

DEALING WITH NOISE COMPLAINTS AROUND UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

Executive Summary

The Durham Police Department initiated **problem-solving** approaches to the problem of excessive noise complaints in communities neighboring university campuses. Durham is the home of Duke University. Trinity Park is an upscale neighborhood immediately adjacent to the campus of Duke University. A few of the approximate 1100 homes are rented to Duke students as a source of investment and serve as unofficial **fraternity** and sorority houses. The permanent residents for many years have complained primarily about the excessive noise, particularly on the weekends, caused by students who throw parties in the rental houses. Other frequent problems to the community as a result of the rental units are excessive vehicles for a single dwelling and litter or disrepair on the property of the rental units.

The Durham Police Department commonly responds to over 100 complaints of excessive noise within a typical school year. These complaints are called in as late as 5:00 a.m. This disruption of an otherwise peaceful community builds resentment on the part of permanent residents toward the students, landlords and university. The complaints are also **frequently** filed as early as 9:00 p.m. This builds resentment on the part of students toward the permanent residents for being inflexible.

In the past, the Durham Police Department has used a strict enforcement approach to responding to calls for service involving excessive noise. This approach has been met with little success. This school year, new problem-solving approaches were incorporated to compliment the strict enforcement strategies. Building a sense of community between the permanent residents and students through the use of monthly meetings, joint Neighborhood Watch programs, and university involvement led to a **17%** decrease in the number of calls for service this school year as compared to the 1999-2000 school year. There was a 9% decrease in calls for service compared to last school year.

Permanent residents and students are beginning to find common ground that has led to greater consideration on the part of students and greater tolerance on the part of permanent residents. The Durham Police Department hopes to build on the successes seen in one year and hopes to serve as a model to other cities facing similar problems around their universities.

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Introduction

Durham, North Carolina is a mid-sized diverse city with a population of approximately 193,000 residents. Historically, Durham's roots are seated in cigarette and textile manufacturing. Durham is home to the world-renowned Research Triangle Park, Duke University and its 2001 NCAA National Championship Basketball Team, North Carolina Central University, the Durham Bulls, the North Carolina Museum of Life and Science, the American Dance Festival, Duke Chapel, Sarah P. Duke Gardens, and numerous other attractions.

Duke University

Duke University began in Durham as Trinity College in 1892. In 1924 the name was changed to Duke University following a sizable endowment and expansion of the University thanks to the James Duke family.

Trinity College began with a campus within walking distance of downtown Durham. It is best known and recognized by a mile-long stone wall that encompasses what is now known as the "East Campus" of Duke University. During the expansion, Duke University built a two-mile connecting road and constructed a new gothic architecture "West Campus" that Duke is best known for today. The well-known Duke Chapel and athletic facilities are all part of Duke's West Campus

Trinity Park

Trinity Park is a residential neighborhood immediately adjacent to the East Campus wall of Duke University. Its close proximity to Duke and downtown Durham makes it a very popular neighborhood among young urban professionals. There are approximately 1,100 residences housing approximately 3,000 residents. Houses in Trinity Park have an average tax value of approximately \$250,000.

Approximately thirty of the residences in Trinity Park are owned by landlords who rent primarily to Duke University students as a source of investment. Three Durham residents own a majority of the homes that are rented to Duke students.

Each school year, the Durham Police Department is forced to answer a disproportionate number of noise complaints in the Trinity Park community. Almost every complaint involves Duke student parties being held in the rental properties.

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Scanning

A scan of the problem **would** reveal what perhaps many cities experience with neighborhoods in close proximity to university campuses. Upper class students begin to look for an alternative to **on-campus** housing yet desire close proximity to the university in order to reduce the problem of driving and affordable parking. When these students choose to live in residential neighborhoods, they find that their lifestyle is different from that of their neighbors. Student parties tend to draw large, sometimes uncontrollable crowds of people. These parties also tend to end much later than the gatherings of their older, more mature neighbors.

This excessive noise problem in Trinity Park has been in existence for many years and is the source of many complaints for the Durham Police Department, both in 911 calls for service as well as at community and **neighborhood** association meetings that the Police Department attends.

