

Summary

The Oliver/Montello Neighborhood located geographically in the northeast area of the City of Reno had been for the past 25 years an area of crime, suburban blight, violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and had a sense of neighborhood frustration with tension between the citizens and the local government. The location of Pat Baker Park is in the middle of this neighborhood and makes it a prime area for foot and vehicle traffic being between a high school to the north, a middle and elementary school to the south and with two convenience stores within a block of the park. There was a small strip mall within a block of the park that had been infested with criminal activities and was used a cover from the authorities. The problem was well recognized by the police department, the media and the citizens of the community. Traditional police methods were a temporary and very limited fix to the high calls for service, drug dealing and violence in the neighborhood.

Surveys, neighborhood contact teams, community meetings and meetings with school district personnel were convened to bring all of the stakeholders together. A committee was formed with these multiple organizations both private and public to determine a multi-pronged course of action to take. The results were clear and sustained as the amount of emergency service calls to the area plummeted. There was a 35% reduction in police calls for service from 2005 to 2010. We began to see an increase of neighborhood pride and a sense of ownership in the community. Sustained and continual monitoring of the neighborhood is necessary to eradicate any small problems that might quickly escalate as the neighborhood is still a target for those who exploit those in economically distressed neighborhoods. With the current economic downturn, funds that had been allocated to provide a neighborhood community center have dwindled. Community and City involvement are essential to keeping the on-going trend positive during these challenging times.

Scanning

The nature of the problem was crime, both petty and violent along with drug and alcohol abuse. The Oliver/Montello area was close to two major arterial roads, had a small commercial area at the edge of the neighborhood within close proximity to a park and in between a high school, middle school and elementary school. The neighborhood had experienced suburban blight with unkempt yards, drug houses, abandoned vehicles and a park that was unsafe for children and citizens. Nearby residents did not feel safe or secure in their neighborhood and rarely used the park. The park had broken play equipment, weed infested landscaping, lacking any bathrooms or structures and very little

lighting. The problems were readily identified by the police, the neighborhood and community leaders. This was seen as a high priority due to the volume of emergency calls, the length of time this neighborhood had been in jeopardy and the dangers to the community especially the school children who walked through it on a daily basis. The initial diagnosis was that the problem was multifaceted and needed more than just law enforcement involvement.

Analysis

The problems in the Oliver Montello area had existed for the past 25 years. Law enforcement efforts were initially sporadic and incident based response. They targeted a specific incident, crime or group. They did not look at the overall issues of the fear and intimidation in the neighborhood, poverty, blight, nuisances, and a feeling of abandonment from local government.

In 2005, law enforcement began more consistent efforts with high visibility patrols, undercover buy/bust operations and gang suppression efforts. Surveys, community meetings, crime analysis, neighborhood, church and school groups were all used in determining the problem. Officers and volunteers went door to door with questionnaires to find out citizen concerns and bring them back to community meetings to review results. Crime Analysis clearly showed the high calls for service and then uncovered the significant number of arrests of individuals that did not reside in the community. Neighborhood church and school groups all voiced their concerns about the quality of life, the safety of the community and what improvements they would like to see. It became clear that a very small minority of businesses and residences harbored the

criminal activity responsible for bringing a large amount of transient population into the neighborhood to conduct criminal activity, mainly drug dealing. When these individuals came into the neighborhood they victimized the community as well as each other. The times associated with criminal activity coincided with lunch, after school and work hours continuing on into the evening.

Response

Traditional law enforcement operations were tried in the past, such as undercover buy/bust operations and gang sweeps through the neighborhood. Unfortunately these efforts would merely increase the tension between police and the community due to some citizens from the neighborhood being swept up during these operations. Once these operations were completed there would be very little assessment and follow-up to accurately gauge if there had been any permanent impact to the neighborhood. Some of the other alternatives that were tried with limited success were changing traffic thoroughfares into one way streets directing the traffic from the north and west to all flow out south to the main arterial road. This strategy was met with frustration from the residents in the neighborhood who saw this as an inconvenience to them and having no impact on the traffic coming into the area.

