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**THE SOUTHEAST SARASOTA
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION
PROGRAM**

*A PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING BLUEPRINT FOR AN "AVERAGE"
NEIGHBORHOOD*

ABSTRACT

Southeast Sarasota is a good neighborhood - typical of many growing communities around the country.

As with all growing areas, residents are facing problems associated with such growth - primarily increases in crime and residential traffic.

This project, the Southeast Sarasota Neighborhood Association program, illustrates how Problem-Oriented Policing can be instituted utilizing different areas of city government, in partnership with the community, to bring about major improvements. This project is of particular interest because it targets an "average" neighborhood, not a typical high-crime or problem area.

In May 1997, a Southeast Sarasota Neighborhood Task Force was established to study the various issues facing the community. *The scanning process* began. The Task Force divided itself into three committees: Crime Prevention, Traffic Calming and Code Enforcement.

More than 100 residents initially met with representatives from the Sarasota Police Department. Working with members of the Police Department, Traffic Engineering and Code Enforcement, *the analysis phase* began.

The Traffic Calming Committee began reviewing traffic data and interviewing residents. Neighborhood boundaries were established and traffic counts were taken on streets throughout the community.

The Crime Prevention Committee got busy by collecting and reviewing crime statistics. Neighbors were interviewed and a survey was conducted to get more information about their concerns.

The Code Enforcement Committee got an education from Code Enforcement officials about what violations may exist. They divided up the area and went from house to house, identifying 67 possible code violations.

From the extensive analysis phase, numerous plans of action were developed in *the response phase*. A detailed traffic calming plan was adopted. This plan uses traffic circles, speed tables, neck-outs, pedestrian bridges and bicycle paths to increase neighborhood safety.

The Crime Prevention Committee helped establish a neighborhood police substation. They expanded and reorganized their Neighborhood Watch team and began sending out newsletters. Much attention was paid to the community park, Arlington Park, with improvements to lighting, parking and noise issues.

The Code Enforcement Committee got all 67 violations corrected in a 6-week period.

Now, the Southeast Sarasota Neighborhood Association program moves into *the assessment phase*. How have we done? Crime statistics indicate a noticeable improvement and traffic studies show a marked decrease in dangerous traffic patterns. As this program continues to grow and mature, we anticipate great success. This Problem-Oriented Policing plan provides a blueprint for action that can be used to improve all neighborhoods, not just "problem" areas.



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The story of the Southeast Sarasota Neighborhood Association Program begins in May 1997.

Southeast Sarasota is an older, established neighborhood mainly consisting of single family homes build in the 1950s through the 1970s. According to the 1990 U.S. Census of Population and Housing, there are 4,846 people living in Southeast Sarasota and the average household income of wage earners is \$31,982 per year.

The majority of people living in Southeast Sarasota are white and in their early 40s. They own their own homes, paying an average \$649 per month mortgage. There are 1,428 people over 65 in the community; there are 784 children 17 or under.

Southeast Sarasota is, in many aspects, an average neighborhood. It is not a high-crime area, nor is it a hotbed for drugs or prostitution. It is a nice place to live and to raise a family.

This is not to say Southeast Sarasota had no problems. As with many communities, it had seen a lot of recent growth. Traffic was bad and getting worse. Drivers used many of its residential streets as high-speed cut-throughfts from major traffic arteries. Residential burglaries were on the rise and its centerpiece, Arlington Park, was becoming noisy and an after-dark hangout for unsupervised juveniles and others.

PART I - SCANNING - The identification of the problem

The problems facing the residents of this southeast Sarasota neighborhood are similar to problems facing many growing communities across the nation - increased crime and traffic problems, lack of community cohesiveness, lack of interaction between the government and the community.

The Southeast Sarasota neighborhood historically had not received much attention from police or other government entities. It was a good, average neighborhood and the majority of resources were diverted to "problem" areas of the city.