The reason this problem was identified as a candidate for new and innovative problem-solving strategies is due in large part to the desire of the community to develop long-term solutions. Many different strategies have been considered and attempted in the past, but they never successfully reduced the problem.

Past Strategies

In the past, the Durham Police Department has employed very traditional approaches to the excessive noise problems with Duke students in Trinity Park. When a call for service was received, police responded, spoke to the residents of the home and warned them to keep the noise down... only to find themselves returning several times to the same property in one evening.

As the problem persisted, the community demanded a more aggressive approach to the problem. The Durham Police Department then began to respond to calls for service with immediate enforcement action upon the residents of the home. Decibel meters were purchased and officers trained on how to read the instruments. If the party was found to be beyond the allowable noise level according to Durham City Ordinances, residents were criminally cited for violation of a City Ordinance. This approach proved to be very difficult due to training officers on the use of decibel meters. Trained officers would move to new units and maintenance and calibration of the instruments was expensive and hard to find.

Durham City Ordinances further broadened the definition of "excessive noise" to include any noise that disturbed the peaceful tranquility of the neighborhood. Police then continued to cite violators, yet would subpoena complainants to court to testify as to how the noise created by the students disturbed the normal peaceful tranquility of the neighborhood. This basically negated the need for decibel meters in order to charge students with the criminal offense.

As one could imagine, excessive noise was not considered a high priority with the office of the District Attorney. There was no desire to see young students face criminal prosecution that could have lifelong effects on them. These cases were generally dismissed or disposed of without the students facing an actual criminal conviction. Yet the Trinity Park community demanded more aggressive enforcement. Residents used political connections to place pressure on the District Attorney to treat the charges more seriously. This was frequently met with minor cases going to trial and a general feeling of wasting the court's time.

Public "nuisance abatement" procedures were even considered against the landlords of these properties, but these were found to be costly, time consuming and questionable as to the success of the effort. As this excessive noise continued, it bred more and more contempt among the Trinity Park residents against Duke University, Duke students, and the landlords who rent to Duke students.

Analysis

The Durham Police Department chose to use more of a **problem-oriented** approach to the excessive noise complaints in Trinity Park. An analysis of the problem showed that almost every noise complaint in the Trinity Park community fell within the traditional school year. In order to conduct a consistent analysis of the complaints, a four-year analysis of complaints that fell between August 1 through April 1 was grouped together. The purpose of such an analysis was to fall more in line with a traditional school year.

Prior to the 2002-2003 school year, the Durham Police Department responded to an average of 105 excessive noise, or loud music, or loud party complaints within the Trinity Park community. As one would expect, approximately 55% of the complaints fell on Saturday and Sunday. An average of 50% of these complaints fell between the hours of 11 p.m. and 2 a.m. A lower percentage, yet not uncommon, was complaints as late as 5 a.m. Also noted was that an unexpected large percentage, an average of 13%, of the complaints fell between the hours of 9 p.m. and 11 p.m. What this told us in the analysis phase was that the permanent residents had very little tolerance for excessive noise and would complain long before most residents went to sleep for the evening. Perhaps the 4 a.m. and 5 a.m. complaints led to the reduced tolerance level by the Trinity Park residents.

After speaking with permanent residents and students, it became very evident that there was a great amount of resentment and animosity between the students and permanent residents. The permanent residents resented the students living in their neighborhoods. This resentment was not solely because of excessive noise problems. Large numbers of students would **frequently** take up residence in each rental home causing a parking problem. Sometimes up to eight students with eight cars would live inside one home. Yards and porches were frequently littered with beer cans and bottles causing permanent residents to feel that the neighborhood was unattractive, which they feared would lead to lower property values.

Students likewise resented the intolerance of the permanent residents. While responding to complaints, students frequently expressed frustration about the complainants for not being more understanding while choosing to live in such close proximity to a college campus. There was a very obvious "us versus them" mentality on the part of permanent residents and students.

