

“Fixing Broken Windows”

A Collaborative Approach to Housing Remediation



Summary
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The City of New Rochelle is located in the southern tier of New York State, in lower Westchester County and fifteen miles north of midtown Manhattan. With a population of 73,346 it is the seventh largest city in the state. The Police Department responds to over 50,000 calls for service annually.

The city of New Rochelle, for the last several decades, has experienced an evolving demographic landscape. This evolution, along with three major colleges, a considerable number of undocumented aliens, a large number of day laborers and housing that dates to the early 1900's have all contributed to a large number of dwellings that are susceptible to abuse. The health of a city can be mirrored by a healthy housing stock. Conversely illegal housing unaddressed is synonymous to the theory of Broken Windows. Ignored, they lead to greater and greater problems.

Illegal housing tears away at the fabric of the neighborhood. For several years the Police Department received an increasing number of complaints associated with quality of life problems. These complaints were generated from various and numerous parts of the city. Many were systemic of building and fire code violations, as well as overcrowding and illegal housing. The Department was utilizing a traditional approach in responding to these calls for service. It would service complaints that fell under their jurisdiction and all other complaints would be forwarded to the proper agency. As many of the complaints received were repeats, it was obvious they weren't being addressed in an effective and efficient manner. The Department's response and ensuing referrals demonstrated the need for a more effective and efficient approach to these issues. Thus, a multi-agency task force was established to coordinate resources and respond in unison to address these complaints.

In August of 2007, the Police Department spearheaded the creation of a multi-agency task force comprised of the Police, Fire, Buildings, Public Works and the County Electrical Inspectors whose efforts were overseen by the Law Department. The above agencies formed a Quality of Life Task Force. Their mission was to inspect residential properties throughout the City which had a negative impact on the safety and quality of life for residents of New Rochelle.

The Quality of Life Task Force has taken both a proactive and reactive approach in choosing locations to be inspected. Prospective sites are developed from a variety of sources: private citizens, neighborhood associations, as well as the Office of Off Campus Housing for the local colleges. Locations are also noted from observations and reports provided by both fire and police personnel during routine calls for service. Potential locations that are considered for inspection are usually in violation of state or local building codes and or local police and fire codes. During their monthly meetings, members of the task force exchange information and review and formulate a list of locations to be inspected.

To date, the Quality of Life Task force has inspected nearly 200 locations throughout the City of New Rochelle. These inspections have resulted in the issuance of 557 summonses for various building, fire, and police code violations. Violations ranged from minor violations to hazardous and potentially life threatening conditions. Of the locations inspected, 84 were found to be non-owner occupied properties which were illegally profiting from the NYS STAR Program¹. Since August 2007, as a result of removing these properties from the STAR Program, the Quality of Life Task Force has saved the State of NY over \$225,960 dollars.

In addition to achieving its goal of improving the quality of life for the citizens of New Rochelle, the Quality of Life Task Force has reduced calls for service, uncovered and corrected life-threatening hazards, fostered lasting working partnerships with other City Agencies, bolstered the Police Department's standing in the community, and saved hundreds of thousands of dollars for the State. Landlords and/or homeowners who engage in illegal property conversions, rent apartments to college students beyond the legal capacity, or take advantage of undocumented aliens by crowding them into unlawful rooms or apartments, will no longer operate with impunity. A system is now in place to rectify those conditions and hold violators accountable.

¹ This School Tax Relief Program includes a partial property tax exemption as well as a school property tax rebate for owner occupied properties.

New Rochelle Police Department New Rochelle, New York

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Scanning

The city of New Rochelle, for the last several decades, has experienced an evolving demographic landscape. This evolution, along with three major colleges, a considerable number of undocumented aliens, a large number of day laborers and housing that dates to the early 1900's have all contributed to a large number of dwellings that are susceptible to abuse. It can be said that the health of a city can be mirrored by a healthy housing stock, and illegal housing unaddressed, is synonymous to the theory of Broken Windows. Illegal housing tears away at the fabric of the neighborhood .For several years the Police Department was receiving an increasing number of complaints associated with quality of life problems. Complaints were being received from neighborhood associations, private residents, local businesses and elected officials. These complaints were being generated from various parts of the city from numerous problem locations. Many of these problems were systemic of building and fire code violations, as well as overcrowding and illegal housing. Additionally, the demand placed by this overcrowding and illegal housing problem was straining and overwhelming the available resources of city services and the local school system. The Department was utilizing a traditional approach in responding to these calls for service. The Police Department would service complaints that fell under their jurisdiction and all other complaints would be forwarded to the proper agency. As many of the complaints received were repeat complaints, it was obvious the traditional approach was not

working. Complaints weren't being addressed in an organized, systematic and direct manner. The Department's response and ensuing referrals demonstrated the need for a more effective and efficient approach to these issues.

