

Arlington Strong Neighborhood Initiative Pilot Area

Summary

Successful neighborhood initiatives are shaped locally to respond to the needs of populations and to assure that communities have a genuine sense of ownership. It is necessary to take time to find out how neighborhood residents really feel about where they live, what their hopes are, what their fears are, and what is working in their neighborhoods and what is not. Most important, new partnerships must be created; partnerships between city department and neighborhood groups, between local reform efforts and outside intermediaries, and between the grassroots stakeholders that bring the local wisdom and the outside investor who have access to power and capital.

In the case of Arlington's Strong Neighborhood Initiative, neighborhood focus groups were utilized to help further identify common ground, centers of strength and opportunities for action in the community. The groups were as diverse as possible, representing every major interest and perspective in the community and representing the community's demographic diversity in terms of age, race, gender, perspective and places of residence and employment. Special effort and attention was given to tapping into populations and people that are traditionally absent from the community process (minorities, seniors, renters, etc.). All of the key stakeholders participated in the development of a common agenda.

Scanning:

Various areas of the city suffered from neighborhood blight and was evidenced in consistent increased in violent and property crimes. Discussions focused on neighborhoods. City staff members were challenged with creating and sustaining neighborhoods that were youthful, safe, livable, fiscally strong, and intellectually stimulating. In addition, a

reinvigorating effort was put in place to ensure sustainability by leveraging resources, increasing citizen participation and encouraging community stakeholder collaborations. The goals were to:

- Grow and diversify the economy
- Maintain a competitive workforce
- Focus on redeveloping areas
- Enhance the quality of life
- Promote cooperation and inclusiveness

A focus group comprised of a representative from each city department was created. The focus group created a pilot area to further narrow the focus. The area comprised over 1,900 single family houses, 33 duplexes, four apartment complexes and 89 commercial businesses. This allowed for the coordination of valuable resources and review of best practices, aimed at engaging all city departments, citizens, and businesses in the process of re-invigorating neighborhoods. Addressing crime, code violations, and other quality of life issues were the main focus of the pilot area.

Analysis:

Patrol units and storefront units and H.E.A.T. units addressed crime issues including gangs, prostitution, homeless issues, and code issues. Cross collaboration efforts were many. A joint operation was run in where 270 homes were contacted by Code Ranger volunteers, Code enforcement and Police officers. A joint BMV/garage burglary and top-ten code violation report card was handed out addressing issues of crime, crime prevention, and quality of life issues. These cards were aimed at addressing the neighborhood to prevent any “broken windows syndrome” from contributing to the crime. The Arlington Fire Department distributed 1,000 pamphlets on door hangers to homes in the pilot area. The pamphlets had issues from code, police, fire, libraries and other city services as part of the effort to train and to leverage resources and garner more “eyes on the street”.

Response/Activity:

As a result of efforts, three citizen watch groups were formed in the area. One of the groups has three trained members in the Citizens on Patrol program. One substantial business watch group was formed which contributed heavily to the resolution of prostitution and homeless issues. A baseline was established of the area both from a code violation standpoint and criminal activity standpoint. After the baseline report, voluntary compliance coupled with police, fire and code efforts has produced a much “cleaner area” where crime is “less likely” to occur. The overall numbers are down in the areas where the highest citizen and business engagement occurred. Comparing the August 2006 to June 2007 time period to August 2005 to June 2006, an overall 4.3% decrease in violent crime offenses occurred with the strongest declines in robbery (by 50%) and theft (14.5%).

Code Rangers are a reality and participated in the area “policing” the top ten code violation issues. Neighborhood academies are underway and at least two have been conducted addressing citizen responsibility in a strong neighborhood and how best to interface with the city. Most goals have been met as set by the council and the “pilot” has been made into a regular operational area. A new area is coming into review on the north side of Arlington for similar project and objectives.

Assessment:

The Arlington Police Department and other city departments frequently meet to address issues and to continue to inject focus in this area. Support of the business groups, citizen action groups, and citizen watch groups will continue as part of the overall strategy of leveraging resources and creating more “eyes on the street”. While these goals were in large part met, the “sustainability” will only come about by continued partnerships with Police, Fire, Code and other city

departments with these groups until they mature enough to function largely on their own as a participating partner in the neighborhood process.

Agency and Officer Information

This initiative began at the Mayor and Council level and involved all city departments. The pilot area lies under the responsibility of the East Patrol District. East District patrol officers have been trained in the top-ten code violations and contribute both in enforcement and reporting.

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