

CITY OF LONG BEACH

POLICE DEPARTMENT

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JEROME E. LANCE
Chief of Police

02-22

March 15,2002

Police Executive Research Forum
1120 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 930
Washington, DC 20036

Attention: Herman Goldstein Award Selection Committee

Dear Selection Committee Members:

As the Chief of Police for the City of Long Beach, I would like to ask for your serious consideration of our award submission for the Herman Goldstein Award for our Department's collaboration with the Fresh Start program.

The Long Beach Police Department's community policing philosophy involves active participation in multi-agency, community enhancing collaborations, such as the Fresh Start program. The Department's contribution to the Fresh Start program includes a full time Police Services Assistant, a supervising Sergeant, community policing officers, and officers from other details as needed.

The Department is a strong collaborator to the Fresh Start program because it is based on successful, community policing principles. The positive changes that have come about in the communities where these former problem properties were located makes me proud to submit this valued program. Please join me in acknowledging the many team players from our Department, as well as the participating agencies, in their efforts to improve the lives of our Long Beach residents.

Sincerely,



Jerome E. Lance
Chief of Police

JEL:AWB:MP:ei
Gold.lett.doc

Attachments

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The Fresh Start Program

Long Beach Police Department

Summary

The Problem: Nuisance properties in the City of Long Beach that were constantly generating a high volume of calls for service, reoccurring property maintenance violations, and blight.

Analysis: The Long Beach Police Department was one of the agencies that recognized the connection between the lower quality of life in the communities where the problem properties were located, and the need to address the issues in a comprehensive, multi-agency long term approach to bring the affected communities back to a healthy state. Police, Planning and Building, Fire, Health, Housing, and utilities recognized their duplication of efforts when taking action against problem properties. The Strike Force Committee composed of representatives from Police, Health, Code Enforcement, Fire and Community Development created the Fresh Start Program to address all of the multi-agency violations in a coordinated manner.

Response: The Strike Force committee implemented the Fresh Start Program and put it into action against the most problematic, blighted properties. The program was staffed with a full time Police Services Assistant and a Building Inspector. The Fresh Start Program consisted of the following steps:

1. Owners were advised of specific problems and given the tools to assist them in resolving deficiencies.
2. The owner was then given 30 to 60 days to bring their property into compliance.
3. The property was monitored for one year to ensure continued code compliance.
4. Failure to resolve problems lead to:
 - a. Closure of the building (For drug abatement issues)
 - b. Strike Force action
 - c. Referral to the City Attorney for civil and/or criminal charges
 - d. Referral to the Neighborhood Nuisance abatement program;More than one of the above abatement actions could have been imposed to gain compliance.

Assessment

After implementation of the Fresh Start program, 126 problem properties were added to the Fresh Start Program for 2001. Two properties were improved from Code 9 status (two responding officers required) to only one officer required on calls for service. Duplicate efforts between responding agencies have been greatly reduced, and the time required to reach compliance has been reduced. The calls for service at these two properties were reduced.

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Scanning

Long Beach is a port city that extends over 50 square miles, with a diverse population of 461,522 residents and a population density of 9,230 residents per square mile. The majority of citizens that are renters live in large apartment complexes of 10 or more units (44,257 or 26% of all renters). The housing stock is considered old, with 71,012 (41.7%) of units built between 1940 and 1959.

The City of Long Beach has been plagued by problem rental properties that have become rundown, out of compliance with local codes, and a source of increased calls for service. The problem properties not only blight the immediate community, but also negatively affect the entire city. As an example, North Long Beach has three major commercial and industrial corridors located along Atlantic Boulevard, Long Beach Boulevard, and Artesia Boulevard. For the most part, the residential areas along these corridors are composed of relatively sound single-family neighborhoods with pockets of overcrowded and deteriorating structures. In contrast, the commercial properties along these corridors consist of aging strip commercial buildings characterized by physical deterioration, substandard design, and a lack of adequate parking. Community members long ago expressed their concern over the negative effects these commercial properties exerted on the nearby residential areas.

The City of Long Beach took note of the interest expressed by residents and business affected by the aging commercial areas, and in doing so, created the North Long Beach Redevelopment Project. The residents were rightly aware of the many deleterious effects blighted properties had on their communities as evidenced by the fact that one fourth of all crimes that occurred in the City of Long Beach from 1991 to 1994 took place in the North Long Beach Redevelopment Project Area (see attached map). A large portion of the North Long Beach Redevelopment Project Area is an exact match for the Police Department's North Division Area (see map in the Analysis section).