In August of 2007, the Police Department spearheaded the creation of the Quality of Life Task Force comprised of the Police, Fire, Buildings, Public Works and the County Electrical Inspectors whose efforts were overseen by the Law Department.

The mission was to inspect residential properties throughout the City which had a negative impact on the safety and quality of life for residents of New Rochelle. The Quality of Life Task Force would allow for coordination of resources and would respond in unison to address these complaints.

The objective of this Quality of Life Task Force was to set in motion a series of coordinated and corrective actions, such as community education of the type of complaints that were being received, as well as specific codes and laws that must be adhered to. Voluntary compliance was sought, but if that was not achieved appropriate enforcement would be warranted.

These and other actions would serve to repair the unhealthy housing stock, thus restoring neighborhood pride and achieve resident cooperation.

It was anticipated that by addressing quality of life complaints and associated problems, this would lead to a marked improvement in the housing stock. By improving the housing stock, a decrease in calls for service in related neighborhoods could be achieved, thus restoring neighborhood pride. Specifically, our goal was to improve the

quality of the housing stock, reduce criminal activity and reduce overall calls for service within the first 18-24 months. In the 24-36 month period the progress and sustainability of the program would be evaluated with anticipated additional decreases.

Analysis

Numerous techniques have been utilized to chart and evaluate the progress of this endeavor. Neighborhood/community meetings, involving the Quality of Life Task Force, Beat Officers, private residents, neighborhood associations, and off campus housing offices of the local colleges have contributed to a thorough analytical review of all contributing factors associated with these nuisance locations

An analysis of the Department's Records Management System was instrumental in the identification of specific locations with hazardous and life threatening conditions based on community complaints and repeat calls for service.

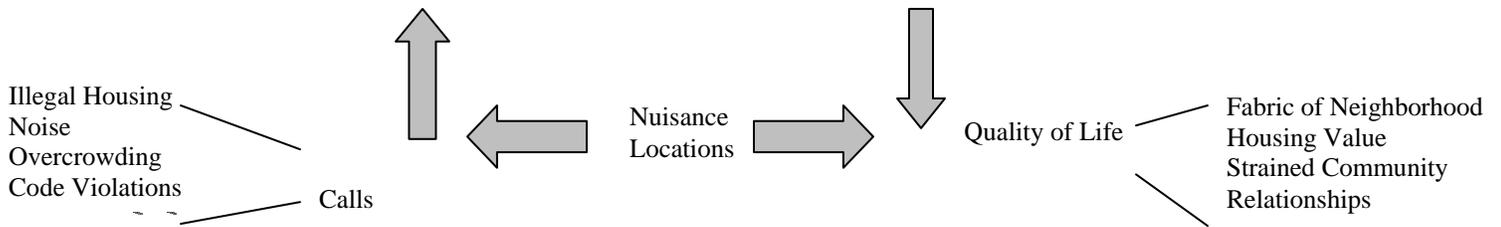
A weekly review was conducted to identify problem locations. These locations included both those previously identified as well as new locations that were deemed problematic.

Furthermore, a Quality of Life Synopsis was developed and distributed on a regular basis to each Quality of Life Task Force member. The synopsis included locations inspected, violations observed, actions taken and whether or not a follow-up inspection was required.

All of the above listed techniques and actions were beneficial to the tracking and evaluation of the initial project goals, which was to improve the quality of the housing stock, thereby decreasing criminal activity, and decreasing overall calls for service by 10%-15%.

The below cause and effect diagram summarizes the analysis

2nd Quarter 2007



- Inside of Specific Residences
- Repeat Complaints
- Increased Calls for Service
- Increased Community Complaints
- Hazardous and Life Threatening Conditions

Response

For several years the Police Department was receiving an increasing number of complaints associated with illegal housing. As many of the complaints received were repeat complaints, it was obvious the traditional approach was not working. Complaints weren't being addressed in an organized, systematic and direct manner. Our solution to the problem was the creation of a Quality of Life Task Force whose actions were coordinated by the Police Department. To address the illegal housing and associated problems, the Task Force would employ a multi-pronged attack using both educational and enforcement components.