But even good neighborhoods have problems. In this case, noise and parking problems at its community park, Arlington Park, and increasing traffic flows through residential neighborhoods, were the catalysts for action.

Internal and external components were used to initially identify what types of problems we were facing. Police met with neighbors to discuss their concerns. Area officers, as well, had personally observed some of the ongoing problems in the area. Police reports were examined to indicate where patterns of activity occurred. Reviews of police records and further interviews with residents indicated action for improvement was needed.

In May 1997, the Southeast Sarasota Neighborhood Task Force was formed. The Task Force initially consisted of more than 100 interested residents working with representatives from the Sarasota Police Department, the City Engineering Department and Code Enforcement to break down and analyze what the problems were and how they could be addressed. Once again, internal and external components were used to break down the problems into a workable structure.

After the initial brainstorming process and preliminary analysis, three items were singled out for further study. Community volunteers signed up to participate in these three committees — the Crime Prevention Committee, the Traffic Calming Committee and the Code Enforcement Committee. Each of these committees was assisted by City of

Sarasota officials in their areas of expertise. The Problem-Oriented Policing method was used throughout.

PART II - ANALYSIS - Determining the causes, scope and effects of a problem

Each of the three committees conducted detail analyses of their area of concern.

The Traffic Calming Committee held its first meeting in June 1997. The committee, which consisted of representatives from area neighborhoods and businesses, held two meetings a month over the next seven months. The goal of the committee was to establish a comprehensive area-wide plan that would calm traffic and improve the safety of all who live in and visit this area.

Initially, the Traffic Calming Committee established neighborhood boundaries in which to conduct their studies. In this phase, each street within the neighborhood was analyzed for potential problems. During the upcoming months, detailed traffic counts were taken on streets throughout Southeast Sarasota. This traffic data included volume counts, speed driven and traffic cut-through routes.

These traffic counts helped in determining which streets are heavily traveled, which are used as cut-through routes and which had traffic moving at high rates of speed. Southeast Sarasota faced some unique traffic problems, being bounded by four major roads with many cut through opportunities. In addition, Sarasota's largest hospital with more than 3,000 employees is nearby. Committee members went door-to-door, talking to community members about their concerns in order to further identify where problems exist.

The Crime Prevention Committee also began meeting in June 1997. It determined its goal was to develop long-lasting responses to reduce harm to the community as well as the fear of future harm. In order to identify what specific problems needed to be addressed, an analysis was performed on crime statistics and calls for service for 12 months prior to the committee being formed.

The committee conducted surveys among community residents. In addition, the committee held a community forum to get further input regarding the neighborhood's perception of what crime problems exist.

The Code Enforcement Committee also put in a lot of legwork. It established its goal of bringing all area properties into compliance with City codes.

Code Enforcement is an important and often-overlooked tool in preventing crime and improving neighborhoods. If code violations are ignored, property values can go down and neighborhoods deteriorate, eventually becoming areas that invite drugs and prostitution.

In order to detect any possible code violations in Southeast Sarasota, the community was broken down into sections and each committee member combed their assigned neighborhoods, looking for possible code violations. Committee members received instruction from City Code Enforcement personnel on what to look for.

~~*PART III - RESPONSE - Planned actions taken to deal with the problem*~~

The Traffic Calming Committee reviewed extensive traffic data, interviewed residents and held workshops over the seven-month period. At that point, they reviewed multiple solutions and alternatives to reduce and calm traffic in Southeast Sarasota. After much

work, they devised a Master Plan. Some of the components of the Master Plan include the placement of speed tables, medians, textured pavement and cross walks, neck-outs, semi-diverters, traffic circles, bicycle lanes and sidewalks. Other solutions included in the response were aspects of streetscaping, such as street lighting, street trees, raised circle and landscaping.

An advertised open house for viewing and comments on the Master Plan was held on February 19, 1998. The plan was approved and funded by the City Commission.