The Mayor, City Council and City Manager made a collective commitment to the residents of the area, in effect by saying, “enough is enough.” In October of 2007, at a neighborhood meeting with over 100 community stakeholders present, the City Manager echoed this commitment and made it clear that the community residents deserve to live in a safe and healthy environment just like every other resident in the City of Reno. One of

the key participants was the newly appointed Community Action Officer for the north district. He had already begun creating partnerships in the community and by the time of this meeting, had the following groups in attendance: Public Works, Code Enforcement, Parks and Recreation, Economic Development, Join Together Northern Nevada, Washoe County Juvenile Services, Community Service Agency Development Corporation, Second Baptist Church, Youth Art Works, Washoe County School District, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Washoe County Sheriffs Department, Boys and Girls Club of Truckee Meadows, Waste Management, Sierra Restrooms Solutions, Kids to Senior Corner, Saint Mary's Hospital, Northern Nevada Mental Health Institute and other partners.

Following this meeting four working subcommittees were created: Law Enforcement, Parks and Recreation, Code Enforcement and Redevelopment/ Economic Development. Each subcommittee was comprised of citizens with a minimum of one city advisor to keep the group on track. Each group developed their own action plans. For Law Enforcement they were: Community networking through daily contacts, integration a Community Action Officer, using high visibility patrols throughout the neighborhood as well as proactive contacts, intervention and enforcement, deployment of specialized enforcement and community action when needed, installation of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), and assessment of impact. For Parks, Recreation and Community Service they were: the addition of two new modular playgrounds with rubberized safety surfacing and curbing, new perimeter fencing for the park, new sidewalks, benches, trash receptacles and additional lighting in the park. Code Enforcement developed the following: a Neighborhood clean-up, "Notice of Enforcement Activities" letter mailed to home owners and tenants concerning targeted code enforcement activities and types of

issues and violations that will be aggressively enforced and continue increased door-to-door “good partnership” relationship building. For Redevelopment/Economic Development, which included Public Works, they were: Provide direct support for the evaluation/demolition of city acquired buildings, prioritize streets for resurfacing, redesign of parking around Pat Baker Park, child care/preschool, social service space/community service center, affordable and workforce housing.

A neighborhood clean-up was held in November of 2007 where residents discarded tons of refuse at no cost to them at a designated drop point within the neighborhood. Residents were able to have their junk vehicles towed at no expense during the clean up. A neighborhood barbeque was held at the park, to celebrate the beginning of its restoration.

The next major step was the City of Reno’s purchase of the commercial property in the neighborhood. Once the property was purchased, the city slated it for demolition in April of 2008. Again there was another neighborhood clean-up day scheduled, with a barbeque at the park and demolition of these buildings. The demolition company was able to recycle or reuse over 80% of the entire structures (350-500 tons) saving the City of Reno several thousand dollars in disposal costs and landfill fees. Residential property was additionally purchased by both the City of Reno and Reno Housing Authority. The properties ranged from empty lots to dilapidated drug houses. The majority of these properties were revitalized and families who qualified were able to move into these new modernized single family dwellings.

Assessment

The changes in the neighborhood were immediate and noticeable in both the appearance and feel when you spoke with the citizens. Families in the neighborhood took a caretaking approach to the neighborhood which is clearly evident in the amount of people that can be seen using the park and walking around the area.

New park equipment, bathrooms and restoration of the grounds have made it a neighborhood meeting place as well as a safe and friendly area for children to play. Community activities are held throughout the summer months in the park supported by the City of Reno along with non-profit organizations. A full range of recreational programs were offered in the surrounding schools to include: sports leagues, teen clubs, summer and holiday camps, recreation and art class and swimming lessons. A partnership with Community Services Agency (CSA) was established. CSA is a private non-profit social service agency with an associated non-profit development entity that moved into the area. CSA provides the following to the neighborhood: A Head Start Program with licensed childcare, energy education, financial education, technology education, free tax preparation, family financial management and fatherhood classes.

Public Works completed street maintenance, pothole filing, regular street sweeping of the area, snow removal during winter months, improved paint and signage, cleaning of the sewers and drain pipes on a regular basis. Improved street light in and around the park helped to increase visibility and removed hiding places for criminal activities.