The educational component consisted of a series of town hall meetings hosted by the Quality of Life Task Force. These meetings were held with citizen groups organized by local politicians, as well as newly formed neighborhood associations, and college administrators and students. Meetings were also set up with several local landlords who owned multiple dwellings and were the source of numerous complaints. In particular, overzealous landlords housing an excessive number of students and/or illegal aliens in substandard dwellings. The purpose of these meetings were twofold, educate the community on specific codes and laws that must be adhered to, and to gather information and a better understanding from citizens on complaints being received.

At the start of the project these meetings were held with individual groups, as a source of some of the complaints being received stemmed from friction between certain groups. As the project progressed we were able to hold meetings with multiple groups in

the same room. These groups were then able to gain a better understanding as to what each other's concerns were. Most times it was revealed that many of the concerns were similar and that different groups in the community shared the same goals. These meetings brought about renewed neighborhood pride and resident cooperation.

The second component consisted of enforcement. The Quality of Life Task Force has taken both a proactive and reactive approach in choosing locations to be inspected. Prospective sites are developed from a variety of sources: private citizens, neighborhood associations, as well as the Off Campus Housing Office for the local college. Locations are also noted from observations and reports provided by both fire and police personnel during routine calls for service. Potential locations that are considered for inspection are usually in violation of state or local building codes and or local police and fire codes. During their monthly meetings, members of the Task Force exchange information that has been developed and review and formulate a list of locations to be inspected. Although voluntary compliance was sought, if it was not achieved appropriate enforcement would be warranted. It was found that Quality of Life Task Force, serving as an inspection team worked much more efficiently. Various violations would be addressed all at once instead of going through the referral process which could take weeks.

It was also discovered that some property owners looked at receiving a summons and appearing in court to pay a fine as just the price of doing business. Fines were minimal and prosecution didn't take into account reoccurring violations by the same offender. To

address this, the local Court along with the District Attorney's Office agreed to work together and aggressively prosecute individuals summonsed by the Task Force. The New Rochelle Corporation Counsel introduced and passed local legislation which also authorized an escalating fine schedule for repeat offenders.

Additionally, as word spread of the Quality of Life Task Force, many landlords were advising tenants not to answer the door when the Task Force would appear for an inspection, thereby preventing remedial action. To address this issue, the Task Force is working with the New Rochelle Corporation Counsel to create an administrative warrant. The creation of the administrative warrant would solve the problem when a tenant or landlord refuses to allow the Task Force to enter a premise for an inspection.

Another example of a creative and innovative approach utilized during this endeavor is the following. After it was determined that a landlord was in violation of the New York State STAR Program, the property would be removed from the tax exemption, and thus saving the State of New York future lost revenue. However, there is no sanction in place for the landlord to pay restitution to the State, and there is no legal recourse for criminal prosecution. The Quality of Life Task Force is in the early stages of working with elected officials to develop legislation, on a State level, to prosecute offenders of the STAR Program.

Assessment

This project, “Fixing Broken Windows” A Collaborative Approach to Housing Remediation, has resulted in numerous, measurable and sustainable positive outcomes. Since the inception of the program in 2007, it has achieved many noteworthy results.

- Creation of Multi-Agency Task Force to address complaints in an organized, systematic and direct manner
- Task Force has inspected 183 locations throughout the City
- Issued 557 summonses for various housing, fire, and police violations
- Introduced and passed local legislation which also authorized an escalating fine schedule for repeat offenders
- Creation of an administrative warrant to facilitate inspection of premises in need of remedial action.
- Identified and removed 84 properties from the NYS Star Program, saving the State of New York \$225,960 dollars.
- Working with elected officials to develop State level legislation to prosecute offenders of the STAR Program.
- Part 1 Crimes decreased 15% from 2008 – Lowest crime total since 1961
- Decreased number of complaints associated with quality of life problems
- Improved the quality of housing stock, thereby reducing overall calls for service
 - 6% reduction realized in first 18-24 month period
 - 15.7% reduction projected for 24-36 month period (2010)

- Built lasting partnerships, including city agencies, businesses, residents and elected officials
- Program restored neighborhood pride and renewed resident cooperation

There have been numerous times when a scheduled inspection conducted by the Quality of Life Task Force led to additional inspections of surrounding premises, and unanticipated outcomes.

