

ALLAPATTAH PRODUCE MARKET POWER PLAY

REVITALIZING A PRODUCE MARKET THROUGH COOPERATION

MIAMI POLICE DEPARTMENT, FLORIDA, 2002

THE PROBLEM: The Allapattah Produce Market has been plagued by social problems including residential burglaries, illegal narcotics sales, a large homeless population, health and sanitation hazards, traffic congestion, and environmental concerns throughout the years. The market was essential to commercial interests and the quality of life in the surrounding neighborhood.

ANALYSIS: Law enforcement personnel reviewed crime statistics for the neighborhood and also used the observations of the patrol units and code enforcement personnel. Between 7:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m., businesses in the market averaged 23 burglaries a month. A traffic flow study was conducted to address traffic congestion concerns.

RESPONSE: Business owners continued to secure their waste containers, restricting access to outdated produce by the homeless population, virtually eliminating the vagrancy problem and criminal activities. A \$600,000 grant from the State of Florida allowed for improvements to the market. A complete road redesign project was scheduled to reduce traffic congestion. Many of the homeless people received job training and are employed at the Market and others have obtained their commercial driver licenses and drive commercial produce trucks to the market. Water samples have shown a decrease in pollution and bacteria. Monthly meetings are held by the Allapattah Business Owners Association identify and address concerns about the market.

ASSESSMENT: Over the past 18 months, criminal activities at the market have decreased. Further assessment of the area has revealed the elimination of the homeless population, a reduction of health and sanitation hazards, a substantial decrease in traffic congestion, and a renewed interest in investment opportunities and other infrastructure improvements in the area by local business owners. Over five new businesses have moved into the Market, bringing the total amount of businesses to 180 with annual sales exceeding \$400 million dollars.

SCANNING

The City of Miami's Allapattah Produce Market is a focal point for the commercial shipping of

fresh produce for the Southeast United States, through the Port of Miami, the Miami International Airport, and the railroad and highway transportation systems. The Produce

Market also distributes fresh produce to the local supermarkets, cruise ships, and "mom & pop bodegas" in the area. Multiple garment wholesale outlets as well as some moderately priced, working-class residential communities surround this 3 by 5 city block area. Over the past few years, the Produce Market had become an extremely troubled neighborhood, riddled with a wide range of crime, a large homeless population, pollution and health hazards, and a general malaise that negatively impacted the economic infrastructure and quality of life in the area. Business operators had allowed their facilities to deteriorate, characterized by unpainted structures, garbage-strewn parking lots, overgrown vacant lots, and overflowing garbage bins. The neighborhood's streets were unable to support the increasing flow of large commercial tractor-trailer trucks, which generated major traffic congestion. Produce distributors were illegally disposing of rotted produce, creating a significant health and pollution hazard. An extensive homeless population had contributed to the high level of criminal activity in the neighborhood.

Officer William Clayton, Problem Solving Team (PST) police officers, and code enforcement personnel assigned to the Allapattah Neighborhood Enhancement Team (NET) area received numerous complaints concerning the pollution problems, health hazards, heavy road traffic, inadequate parking and staging areas, illegal dumping, code violations, and homeless population in the Produce Market. The PST officers and Officer Clayton noted a heavy volume of calls for service and an alarmingly high incidence of illegal narcotics trafficking, strong-arm robberies and burglaries in the area. Residents in the neighborhoods adjacent to the Produce Market expressed concern regarding the dangers and congestion created by the large tractor-trailer trucks on their small community streets, the disturbing levels of street crime and home burglaries and the large homeless population. Produce shippers complained about the inadequate transportation infrastructure as well as the pollution and health hazards that created a negative impact on their businesses.

The following agencies were vital in identifying the nature and extent of the problems:

- Allapattah NET code enforcement personnel and PST officers
- Commercial produce distributors at the Produce Market
- Residents in the adjacent communities
- Homeless Assistance Center
- Miami Coalition for the Homeless
- Miami-Dade County Department of Environmental Resource Management
- City of Miami Solid Waste Department
- Miami-Dade County Health Department
- State of Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

As the focal point for produce distribution throughout the Southeastern United States, the Produce Market is a vital component of Miami's economic base. As the Produce Market descended into an increasingly deteriorated state, the impact was not only economic, but the overall quality of life in the neighborhood also suffered. This problem became a major priority for the City of Miami for several reasons. The illegal disposal of waste produce into the sewer system was considered a significant pollution factor in the Miami River, which is the target for a major revitalization initiative by the City of Miami. The extensive illegal dumping in the area resulted in a major health and sanitation hazard for the Produce Market and the surrounding residential areas. The unusual high crime rate in the area was a major concern, creating a fear of crime that disrupted the normal social interaction in the neighborhood and depressing the property values. The increasing level of truck traffic was creating a safety hazard on the residential streets in the surrounding area.

