
SCENIC

Saginaw Code Enforcement Neighborhood Improvement Cooperative

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION Annual Program Excellence Award Nomination

PROBLEM ASSESSMENT

The City of Saginaw like many Cities that relied on the automotive industry has experienced a great deal of urban blight particularly in the last ten years. The problem that has resulted from a decline in population and revenues is an overwhelming amount of blight and code enforcement issues without an effective means to enforce property codes and taxpayer concerns especially with a declining staff to address such matters. This lack of an effective code enforcement program has contributed to a lack of trust in government and tax payers feeling that their tax dollars are not being effectively utilized and that government is non responsive to their concerns.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND COSTS

The State of Michigan implemented a program known as Cities of Promise. This program focused on urban areas of the State of Michigan which are experiencing hardships as a result of economic conditions. This program brought not only funding but a significant amount of support and access to all State of Michigan departments and created an excellent forum for an exchange of information and ideas between the participant cities. As a result a team of City of Saginaw Employees in the Spring of 2008 met to discuss how they could significantly impact the problem as described above. This team consisted of Mid Level management staff, and front line employees all of which more or less volunteered to bring resolution to this problem. Participants

were from several departments and several collective bargaining units which typically compete for funding and therefore historically did not communicate well with one another. At no time in this process did department or union lines become a part of the conversation.

The first step in the implementation was getting everyone on the same page in that we all had the common goal of cleaning up the City of Saginaw, whether it be crime, fire prevention, environmental, or housing issues. The other priority was to develop a relationship amongst all employees where there was a significant level of trust and cooperation.

It was recognized that in many cases there were multiple violations at these blight producing properties including Housing, Fire Code, Environmental Code, and Law Enforcement Issues. The team decided to teach each other how to deal with their respective area of code enforcement. This way all issues are handled with one employee with only one stop creating a huge efficiency.

The next step in the implementation was rolling program out to the public. Saginaw had a few neighborhood groups which met with limited participation, so we started attending their meetings which were brutal in the beginning, twenty years of broken promises had to be aired and we had to earn their trust. We began by taking their concerns at every meeting and resolving their issues within five days of the meeting, many times sooner. What this very quickly did was build trust and customer satisfaction. Word has spread and there are now more than twenty neighborhood groups which meet regularly and are well attended as a result of this work and they continue to grow and they depend on the SCENIC team to move their initiatives forward. The focus of the work is driven by the residents and the SCENIC teams takes each and every concern seriously and acts aggressively to resolve. Many friendships have resulted among SCENIC Team members (City Hall Employees) and our residents. Residents now have

confidence in City Hall and the SCENIC team and provide invaluable assistance and information to the team members. The residents are the eyes and ears of the program.

The uniqueness of this program comes from the utilization of many municipal employees on a voluntary basis from many different departments and labor unions working toward a common goal with **NO** additional cost to the taxpayer, ultimately resulting in a team of employees which number more than twenty enforcing codes in the City of Saginaw which enhance the “SCENIC” qualities of the City.

TANGIBLE RESULTS AND PROGRAM OUTCOMES

One of the biggest outcomes of this program is the restoration of trust in City government. Everyday trust is built and enhanced with our residents because of the actions of the SCENIC team.

Tangible results include the removal of over 300 abandoned vehicles, the removal of hundreds of abandoned buildings in strategic locations where they were most effective, fireworks enforcement which was contributing to lack of peace and quiet in some neighborhoods, assistance to law enforcement in identifying problem locations where unlawful activity is taking place, the creation of an information network that feeds problems to the team for resolution before further damage is caused to a neighborhood. Over 300 vacant abandoned buildings have been boarded up by Neighborhood Groups, City Employees, and the volunteer services of area contractors resulting in a reduction of injury, illegal activities that typically occur in these structures and arson fires. All of these results were attained with nothing more than a little bit of effort from City Employees to communicate effectively with one another and a few office supplies.

The SCENIC program has been featured as a best practice program in the State of Michigan and was also recognized by the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police for Excellence in Environmental Crimes Enforcement.

LESSONS LEARNED DURING PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION, AND ANALYSIS OF THE PROGRAM

There were many lessons learned during our implementation of this program and they are as follows:

- ✓ When you have an issue that has not been handled very well in the past and you ask your residents to trust you be prepared to “get beat up” in the beginning. Trust has to be earned.
- ✓ The people are very important! People that want to make change happen, will make change happen, so it is critical that the right team is assembled and that they are all carrying the same message with the same motives with “No Baggage”.
- ✓ You have to be prepared to be held accountable. You must deliver what you say you are going to deliver and if you do you will build invaluable free resources that give freely toward meeting your goals.