One inspection of an illegal basement apartment by the Quality of Life Task Force led to the inspection of a second structure situated on the same property. At this location, the owner was attempting to excavate the basement floor of the second structure to create a full basement to accommodate an illegal basement apartment. He had dug about six feet below the foundation, compromising the integrity of the home. This inspection led to the discovery of a previously undetected, hazardous and potentially life threatening condition. The homeowner was issued numerous summonses, the illegal renovation was stopped and a potential catastrophe was averted by this inspection.

Although success has been realized in numerous parts of the city, the issues dealt with in the Greater Mount Joy Neighborhood, and the success attained, exemplify those throughout the city. This neighborhood is located in the central part of the city, and is made up predominantly of single family homes built in the early 1900's. It is about six square blocks, covering 1.5 miles and has nearly 200 homes. The residents consist of longtime citizens of the community, recent immigrants and college students. The race and ethnicity makeup consists of white, black and Hispanic. An underlying problem in this neighborhood was the evolving demographic landscape mentioned earlier in this project. This evolution was not being accepted or embraced by its older residents.

There was no harmonious relationship among the longtime homeowners, new comers to the community, and college students living off campus.

Members of the Quality of Life Task Force attended meetings where residents were given the opportunity to voice their concerns. At first, these meetings were held with individual groups, as a source of some of the complaints stemmed from friction between certain groups. As the project progressed, we were able to hold meetings with multiple groups in the same room. These groups were then able to gain a better understanding as to what each other's concerns were. Most times it was revealed that many of the concerns were similar and that different groups in the community shared the same goals. These meetings brought about renewed neighborhood cooperation, which continues to become more evident and lasting. What began as an antagonistic relationship between opposing groups has evolved into one of harmony. Proof of this transformation was exemplified by a block party in September 2009, organized by the Greater Mount Joy Neighborhood Association, and attended by residents representing the entire community. A neighborhood that was once divided is now united with a renewed sense of pride, and this now positive relationship is serving to sustain the great success realized in this neighborhood.

The results in the Greater Mount Joy Neighborhood are as follows:

Through the inspection process, the college students were educated on crime prevention and personal safety.

College Security expanded their patrol to include this neighborhood.