The area's "stakeholders" realized that this situation was continuing to deteriorate and was having an increasingly negative impact on their business interests. The quality of life in the adjacent residential neighborhood was being degraded by the crime, pollution and heavy traffic. They understood that a partnership with

the law enforcement, code enforcement, and regulatory agencies would be absolutely essential to addressing the issues that were having a deleterious impact on their businesses and homes.

ANALYSIS

Several analytical approaches and data sources were utilized. Officer William Clayton and the PST officers reviewed the results of analysis of calls for service and crime statistics to develop a better understanding of the criminal activity in the area. In an effort to develop a comprehensive industrial/commercial street traffic plan for the area, a traffic analysis was conducted. The goal of the traffic analysis was to develop a designated commercial access route to the Produce Market area from the major arterial road system, and to avoid the residential communities.

An extensive zoning analysis of all the commercial enterprises in the area was conducted in an effort to develop a plan to address the problems of waste disposal, pollution, and illegal commercial operations. This plan would also address the "gray market" in discarded produce, code violations and application of standards for littering and illegal dumping. Aside from the formal studies and analytical initiatives, Officer William Clayton and the PST officers established a continuous presence, developing an extremely close rapport with the business operators and the regulatory agency personnel focused on the area. This day-to-day observation was a vital source of information on the dynamics of the Produce Market and provided keen insight into the ills that were impacting the area.

The turbulence at the Produce Market is a daily occurrence, peaking during the early morning hours (2:00 a.m. to 4:00 a.m.) when the large trucks jam the area for the transfer of produce from the loading docks to the trucks. The Produce Market had been deteriorating for the past 10-15 years. In the past few years, the Produce Market's infrastructure has been unable to support the increasing tempo of operations.

In the situation at the Produce Market, a major group of offenders were the homeless people

and the criminal element that associates itself with the homeless problem—illegal narcotics traffickers. The homeless population was drawn to the Produce Market by the ready availability of outdated, discarded produce and the limited opportunity for work loading and unloading trucks.

Some homeless people established "gray markets" and illegally sold the outdated produce. Narcotics traffickers preyed upon the homeless people. In order to support their "drug habits," the homeless people became involved in criminal activities, such as strong-arm robberies and burglaries in the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

The other major offender elements were some of the business operators, who refused to comply with the various health, sanitation, and pollution regulations and codes relevant to the handling and storage of fresh produce. This segment of the business community continued to illegally dump trash and outdated produce on the streets and vacant lots in the area. Their garbage bins overflowed with outdated produce, attracting both the homeless as well as rodents. These offenders were reluctant to expend the resources to properly manage their waste products or improve their facilities and processes to meet the regulatory requirements. Additionally, some of the produce shippers disregarded the parking and traffic control restrictions, continuing to illegally park trucks along the streets, creating major traffic congestion problems for the other businesses in the area.

The victims in this situation were the residents in the neighboring communities, and the business operators who expended the resources to maintain their business infrastructures in compliance with the regulatory requirements. The residents were frequently victimized by the criminal activities in their neighborhoods, and were often exposed to the traffic congestion and noise created by the large trucks supporting the produce distributors. The business owners, who made the efforts to comply with the various codes and regulations, fell victim to the continued deterioration of their commercial neighborhood.

The damages created by the ongoing deterioration at the Produce Market were multiple. The residents in the neighboring residential communities were victimized by the criminal activities, traffic congestion, and noise as well as decreasing property values. Within the Produce Market itself, the ongoing failures to comply with various regulatory codes and ordinances resulted in significant pollution, health and sanitation problems.

As non-compliant businesses allowed their facilities to deteriorate, the overall quality of life and economic well-being, in general, suffered. Individual businesses were unable to retain competent employees, as the Produce Market was perceived as a "below standard" workplace. Business owners were reluctant to reinvest, as the economic future grew dimmer. The homeless population in the area was frequently the source for criminal activities, including pilferage from the businesses, illegal narcotics sales, as well as street robberies and residential burglaries.