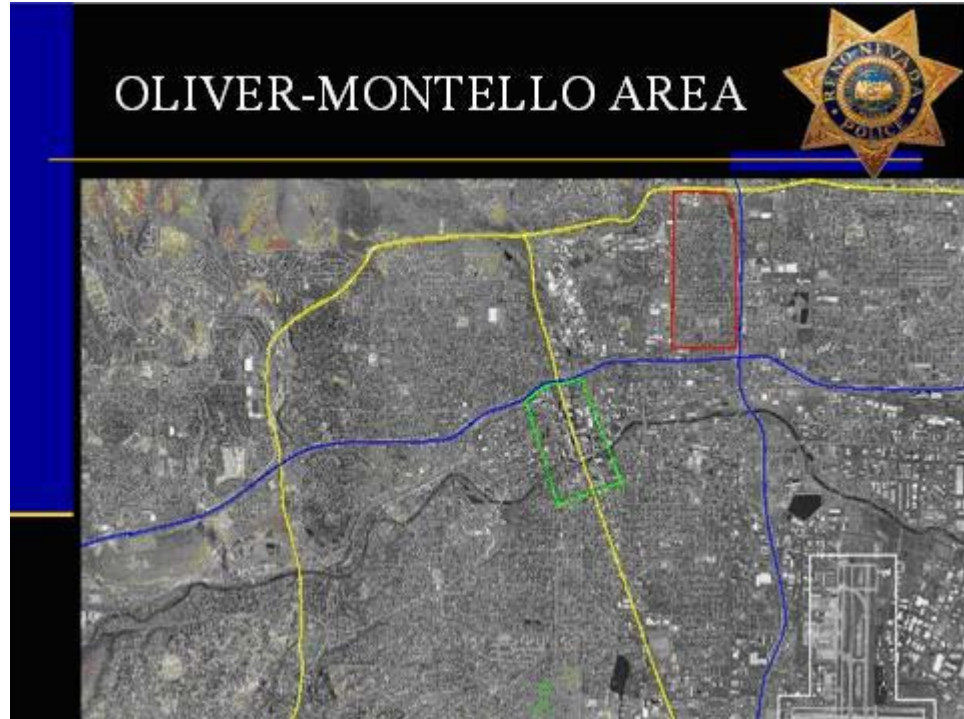
Blight, garbage, abandoned vehicles and rundown residences are a rarity in the neighborhood. Pot-holed streets were repaved with new signage for the streets; cracked and broken sidewalks were removed or repaired. Surveys were completed in the

neighborhood following the bulk of the responses have shown positive results in both community pride and satisfaction with the City of Reno's efforts. Neighborhood Advisory Meetings were initially held monthly for citizens to express any concerns or suggests but have been shifted to quarterly due to the current economic times. These meetings are attended by City Staff including a beat or CAO officer along with any other requested entity by the board.

Crime analysis showed an instantaneous reduction in crimes and police calls for service, this downward trend has continued to this day. There has been a 35% overall reduction of calls for service in the area from 2005-2010 with a 79% reduction in narcotics activity, 72% reduction in vehicle burglaries, 41% reduction in disturbance calls and 26% reduction in violent crime.

If the CAO, Code Enforcement Officers or residents come across any issues they are immediately dealt with to prevent them from swelling into a larger problem. There are occasionally spikes in calls for service as this is related to the residents being vigilant in notifying authorities of any criminal or nuisance activities. This neighborhood is still economically challenged and as a result of the current fiscal crisis the neighborhood community center has been out on hold. It is essential for the community and the city to continually monitor the area as it is still susceptible to unscrupulous individuals who may be returning from prison or other regions due to the current economic downturn. Cooperation between all the initial stakeholders continues to this day, and there is hope that through a grant or other non-profit ideas the visions of a community resource center with come to fruition.

Appendix:



OLIVER-MONTELLO NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE



- Years ago, the Oliver-Montello Neighborhood in northeast Reno was described by Reno Police officials as an "open air drug market" where teens were killed during gang warfare and drug dealers monopolized the area and surrounding businesses.
- Pat Baker Park, located at the center of the neighborhood was identified as a major source of the neighborhood's crime problems.
- Children didn't play in the park. Instead, drug needles and crack cocaine wrappers littered its ground.
- The culture of violence and drugs kept a tight hold on the neighborhood until 2005, when the Reno Police Department made it a priority to clean up crime and blight in the park.



PAT BAKER PARK



- Constructed in 3 days by civil rights activist Pat Baker as a tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968.
- Major milestone in the civil rights movement in this largely African-American neighborhood in Northeast Reno.



SCANNING



- Low police presence in the area due to high violence threat in the area.
- Calls for service response required a minimum of 3 officers on scene for cover and situational awareness.
- Neighborhood trust of the Police Department was very low.
- Businesses in the small strip mall in the area were used by drug dealers for sales operations and gang activity due to the high vehicle and foot traffic coming through the area.

EXPLOITED BUSINESSES



- Three buildings near the park were the source of many problems in the area.



NARCOTICS SALES



- Buildings and businesses used by drug dealers for narcotics trafficking.
- Buildings used to facilitate prostitution.
- Once vacant, buildings used as gang houses for local gangs and gangs from other areas.



