

STREET SWEEPING, BROADWAY STYLE



REVITALIZING A BUSINESS DISTRICT FROM THE INSIDE OUT

GREEN BAY POLICE DEPARTMENT, WISCONSIN, FORT HOWARD DISTRICT

THE PROBLEM: An inner-city business district had become a high-crime area marked by litter, broken liquor bottles, and people living on the street who were often drunk and disorderly.

ANALYSIS: Officers discovered a high concentration of crime compared to the rest of the city and a disproportionate demand for police and rescue services. Analysis of police records indicated that approximately 20 people were involved in most of the neighborhood complaints. Furthermore, neighborhood residents and business leaders had lost faith in the police to respond to disorder in the area.

RESPONSE: Police spearheaded a community effort to strongly enforce public ordinances on open intoxicants, evictions from city parks, trespassing in city parks, and lewd and lascivious behavior. They also worked to increase liquor license regulation, mobilize citizens to attend city council meetings, modify the environmental design, use the court system to link alcoholics with treatment resources, and gain the cooperation of liquor store and tavern owners in denying alcohol to habitually intoxicated people.

ASSESSMENT: After a problem-solving initiative began in 1995, Broadway Street was transformed into a booming business district. From 1993, when there were no community police officers in place, to 1999, after police officers had been in place for 4 years, the area experienced a 65-percent reduction in total police calls and a 91-percent decrease in the demand for rescue squad services to handle injuries resulting from assaults. From 1995 to February 2000, the Broadway business district gained more than \$8.4 million in new public and private investment, 410 new jobs, and 33 new businesses.

SCANNING

In the city of Green Bay, Wisconsin, Broadway Street had a seedy reputation. People lived on the street, were often drunk and disorderly, and slept on park benches outside of neglected, decaying buildings. Liquor bottles littered the streets. For 4 decades, taverns known for the frequent

disorderly behavior of their patrons were not held accountable.

In fact, 16 to 18 taverns—the scene of multiple shootings, stabbings, and other violent crimes—operated in Broadway's 3-block business district. Broadway became

known as the “Wild West,” and law-abiding citizens avoided the area and most area businesses suffered financially.

Residents and business owners in the area viewed Broadway as isolated. They felt abandoned by city government. Before 1995, there was little growth in the Broadway business district.

ANALYZING THE PROBLEM

In 1995, the Green Bay Police Department adopted the concept of community policing. Two officers were assigned to the Fort Howard district, which includes the Broadway business district. Green Bay’s community-policing officers (CPO’s) focus on long-term problem solving and typically are not dispatched to calls-for-service.

The newly stationed CPO’s, Bill Bongle and Steve Scully, met face-to-face with neighborhood residents, schoolteachers, children, and business people. Within a short time, the officers learned firsthand about the problems plaguing the Broadway area:

- n A disproportionate demand for police and rescue services compared to the rest of the city.
- n An unusually high concentration of crimes, including battery, disorderly conduct, retail theft, property damage, public urination, prostitution, and drug activity.
- n Visibly intoxicated people in city parks and in close proximity to the nearby elementary school engaging in inappropriate behavior (sleeping on benches, vomiting, urinating, and defecating outdoors).

People Living on the Streets and in the Taverns

An analysis of police offense reports revealed that approximately 20 individuals, mostly habitually intoxicated people who lived on the streets and people who had mental

illnesses, were responsible for most of the neighborhood complaints. The homeless shelter had referred many of these individuals to the Brown County Mental Health Center’s Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse outpatient counseling. Many of the people living on the street did not use or access these services and remained on the street, though they would have been permitted to stay at the shelter if they had become sober.

Analysis of police data showed that most victims of serious crimes in the area, such as stabbings, shootings, and assaults, were patrons of the problem taverns. Several high-profile incidents, involving violent behavior, drug activity, and prostitution, took place at the Broadway taverns. In 1993, two men were shot; in 1996, detectives uncovered a child prostitution ring; in 1997, there was a violent attack with pool sticks; in 1998, five people were stabbed in a bar fight; and in 1999, a bar manager was arrested for selling cocaine from a Broadway bar. Repeat calls were made to the same licensed liquor establishments for fights and other alcohol-related problems. Victimization rates were very low for citizens in the area who did not patronize the taverns.