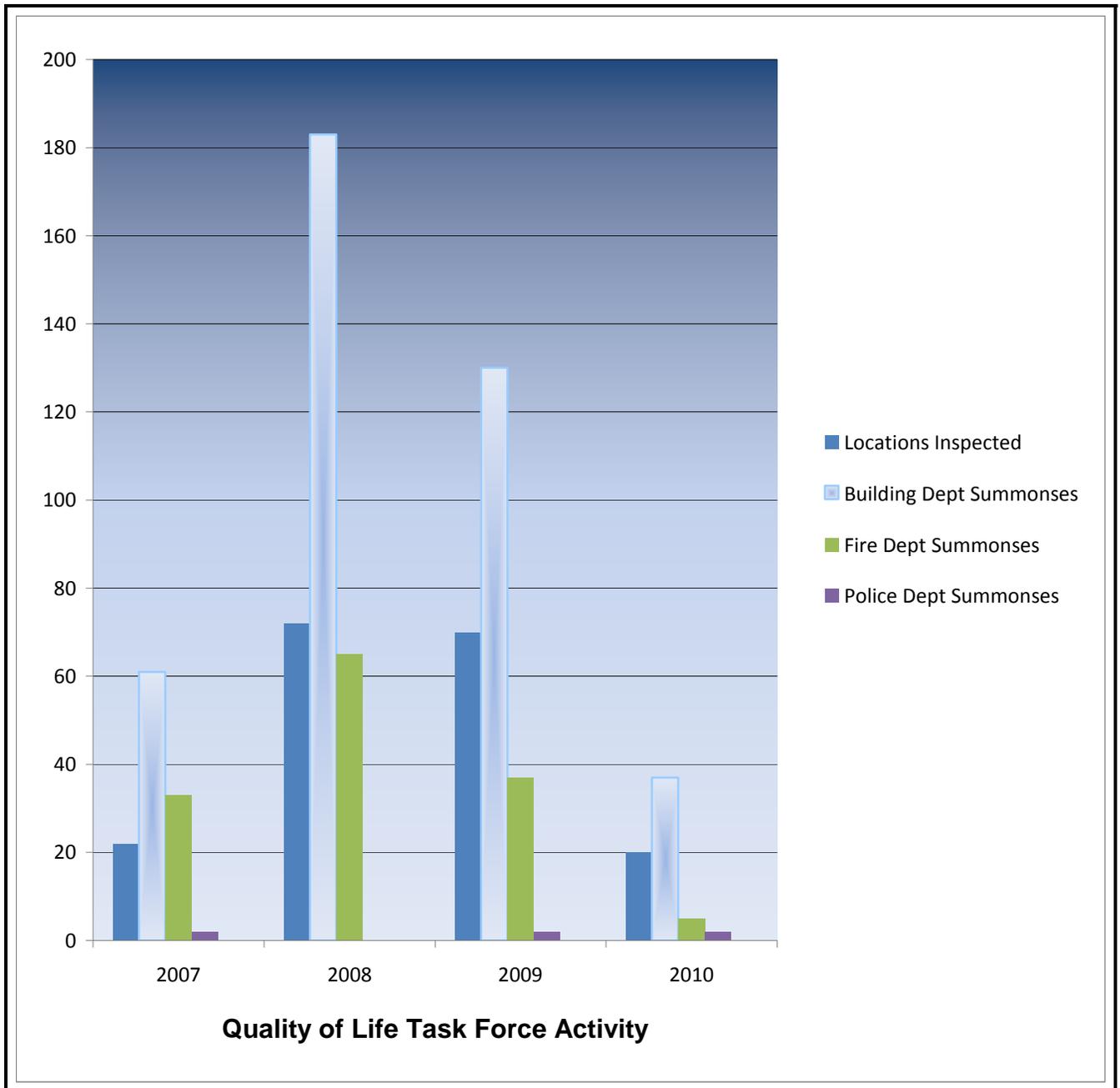
Due to all of the community involvement in this area, as well as the activity of the Quality of Life Task Force, burglaries and robberies have been reduced dramatically.

There has only been one robbery in this neighborhood during the period of July 1st, 2009 – March 31st, 2010, and not a single burglary during this same period.

Furthermore, the initial goals of improving housing stock, reducing crime, and decreasing calls for service by 10%-15% have not only been met, but greatly exceeded.

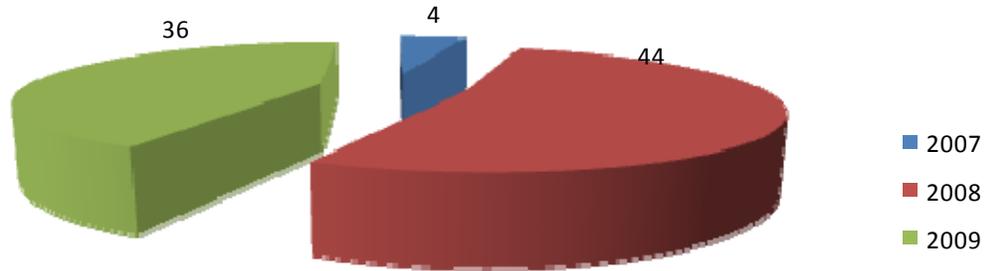
In 2008, there was an 8.5% decrease in calls for service, and a 21.9% decrease through 2009. A review of data in our Records Management System for the first quarter of 2010 revealed that we are on track for a 49.8% decrease in calls for service in the Greater Mount Joy Neighborhood. This reduction in calls for service allows the Police Department to deploy resources elsewhere, and with depleted resources and reduced manpower this allows for a greater level of operational efficiency.

The following three pages contain charts that summarize some of the activity during this program.