The first phase of the plan is aimed at addressing some of the most serious problems as quickly as possible. Several speed tables and speed humps are being installed on residential streets that were found to be major cut-through arteries. Medians are being installed on other streets and one street, commonly used as a cut-through by patrons of a nearby bar, will be closed to through traffic.

Phase Two includes a major beautification project on the street that runs through Southeast Sarasota, Hyde Park. Further modifications of street design will be put in place for Phase Three and Phase Four.

The Crime Prevention Committee's first response task was to reorganize several Neighborhood Watch groups into a larger, more cohesive and more active group. This group designed and produced a brochure, introducing the new neighborhood substation and police officers assigned to the station. The brochure offers helpful advice on how to get in touch with their officers and neighborhood volunteers, and encourages residents to participate in the Neighborhood Watch and attend monthly meetings at the substation. This brochure was distributed by volunteers as well as being sent out by the City in its monthly utility billing.

Of course, getting the substation up and operational also required much work from police and citizens alike. Use of the property and building was donated by the area hospital, Sarasota Memorial Hospital, along with several computers. The hospital continues to donate all utility costs. This unique partnership between police, the community and the local hospital has resulted in a long-term commitment from the hospital to better serve the community.

Using Problem-Oriented Policing on a smaller scale, police working with residents planned the best uses for the substation. It is used by officers working that district as well as by neighborhood groups who wish to hold meetings there.

A second response priority was to increase traffic patrols in the area. The Sarasota Police Traffic Unit had doubled in size in the past year and was able to assign more officers to the area. The Unit adopted a "zero tolerance" policy concerning traffic offenders.

Recurring problems in Arlington Park also rated responses. Major problems identified in the analysis included inadequate lighting, illegal parking, amplified noise from the park and loitering juveniles.

Armed with a new City of Sarasota noise ordinance, police have been able to reduce the number of noise complaints at the park. Increased parking enforcement has prevented cars from randomly parking at private homes, as had been done in the past, in addition, a wooden fence was installed to keep people from illegally parking near the basketball courts.

Lighting was improved within the park by cutting back the non-native pepper tree bushes. Community volunteers were directly involved in this effort, which increased the

amount of light on the sidewalks and walking paths. A timer on the basketball court lights now allows it to turn off at a predetermined time so neighbors don't have to contend with late-night activity. Signs were requested to be added to identify park access and to facilitate the reporting of suspicious activities. Increased patrols now prevent juveniles and others from loitering at the park. The active enforcement of a new state law fining minors for smoking has also been effective at discouraging "hanging out" at the park.

We are now working on an additional response to improve park safety. Police and citizens are working with park management to establish more community-based programs for children of all ages. These programs will be affordable based on family income.

The Code Enforcement Committee was able to identify 67 properties with code enforcement violations during the analysis phase. All of these properties were inspected by a City Code Enforcement Inspector. Each violator was notified of the violation and given an adequate time to correct the problem. In many cases, additional follow-up and further contact with the violators were required.

~~*PART IV - ASSESSMENT - -Measuring of indicators to determine the effectiveness of the responses*~~

The Traffic Calming Committee has devised an intricate, comprehensive Master Plan to slow traffic in residential areas and increase safety. Phase I is underway now, and already improvements are being seen. Comparing the first four months of 1997 to the first four months of 1998, accidents have declined 14 percent. Careless driving incidents have dropped 56 percent. We see this as an early indicator that community awareness and the earliest changes are having a positive impact.

The Traffic Calming Master Plan has proven to be very popular not only with the Southeast Sarasota neighborhood, but with other areas of Sarasota as well. Neighborhood groups in other areas now wish to copy the blueprint set up by Southeast Sarasota.

The Crime Prevention Committee has also shown a measure of success. Burglaries dropped 47 percent during the first four months of 1998. Credit for that is attributed to the more active Neighborhood Watch group as well as police interacting more with community residents.

Improvements in Arlington Park are bearing fruit. Reports of juvenile problems in the area dropped 47 percent. Noise violations dropped 36 percent. Illegal parking has been curtailed and community residents report being pleased at the better lighting at the park.