Prior to assignment of the PST officers, the problems at the Produce Market were addressed by more traditional law enforcement and code enforcement procedures. Police officers reacted to criminal activities in response to complaints and calls for service. Regulatory agencies periodically conducted inspections and issued violations and levied fines on non-complying businesses. An antagonistic attitude existed between the businesses and the law enforcement and code enforcement officials.

Analysis of the situation at the Produce Market indicated that the improper and illegal disposal of waste and outdated produce resulted in the evolution of the homeless population, which in turn created the basis for increases in criminal activities in the area. Failures to comply with health, sanitation and pollution codes and regulations resulted in a wide range of problems that resulted in serious deficiencies and hazards in those areas. Analysis of the traffic congestion issue revealed that the transportation infrastructure was inadequate to support the expanding transshipment requirements.

The analysis revealed that the fundamental problem at the Produce Market was that the business operators had been allowed to operate

with very limited oversight by the various regulatory agencies concerned with health, sanitation and pollution issues. The volume of produce being processed had increased over the years, and operators, under pressure to maintain the increased tempo of operations, disregarded health and sanitation standards.

The infrastructure designed to process the waste produced became woefully inadequate, and the distributors utilized illegal means to dispose of unusable produce, resulting in an extremely serious health and sanitation problem as well as forming the breeding ground for the development of the homeless population. The development of the homeless population resulted in an increase in criminal activities. The illegal disposal of waste into the sewers eventually began to pollute the Miami River. Attendant with this increase in operations, there was an equally significant increase in the transportation requirements. The increase in transportation was not matched with appropriate transportation infrastructure improvements, resulting in major congestion problems.

To develop a more detailed understanding of the overall problem at the Produce Market, it was essential that the PST become knowledgeable as to the functions and internal processes of the various businesses that comprise the market. The PST developed vital insight into the timelines inherent in the transshipment of fresh produce, where the majority of the activities were conducted during the early morning hours (2:00 a.m. to 4:00 a.m.). There was a minimum of activity during the daylight hours, when the transshipment of produce was directed primarily at the small markets.

The PST also needed to understand the economic pressures that impacted upon the business operators. The smaller, less prosperous operations depended upon quicker "turnover" of fresh produce, thus did not invest resources in long term storage and refrigeration facilities. These operations frequently conducted their loading/unloading activities along the streets contributing to the traffic congestion. These smaller operations were often reluctant to expend the resources on the requirements for compliance with the various codes and regulations related to health, sanitation and

pollution. Additionally, they were less inclined to improve the quality of their facilities, leaving their installations unfenced and their garbage bins overflowing with discarded produce. The larger scale operations processed greater amounts of produce via loading docks supporting larger tractor-trailer trucks, and often encountered difficulties related to longer term parking of the vehicles and disposing of larger amounts of outdated produce.

In general, the more insight the PST developed in the overall process of operations in the Produce Market, the more effective their relationships with the business operators became. Additionally, the location of the Produce Market was a major factor contributing to the traffic congestion and noise problem. The transportation infrastructure that was developed to support the residential communities adjacent to the Produce Market had proven to be woefully inadequate to support the increased traffic related to the expanded Produce Market.

Discussions of the problems were conducted in several venues. The City of Miami Solid Waste Department hosted a meeting with the business owners and officials from the various city, county and state regulatory and law enforcement agencies focused on the Produce Market. The purpose of the meeting was to inform the business owners as to the process to be utilized in support of the code enforcement and inspection regime. This meeting allowed the business owners to raise their concerns related to the enforcement procedures, and enabled the regulatory agencies to establish rapport with the commercial interests. The end result of the meeting was that both elements developed an understanding of the requirements for compliance and the overall inspection and review process to be implemented. Additionally, PST officers frequently met with business operators, regulatory officials as well as local residents to discuss various issues involving the Produce Center.

RESPONSE

The issues that were creating the deterioration at the Produce Market demanded a series of responses beyond the more traditional law and code enforcement methodologies. The PST

officers and the code enforcement personnel worked closely with all the commercial entities to address code violation issues, as well as improved methods of disposing of waste produce. In response to the urging of the PST officers and Officer William Clayton, business operators are building locked stockade-fence enclosures around their individual trash bins.