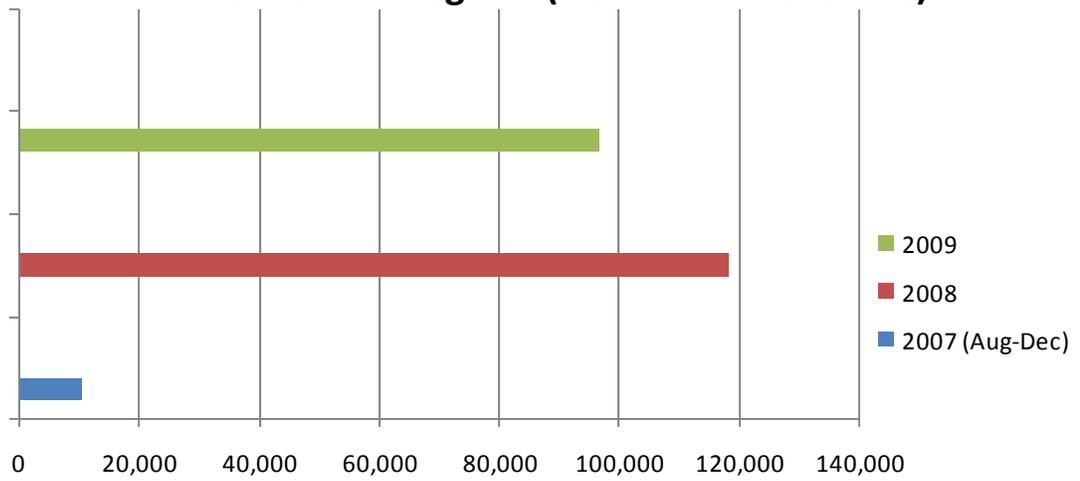


The number of summonses issued by the Police Department is minimal, thus demonstrating that traditional enforcement was ineffective. The collaborative approach utilized the expertise and authority of numerous agencies, and is a testament of the strength and effectiveness of this partnership as opposed to a single entity attempting to solve the identified problems.

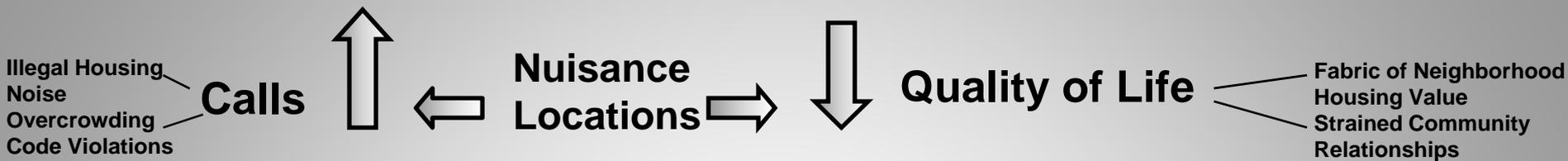
Properties Removed from STAR Program



Savings to New York State by Removing Properties from STAR Program (Dollars in Thousands)

