

POLICE AND CITIZENS FORMA NON-PROFIT ASSOCIATION TO REVITALIZE A COMMUNITY

Faced with rising narcotic distribution arrests and constant crime, social and economic concerns, the Baltimore County Police Department formed a partnership with community leaders to revitalize an 828 affordable apartment community in the Essex area of Baltimore County.

A non-profit organization, the Community Center for Youth Development Incorporated, was formed. This association applied for and obtained a \$300,000 community development block grant to purchase and renovate a 4,500 square foot structure in the heart of the troubled community.

The Community Center will offer daycare, job placement, education* health, family counseling, and a community center office. Existing government services will have an on-site structure to provide needed assistance to the community. The Center will provide a meeting place, develop a communal atmosphere of empowerment and esteem building through self-reliance. The intent of the center is to provide improved quality of life for the working poor, and the elderly on a fixed income. It will facilitate community efforts to help those families dependent on public support to stand on their own. It will develop and educate youth and adults alike. The Center will help stabilize the transient community addressing the social and crime concerns. The Center is but one aspect of the strategic plan for this community, others such as the defensible space plan, and efforts by public and private organizations combine to offer a holistic approach to this community.

The development of the community center has become the cornerstone of community revitalization. It has brought together community and government leaders to focus in on the problem. Community associations have formed, community participation has increased evidenced by increased community involvement and 125% increase in narcotic phone complaints. Calls for disturbance decreased by 20% in 1994, violent Part I offenses continued to decline throughout 1994 hitting their lowest level since 1989.

**COMMUNITY CENTER
FOR
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

In the fall of 1993, a meeting was held at the Essex Police Station with then U.S. Congresswoman Helen Delich Bentley. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the needs of law enforcement at the field level.

During the meeting, discussion centered on the community of Tall Trees in Essex. The Baltimore County Police Department has become well aware of the social, economic and crime concerns of the approximately 800 apartment affordable housing complex of more than 2300 residents.

For many years, the area has been known as a high crime area with one of the highest crime rates in Baltimore County. The following statistics illustrate the problem:

Index Crimes (Serious Offenses) in the Complex:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Incidents Reported</u>
1989	262
1990	230
1991	250
1992	207
1993	174

In 1993, 410 total arrests were made for criminal violations in the complex; 54 of those were juveniles.

In 1994, over 200 arrests were made for narcotic violations alone; over 60% of those arrests were for the sale of cocaine/crack distribution.

In recent years, the owners, tenants, police, local area Chamber of Commerce and other county agencies worked together in partnership to

reduce criminal activity. This effort has seen some success. However, more needs to be done, particularly in the area of youth and young adult development. It was stressed to Congresswoman Bentley, early intervention is the key to a long range solution to the crime problem in the community. Captain Johnson introduced the concept of a community center for youth and adult development. The center's focus would be community empowerment offering education, daycare for working families, health and social services. The center will develop a sense of belongingness in the residents of the community, improve esteem and facilitate employability through its daycare, education, health and job placement services.

The center's goal will be to address communal pathologies that cause social disorder and crime. It will become a meeting place that will empower and create a sense of attachment to the community. It will address the transient residential behavior of the residents in the community and stabilize the area.

Each service to be offered in the center was carefully thought out and is based on the needs expressed by those residing in the community, owners and those who have provided private and government services to the complex over the years.

The availability of day care services is necessary to allow families with young children receiving AFDC benefits, the opportunity to participate in job skill training and then become and remain employed. This is needed now to accommodate those involved in Project Independence, but will become even more critical when currently proposed welfare reform legislation becomes law. This new legislation will

require AFDC beneficiaries to participate in job skill training programs and also requires government to provide day care services.

Pending welfare reform legislation also requires clients to search for employment when the training period has ended. Assistance in this effort will be necessary if the client's job search effort is to be successful. This assistance will be provided through the community center.

Convenient and ready access to government agencies is needed. Government agencies, social services, health and education will be provided space in the center. These operations will be based in the community center building. A community association, citizens on patrol, private security and police office will be established in the complex.