The impact problem properties have on residential areas within the City of Long Beach include lower home ownership rates, lower quality of life, lower median home values and rents. The unsafe, crime-ridden, quality-of-life issues encountered by the patrol officers at the same dangerous properties on a continual basis, prompted the Department to want to become involved in a program to improve the quality of life for residents for the long term. In 1996, The Fresh Start program started operating with staffing provided by one full-time Police Services Assistant (PSA) and one building inspector. The PSA coordinated the actions taken against properties by multiple-agencies. The PSA also coordinated Strike Force actions against the worst properties. In coordinating the Strike Force, the PSA determined which agencies to call out to a property and also was the lead point-of-contact in communicating with the Police Department to request officer assistance.

The stakeholders were identified as homeowners, renters, local residents, the Police Department, and local businesses.

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Analysis

Observations provided by patrol and community policing officers provided anecdotal evidence that the Fresh Start program was indeed improving the living conditions at crime-ridden locations. What made the program work well was a steady source of referrals. A variety of methods were used to collect information on problem properties: citizen complaints, referrals from any agency connected with the site, such as the electrical utility, Gas Department, and Police. Strike Force Committee members also made referrals to the Fresh Start staff directly. Fresh Start staff researched the history of the problem properties, which included statistics from Planning and Building, Police, Fire, Housing, and utility companies.

As evidenced in the chart below, patrol actively participated in the Fresh Start program by providing 79 problem property referrals. Officer referrals were also made by Community Policing, Gang Enforcement, Vice, Narcotics, and the Bike Patrol.

FRESH START

	May	June	July	Aug.	Sit.'	Oct'	Nov	Dec.	TOTAL
Meetings Attended	2	5	6	2	3	3	2	1	
Referrals:									
From Patrol	0	10	1	16	10	23	8	11	79
From Other City Depts.	1	2	11	5	5	13	3	5	45
Out to Other City Depts.	0	0	5	12	6	22	5	5	55
Properties Inspected:	1	12	11	21	15	36	18	16	120
Assists for Section 8	0	11	9	10	10	19	19	16	94

If, after review, Fresh Start staff found that a property was constantly generating public nuisance activities, the property owner was contacted by the Strike Force committee. The owner was asked to contact the Fresh Start program to schedule a meeting. Property owners were provided with a list of violations, and were referred to resources within the city that could provide them assistance in making the needed improvements.

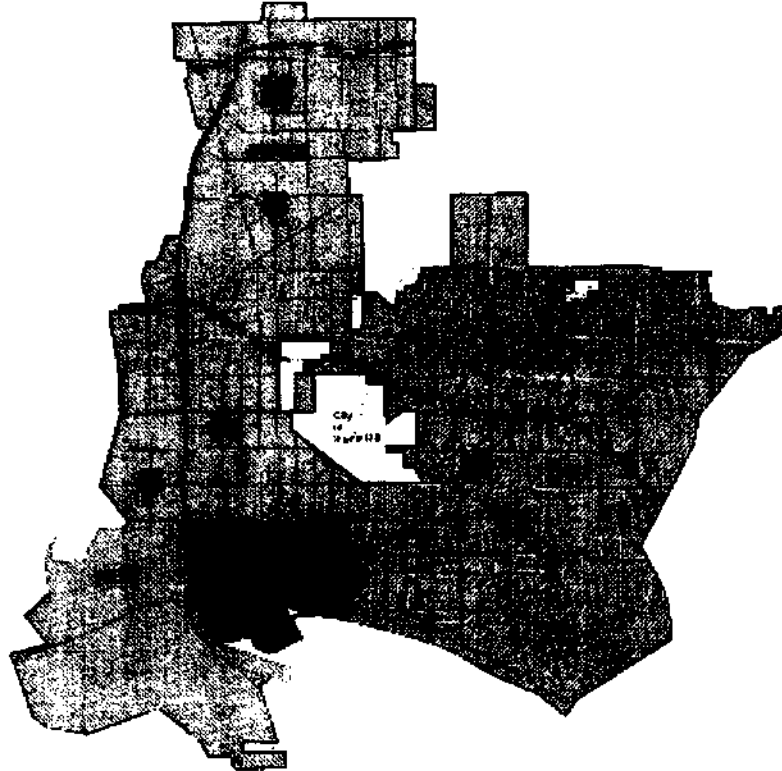
The Fresh Start program staff created a status report database that tracked the property address, date the complaint was received, and the referring agency, a column for actions taken against the property, and a section detailing further action taken by other agencies. While reviewing the data, Fresh Start staff noticed the prevalence of frequent and multiple actions taken against the same properties for the same problems. A review of the problem properties shed further light on the profile of the owners of the most dilapidated, crime-ridden properties in the Fresh Start program. The problem property owners were usually motivated only by greed, with no regard for the physical condition of their properties or the dire living conditions of their tenants. Some landlords purchased property strictly for the cash flow from all of the rent payments with no intention of making needed repairs and renovations.