Permanent residents also resented the landlords who rented to these students. An analysis of homeowners found that two residents of Durham owned the vast majority of the problem rental houses. In the past, both the Trinity Park Neighborhood Association and the Durham Police Department had attempted to appeal to the landlords to exercise stricter control on the students to whom they rented. This was met with very limited results. It was evident that the primary motivation of the two landlords was the investment value of their property.

While Trinity Park is a large neighborhood with over 1,100 residences, it was observed that the majority of the problem homes were within one block of the East Campus wall of Duke University. On many occasions the problem homes were directly across the street from the East Campus wall. Therefore, the noise complaint problem was not as widespread as one may have thought. A plot map of the complaint locations is attached. It should be noted that on the plot map, some plots may represent multiple calls to the same address.

Another interesting observation was that many of these problem homes were considered by the residents/students to be "unofficial" fraternity or sorority homes. While this has not always been the case, Duke University does not have an official fraternity/sorority row on its campus.

Response

Having this analysis in mind, it was felt that the most effective response would need to be centered on developing a sense of community among the permanent residents and students. This would entail developing a sense of consideration for the permanent residents on behalf of the students and developing a sense of tolerance for the students on behalf of the permanent residents. Communication was felt to be the most critical component of developing that sense of community. Much effort was focused on bringing the two groups together to discuss problems and collaboratively develop solutions that both students and permanent residents could be satisfied with.

Community Building Efforts

While the Durham Police Department has worked very hard to bridge the divide, it should be noted that the faculty and staff of Duke University has also played a very active role in developing solutions to the excessive noise problem, not just with Trinity Park residents, but with all neighboring communities of their university.

The *Student Life* staff of Duke University hosted monthly meetings to discuss various problems with students in the neighboring communities. Representatives from the *Student Life* staff, off-campus students (both undergraduate and graduate), permanent

residents from neighboring communities (including Trinity Park), campus police and the Durham Police Department would meet monthly for lunch to discuss various problems that students were causing within the surrounding neighborhoods. The problems did not always center on excessive noise. Many times the discussion would center on parking, litter, excessive residents and even crime prevention techniques. One interesting topic of conversation involved permanent residents sharing with students their concern for their lack of crime prevention practices after a resident saw four laptop computer boxes lying beside a trashcan outside of the home. The residents expressed to students that they were sending a message to potential criminals that at least four new laptop computers were likely inside the home. Students appreciated the advice. District Two officers felt it important to be included in those meetings and began attending on a regular basis.

As approaches to excessive noise complaints were being examined, Trinity Park was experiencing a surge in property crime. Residential burglaries and thefts from vehicles were the most common crimes. Trinity Park's proximity to downtown Durham made it an easy target for property crime. Many of the victims of these property crimes were the students renting homes in neighborhood. *Neighborhood Watch* programs had been established in the past, but had gone largely dormant. Students were never involved in the *Neighborhood Watch* meetings. As crime prevention specialists in District Two sought to strengthen the program, community oriented policing officers saw this surge in crime as an excellent opportunity to bring permanent residents and students together toward a common goal; reduce the property crime in Trinity Park by being observant of neighbors' homes. A special effort was made to include students in the revived *Neighborhood Watch* meetings, but it was believed that students were typically uninterested in neighborhood functions and less interested in crime prevention efforts. Surprisingly, we found a large proportion of the students attending the monthly functions when invited. *Neighborhood Watch* was successful in two different ways. First, we saw a reduction of property crime in Trinity Park. Residents were instrumental in reporting suspicious activity and would remain within sight of suspects until the arrival of officers. Second, District Two officers felt that *Neighborhood Watch* involvement did more to build a sense of community between the permanent residents and students than any other program. Maintaining enthusiasm about the program and a continual effort to involve more students are high priorities for District Two.

Enforcement Efforts

While building community between the permanent residents and the students of Trinity Park was a high priority for District Two officers, it was felt by the Trinity Park community and District Two officers that enforcement efforts should not be abandoned. It was important that students realize that by choosing to live off campus, new expectations and new accountability concerning their behavior was essential. When laws were violated, police action was certain.

