalization of their community.

Approximately a dozen block clubs have been established in the neighborhoods surrounding the target area. Before the Neighborhood Initiative began, there were 13 community groups, that number has doubled.

The level of Police Officer involvement in the project has grown, they too have become committed to the area. With the improved image of patrol officers there has been an increase in the degree of trust, confidence and respect for the police.

This project has been implemented since December of 1995 and has been recorded as progressed over a six month period of time. Calls for service and complaints have been utilized as a determining factor and increased interaction with the community by the formulation of block clubs. Officers have increased their number of arrests and feel more confident when leaving the area for the arrest booking process. The community has expressed satisfaction through feedback at block club meetings, letters of commendation and increased business owner contacts.

In the beginning stages of this project, there was a lack of cooperation from the district council person. Presently, his involvement has increased and his assistance has been welcomed. Also in the early stages, business owners lacked interest, but now show present a high degree of interest and involvement. The police officers assigned to the Initiative were frustrated due to the lack of community interest and response, as well as, the limited amount of assistance they received from other units within the Department and city services. Present day has brought about cooperation and increased communication amongst all parties involved.

Displacement of this problem has been a concern of the officers assigned in and away from the targeted area. At present, this problem has not presented itself in another section of the city. It is believed that the problem, relating to the peddlers and vendors has not been displaced in the form of group activity. Speaking with city-wide community police officers on a monthly basis and related complaints have not been reported.

A continued response is required by the Police, city services, government and the community alike to maintain this area and for the problem not to return to same. Continued Police participation will be necessary will be necessary, however, the community has taken on a much larger part in creating and maintaining order in the area. A continued response is required and efforts of the efforts for all involved will continue to be monitored.

The evaluation of this project was conducted by Police Department Researcher, Community Police Officer, Community Policing Coordinator, City Council person and community members.

E. PHILOSOPHY AND ORGANIZATION

The Jefferson Avenue Neighborhood Initiative Clean-up/Community Revitalization project is one of four comprehensive proactive neighborhood plans that have been developed to combat quality of life issues in the city of Buffalo. The Jefferson Avenue community/police partnership was specifically designed to address community concerns in a defined neighborhood served by the 6th Precinct. Officers from the Precinct were selected to participate in the Initiative based on their commitment to the community and to the Initiative goals of Strict Enforcement, High Visibility, and Increased Communication with the Community.

Community Police Officer Kimberly Beary, assigned to Precinct #6 serves as the facilitator of the project. Her extensive training includes Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) training in Community Policing, Problem-Solving and the S.A.R.A. model, as well as training from the Community Policing Consortium in Community Policing. In addition, she has attended a number of crime prevention seminars and has received certification in New York State Crime Prevention Training and Gang Resistance Education and Training. The officers assigned to the Initiative and supervisors of the project have been exposed to problem-oriented policing by attending a series of forums and seminars hosted by the Buffalo Police Department. Guest speakers have included Jack Green from Temple University, and Christopher Braiden, retired Superintendent from the Edmonton Police Department.

Many officers assigned to the Initiative have commented since the Initiatives inception that they consider it an incentive to participate in the Initiative in merely knowing that they have been empowered to make decisions, and as a result are making a difference in the neighborhood they serve. Participating officer's in the Initiative were recently acknowledged at a banquet hosted by citizens in the Initiative area, where Police Commissioner R. Gil Kerlikowske presented the officers with certificates of appreciation for their dedication and commitment to the Initiative. Officers are also given the opportunity to attend training sessions outside of the Buffalo area to gain cutting edge knowledge and insight in specific areas of concern to the Initiative efforts.

The Department is presently in the process of developing a Community Policing resource center, where a collection of Community Policing and Problem-Solving materials are being made available for all departmental personnel to utilize in their problem-solving efforts. Materials presently available are routinely used by officer's assigned to the Initiative. In addition, participating officers and supervisors of the project are routinely sent copies of FERF's Problem Solving Quarterly, and the Community Policing Consortium's Community Policing Exchange Bi-Monthly reports to assist in their problem-solving efforts.

Due to the fiscal constraints of the Department, the Initiative has utilized existing police services through the re-deployment of manpower. Officers are however, allowed overtime payment to attend community meetings and participate in neighborhood revitalization projects. In addition, the officers assigned to the Initiative have lobbied City agencies to commit services to the project, and the sitting district councilperson to appropriate discretionary block grant funds to equip a C.O.P.S. satellite station located in the Initiative area, as well provide additional funding to the Initiative efforts.

50 Women with a Vision

The *50 Women with a Vision* group was organized to help restore Jefferson Avenue to the vibrant and productive area that it once was. To implement any changes the cooperation of those providing goods and services and those receiving them is needed. Therefore, our initial efforts in this restoration project include meetings with area business owners, area residents, police officials, and city and county government officials.

The plan to restore the area includes several fundamental goals:

- to clean it up and make it visually appealing
- to make the neighborhood a safe environment for businesses and residents
- to coordinate the efforts of the key participants (residents, business owners, local officials)

Other efforts include providing an avenue to encourage new business development, networking with existing organizations, encouraging additional block club formation, and tapping into presently underutilized resources.

"Divided we Fall...Together We Build"

Enact the vision with us as we initiate
THE JEFFERSON RENAISSANCE PROJECT
and engage to restore THE APOLLO THEATRE



Become a part of the positive movement at
The Jefferson Avenue Arts' Festival • 96

July 28th, 1996 ...12 noon - 6 pm

- ✧ *A 'March of Faith' Community Parade
from Best Street to The Apollo Site*
- ✧ *Guest Appearances by Renowned
Musical Celebrities & Performing Artists of Buffalo*
- ✧ *Special Presentations from
Talented Youth Groups & Progressive Young Artists*
- ✧ *An Afrikan World Marketplace on the Avenue*

For General Information or to offer help call Valeria Cray at 882-7594, or Kim Beaty-851-4406
For Vendor Information call Gail Cray at 883-4367 or Michelle Boyd
For Parade Information call baba eesa at 885-3416

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