As of year end 2001, the Fresh Start program has brought coordinated enforcement and abatement actions against 126 problem properties. The Long Beach Police Department divides the city into the following divisions: North, South, East, and West. The problem Fresh Start properties were located within the divisions as follows:

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Division	Fresh Start Properties
West	44
South	37
North	28
East	17
Total	126



An analysis of problem property locations revealed that the highest concentration of Fresh Start problem properties was in the West division. The South division, with the second highest number of Fresh Start properties, mirrored its high population density and prevalence of large, multi-unit apartment complexes. The more affluent East division had the lowest number of Fresh Start properties (17), which is indicative of the division's higher income and home ownership levels.

Two of the properties that required the most intensive abatement actions were used as an indicator of the effectiveness of the Fresh Start program in reducing calls for service. It should be noted that these properties had been formerly designated Code 9 by the communications center, thus requiring two officers to respond due to unsafe conditions.

The average number of calls for service was calculated on a before and after Fresh Start Program basis:

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4800 Block Long Beach Blvd.

	Before Fresh Start	After Fresh Start
Average Monthly Calls for Service	14	4.3
Code 9 Status	On	Off

1900 Block of Atlantic Boulevard

	Before Fresh Start	After Fresh Start
Average Monthly Calls for Service	7.3	5
Code 9 Status	On	Off

Response

After reviewing the very positive results obtained by the Department's collaboration with the Fresh Start program, officers realized that assisting the program with immediate law enforcement activities was in fact helping to restore the long-term health of the communities located near the problem properties. The focus of the Fresh Start program has been to target the most severe properties that require multi-agency coordination to bring back into acceptable living conditions.

Officers realized the need to participate in a second program that intended to proactively focus on properties starting to exhibit minor signs of blighting and problems. The Department decided to participate in a new Code Compliance Collaborative program that is more proactive in nature and addresses the smaller blight issues before they reach a chronic state of blight. The Code Compliance Program (CCP) is a three-year program, which is implemented in a 2.5-mile area of the city. The CCP team meets with the Council member for the district on a quarterly basis. The community is advised of the program progress in their neighborhoods. The goals of the program are to improve housing conditions, retain affordable housing, build healthy neighborhoods, and to clean blighted areas.

The Long Beach Police Department has dedicated a full time community policing officer to the Code Compliance Program. The team is made up of:

- One Police officer
- Two Code Enforcement Inspectors
- One Community Planner
- One Public Health Nurse
- One Environmental Health Specialist
- « One Deputy City Prosecutor
- One Criminal Records Specialist

The Department's strategy to address the issues of blight in our neighborhoods is to participate in two code compliance collaborative programs that focus on improving problem properties:

1. Participation in the Fresh Start program will address the serious, long-standing problem properties (For example: dilapidated, unsafe structures, and major code violations).

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2. Participation in the Code Compliance program will address the smaller problems in a preventative, proactive manner (For example: trash, overgrown vegetation, and abandoned vehicles).

Assessment

The Fresh Start program has improved the living conditions and lowered the fear of crime in the properties that house numerous citizens, that prior to Fresh Start, lived in un-safe, dilapidated, gang and drug infested apartments. Approximately 10 Fresh Start properties have been cleared of all violations in 2001, and the rest of the properties are in various stages of compliance or monitoring following compliance. Please refer to the attached before and after pictures for a glimpse of the dramatic improvement in two of the most troubled Fresh Start program properties.

Active collaboration in the Fresh Start program, especially by the Community Policing divisions, has opened a valuable, synergistic line of communication with city agencies that frequently provide valuable crime and environmental information at Strike Force meetings conducted by Code Enforcement on a regular basis.

The Department has gained an expertise in community policing principles and problem-solving approaches that encompass the entire community, not just the criminal. The Department recognized the need to not only focus on enforcement, but to proactively participate in those programs that will improve the living conditions and lower the crime rate for the entire community. To improve the long-term outlook for our community, the Department will continue to participate in community enhancing programs. Blight tends to behave in a vicious cycle; blight conditions lead to a continuous state of crime and deterioration. The Department recognizes that without addressing the problems that caused the blight in the first place, a permanent improvement in the health of the neighborhood will not be achieved.

Active participation by patrol, community policing, gangs, narcotics and other details in the Fresh Start program, and more recently, the Code Compliance Program, is evidence of the Department's commitment not only to short-term enforcement, but also to long term, permanent community healing measures.

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For More Information

To obtain more information about the Long Beach Police Department's integral role in the Fresh Start program, contact:

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