Loosely Regulated Liquor Licenses

Wisconsin State law provides a judicial process for local governments to regulate liquor licenses. Unfortunately, the Green Bay city government rarely exercised its authority to revoke or suspend the licenses of poorly-operated taverns. In fact, the city’s Protection and Welfare Committee, which regulates liquor licenses, often approved and renewed licenses in the area without question. In some cases, convicted drug dealers were granted bartender licenses.

The progression of disciplinary action against an owner of a problem tavern amounted to a series of warning letters issued by the Committee. Before 1995,

no liquor license had been revoked since the late 1970's. The Committee declined to take action against a problem bar unless the police issued the bar owner a citation. But under existing city ordinances, police officers could not issue a citation to a bar owner if the owner was absent at the time an incident occurred. As a result, bar management practices and absentee owners contributed to an environment that fostered disorderly and illegal conduct. Under the existing licensing system, it was difficult to hold owners accountable for activities that occurred in their bar.

Police Enforcement Lacking

The police response to alcohol-related complaints in the Broadway business district rarely included arrests, partly due to jail policy. In the early 1990's, the local jail refused to accept prisoners who had blood alcohol content levels higher than .30 percent, unless they had received medical clearances. This eliminated what was known as the "drunk tank" and left no other practical alternative for street patrol officers.

As a consequence of the policy, police spent their time transporting intoxicated people who had been arrested for offenses such as disorderly conduct to a hospital emergency room to receive medical clearance. Police would then transport them to the Brown County Jail or the Brown County Mental Health Center, which provided detoxification. These facilities often released people to the community after 24 hours, where police officers would find them in the same condition soon after their release. Patrol officers viewed the 2 hours spent transporting arrestees from place to place as a waste of time and taxpayer dollars.

During their analysis, the CPO's learned that the neighborhood lacked faith in the police. At meetings sponsored by the Fort Howard-Jefferson Family Neighborhood Resource Center, a bilingual, multicultural, grassroots organization with a commitment

to strengthen the Broadway neighborhood, CPO's listened to area business leaders and neighborhood residents. Community members said Broadway was viewed as a dumping ground by the rest of the city, including the police, and its business community had long ago lost faith in the police department's response. Citizens no longer called to report nonemergency problems to the police.

The Green Bay Police Department's analysis showed that the police department had not reached out to other government agencies—such as the revenue department, park department, city attorney's office, building and health inspection departments, and mental health services—that were available to help them address problems in the neighborhood.

Officers also had not been aware of the different roles that municipal and circuit courts could play in resolving disorder problems. Officers in Green Bay can divert offenders to circuit court, but they are encouraged to send minor offenses to municipal court to generate fines. However, the circuit court can order offenders into treatment while the municipal court cannot. The officers met with the Brown County District Attorney, who agreed that people who were habitually intoxicated should be diverted to circuit court, which has broad sentencing authority, including alcohol treatment and probation.

Environmental Design Flaws

A review of building design in the Broadway area highlighted numerous deficiencies. Several taverns had dark alcoves and doorways facing alleys, permitting criminals discrete, easy access to the taverns. Drug users and sellers could quickly duck into taverns and get lost in the crowd, making it difficult for patrol officers to make arrests. Poorly designed landscaping created hiding places for people who were intoxicated and living on the street. Dense undergrowth made detection of transients during routine surveillance difficult.

Resources That Helped Broadway Succeed

Funding

The Green Bay Police Department has been assisted by funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. A grant enables the department to pay salaries for four community-policing officers for 3 years. Two of these officers are assigned to the Fort Howard district.

Training

The department developed its own problem-solving training by organizing meetings with other similarly assigned police officers from across the State. Herman Goldstein's book, *Problem-Oriented Policing* (McGraw Hill, 1990), helped the department develop problem-solving strategies.

Donations

Community members donated office space and equipment for their community-policing officers. Office space was provided free of charge in a housing complex for the elderly. Area businesses donated a computer, a cellular telephone, police bicycles, and office furniture.

