

**Closing Down Problem/Nuisance Properties:
Does Oakland's Strategy Work to Reduce Crime?**

by

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INTRODUCTION

Violence and crime plague certain areas in the City of Oakland. In an effort to deal with the underlying reasons for the crime, the City has abated the nuisances associated with specific properties that attract crime. These conditions can include run-down or abandoned homes where owners have allowed crime to flourish on their property. Through this process, the City petitions the court for permission to force/impose the correction of problems or conditions that contribute to crime or blight in a neighborhood. This program is also referred to as the Beat Health process, named after a unit within the Oakland Police Department dedicated to working on problem properties. These specific properties (i.e., problem/nuisance properties) can be businesses, apartments, or single-family homes. Typically these actions focus on single-family homes that attract a high level of police activity. The process can take as little as a day with a cooperative owner and up to 1-2 years with an uncooperative owner. In many cases cooperative property owners reach an agreement listing corrections before the matter even reaches a court hearing. The City of Oakland has also used rigid enforcement of the building code as a tool, and most recently has initiated a nuisance property process that only requires an administrative hearing with a City of Oakland representative before monetary sanctions can be applied. Oakland is not alone; other cities face the same problems and use similar processes to deal with crime ridden/run-down properties in their communities.

The author of this paper believes the closing and rehabilitation of the blighted property at 1956 85th Avenue, Oakland, CA (“the house”), has caused a decrease in crime in the 1900 block of 85th Avenue, Oakland, CA (“the block”). In addition, the residents’ and government workers’ perceptions of the drop in crime are consistent with the number of crimes reported and with Drug Hotline calls. This paper details research regarding the causal relationship between the activity at the house and crime in the block. The researcher gathered and analyzed information from crime statistics, personal interviews, literature reviews, a neighborhood survey, and a survey of government employees involved in the closure of problem properties. The case study compared two periods: before the blighted property was closed (June 1, 2000 – December 1, 2002) and after the blighted property was closed (December 2, 2002 – May 31, 2004).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous databases were searched for material related to this topic. The databases were searched looking for key words such as: closing down blighted properties, closing down problem/nuisance properties, closing down crack houses, closing down homes, broken window theory, drug houses, and disorder in neighborhoods. The Internet search engine

www.Google.com yielded only a few related news articles. The author examined numerous databases at the Golden Gate University Library and the Golden Gate University Law Library, as well as conducted a physical search of the relevant sections in each library. There were several books that discussed basic crime prevention concepts in the field of criminology. The researcher conducted a thorough analysis of several major law enforcement research groups and law enforcement agencies. Five knowledgeable industry professionals were interviewed, providing valuable resources during the search for related literature and insight on the policy implementation of problem/nuisance property strategies.

Background and Policy Philosophies

In September of 1989, Tom DeVries, *California Magazine*, wrote a feature article about the Beat Health Program titled, *The New Urban Guerrillas*. (DeVeries, 1999) DeVries outlined Oakland's Beat Health Program as a new method of bringing police and citizens together to work on problem/nuisance properties. The Beat Health Program was initially developed by Sergeant Bob Crawford of the Oakland Police Department in 1988 because he was frustrated by multiple weekly responses to locations that attracted crime. One day he noticed a problem/nuisance property stealing electrical power through a rigged electrical panel. Pacific Gas and Electric Company was alerted and immediately turned off the power. This action forced the problem residents out of the property. The community responded positively to the creative tactic. DeVries writes, "Parents are fighting to make good lives for their children. Neighbors are standing up to the thugs and the slumlords. And there are still good cops who are not too jaded or exhausted to try to find new ways to help" (DeVries, 1999, p.63). The article outlined the positive effects of the collaboration at multiple problem/nuisance properties. Because of the observed beneficial impacts, the City of Oakland has continued to support the program over the years. "Having concluded that this approach works where conventional policing is failing, the Oakland Police Department has approved a massive budget increase and eleven new employees for Beat Health" (DeVries, 1999, p.69).