The park's new emphasis on programming for children is already changing, in a positive way, how children use the park. A "Summer in the Park" program, for kids from 1st grade through 6th grade, will include activities such as swimming, field trips, games and arts and crafts. Other new programs for children include karate, diving, swimming and "Tot Time," for tots ages 1-5 and their mothers.

The "zero-tolerance" Traffic Unit handed out 139 tickets during this time period, an increase of 21 percent over the prior year. Traffic officers paid particular attention to school zones, handing out 18 tickets, an increase of 55 percent.

The Code Enforcement Committee, while facing the most clear-cut problem, had complete success in its response. All 67 properties identified with violations were brought into compliance with City Code within a six-week time period.

Now that the volunteers of the Code Enforcement Committee are knowledgeable in City Code policy, they continue to act as the watchdogs of Code Enforcement in

Southeast Sarasota. In this way, problems can be reported and quickly addressed instead of piling up and neighborhoods deteriorating due to one or two homes.

Thus, the Southeast Sarasota Neighborhood Association program is a work-in-progress that has already demonstrated real success. It demonstrates how Problem-Oriented Policing can be used to positively affect any neighborhood and it need not be used only in significant problem areas.

Community residents, the police and other City officials have been extremely pleased with the results of the Southeast Sarasota Neighborhood Association program. By identifying and addressing these three problem areas - traffic, crime and code enforcement; and by analyzing and developing responses to each based on neighborhood needs, we believe we have developed a blueprint that can be effectively applied to other neighborhoods. Indeed, other neighborhoods are already requesting we do so.

As neighborhoods grow, so do problems. By using the Problem-Oriented Policing method, we have been able to interact with residents to introduce changes to improve Southeast Sarasota and help it keep its community identity. A good neighborhood is getting better.

AGENCY AND OTHER INFORMATION

The Southeast Sarasota Neighborhood Association Project is an extensive effort that involved the entire Sarasota Police Department, as well as requiring support from many other City departments. All Sarasota officers and management have been trained in the Problem-Oriented Policing concept. Officers are encouraged to use it on a daily basis.

No special incentives are given to officers for using these problem-solving techniques. This is because our officers are professionals who realize, once being trained in Problem-Oriented Policing, that their jobs are made easier when applying these techniques.

Sarasota Police have been using Problem Oriented Policing for about six years, so most are well-versed in the technique. We have designed a worksheet for officers (see attachments) to help in the SARA process.

All Police personnel, from the Chief to the zone patrol officers, were committed to making this project a success. Of all of the responses to the identified problems, none required going beyond our existing departmental budget. The City Commission approved funds for the Traffic Calming Master Plan, which will be paid for out of the City's budget.

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ATTACHMENTS

**UNIFORM SERVICES DIVISION
PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING
PROJECT SHEET**

DISTRICT: _____ **SQUAD** _____

DATE PROBLEM IDENTIFIED: _____

LOCATION: _____

NAME OF PERSON(S) OR BUSINESS INVOLVED: _____

PROJECT SUPERVISOR ASSIGNED: _____

SCANNING RESULTS: _____

ANALYSIS OF PROBLEM: _____

GOALS OF THIS PROJECT: _____

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO REDUCE OR ELIMINATE THE PROBLEM:

TARGET DATE TO BEGIN PROJECT: _____

ESTIMATED DURATION OF THIS PROJECT: _____

SPECIFIC TACTICS TO BE EMPLOYED: _____

LOGISTIC CONSIDERATIONS

MANPOWER NEEDS: _____

VEHICLE EMPLOYMENT/NEEDS: _____

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT NEEDS: _____

INTER-AGENCY SUPPORT REQUESTED: _____

OTHER GOVERNMENTAL SERVICES REQUESTED: _____

Submitted by: _____

APPROVE

DISAPPROVE

**DISTRICT COMMANDER
DIVISION COMMANDER
DEPUTY CHIEF OF POLICE**