This effort not only enhances the beautification effort in the area, but also prevents access to the outdated produce that is disposed in these dumpsters. The PST officers have advised all business operators regarding the requirements to enclose their trash bins and continue to monitor the construction and repair of the enclosures. Businesses continuously failing to comply are cited and fined until they are brought into compliance. PST officers have arranged for increased trash collection services in an effort to decrease the amounts of trash accumulating in the area.

The PST officers also worked with the commercial operators to develop improved parking, unloading, and turn-around facilities for the large trucks serving the businesses in the area. PST officers, along with Officer William Clayton, continuously patrol the area, warning business operators about illegally parked vehicles, and eventually arranging for towing of vehicles that are frequently in violation of parking restrictions. PST officers have located vacant lots and alleyways that could serve as off-street parking (and turnaround areas) and encouraged owners to remove the trash and overgrown shrubbery, replacing it with fenced, paved areas to support the parking requirements. At the urging of PST officers, the Florida East Coast Railroad has agreed to lease its property adjacent to the railroad tracks to the business owners, who, in turn, will clear the area and develop parking spaces.

With the support of the PST officers, business owners have undertaken a variety of beautification projects, focused primarily on plating trees and shrubbery. Multiple agencies involved with environmental and pollution issues focused their efforts on the methodologies that the businesses disposed of their outdated produce and the impact those procedures had on the sewer systems and other environmental

elements. The PST officers collaborated closely with the Homeless Assistance Center to address the problems associated with the large homeless population and caseworkers interviewed the homeless people, offering shelter, drug treatment, mental health counseling and assistance in job searches.

The focus of the response initiatives was directed at those fundamental problems, causes and underlying conditions discovered during the analysis. The PST officers and the personnel from the various regulatory agencies focused their efforts on enforcing the health, sanitation and pollution codes and regulations. Access to waste produce by the homeless was eliminated by enclosing and securing the trash bins. Denied access to outdated produce, the homeless population diminished, and the crime rate in the neighborhood dropped significantly. The traffic congestion issue was the focus of a traffic flow study and PST officers implemented parking restrictions to improve the traffic flow in the area. Additionally, funding has been identified to implement the more extensive aspects of the traffic flow study. Day-to-day interaction between the PST officers and the business operators resulted in a renewed interest in enhancing the commercial facilities and supporting infrastructure. Business owners improved their buildings and loading docks, secured their parking lots and removed the trash and litter from their property.

Prior to the implementation of the response, some traditional law enforcement criteria were utilized to establish a perspective on the issue. A primary criterion was the level of calls for service and increasing criminal activities in the neighborhood. The department was sensitive to the impact the deterioration at the Produce Market was having on the quality of life and social values in the community, and determined that the most expedient and cost effective approach would be the implementation of the problem solving approach.

The goals of the response plan were to:

- Significantly reduce the pollution created by improper disposal of waste.
- Improve sanitation and health standards.

- Reduce the traffic congestion in neighborhood streets and enhance the transportation infrastructure in the Produce Market.
- Reduce the criminal activity in the area thus reducing the fear of crime in the neighboring residential areas.
- Reduce the homeless population in the area by eliminating the various inducements that attract the homeless population to the area.
- Promote a partnership between the commercial entities and the City of Miami officials responsible for enhancing the overall quality of life in the community.
- Create a unique "Farmer's Market" venue open to the public.
- Encourage the business operators to cooperate in a self-policing agreement focused on overall improvement in the quality of life and enhancement of their long-term commercial interests.

The following agencies contributed to the problem-solving effort:

- Allapattah NET code enforcement personnel and PST officers
- Commercial produce distributors
- Residents in the adjacent communities
- Homeless Assistance Center
- Miami-Dade County Department of Environmental Resource Management
- Environmental Protection Agency
- City of Miami Solid Waste Department
- Miami-Dade County Health Department
- State of Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

The major difficulty encountered during response implementation was the inability of city and county agencies to deploy resources and react with the same level of intensity that characterizes the PST officer's approach. This shortfall is generally the result of resource constraints within the agencies and bureaucratic difficulties in coordinating the efforts of multiple organizations focused on a wide range of problems beyond the issue at the Produce Market.