NEIGHBORHOOD GANGS



- Gangs took hold of the neighborhood and exploited places like Pat Baker Park for use in their gang operations.



NEIGHBORHOOD BLIGHT



- Prior to neighborhood clean-up efforts, trash and other miscellaneous items littered the yards of many houses in the community.



ANALYSIS



- Crime problems gained control of the entire Oliver-Montello area and largely originated from Pat Baker Park.
- For approximately 25 years, the Oliver-Montello area had been plagued with higher crime and neighborhood problems compared to other neighborhoods in the city.
- The Oliver-Montello area became known for high crime incidents related to narcotics trafficking, shootings, robberies, and a variety of property crimes.
- Citizens in the area reported feeling unsafe.
- Traditional police operations were not successful in mitigating these problems.

ANALYSIS



- **Reno City Council members and volunteers went door-to-door to gain input from the citizens on how the issues in the Oliver-Montello area should be best handled, and how those issues impacted their lives.**
- **Neighborhood meetings and advisory boards were organized to gather information and input from the community, and to educate the citizens on how to prevent and report crime.**

RESPONSE



- Traditional policing methods proved ineffective.
- The Reno Police Department decided that in order to reduce crime in the Oliver-Montello area, we would have to use a problem oriented approach.
- Targeted the root cause of the crimes in the area.
- Reached out to the community to increase rapport and gain trust with the help of Officer foot patrols.
- 4 sub-committees were created and comprised of area residents and volunteers and at least one city employee.
- These sub-committees were given tasks to complete based on their expertise.
 - Sub-committees included:
 - Law Enforcement
 - Parks and Recreation
 - Code Enforcement
 - Redevelopment/Economic Development

COMMUNITY WIDE EFFORT



- Officers reached out to the community to gain help and support with cleaning up the park and the surrounding neighborhood.
- Reno City Council members, schools, community outreach programs, churches, city code enforcement and social services joined the Police Department to provide aid and support for the Oliver-Montello Initiative.

NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION



- Multiple homes and properties were purchased by the Reno Housing Authority.
- Homes were renovated and put up for sale, or used in rent-to-own projects that increased property values in the area.



DESTRUCTION OF PROBLEM BUILDINGS



- A party was held for the tear-down of the buildings that were used as drug houses.
- Neighborhood residents, community leaders, police officers and city council members attended the event.



Community residents watch as a building that once plagued their neighborhood is destroyed.

TAKING BACK THE PARK



- With help from the Reno Police Department and community leaders, citizens and local businesses helped to rebuild and reclaim the park.



COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT



- A neighborhood clean up was provided to residents to instill sense of ownership of the neighborhood.
- Residents were able to throw away 350-500 tons of trash at no cost to them.
- Junk vehicles towed away at no cost.
- Residents enjoyed a Barbeque in Pat Baker Park to celebrate this ongoing revitalization.



Officer Michael Guider works with neighborhood children to clean-up and rebuild Pat Baker Park.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT



- Volunteers from the neighborhood and other community groups came together for two massive clean-up efforts.



ASSESSMENT

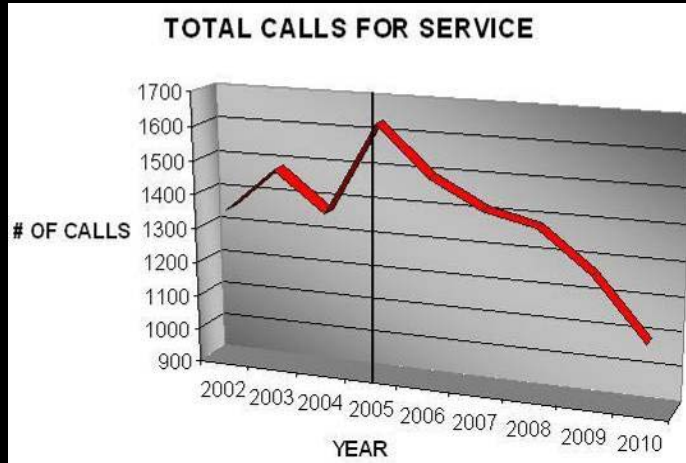


- **35%** reduction in total calls for service in the Oliver-Montello area since the beginning of the project in 2005.
- **79%** reduction in narcotics activity.
- **72%** reduction in vehicle burglaries.
- **41%** reduction in disturbance calls.
- **26%** reduction in violent crime.
- Better quality of life for residents of the area.
- Pat Baker Park now used for recreation by families.
- Sense of pride and ownership instilled with the community.