As Duke University is a private university, the Duke University Campus Police Department had almost no jurisdiction in the Trinity Park community. However, this did not reduce the concern of the Duke University faculty and staff regarding the action of their students in the community. The actions of the students drew resentment by the

community toward Duke University. Duke University was committed to maintaining strong community and public relations within the Durham community. The faculty and staff of Duke University took active involvement in the wrongful actions of its students. The administration of the Duke University Campus Police Department made requests for copies of any citations of Duke students written by Durham police officers. Violations of noise ordinances and alcohol violations were among the most common violations. Campus police would then forward the information to the office of the Dean of Students for administrative action on the students by the university. Often, the threat of action by the university was taken more seriously by the students than criminal action by the Durham Police Department. The university, unlike the Durham Police Department or the District Attorney, had the authority to expel a student from school. Students more often realized the dire consequences of such action.

A new response this year by the Campus Police had a positive effect on the actions of the off-campus students. Although Duke University Campus Police had no law enforcement jurisdiction within the Trinity Park community, officers still responded with officers from the Durham Police Department to loud party complaints within the neighborhood. As stated before, most of the problem rental homes were one block or less from the campus boundaries. Duke University Campus Police would act as an arm of the administration of Duke University and would forward a full incident report to the office of the Dean of Students for follow-up action. This was done in concert with officers from the Durham Police Department taking law enforcement action. Students making excessive noise were now held accountable by the community and the university for their actions.

Near the beginning of the school year, District Two officers worked with **community** residents to identify the problem houses that were most likely to be nuisances throughout the school year. Once the problem houses were identified, informational fliers were developed and distributed to the homes explaining past problems between the students and the permanent residents. Law enforcement action was also specified in the fliers to serve as a warning to the students who chose to hold late parties. The fliers were also used to encourage students to become active in the *Neighborhood Watch* program.

The Trinity Park community also became actively involved in the enforcement action of problem houses. The neighborhood association had a tremendous email and listserv network to communicate problems among the residents. Many residents had political connections and used those connections to assure that the Office of the District Attorney did not take any enforcement action lightly. Once a criminal citation was written, members of the neighborhood association would request a copy of the citation as a matter of public record. Once that copy was obtained, contact was made directly with the District Attorney by a representative of the neighborhood association to ensure that the matter was not disposed of with no consequences to the student.

The community also worked with Duke University to appeal to the parents of the students causing problems. Due to parking shortages within the Trinity Park community, the City of Durham would issue free parking permits to residents of Trinity Park allowing them to park on the city streets. Students living in Trinity Park were also eligible for these

parking passes. The parking pass list, however, was a matter of public record. Once a student applied for a parking pass, he/she then established himself or herself as a resident of the home. Community residents then worked with university officials to determine the billing address of the students. When problems arose within a home, members of the community would then send letters to the billing address of the students appealing to the parents to deal with the students regarding their action within the Trinity Park community. Often, the parents were completely unaware of any problems within the rental homes in the Trinity Park community.

Residents of Durham have recently begun a *Court Watch* program modeled after the practices of *Mothers Against Drunk Driving*. Members of the community will attend trials and court hearings in order to place political pressure on prosecutors and judges to treat property crime seriously and to sentence accordingly. Members of Trinity Park have expressed an interest in getting involved in the program in order to track the disposition of students cited for violation of noise ordinances or alcohol violations.