There is also a tremendous sense of "rationalism" throughout this process, because it looks at the specific locations where the crimes take place (Bozeman, 1979, p.63). Oakland Police Chief Richard Word believes that this strategy is based in a sound crime fighting theory. He stated, "We call it a crime fighting triangle: the victim, the perpetrator, and the location. If you take any one of those things out, you don't have a crime" (Harris, Martinez, 2002). The crime triangle theory has allowed law enforcement to methodically look at crime prevention in specific and identifiable pieces. In addition, it involves the community as key stakeholders, as law enforcement seeks their assistance when dealing with problem properties.

To make the process work even smoother, the unit created a special process to foster further efficiency. Green-Mazerolle describes the process: “Beat Health Officers coordinate site visits by the Specialized Multi-Agency Response Team (SMART), which consists of a group of city inspectors. Depending on the preliminary assessments made by representatives from such agencies as police, housing, fire, public works, vector control, and Pacific Gas and Electric, [a list of property deficiencies will be created]” (1999, p.3). The group works to correct the observed property deficiencies. Due to the lack of overriding priorities within participating agencies, membership on this team has remained relatively constant over the years.

Beat Health Program Study

The United States Department of Justice released a publication titled, *Controlling Drug and Disorder Problems: Oakland’s Beat Health Program* (Green-Mazerolle, Roehl, March 1999). The study details the aftermath of property improvements as well as some property closures conducted by the Beat Health Unit. The study posited, “The average number of drug calls per site *decreased* by nearly 7 percent in the experimental sites [Beat Health sites] and *increased* by nearly 55 percent in the control sites [non-Beat Health sites] from 12 months before to 12 months after intervention” (Green-Mazerolle, Roehl, 1999, p. 6). Their findings showed that the public policy approach was less effective at commercial locations. There was an overall increase in the number of Drug Hotline calls in both the experimental commercial group (45.8%) and control commercial group (282.2%). It should be noted that the increase in the experimental commercial group was substantially less than the increase in the control commercial group.

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Crime and Place

In May of 2004, a report detailing crimes at specific locations within the Seattle city limits was published in *Criminology*, a publication of the American Society of Criminology. The researchers looked at crime in “micro places” or “hot spots” (Bushway, Lum, Weisburd, Yang, 2004). They found that most crime is concentrated in the hot spots and that those places draw disproportionately large amounts of police service. The authors stated, “...[the data] suggest that the general concentration of crime in hot spots follows a consistent pattern over time” (Bushway, Lum, Weisburd, Yang, 2004, p. 6). The information suggests that police maximize their resources by focusing on those hot spots (Sherman, Weisburd, 1995). This study is also supported by earlier hot spot research conducted by Lawrence W. Sherman and David Weisburd (1995).

In January 1996, Ralph Taylor and Adele Harrell published a report titled “Physical Environment and Crime” for the National Institute of Justice, United States Department of Justice. The report details major tenets and assumptions regarding crime prevention through

environmental design. The researchers discuss the “rational offender theory” which states, “Offenders operate in a rational fashion; they prefer to commit crimes that require the least effort, provide the highest benefits, and pose the lowest risks” (Harrell & Taylor, 1996, p. 2). Since offenders look for opportunities, they look for clues in the physical environment that indicate the likelihood of detection. With the assumption that the rational offender theory describes an offender’s mindset, the authors offer four ways to alter the environment to deter crime: “Housing design or block layout, land use and circulation patterns, territorial features, and physical deterioration” (Harrell & Taylor, 1996, p. 3-4). The four approaches to crime reduction through environmental design highlight the importance between the physical environment and the amount of criminal activity.

In 1982, George Kelling and James Q. Wilson introduced their “philosophy of broken windows.” The philosophy was based on a study of officers assigned to patrol neighborhoods on foot. They argued that foot patrol was effective because “what officers did was to elevate, to the extent they could, the level of public order in the neighborhoods” (Kelling & Wilson, 1982, p. 30). The officers were able to get to know the regular offenders in the area as well as other specific neighborhood problems. The citizens reacted well to the officers’ presence, and in the end there was more order in the area. Broken windows are representative of any condition that shows people that an area is unkempt or uncared for by residents. If the negative conditions are left in place, then they will increase the likelihood of neighborhood decay and higher crime rates.