The Fort Howard neighborhood and area businesses conducted a fundraising campaign in 1998 to send the two community-policing officers to the Police Executive Research Forum's Problem-Oriented Policing conference in San Diego, California.

most of the problems in the area. Officers Bongle and Scully provided liquor store and tavern owners with a list of people who were habitually intoxicated, accompanied by a letter from the police department requesting that licensees deny service to them. The police department placed persons on the list if they met the following criteria:

- n Had three or more arrests in a 3-month period in which intoxication was a factor.
- n Had been incapacitated by alcohol, requiring detoxification three or more times in a 3-month period.
- n Were involved in some type of behavior in the Broadway business district that generated a complaint to the police.

The police department's letter was approved through the city attorney's office. To gain compliance with the no-serve list, police educated liquor retailers and

tavern owners on their responsibility to decline service to intoxicated people. The letter defined intoxication by physical characteristics.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sent a letter of complaint to the police department, expressing concern over distribution of the no-serve list. The ACLU argued that "Targeting some individuals to be denied legal goods and services causes a tangible change in the legal and social status of the affected individuals." The ACLU requested that the police department retrieve the lists from bar owners and issue a directive to prohibit the practice in the future. However, the Green Bay City Attorney reviewed the ACLU's complaint and advised the police department that the no-serve list was supported by Wisconsin statute 125.12(2)3, which prohibits distributing "known habitual drunkards." The police department

RESPONSE

The Green Bay Police Department developed a response strategy designed to achieve the following goals:

- n Eliminate illegal activity from the neighborhood.
- n Reduce calls for police and rescue services.
- n Bring business to the neighborhood by improving the public's perception of the Broadway business district.
- n Restore faith in the police department by building a cooperative working relationship with the community.

To achieve these goals, the officers implemented the following five initiatives.

No-Serve List

The police identified and targeted a core group of individuals who accounted for

continued the practice, which turned out to be one of the most successful initiatives implemented by the Fort Howard district's CPO's. People who at one time generated three to four calls per day to the police now rarely have police contact.

The officers also targeted specific bars that had a history of a high volume of calls-for-service. In some cases, bars in the area had generated more than 200 calls to the police in a 1-year period, compared with 11 calls from other bars in the area. Bar owners argued, however, that targeting bars with high call volumes would punish bar owners and employees who made legitimate calls for help. To alleviate the concerns of bar and liquor store owners who might become reluctant to call police when there was a disturbance, the police and business owners agreed that calls for assistance would not be used against the businesses.

Operation "Hot Seat"

For this element of their response strategy, Officers Bongle and Scully stepped up enforcement of ordinance violations in the neighborhood. Police issued citations and arrests for activities that would have resulted in warnings in the past. For an offense such as disorderly conduct, the officers used their discretion to send offenders to circuit court, which has the authority to order alcohol treatment. Several offenders were placed on probation, and Officers Bongle and Scully worked closely with probation officers to enforce probation conditions. These included such restrictions as no alcohol consumption and no visits to taverns or liquor stores. If the officers observed a probationer violating these restrictions, they would report the violation to probation officers, who would have the probationer incarcerated.

Modifying Environmental Design

During analysis, it became clear that no attention had been paid to environmental design in the areas experiencing problems. For this element of the strategy, the police

department and other city agencies made the following changes:

- n Trimmed overgrown shrubs that concealed illegal activity.
- n Modified the Broadway district's park benches to prevent people from lying down.
- n Eliminated access to an unsecured apartment building that people who lived on the street used as a hiding place.
- n Maintained the Broadway district's park grounds, eliminating buildup of litter and bedding generated by people who lived on the streets.
- n Improved lighting in dark alcoves behind taverns and modified rear doors to permit exit only.

Operation "Spotlight"

The police department sought media coverage for its problem-solving efforts. Police believed the media would present a positive story if they were approached early.

The police department explained that arrests, liquor license hearings, and crack-downs were part of the revitalization and improvement of the neighborhood. The department pointed out that many crimes, such as muggings, were rare. A strong relationship was built with the media, who became an asset to the police department by covering the positive change the department was making as well as the trouble businesses and individuals. The press was a useful tool for the department to use against businesses and individuals who did not want to be identified to the public as problems.

Increased Regulation of Liquor Licenses

Police felt that many citizens were unaware of the licensing regulations governing liquor establishments. Therefore, the community-police response included educating citizens about how they could influence the actions of the Protection and Welfare Committee, which had the power to issue and rescind

licenses. Officers Bongle and Scully provided citizens with dates and times of Protection and Welfare Committee meetings, the names and telephone numbers of council members who sat on the Committee, and the proper procedure for addressing the Committee.