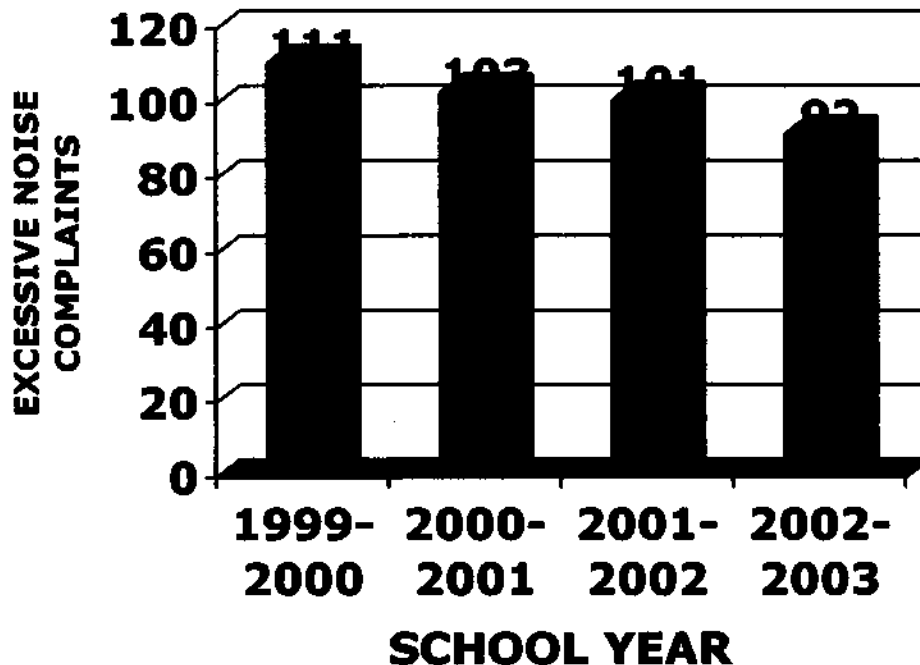
Durham police officers are also involved in aggressive parking enforcement within the Trinity Park community. Illegal parking is a frequent complaint from the Trinity Park community. Many off-campus students from around the city park on Trinity Park streets in order to save money from purchasing on-campus parking passes. With Trinity Park being in such close proximity to the University bus line, students can walk just a short distance on campus to reach a university bus. This creates problems for all residents of Trinity Park. Trinity Park residents also use the aggressive parking enforcement as a means to force student residents to obtain parking passes, thus making their residences a matter of public record for future **reference**.

The combination of community building and consistent, aggressive enforcement was met with expectation of greater community satisfaction with the actions of Duke University and the Durham Police Department. It was also anticipated that the 911 calls for service would decrease during the school year.

Assessment

Near the end of this school year, a final analysis was completed to examine the results of the efforts. In order to have sufficient time to submit this project, calls for service data were collected from August 1 of the previous year to April 1 of the current year, although the school year runs into May. This was consistent with the original analysis of the previous three school years.

This school year saw a 17% decrease in the number of 911 calls for service related to loud noise, music or parties in the Trinity Park community compared to the 1999-2000 school year. There was an 11% decrease in the number of calls for service compared to the 2000-2001 school year. There was also a 9% decrease in the number of calls for service compared to the 2001-2002 school year.



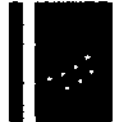
Although no formal survey was conducted with residents of Trinity Park, members of the Trinity Park Neighborhood Association were contacted and asked their impression of the efforts to reduce excessive noise with the students during the present school year. The reaction was mixed. What was encouraging from the residents was their comments on previous problem houses. They stated that many houses that had been problems in previous years were absolutely no problem this school year. The problems this school year were new problem houses.

Conclusion

Based on this assessment, it was concluded that the efforts were successful in reducing nuisance noise in the Trinity Park community. The rental houses most focused on were more considerate of their neighbors and reduced the noise. Although a more dramatic decrease was hoped for, the Durham Police Department learned that its efforts needed to be broadened and future homes would need to be targeted for problem-solving efforts. It was also realized that years of animosity and contempt could not be erased overnight. The Durham Police Department will continue to work toward reducing excessive noise complaints by building collaboration between the permanent residents and students in order to reach consensus in long-term solutions.

The Durham Police Department feels that many cities likely experience the same problems with its neighborhoods in close proximity to universities. It is hoped that these efforts will serve as a model to be used by other police departments in dealing with excessive noise complaints near university campuses.