There have been other community association offices opened in affordable housing communities across the nation. These centers are normally apartments given to the community on a month to month basis by the property owner. These offices due to space and program design are limited in what they can offer, all have impacted their community. Captain Johnson's concept goes far beyond, his vision called for the purchase and total renovation of an entire building that would be owned by the community, offering a holistic program of services. Captain Johnson proposed that a building be purchased in the heart of the complex. He sought to completely renovate a structure. Preliminary discussion began on possible federal funding for such a vast undertaking. Any building in the complex to be purchased and renovated would require substantial rehabilitation to meet the goals of the project.

Captain Johnson requested Congresswoman Bentley to consider the proposal and requested the availability of grant funds, to make it happen. A staff aid to Ms. Bentley, Mr. Chuck Cresswell, attended the original meeting with the Congresswoman. He immediately formed a partnership with the police department and began further discussion with Captain Johnson.

An organized, non-profit corporation was formed in February 1994 to make the vision a reality by Mr. Cresswell and Captain Johnson. The corporation decided on the project name - Community Center for Youth Development. The youth programming day care, education and health services are a very important part of the project. Although the center is identified as the youth development center-, -programming and services to our elderly population have not been overlooked.

The Board of Directors for the Community Center for Youth Development, Incorporated met on 2/26/94. The board approved a resolution to apply to Baltimore County for a Community Development Block Grant. The Block Grant was sought to purchase a structure in the complex, renovate it and its property.

In May 1994, after months of work on development of the project, then County Executive Roger Hayden, advised the Board of Directors that a Community Development Block Grant had been awarded in the amount of \$300,000.00.

In the months to follow, a suitable building was identified and purchased by the Corporation. Architectural design and specifications began in July of 1994. The group dealt with many hurdles throughout the summer of 1994, design requirements for daycare, handicapped and public

use, tax status, zoning and bid specifications were among the many issues to work out as the project progressed.

In the fall of 1994, architectural plans were finalized by Joseph P. Brandli, ALA the architect for the project. Throughout the remaining months of 1994, specifications for renovation were published and contractor inspections and bids for reconstruction were submitted. Captain Johnson began the process of meeting with various public and private organizations to attract interest in the project and seek their involvement. Health care services would be a vital service to the economically troubled area. After lengthy meetings with the private sector leadership at Franklin Square Hospital, the local hospital for the area, a full service health clinic in the center complete with examination rooms and referral services offering prenatal pediatric and geriatric services was established. He further sought the involvement of the mental health services community. When he was a patrol officer in this community, he recognized the desperate need for accessible mental health treatment. After numerous presentations to both private and public mental health providers, agreement was reached to provide such services in the center. Social Services would be an integral part of the center's success in addressing the communal pathologies that concerned Johnson. After months of working with the County Department of Social Services, a full time office was established in the center. The center will offer family and individual counseling, parenting skills, financial management skills, food pantry, and health care referral services.

Various county agencies were sought out to provide site-based programs in the center. The County Department of Recreation and Parks, Department of Aging, and the County Office of Substance Abuse have established offices and programs within the center. It was critical to convince other county agencies to set up on-site programs. The lack of private and public transportation services inhibited citizens from utilizing various programs offered in the county.

In a joint effort with the County Health Department, a Domestic Abuse Referral and Counsel Program was established to be operated out of the center. Captain Johnson continued selling the concept of the center throughout 1994 to community groups and political leaders. He encountered difficulty, some viewed the project as another government handout, others claimed that this project was a departure- from the conservative get tough attitude gaining momentum in the state and community. Numerous meetings were held with any group expressing concern or interest in the project.

The project had to be sold to the field personnel assigned to Johnson's precinct. What role would the local police assume, how involved in the project would we be. As did some members of the public, there were officers in the command that did not support this type of resource spending. This was an exhaustive process of communicating the impact the center would have and gaining the support of the precinct.