ASSESSMENT

In general, the situation at the Produce Market has been remarkably transformed. As a result of a series of discussions and meetings between the business operators and the various regulatory agencies responsible for health, sanitation and pollution issues, code enforcement procedures have been clarified and businesses are rapidly approaching compliance.

The homeless population has been virtually eliminated and the crime rate in the neighborhood has been significantly reduced. Business owners and operators have undertaken a wide range of initiatives to improve their facilities and support infrastructure—buildings have been repainted, parking lots enclosed, trash bins enclosed and secured, trash and litter has been reduced to a minimum, and volunteer beautification projects have been undertaken. In an effort to enhance the quality of life and to improve their commercial opportunities, the business owners have created a merchants association.

The newly created association will become a vital focal point for interfacing with the various official organizations responsible for code enforcement, environmental concerns, sanitation and health hazards, transportation issues as well as law enforcement. There has been a renewed interest in investment in the area, and construction of a major storage facility is underway. Business owners have expressed interest in purchasing a large, condemned baseball stadium as a site for a "farmers market" venue.

The effort at the Produce Market is a "work in progress" and, as such, the evaluation is an ongoing process. PST officers and their counterparts in the city and county agencies are continuously evaluating the effectiveness of their efforts, and making the appropriate adjustments as necessary. The major problems were resource constraints impacting on various city and county agencies, which limited their capability to focus on the produce market issue. Problems also developed in coordinating the efforts of multiple agencies with citywide responsibilities.

The homeless population has been virtually eliminated. Criminal activity has been significantly reduced. The improper disposal of discarded outdated produce has been eliminated. The PST officers and the business operators have formed a partnership dedicated to the improvement of the quality of life and economic well being of the area. The business owners have created a merchants association designed to focus on a wide range of issues and to become a vital focal point for interfacing with the various official organizations responsible for code enforcement, environmental concerns, sanitation and health hazards, transportation issues as well as law enforcement. There has been a significant increase in understanding and compliance with health, sanitation and pollution codes and regulations on the part of the business operators in the area. Funding has been identified for the implementation of the traffic flow study. Business owners have demonstrated an interest in reinvesting and revitalizing the economy in the Produce Market.

Analysis of the calls for service and the crime statistics revealed that the criminal had been significantly reduced. Substantial reinvestment in the area by various business owners indicates that there is a renewed confidence in the economic opportunities. Direct observation and anecdotal evidence verified that the homeless population area had been virtually eliminated.

The effectiveness of the response could have been enhanced with improved liaison with the various city and county agencies with an interest in the Produce Market issue. A better understanding of the resources and constraints impacting the various agencies as well as the

mutual goals of the effort would have served to improve the coordination process focused on the Produce Market.

Whenever there is a migration of homeless people away from an area, there is a concern that the homeless are simply being displaced to another sector of the community. The Homeless Assistance Center has been responsive in providing a wide range of counseling and support to the homeless people that left the Produce Market. This effort is directed at preventing the displacement of the Produce Market homeless population to another neighborhood.

Some aspects of the response plan will require continued monitoring and a continuing effort to maintain the results. PST officers will continue to maintain close interaction with the business owners and encourage an ongoing dialogue regarding mutual interests in the area. Traffic issues will require continuous monitoring to ensure that parking restrictions are complied with and that loading/unloading operations are conducted in the appropriate locations. Enforcement of health, sanitation and pollution codes and regulations will require periodic revisits to ensure total compliance on the part of the business operators. Routine police patrols will be required to enforce a wide range of federal, state and local law enforcement statutes.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Officer William Clayton
Allapattah Problem Solving Team
Phone: (305)575-5128
Fax: (305)575-5129
Email: stevieml@aol.com

NOTES

1. The PST police officers assigned to the NET in coordination with the crime analysis support personnel at the City of Miami Police Department.
2. Officers and managers received 16 hours of problem-solving training.
3. The major incentive to the officers engaged in this problem-solving issue is the development of experience and expertise in community policing methodologies and philosophies and the implementation of problem solving techniques to the issue that affect the quality of life in their communities.
4. Officers involved in this initiative utilized standard problem-solving techniques. The Miami Police Department has produced problem-solving forms, Community Policing manuals and videos.
5. The problem-oriented model was appropriate in addressing this issue.
6. PST officers assigned to the Allapattah NET were committed to this project. Resources were within the departmental budget.