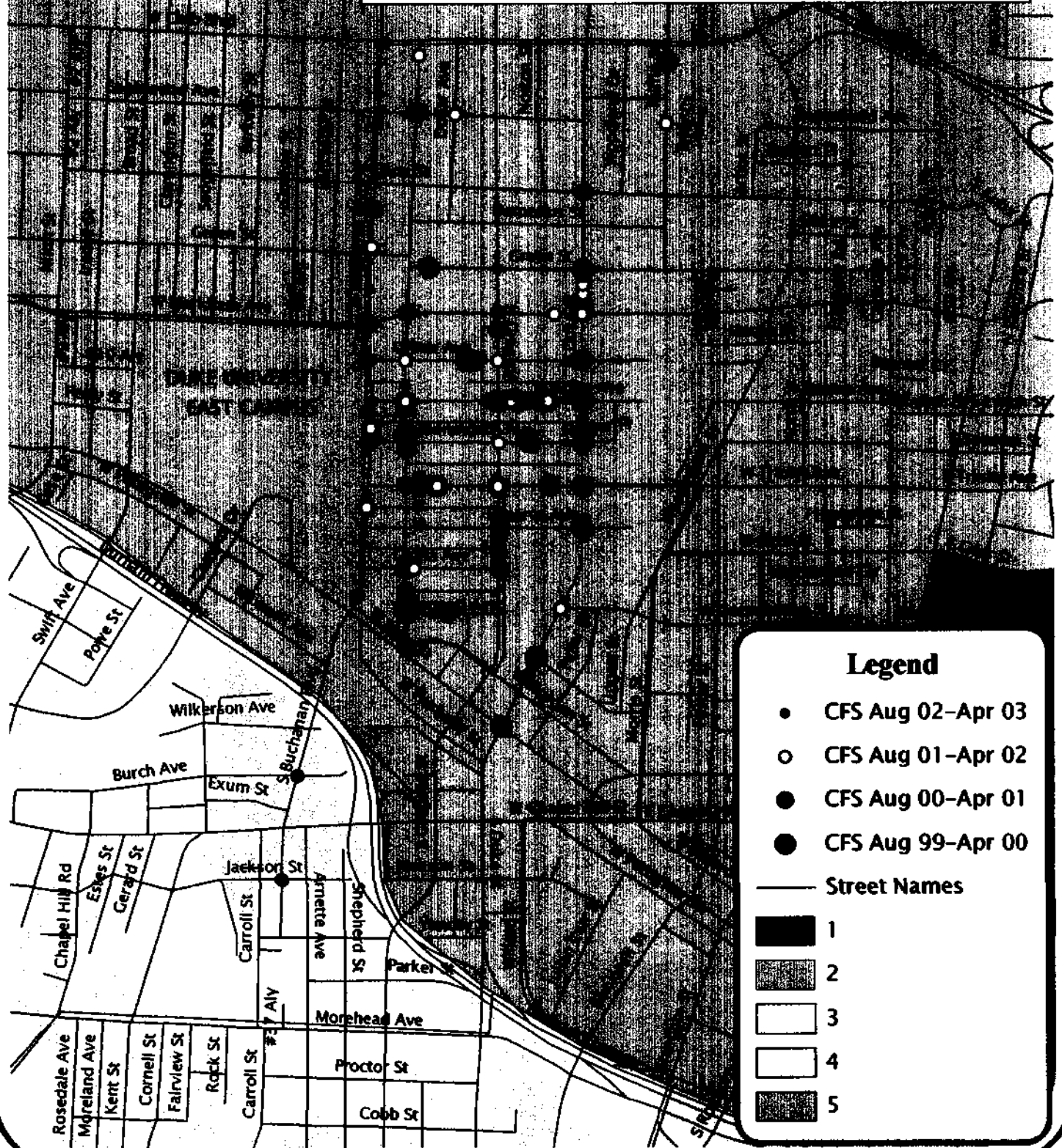
DURHAM



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CITY OF MEDICINE



Durham Police Department Calls for Service Excessive Noise/Loud Music/Party Trinity Park



Legend

- CFS Aug 02–Apr 03
- ◻ CFS Aug 01–Apr 02
- CFS Aug 00–Apr 01
- CFS Aug 99–Apr 00

— Street Names

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- 3
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