

# VIGIL/BURNS AREA

## REDUCING CRIME AND DISORDER BY TARGETING PROBLEMATIC PROPERTIES

LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT, CALIFORNIA, 1993

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- THE PROBLEM:** For nearly two years, the northwest section of Rampart Division has experienced dramatic increases in narcotic offenses, gang related activity, robberies, assaults, citizen complaints, and calls for service.
- ANALYSIS:** Information was obtained from citizens, calls for service reports, and from the personal observations and records of police officers. The data revealed that five properties located within a few blocks of each other were responsible for the dramatic increase in calls for service.
- RESPONSE:** Over a period of three months, the police contacted the owners of the properties and solicited their assistance in renovating, securing, or eliminating the properties. A major narcotics trafficker and several dealers were arrested.
- ASSESSMENT:** Calls for service decreased dramatically. For two months, not a single call for service was received on any of the streets where the targeted properties were located. The majority of the transients and narcotics dealers left the area.
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### SCANNING

For the past two years, the northwest section of Rampart Division, once a relatively crime-free area, has seen dramatic increases in narcotics and gang related activity. Although the majority of the section remains quiet, the Virgil/Burns area, located in the center of the Rampart Division, is comprised of single-family residences, small businesses, and multi-unit complexes, has proven to be a source of rising crime statistics and citizen complaints.

The Multiple Calls For Service (MCFS) report for March thru June of 1992 lists 82 calls from the northwest section. Thirty-seven calls were within the 4000 to 4200 block of Marathon and Monroe Streets; 28 were within the 700 to 900 block of North Virgil Avenue; eleven were

within the 4200 to 4300 block of Burns Avenue; and six were on Normal Avenue.

Although most calls for service were for narcotics disturbances or vandalism-related, robberies and assaults also were increasing.

Subsequent to Officer Suzanne Campbell's initiation of a five-tiered Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) project within the area, the MCFS dropped to zero in August through November of 1992. The project encompassed the area four blocks north and south and two blocks east and west.

## ANALYSIS

During the scanning and analysis phase, Campbell compiled citizen information, MCFS reports, and detective and patrol officer information. Personal observations were also made of the area, which enabled Campbell to identify five primary sources of the increase in calls for service:

1. A parking lot behind a bakery allowed access to other properties along Normal Street and was becoming a chronic problem spot where gang members and narcotics users gathered at night. Transient drinkers also congregated there during daytime hours.
2. A narcotics dealer and supplier were both observed by citizens supplying a majority of the narcotics in the area to 12 to 15 independent dealers along Marathon and Monroe Streets. Citizens described daily drop-off points and on-going sales in front of a day care center.
3. A seldom-used, multi-level Los Angeles Community College (LACC) parking structure had become a haven to transients and narcotics dealers and users.
4. An abandoned house on Marathon Street was caught between the moratorium preventing residential structure tear-downs and escrow. Although the property was knee-deep in trash, human defecation, and narcotics paraphernalia, it became a "flop house" for runaways, prostitutes, and drug users and sellers. Repeated efforts to board up and secure the residence had failed to prevent ongoing deterioration and destruction of the property.
5. A nightclub at Virgil Avenue and Monroe Street, open primarily on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights, was the cause of many disturbances and narcotics-related incidents. Citizens reported blatant narcotics dealing to nightclub patrons coming to, and leaving the premises.

All five locations were within a few blocks of one another and were frequented by the same criminal element.

## RESPONSE

During the response phase, Campbell met with area property owners. As a result of the meeting, the owners increased fencing and installed better lighting around their properties. Additionally, narcotics-related arrests were made and several clean-up projects were initiated. Below is a step-by-step description of a three-month process that successfully decreased calls for service in the area and created a cleaner, more favorable atmosphere.

The bakery located east of 4211 Normal Avenue has a large, semi-enclosed rear parking adjacent to the east wall. The lot was commonly used as a meeting area for local gang members, and the dumpsters located out back enabled juveniles to jump over the wall to gain access to surrounding properties. Officers and citizens complained that the area was a thoroughfare for suspects evading detention and arrest.

The owner was contacted and the dumpsters were relocated and minor lighting improvements were made. Unfortunately, the owner was unwilling to provide more fencing, but did advise Campbell that the bakery would be torn down in April of 1993.

The owner of 4211 Normal Avenue was eager to implement whatever security measures were necessary, and erected a ten-foot spiked wrought-iron fence in front of his property, razor wire to the rear, and invested in motion sensitive lighting. He also hired full-time maintenance and a manager to monitor the property. Graffiti was removed immediately, and extra patrol requests were completed for PM Watch hours. Within a two-week period, calls for service regarding loitering and gang-related activity ceased.

