

## **WEED AND SEED PROGRAM: POLICE AND CODE ENFORCEMENT COLLABORATION**

Since 1994, a collaborative effort between Aurora's Neighborhood Services Department (code enforcement/community development/neighborhood planning) and the Aurora Police Department has been operating in Northwest Aurora, Colorado to improve the quality of life for residents living there. The Weed and Seed Program is an ideal example of how Neighborhood Services and the Aurora Police Department (APD) have worked together to reduce crime and physically improve the Northwest part of Aurora. Primarily funded by the Department of Justice this comprehensive neighborhood revitalization program contains many components that serve to "weed out" the bad element (code violations and crime) in North Aurora and then plant the seeds of neighborhood pride, self-sufficiency, and overall revitalization efforts. The following program elements are included within this comprehensive program.

### **Walk and Talk**

Code enforcement officers and police officers select a neighborhood block to "sweep". Based upon the number of code violations and APD calls for service, this "team" will target a specific block and walk, door to door, talking to residents and informing them of City programs and activities, identifying code violations, issuing Notices of Violations, and gathering information about crime and suspicious activity that is observed by neighbors.

### **Crime and Grime**

Community Roundtables: Regular community meetings are held comprised of citizens, Aurora Police, Code Enforcement and representatives of Original Aurora Renewal for purposes of discussion on crime, property upkeep, and other pertinent neighborhood issues.

Neighborhood Watch in Spanish: Meetings are held to engage Spanish-speaking residents in discussion about crime-prevention and public safety efforts.

Welcome to America: Informative sessions designed to help newly arrived immigrants effectively integrate into North Aurora neighborhoods by providing information on local resources, their rights, and their responsibilities to comply with City laws.

Community Emergency Response Team: Effort to organize residents, block by block, to effectively organize in response to community emergencies that pertain to crime, natural disasters, etc.

Coffee with Cops and Code: Regular coffees held in the community to discuss code enforcement and crime issues with residents.

**Alleyway Addressing:** Provides resources to install property addresses in alleyways so that they are visible to code enforcement, police, fire, and medical emergency vehicles.

**House Calls:** Representatives of APD, Code Enforcement, and Original Aurora Renewal meet individually with individuals/families who are experiencing some significant community problem related to areas such as crime or property upkeep. Together, they form a team approach to identify and implement action oriented strategies for addressing the issues.

**In Partnership with Businesses:** Informs and engages business owners in the crime reduction efforts and neighborhood improvement strategies implemented by the City of Aurora to revitalize the area. "Blockworkers" are assigned to regularly visit businesses to deliver relevant information in both English and Spanish.

**Mediation Services:** Mediation, including cross-cultural mediation, is provided to the community in attempts to prevent crime and manage conflict with a constructive, long-lasting approach.

**Graffiti off Neighborhoods (GON):** Graffiti removal efforts off residential and business sites. GON was responsible for removing approximately 23% of all graffiti in the city.

### **Training for Rental Property Owners and Managers**

***Citizens are the first line of defense against crime in their neighborhoods. Since apartments account for a disproportionate amount of criminal activity, the solution begins there.***

The Police Department and Neighborhood Support Division have developed a comprehensive training program that teaches rental property owners and managers strategies and techniques to effectively prevent/address crime on their property, comply with municipal codes, and to improve housing standards. The result is a comprehensive approach to working with the rental community which includes a full one-day training program and individual assistance to those properties experiencing the most crime and calls for police service. Participants include people who voluntarily attend and those apartment owners or managers who are court ordered to attend due to a zoning/housing related conviction.

This program includes the following subject areas:

- I. Understanding and Recognizing the Criminal Element
- II. Working with the Aurora Police Department and Code Enforcement
- III. Compliance with City Codes
- IV. Developing an Effective Screening Policy
- V. Effective Evictions

- VI. Crime Prevention Techniques
- VII. Empowering Residents

In conjunction with the training program and when necessary, the Aurora Police Department and Neighborhood Support staff schedule comprehensive on-site visits to the most crime ridden apartment complexes in the City. Together, they walk the complexes with the apartment managers to identify code violations, exchange information about criminal activity on the property, and point out changes in the physical environment that could be made to discourage crime.

Neighborhood Services also provides mediation services for the police that involve parking, noise, and family/neighborhood disputes.

### **Favorable Outcomes From this Program**

Because of the collaborative effort between Neighborhood Services and the Aurora Police Department crime has been reduced in Northwest Aurora. There has been an overall reduction in violent crime by 3%, 10% reduction in motor vehicle thefts, and 32% reduction in drug-related arrests, and a reduction of 46% in gun-related incidents.

### **Lesson Learned: *Crime and Community Appearance Are Inextricably Linked***

Within the community development and public safety arenas, there is a proven theory (The Broken Windows Theory) that states: "*crime and community appearance are inextricably linked.*" In other words, in neighborhoods that have poorly maintained homes and yards, inoperable cars, and trash in alleys, you will find a higher incidence of criminal activity. This is because poorly maintained neighborhoods create an unspoken message that the people living there DO NOT CARE about what happens and that their focus is anywhere but external. This type of physical environment is like RADAR to criminals. They want to live and operate in places where people are oblivious to their external environment. This way, they do not get caught!

Fighting to rid poorly maintained neighborhoods of criminals, without the *complementary* efforts of code enforcement, would be a fruitless effort for Police because the environment would continually invite NEW criminals in. But, if the environment/neighborhood were "improved" and people were "organized", it would deliver a different message (one that says "we care and we are watching"). Consequently, a different type of resident (a more responsible and concerned resident) would be attracted to it. This is why the collaborative approach to enforce City Codes, organize residents, implement physical improvements, and fight crime *simultaneously*, is both highly productive and effective for our citizenry and us.