Meetings once conducted in a small room in city hall had to be moved to city council chambers in 1996 to accommodate the increased number of citizens attending. The neighborhood's interest in the Committee's actions increased Committee members' accountability to the public.

The police department worked with the city attorney's office to enforce new city ordinances. Police officers now can cite bar owners even if they are not present when offenses are committed. The city attorney's office developed a system in which points are assessed against the liquor license upon conviction of an alcohol-related offense. Now, the municipal court can automatically suspend a license and close a tavern for a designated period of time after 12 points have been accumulated.

ASSESSMENT

During the past 4 years, the health of the Broadway business district has steadily improved. Five taverns rife with criminal activity were closed because of the joint efforts of community-policing officers and citizens. By pressuring council members to take action, citizens played a key role in driving out the taverns. Community-policing efforts drove out other troublesome businesses, including one where illicit drugs were sold.

Improved Public Perception

Since 1995, the Broadway business district has experienced substantial growth in new businesses and jobs. When 'On Broadway,' a private, nonprofit organization that promotes investment in the Broadway business

district, analyzed changes in the neighborhood from 1995–99, it discovered the following:

- n \$8.4 million had been invested by both public and private interests.
- n 410 new jobs had been created.
- n 33 new businesses had been formed.
- n A \$1.8 million day care center was under construction.
- n \$3.1 million had been devoted to streetscape, sidewalk, and lighting improvements by the city government.

Reduced Need for Police and Emergency Services

Computer-aided dispatch system statistics show a significant decrease in the demand for police resources, including:

- n A 65-percent reduction in total police calls from 1993 to 1999.
- n A 91-percent decrease in calls for rescue squad services from 1993 to 1999.
- n An 86-percent reduction in disorderly conduct calls from 1993 to 1998.
- n A 70-percent decrease in disturbance-unwanted person type calls from 1993 to 1998.

This reduction in the demand for police resources frees police officers to assist in other areas of the city.

Restored Public Faith in the Police

To educate and mobilize neighborhood residents, the Green Bay Police Department built a close, cooperative working relationship with the Fort Howard-Jefferson Family Neighborhood Resource Center, which sponsored neighborhood meetings and handled mass notification of city hearings. This relationship helped the Green Bay Police Department to restore the public's faith in its ability to solve problems in the Broadway district. Cleaning up the area of drunks, taverns, and alleys and bushes played a part in restoring faith, as well.

Dale Smith, owner of Dale's Millennium Motors, a Broadway district business, notes, "Our neighborhood is easily 100 percent better because of the beat cops and their extra efforts." Tom Perry, associate editor of the *Green Bay Press Gazette*, wrote, "Forget the negative images, the news from Broadway is mostly positive and upbeat."

Broadway has become not a part of town that needs to be avoided, but rather "a great place to shop," according to Larry and Ben Frye, owners of the Broadway district's String Instrument Workshop.

Did Crime Relocate?

Although some taverns chose to relocate to other areas of the city, the taverns ceased to pose a problem because they were no longer in the same neighborhood with their problem patrons. However, the habitually intoxicated people did move to areas of the city where enforcement was less stringent. As a consequence, these neighborhoods have asked for and received community-policing teams assigned to their districts.

The Broadway business district now is a thriving part of downtown Green Bay. The Green Bay police had responded to the same calls in the Broadway business district for decades with no change. Only when the police employed a problem-

solving approach and sought the assistance of the community did long-lasting changes take place.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the Green Bay Police Department's efforts, contact Officers Bill Bongle and Steve Scully at the Fort Howard District, Green Bay Police Department, 307 Adams Street, Green Bay, WI 54301; phone: 920-448-3332; fax: 920-448-3333; e-mail: Bill Bongle: beatcop@msn.com, Steve Scully: sscully@execpc.com.

NOTES

1. One individual, who had been placed at the mental health center more than 80 times for intoxication, is estimated to have cost the city some \$96,000, as follows: The Brown County Health Center estimates the cost of an admission for detoxification at \$400 per day, with an average stay of 2 days; St. Vincent's Hospital estimates hospital emergency room costs to average \$300 to \$400 for this type of visit; and the police department's business manager estimates the cost of each call to average between \$50 and \$100, depending on the number of personnel hours required.