In 2001 Rana Sampson, an international consultant on problem and community-oriented policing, authored a publication titled *Drug Dealing in Privately Owned Apartment Complexes* for the Community Oriented Policing Services, United States Department of Justice. The publication discusses what is known about drug dealing on privately owned complexes and offered valuable solutions. The researcher conducted a personal interview with the author. She stressed the importance of quality "place management" practices in turning around properties plagued by drugs sales. Properties with open drug markets bring substance abusers into the neighborhood who may also engage in other criminal activity in support of their habit. Some of these crimes (theft, burglary, vandalism) and particularly the incivilities (loitering, graffiti, speeding, littering) are visible to residents in the area, raising fear levels. Other criminal behavior and neighborhood incivilities also can accompany drug markets, including prostitution, unwanted additional traffic (foot, bike, and vehicle), public drinking, public urination, public drunkenness, etc. Many of these associated crimes go unreported, but can be linked directly to the activity allowed at a specific property.

Civil Remedies

The use of civil remedies to abate crime is similar to the concept of Third Party Policing posited by Michael E. Buerger and Lorraine Green-Mazerolle. They described the use of civil remedies to force and coerce individuals to make substantive changes to an environment in order to reduce crime: “Third Party Policing is our term for police efforts to persuade or coerce nonoffending persons to take actions which are outside the scope of their routine activities, and which are designed to indirectly minimize disorder caused by other persons or to reduce the possibility that crime may occur” (Buerger & Green-Mazerolle, 1998, p.1). The authors describe the Beat Health Program in Oakland as being a place-based strategy that attempts to stop the “spiral of decay” at the specific locations (Buerger & Green-Mazerolle, 1998).

METHODOLOGY

The dependent variable is crimes in the block from 01 Jun 2000 – 31 May 2004 (the time period being studied). The collection of this data presents its own obstacles. For example, individuals on the block and/or police personnel may not have reported crimes appropriately. There are a number of factors that can affect the reporting of crime: “The crime must be known or perceived..., the person perceiving the act must define it as a crime..., someone must report the crime to the police, the police must define the reported act as a crime, and the police must record the crime in the appropriate category” (Sparks, R.F., 1982).

The way in which crime data are collected by the Oakland Police Department has not changed during the time period and should provide a reasonable amount of consistency. Sources used to collect the information were offense reports, Drug Hotline calls, a qualitative survey of residents on the block, and a qualitative survey of police/government employees that work on problem/nuisance properties.

The independent variable is the closing of blighted property at the house, and the research explores a causal relationship between the blighted property and crime in the block. The time periods studied are the following: June 1, 2000 – December 1, 2002 (Period 1), introduction of the independent variable on December 2, 2002 with the property closure, and December 2, 2002 – May 31, 2004 (Period 2). Although the study periods represent different lengths of time, I will use average monthly figures to compare the periods. Drug use in Oakland is relatively constant; therefore, the averages will offer reliable comparisons.

A qualitative survey of residents was conducted in the block to determine the perceptions of crime on the block and at the house. The survey instrument first determined whether or not the resident lived in the block for the entire study period of the project (Group 1). Residents present before the introduction of the independent variable were asked three questions, designed to ascertain if there was a perceived decrease in crime at the house and the block after the introduction of the independent variable. The respondents were asked if they felt safer because of the property closure. A brief statement was read to the respondent and he/she was asked to choose the response that best reflected his/her feelings about the statement (choices: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). The respondents were not given any specific information regarding the crime statistics at the house or the block until the end of the survey. Residents who moved to the block after the introduction of the independent variable (Group 2) were given a brief description of events and asked whether or not they felt crime would drop as a result of the property closure. The results were evaluated separately from the group of residents present for the entire study period.

There may have been reluctance on the part of some residents to participate in the survey out of fear of reprisal from individuals involved in the illegal narcotics trafficking in the area. In order to build a rapport with the respondents, the researcher conducted the survey in a standard Oakland Police Department uniform. This made it reasonably clear that the researcher was not working in partnership with those engaged in illegal activities in the area. Because the sample size is so small, it was vital to gather as many responses as possible. These data are only as good as the memories of the citizens in the block, and the most valuable responses will most likely come from residents who have lived on the block during the entire study period.