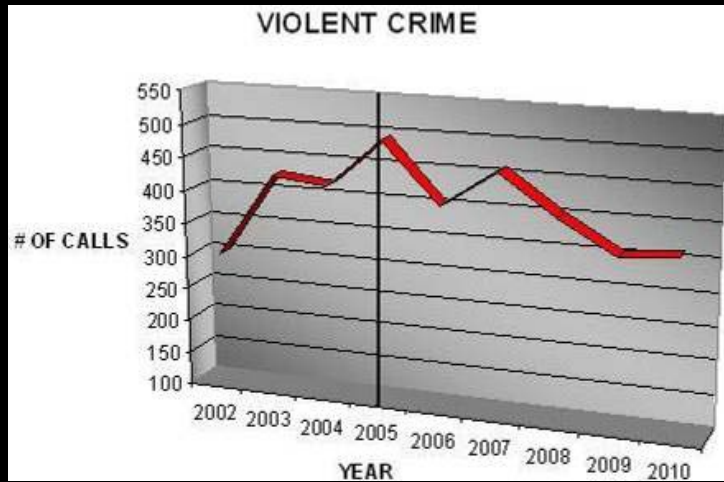
CALLS FOR SERVICE IMPACT



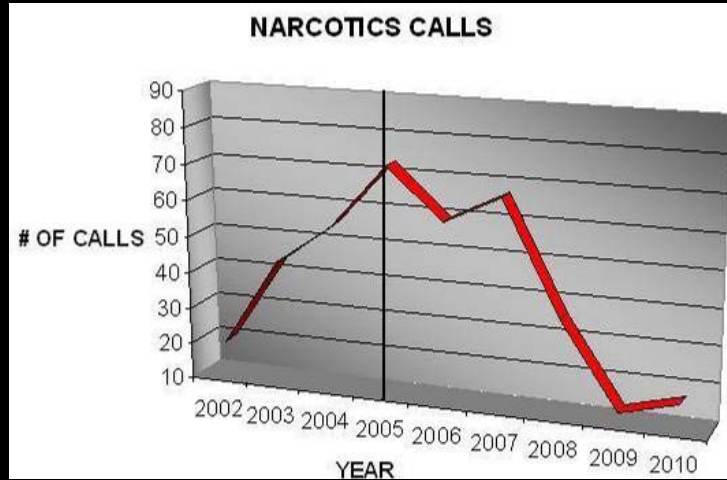
- Since the beginning of the Oliver-Montello Initiative in 2005 there has been a steady decrease in Calls for Service in the neighborhood.



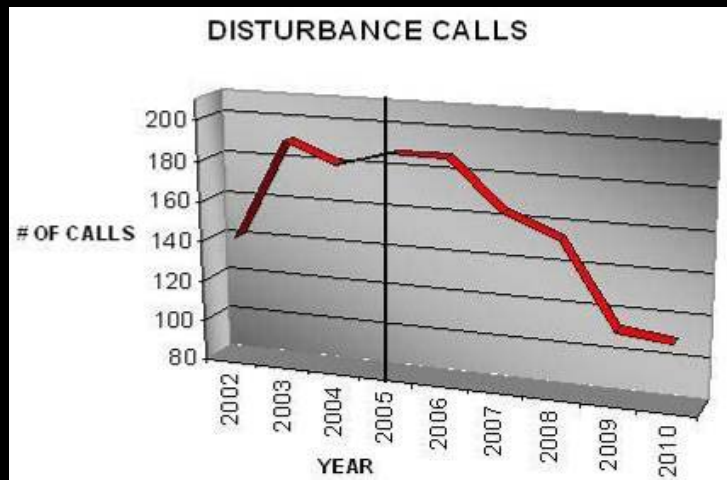
VIOLENT CRIME REDUCTION



NARCOTICS ACTIVITY REDUCTION



DISTURBANCE CALL REDUCTION



FUTURE PLANS



- Potential uses for vacant commercial properties:

- Housing
- Live/Work Opportunities
- Financial Institution
- Small Business Incubator
- Childcare/Preschool
- Service Center
- Multi-Purpose Center



FUTURE PLANS



- Continue open communications with city departments and neighborhood groups.
- Community Action Team (CAT) monitors area and brings resources to bear when any problems are encountered.
- Crime Analysis monitors calls for service in the area and forwards information to CAT.
- Maintain relationships with stakeholders and hold quarterly Neighborhood Advisory Board Meetings.

Link to video:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/CityofReno#p/u/6/5gzGQS6KFTY>