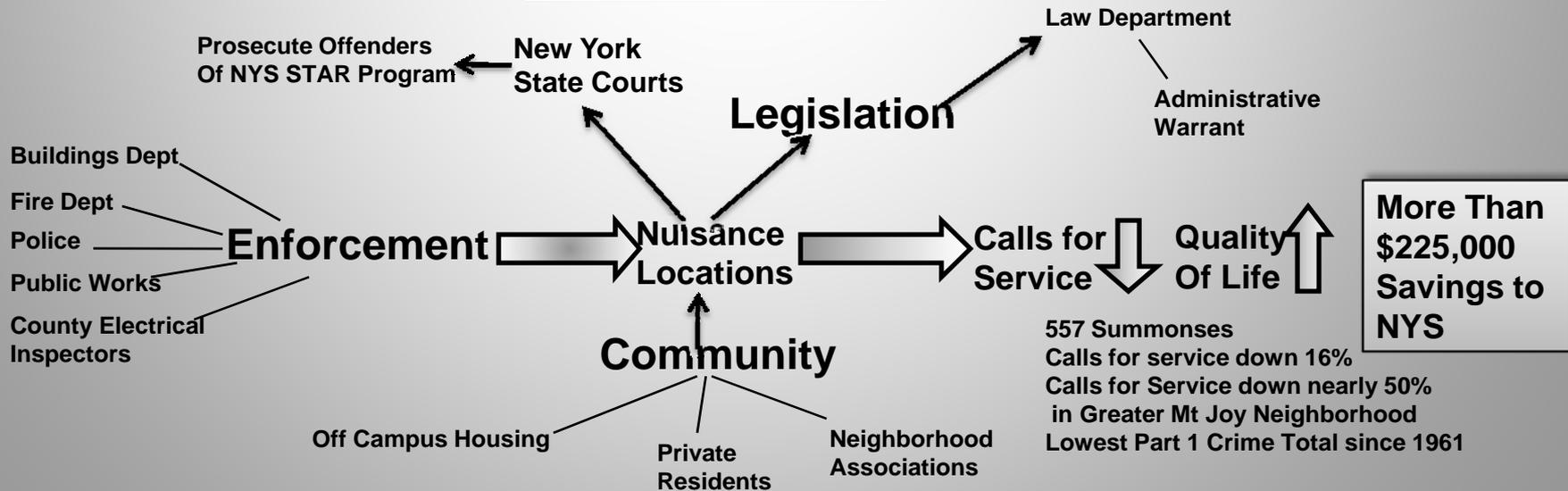


2nd Quarter 2007



- Inside of specific residences
- Repeat Complaints
- Increased Calls for Service
- Increased Community Complaints
- Hazardous and Life Threatening Conditions

1st Quarter 2010



“Fixing Broken Windows” A Collaborative Approach to Housing Remediation, has been evaluated utilizing several different methods. The New Rochelle Police Department’s Records Management Systems has been used for comparison statistics on crimes, calls for service, arrests and city code summonses. Complaints generated from the targeted locations have been reduced nearly 16% from the first quarter 2007 to the first quarter of 2010, with a dramatic decrease of 49.8% in the Greater Mount Joy Neighborhood. Burglaries and robberies in this neighborhood have been virtually eliminated. The Part 1 crime total for the entire city was down 15% from 2008 to 2009, and 2009 was the lowest total since 1961. The quality-of-life was dramatically improved by enforcement via 557 code summonses. It is anticipated that all of these measures, statistical and otherwise, will continue to demonstrate that this multi-agency partnership remains strong and committed to improving the quality of the housing stock, improving the quality of life and reducing crime.

Beat Officer Queries with community groups and neighborhood associations have also been a means to measure success, as well as on-going monitoring of past problematic locations.

The institutionalization of this endeavor lies in both the credible and lasting legislative and enforcement aspects. The partnerships, such as the Quality of Life Task Force, remain intact. Additionally, working with elected officials to enact legislation is attainable elsewhere, and should always be considered as at least one aspect of problem solving. The New Rochelle Police Department anticipates that, through the programs’ various partnerships and principles, “Fixing Broken Windows” will continue to allow for effective

and efficient enforcement should similar problems arise in the future. Additionally, the partnerships will transcend this particular initiative, and allow for a seamless response to a myriad of housing and quality of life issues throughout the city. Other law enforcement agencies can adopt all of the strategies and practices employed during “Fixing Broken Windows”. The methods are a model for other law enforcement agencies to emulate, and the project is readily adaptable to other agencies and organizations. The key aspect is the ability to form partnerships, including city agencies, businesses, residents and elected officials. Partnerships can be formed with effort, perseverance and commitment. The New Rochelle Police Department had in place a strong relationship with the community, based on years of a strong commitment to community policing and problem solving through various partnerships and projects.

By removing ineligible properties from the STAR program, the actions by the Quality of Life Task Force have resulted in a savings of over \$225,000. If other agencies throughout the State adopt this plan, the savings could easily exceed tens of millions of dollars. Considering the challenging economic conditions faced by the entire State of New York, this model could serve as a vital financial plan to aid the State in its economic recovery.

“Fixing Broken Windows” was initiated in the early part of 2007, and the preceding project document has demonstrated, by remarkable results, that the initiative has achieved a great deal of success in a relatively short period of time. Through a total community outreach effort, using the Quality of Life Task Force, all organizations played

a vital role in the effort via particular strengths and capacities. Additionally, all organizations understood that efforts needed to be comprehensive, collaborative and enduring. Enforcement, after educating the public, has also been an integral component to the problem solving in the aforementioned areas of the city. Through these combined efforts, serious and life threatening housing conditions have been reduced, and quality of life improved.

Agency and Officer Information

Key Project Team Members

Police Commissioner Patrick J. Carroll
Lieutenant William Childs
Sergeant. Barry Johnson
Detective. Liliana Sanchez
Fire Commissioner Raymond Kiernan
Fire Captain Henry Senno
Firefighter Michael Walsh
Commissioner of Development Michael Freimuth
Deputy Building Commissioner Paul Vacca
Senior Housing Inspector Tino D'Abruzzo
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