The researcher formulated a survey for government employees, which measured the perceptions of employees assigned to work on problem properties in the City of Oakland. Because only a few employees worked on this specific property, the researcher surveyed a larger group that often works on problem/nuisance properties throughout the city. After the researcher provided a brief background on the property, respondents were asked to gauge the impact of the property closure on crime at the house and in the block. Respondents were also asked to assign a percentage range by which they believed the crime would drop at the house and the block. Lastly, respondents were asked to gauge whether or not they believed other residents felt safer in the block. In the end, the answers of government employees were compared to the responses of the residents to determine any differences in perception. The answers from each survey were compared to the actual crime statistics recorded for the block.

The survey was tested in a focus-group of Oakland residents that did not reside in the study area. The government employee survey was sent to six government employees to review

and recommend corrections. The respondents provided valuable feedback regarding ambiguities in the survey questions, and several suggestions were incorporated into the final version. For the actual survey, each respondent was sent an email providing a brief explanation of the survey and a brief background of the house. The information was tabulated using a web-based service. The survey was open for completion from August 30, 2004 8:00 A.M. through September 17, 2004 at 5:00 P.M.

Research Questions:

- 1-Did the government's action taken and subsequent sale of the house decrease the crime rate at the house?
- 2-Did the government's action taken and subsequent sale of the house decrease the crime rate in the block?
- 3-Does the actual increase/decrease of crime in the block match the perceptions of the residents in the block and government employees?

Operational Definitions:

Abating means causing the nuisance to cease. In this specific case it represented an eviction of the owner and seizure of the property, then the subsequent sale of the property.

Blighted property (a.k.a nuisance property, problem property) means property that contributes to the crime in a specific area. Often times the blighted property can be run-down and used to conduct illegal activity.

Crime means the rate of crime measured by Oakland Police Department Offense Reports and Drug Hotline calls.

The *Beat Health Unit* at the Oakland Police Department is responsible for spearheading work on blighted properties on behalf of the Oakland Police Department. They often coordinate the response of multiple city agencies.

The *City Attorney's Office* is responsible for bringing legal action in the appropriate court to coerce action on the part of a resident or owner.

Government employees represent members of city and county public agencies, including the Oakland City Attorney's Office, that work on blighted properties.

Safer is a subjective term. It was used in the survey instruments to measure a person's perceptions relative to his/her likelihood of being a victim of a crime and/or his/her general perception of crime in their neighborhood.

Operational Hypothesis:

The researcher believes abating the blighted property at 1956 85th Avenue has caused a decrease in crime at 1956 85th Avenue and the 1900 block of 85th Avenue. In addition, the residents' and government workers' perceptions of the drop in crime are matched by the numbers of crimes reported and Drug Hotline calls.

Researcher Qualifications

The researcher has been a police officer in the City of Oakland for approximately 10 years, with experience in line level enforcement activities as well as management. The majority of the researcher's field experience has been in East Oakland (the area of the study property). In addition, the researcher has extensive experience in police-community relations and criminal investigation. The researcher would best be categorized as a participant observer.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section presents the information discovered from the resident survey, government employee survey, offense reports, Drug Hotline calls, and interviews with industry professionals.

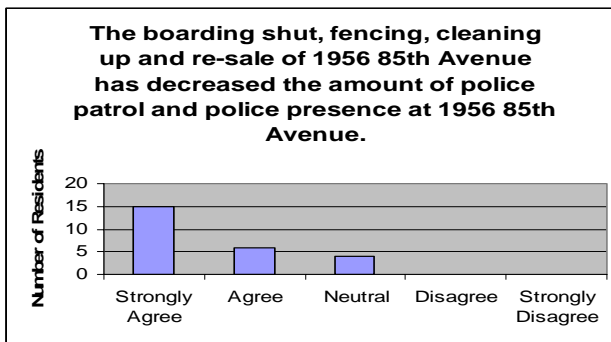
Surveys

Resident Survey

The researcher surveyed the residents in the block. Only one person was interviewed per residence. There were a total of 34 possible respondents, with 33 of the respondents actually interviewed, representing a 97% response rate. The responses were collected on three separate site visits and a trained Spanish translator assisted where necessary. The respondents were split into two groups: those present before December 2, 2002 (Group 1) and those who moved to the block on or after December 2, 2002 (Group 2). There were 25 respondents in Group 1, and 8 respondents in Group 2. The most passionate respondents were the ones closest to the house, and they generally felt positive about the property closure.