Having worked the area prior to becoming Acting Senior Lead Officer, Campbell was familiar with a primary drug supplier in this area. Community members reported seeing the

supplier parceling out narcotics to independent dealers daily.

After receiving a phone call from a community member on June 24, 1992, Campbell located the dealer and detained the suspect for further investigation. Not only did the dealer have outstanding warrants, but he was also wanted by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) for illegal entry into the country. The suspect entered the United States illegally from El Salvador three times, an offense that carries a sentence in federal prison of seven to ten years prior to deportation. Although narcotics were not found at the scene, it was later determined that the suspect had more than ten grams of rock cocaine in his shoes. The suspect is now being detained at Terminal Island pending further court processing.

A mini-task force was initiated to address narcotics dealing in front of a day care center located in the 4100 block of Monroe. Two suspects were detained during a narcotics transaction in front of the center. Campbell knew both suspects from prior arrests and was aware that one of the dealers had recently been released from prison after serving an additional six months for parole violation. A parole hold was requested, and the suspects have not returned to the area.

Citizens on Monroe were extremely pleased when these two blatant narcotics problems were eliminated from their neighborhood. Additionally, ten to twelve transient street dealers left the area.

A multi-level parking structure Located one block west of 4211 Normal Street, at Madison Avenue was, upon first observation, no longer be in use. The exterior was covered with graffiti and overgrowth, and the surrounding sidewalks and parkways had become a dumping ground for discarded, soiled furniture. An abandoned moving van had been left alongside the structure. The van was covered with graffiti; its interior contained soiled mattresses, beer bottles, discarded clothing. The van was an eyesore to the surrounding community.

Campbell impounded the vehicle and determined that structure belonged to LACC. Campbell contacted the maintenance staff and requested a clean-up of the property. The maintenance staff responded quickly and a renovation of the property began within three days. After two weeks, the structure was freshly painted and the parkways had been cleared. After approximately six weeks, no graffiti was observed and new grass had been cultivated. LACC students began to utilize the parking structure again.

An abandoned house on Marathon remained an eyesore and a hazard to the community, despite numerous attempts by community members and officers to secure and maintain the property. Two fires had been set at the location in prior months. The location was an obvious health and safety hazard.

Campbell determined that, due to a political moratorium imposed approximately two years prior, the property owner could not tear down the abandoned structure to rebuild or sell the property. However, knowing the moratorium would lift around July or August of 1992, Campbell contacted the owner, the management company, and the proposed wrecking company to determine the permits necessary to complete the tear-down. Campbell met various inspectors at the location and even summoned the area's "A" car to assist with clearing the residence of transients prior to inspections. When the moratorium was lifted, the teardown was initiated as planned. The problem location was leveled and the lot is up for sale.

At another problem location, a citizen, Olga Dymytryk, had been keeping a daily log of activities occurring at the "Canadonga" nightclub on Virgil Avenue at Normal Street. Disturbances of urinating in public, bottle-breaking, drunken driving, blatant narcotics sales, and shots-fired incidents abounded. An ad-hoc community member meeting was held at Rampart Station, and a POP project was initiated.

Campbell attended the meeting and received owner and attorney information regarding the property. While assessing the situation, it was

discovered that ordinances banned amplified music and required food sales to exceed alcohol sales. Spot checks had revealed that the club in violation of both ordinances.

However, Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC) had lost its funding for use of undercover agents, and Campbell was advised that violations would result only in possible citations. When Campbell discussed the on-going nuisance problem with the nightclub owner's attorney, it was discovered that the owner had twelve other dance clubs that were not sources of complaints, and he did not want to have political or financial trouble because of this one. The attorney indicated that a little personal attention and pressure would go a long way.

Campbell advised Dymytryk to continue the log, to write letters, and to forward information to the Department's Commission Investigation Division (CID). CID sat down with the owner and advised him of the on-going nuisance. The owner decided not to renew his lease, and the location remains secure and quiet.

#### **ASSESSMENT**

The elimination of each target area, suspect, or the renovation of unsecured locations

contributed greatly to the decrease in calls for service. For two months, no streets where target locations existed were listed on the MCFS report. For a brief five-day period in October, robbery incidents on Virgil rose dramatically. However, subsequent to the arrest of a suspect, the statistics for November and December 1993, like August and September, have no Virgil area addresses listed.

As the community interest and clean-up efforts increased, the entire mood of the community was transformed. Even the criminal element commented on how much nicer the area looked.

Campbell received letters of commendation and numerous telephone reports regarding the overall improvement. The gang that once frequented the bakery has disbanded and no new "gathering" location has yet been discovered.

A majority of the transients and narcotics dealers left the area altogether and no longer frequent the parking structure or the area of the abandoned house. No complaints have been received from the day care center on Monroe since the arrests described. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night disturbance/nuisance activity has decreased significantly since the closure of the "Canandonga" nightclub.