Captain Johnson resisted efforts to accept and establish police satellite locations offered to him by more than six affordable housing communities in his precinct. He would not agree to such a location in the community center structure he had started. To gain the support of

his personnel and further community resident involvement, he developed a community association/community patrol private security and county police office concept for the center. All would play an equal role in a partnership to address what heretofore was a police only responsibility. The Community Outreach Unit of the Essex Precinct worked throughout the spring of 1995 to establish a community association and community on patrol to move into the center upon its opening. Johnson worked with the more than 40 owners of the 105 building complex convincing them to devote the financial resources to provide private security in the complex to bring the joint public safety office concept together. The owners association agreed to fund for private security services and budget yearly *for* private security.

Captain Johnson realizing that the center's growing* list of providers created administrative and management concerns, sought public funding to hire an executive director for the center. After several meetings with the Baltimore county Citizens Foundation, a private group of business and individuals, the center was awarded a grant to retain an executive director. The role of the executive, in addition to administering the daily affairs of the center, will be fundraising to cover salaries and utilities costs.

While the task of establishing the center alone was very time consuming, it was but a part of the holistic strategic plan for the Tall Trees Community. Traditional enforcement on foot, bike, vehicle, undercover narcotic, and intelligence, has and will continue to be a priority for the complex.

Defensible space plans, crime reduction through environmental controls have been developed by Johnson and the County Planning and Zoning Office. He has further formed a partnership with this office, Together they have blocked undesirable businesses from establishing adjacent to or in the project site. His work with Traffic Engineering brought about roadway pattern changes in the complex. This effort created safer movement of traffic and aided the ability to enforce drug and prostitution violations.

Captain Johnson through his partnership with the local County area Chamber of Commerce brought pressure on the ownership of the complex to create drastic reform in their management practices. Together in a partnership, Johnson and the Chamber brought about changes in the complexes background check screening process, lease agreements, lighting, maintenance of the structures, private security, rental practices, eviction process, trespassing enforcement, resident identification, and parking restrictions.

Meetings were requested with the County State's Attorney's Office to address his concerns associated with trespass enforcement and establishment enhanced narcotic prosecution for those arrested in the target area.. Through the County's Legal Division, Johnson requested that legislation be introduced to stop property owners from evicting property into the public roadways of the affordable housing communities. These mass evictions as many as a dozen dwellers at a time, contributed further to the broken windows effect of the area and diminished the esteem of those remaining in the complex. County Code was eventually passed by working with his local councilmen to prohibit this practice.

The local media was utilized to send a positive message to the Essex area while reporting the facts by Johnson. Despite efforts on behalf of some building owners to keep media out, they were encouraged to attend all meetings and given full access to all information possessed by county agencies. They were kept up to date on crime and social statistical information and encouraged to use the material in their articles.

It is clear that the vision begun during a meeting some 11 months earlier was coming about. The insight, dedication despite adversity and true commitment to the community, kept the group moving forward. The renovation to the structure was expected to take several months. In August 1995, the center will open.

The approximately 4500 square feet facility will become the heart of the community revitalization effort. Community resident involvement is critical to the success of the center and will become an on-going requirement for the complex.

Funding for the maintenance of the structure and its utilities will become a yearly task for the community, Board of Directors, and the executive director.

Government services will now have a permanent accessible structure to provide needed assistance to the community. Perhaps the most critical benefit, the center will provide a meeting place, a location of mediation, resolution and empowerment of those in the affordable housing complex for many years to come. The intent of the center is to provide an improved quality of life for the working poor and elderly on a fixed income. It will facilitate community efforts to help those families

dependent on public support to stand on their own. It will develop and educate youth and adults alike. The center will help stabilize the community. Community development and rehabilitation will grow from this new site of hope, pride, and example.

Weakened family and communal ties that bind people together and result in social disorganization will be addressed in the Community Center for Youth Development. The center will address a range of social pathologies including crime. The reduction in police calls for service in Tall Trees will allow us to move on to the next community in need.