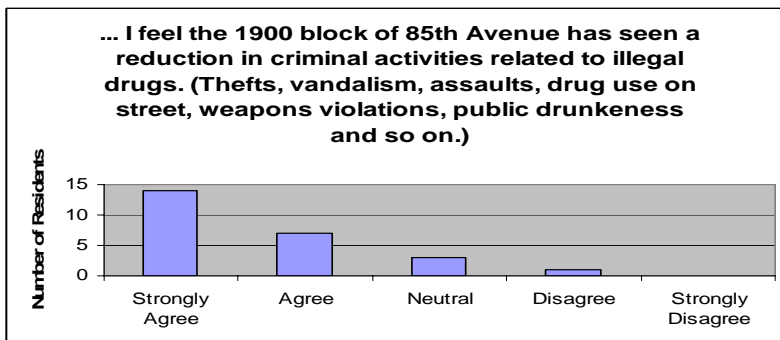
Group 1
(Present for entire study period)

1- Statement presented: *The boarding shut, fencing, cleaning up and re-sale of 1956 85th Avenue has **decreased** the amount of police patrol and police presence at 1956 85th Avenue.* Sixty percent of the respondents (15) strongly agreed with the statement, 24% (6) agreed with the statement, 16% (4) had a neutral position, and no one either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.



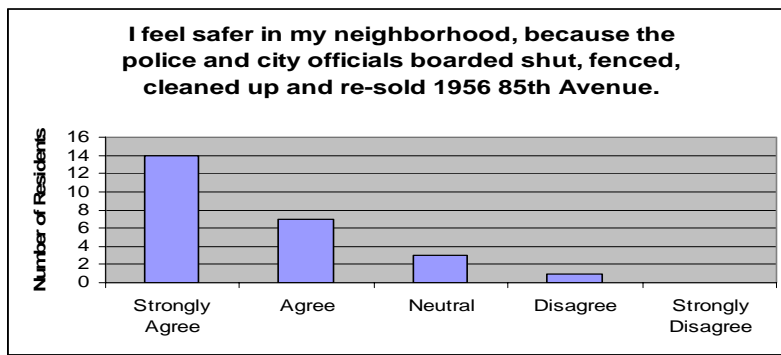
The response to this question tends to show that the residents clearly perceive less police presence at 1956 85th Avenue.

2- Statement Presented: *Since 1956 85th Avenue was boarded shut, fenced, cleaned up and re-sold, I feel the 1900 block of 85th Avenue has seen a reduction in criminal activities related to illegal drugs. (Thefts, vandalism, assaults, drug use on street, weapons violations, public drunkenness and so on.)* Fifty-six percent of respondents (14) strongly agreed with the statement, 28% (7) agreed, 12% (3) had a neutral opinion, 4% (1) disagreed, and no one strongly disagreed.



The responses to this question show the residents have seen a reduction of criminal activity since the property was closed. There was no indication that anything other than the closure of the house caused the perception of the reduction of crimes related to drugs in the block.

3- Statement Presented: *I feel safer in my neighborhood, because the police and city officials boarded shut, fenced, cleaned up and re-sold 1956 85th Avenue.* Fifty six percent of respondents (14) strongly agreed with the statement, 28% (7) agreed, 12% (3) had a neutral opinion, 4% (1) disagreed, and no one strongly disagreed.

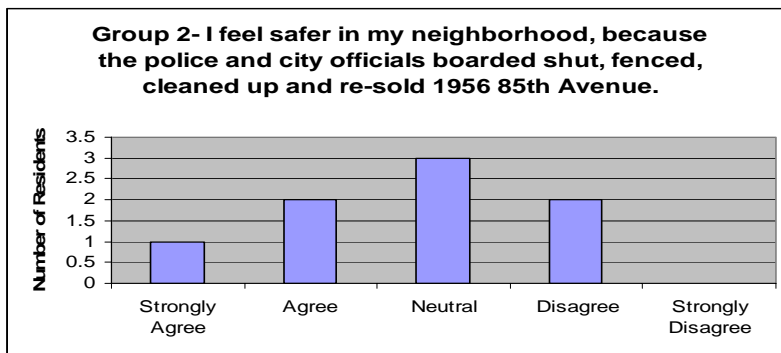


The responses from Group 1 show that the community clearly perceived an increase to their safety and security in the block.

Group 2

(Present after the introduction of the independent variable)

1- Statement Presented: *I feel safer in my neighborhood, because the police and city officials boarded shut, fenced, cleaned up and re-sold 1956 85th Avenue.* There was no consensus among the group: 12.5% (1 respondent) strongly agreed, 25% (2 respondents) agreed, 37.5% (3 respondents) had a neutral opinion, 25% (2 respondents) disagreed, and no one strongly disagreed.



The responses from this group provide inconclusive evidence to show a nexus between crime and safety in the block and the closure of the house. As noted earlier, this group was not present before the closure and rehabilitation of the house. It should be noted that some of the respondents stated that they heard about some of the problems at the house before the closure from residents in Group One. This may show that the house had enough effect on some residents, because they may have discussed it with some of the new residents that moved into the block.

Government Employee Survey

The researcher sent the survey to 54 government employees involved in the closure of problem/nuisance properties in Oakland. Eighteen respondents, representing 33%, answered the web-based questionnaire.

1- Statement Presented: *The police activity at 1956 85th Avenue has decreased since the property was boarded shut on December 2, 2002, cleaned up, and subsequently re-sold.* The majority of respondents strongly agreed with the statement: 61.1% (11) strongly agreed, 11% (2) agreed, 22.2% (4) had no opinion, 5.6% (1) disagreed, and no one strongly disagreed. The clear

majority of government employees believe that the closure of the property would decrease the amount of police presence. This reflects the opinion of the residents in the block.

Statement 1

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Number of Responses	11	2	4	1	0
Percentage	61.1%	11.1%	22.2%	5.6%	0%

2- Statement Presented: *The police activity in the 1900 block of 85th Avenue has decreased since the property was boarded shut on December 2, 2002, cleaned up, and subsequently re-sold.* The majority of respondents agreed with the statement: 33.3% (6) strongly agreed, 44.4% (8) agreed, 22% (4) had no opinion, and no one disagreed or strongly disagreed. The clear majority of government employees feel that the closure of the property decreased the amount of crime in the block.

Statement 2

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Number of Responses	6	8	4	0	0
Percentage	33.3%	44.4%	22.2%	0%	0%

3- Statement Presented: *Residents in the 1900 block of 85th Avenue feel safer because the police and city/county officials boarded shut, cleaned up, and subsequently re-sold 1956 85th Avenue.* The majority strongly agreed with the statement: 38.9% (7) strongly agreed, 16.7% (3) agreed, 38.9% (7) had no opinion, 5.6% (1) disagreed, and no one strongly disagreed. Government employees felt that citizens would feel safer, but the majority was not as strong as on other questions.

Statement 3

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Number of Responses	7	3	7	1	0
Percentage	38.9%	16.7%	38.9%	5.6%	0%

4- Question Presented: *What percentage do you believe police activity has decreased at 1956 85th Avenue since the police and city/county officials boarded shut and cleaned up 1956 85th Avenue on December 2, 2002?* The respondents had varying opinions: 16.7% (3 respondents) had no opinion, 27.8% (5 respondents) felt it would drop 81-100%, 27.8% (5 respondents) felt it would drop 61-80%, 11.1% (2 respondents) felt it would drop 41-60%, 16.7% (3 respondents) felt it would drop 21-40%, and no respondents felt that it would drop 0-20%. The majority felt that crime would drop 61-100% after the house was closed and rehabilitated. This shows that employees believed there was a strong nexus between the property and crime on the property.

Question 4

	81-100%	61-80%	41-60%	21-40%	0-20%	No Opinion
Number of Responses	5	5	2	3	0	3
Percentage	27.8%	27.8%	11.1%	16.7%	0%	16.7%

5- Question Presented: *What percentage do you believe police activity has decreased in the 1900 block of 85th Avenue since the property was boarded up on December 2, 2002 and subsequently re-sold.* The percentages were spread closely in each category: 22.2% (4 respondents) had no opinion, 22.2% (4 respondents) felt crime would drop 81-100%, 22.2% (4 respondents) felt crime would drop 61-80%, 11.1% (2 respondents) felt crime would drop

41-60%, 16.7% (3 respondents) felt crime would drop 21-40%, and 5.6% (1 respondent) felt crime would drop 0-20%. This response shows that employees believe crime would drop in the block, but not by as high a percentage as at the specific house.

Question 5

	81-100%	61-80%	41-60%	21-40%	0-20%	No Opinion
Number of Responses	4	4	2	3	1	4
Percentage	22.2%	22.2%	11.1%	16.7%	5.6%	22.2%

Comparison of Offense Reports

Offense reports are completed by police officers or citizens when documenting the occurrence of a crime. The researcher maintained the two time periods when comparing offense reports. In Period 1, the block had an average of 2.2 crimes per month and in period 2 there were .7 crimes per month. This represents a reduction of 1.5 crimes per month or 68% (1.5 / 2.2). This comparison tends to show a nexus between the closure and rehabilitation of the house and the crime for the entire block. Clearly, the number of offense reports dropped after the closure of the house. In addition, at the house there were .86 (25 / 29) crimes per month in Period 1 and .05 (1 / 18) crimes in Period 2. There was a total reduction of crime by .81 or 94% (.81 / .86) per month. The sharp drop in crime after the closure and rehabilitation of the property illustrates the results of the government’s action on crime at the house and in the block. The dramatic drop of crime reports at the house between the two periods is responsible for a large portion of the total drop in crime for the block.

Comparison of Drug Hotline Calls

The Drug Hotline is used to report crimes related to narcotics trafficking in the street and/or specific properties. This number is widely advertised by the Oakland Police Department and other crime prevention personnel. I compared the Drug Hotline Calls for Period 1 and Period 2.

There were .24 calls per month in Period 1, and .16 calls in Period 2. This represents a 33% reduction of calls to the Drug Hotline between Period 1 and Period 2. This comparison

tends to show a drop of drug activity at the house and the block. The Drug Hotline calls in Period 1 described specific drug activity next to specific houses and on the sidewalk and/or street areas of the block. The Drug Hotline calls in Period 2 described some incidents of drug dealing at the corner of 85th Avenue at Olive Street, at the eastern boundary of the study area. It should be noted that there were no calls to the Hotline reporting any activity at the house. This represents a 100% drop of Drug Hotline calls reporting drug activity at the house.

Summary of Personal Interviews

Officer Brad Gardiner, nationally recognized for his efforts in closing problem properties, worked on the property and stated that before the house was closed there was an inordinate amount of calls for police service for drug related offenses. In his opinion, the crime at the house stopped and the crime in the block dropped as a direct result of the property closure. He stated that numerous citizens have contacted him with positive comments about the closure. Sergeant Michael Poirier, Supervising Sergeant for the Crime Reduction Team in the area of the house, provided specific information on criminal history of the residence. He stated that his officers made numerous arrests at the house prior to the closure and rehabilitation the property. Once the property was closed on December 2, 2002, the drug dealing stopped at the property, and he noticed a drop of criminal activity on the entire block.

Barbara Killey, Deputy City Attorney for the Oakland City Attorney's Office, provided information related to legal action taken against the property. She believes that the house was a magnet for crime problems in the entire block. Based on her work on the project, she believes that the closure of the house dropped the crime rate not only at the specific property but in the entire block.

Sergeant Robert Crawford, a nationally recognized expert in problem/nuisance properties with 40 years of law enforcement experience, provided background information regarding the Beat Health Process. He stated that a single property can often be responsible for an inordinate amount of police response in the neighborhood, and that such was likely the case at the house.

Research Questions

1-Did the government's action taken and subsequent sale of the house decrease the crime rate at the house?

Yes. The survey of residents showed that 84% believed that crime dropped at the house. The survey of government employees showed that 72.1% of government employees believed that crime would drop because of the closure and rehabilitation of the house. The offense reports

show a 94% reduction in crime at the location. The Drug Hotline calls show a 100% reduction at the house. The interviews conducted support the conclusion of a drop in crime rate at the house.

2-Did the government's action taken and subsequent sale of the house decrease the crime rate in the block?

Yes. The survey of residents showed that 84% believed that crime dropped in the block. The survey of government employees showed that 78% of government employees believed that crime would drop because of the closure and rehabilitation of the house. The offense reports show a 73% reduction in crime at the house. The Drug Hotline calls show a 53% reduction in the block. The interviews conducted support the drop in crime in the block.

3-Does the actual increase/decrease of crime in the block match the perceptions of the residents in the block and government employees?

Yes. The residents overwhelmingly perceived a decrease in crime at the house and the block. The majority of residents, 84%, indicated that they feel safer in the block since the house was closed and rehabilitated. The government employee surveys showed that they felt that crime would drop significantly at the house and the block. The interviews of government employees matched the perceptions of the residents in the block.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research showed a reduction of crime at house and in the block, after the property closure and rehabilitation. The residents overwhelmingly indicated an increased sense of safety, and one that will pay dividends for years to come. A resident's sense of safety is closely tied to his/her perception of quality of life in the area; therefore, the increase in perceived safety equals an increase in quality of life. The research supports this strategy's use to reduce crime reduction in other neighborhoods.

The research shows that the residents' observations in the block closely match the expectations of the government employees that work on problem/nuisance properties. This means that government employees believe that closing problem/nuisance properties will lower crime at that location and at a slightly lower rate in the block. Those beliefs are matched by the perceptions of the residents in the block as well as the analysis of the offense reports and Drug Hotline calls.

Although this strategy has seen many successes since 1988, there are some policies that would potentially strengthen the strategy. The following is a list of policy recommendations and areas for further research:

Policy Recommendations

Target Group: Public Safety Officials

- Continue the focus on nuisance/problem properties as a viable solution to address crime. Maintain current staffing levels dedicated to the program and/or seek additional staffing even in tough budget times. An effective Beat Health Program will reduce the overall demand for police service at specific properties.
- Look for more tools to shut down/rehabilitate problem/nuisance properties and seek additional regulations to strengthen the ability to address these problems. In addition, this strategy allows the police to spend their valuable time and resources on other nuisance/problem properties.
- Publicize results to the broader neighborhood around the block. This may broaden the sense of safety in the larger neighborhood and galvanize other neighborhoods to call for action against other problem/nuisance properties. This can be accomplished with the staff currently assigned to community outreach.

Provide training for residents after the abatement of a problem/nuisance property. Training should include recognition of criminal behavior and the appropriate reporting of observed criminal behavior. In addition, they should learn how to spot conditions conducive to criminal behavior and take swift action. The emphasis should be on proactive action to maintain an environment conducive to safety and to maintain the gains achieved in the neighborhood.

- Foster the police/government and community partnerships with the 1900 block of 85th Avenue and other areas. This will increase communication and facilitate the reporting of conditions conducive to crime. Over time, this will provide police and government officials with more information on problem/nuisance properties with the citizens acting as the eyes and ears of the program. This will increase the sense of safety in the neighborhoods.
- Continue to provide training to police and government officials on the Beat Health Process. The training should highlight the advantages of this strategy to the overall safety in the neighborhoods. The training creates buy-in on the part of employees, because they will see that their hard work pays great dividends for the community. In addition, the training should

emphasize the criminal and civil codes used to attack problem properties. This training will increase the capacity of the police and government employees to effectively deal with problem/nuisance properties.

Target Group: Elected Officials

- Mandate support for this strategy at the highest levels of police department and other government agencies. This process is dependent on the coordination of many enforcement and inspection services from the city and county governments. If agencies set different priorities, it may slow the number of multi-agency problem/nuisance property inspections. If anything, the number of inspections should increase until every problem/nuisance property has been addressed.
- Maintain program funding in the budget, even during fiscal crisis. This program represents a wise use of taxpayer funds, because it can solve problems for the long term. In the end, this strategy will reduce the drain on valuable police and government services.

Areas for Further Research

- Researchers should look for additional indicators of crime in the area. Other measures may offer additional or more specific insight into the total impact of crime and safety in the block. The most prevalent measure, calls for police service, was not possible in this research because of staffing cut backs and computer system / data base changes at the Oakland Police Department. These issues will be worked out over time and that information will become available.
- Research additional properties in a wide array of neighborhoods. This research should be conducted on a larger scale using the same technique to determine the external validity of this study. The additional research could solidify this strategy as a viable tactic to use and/or enhance efforts to combat problem properties.
- Research the socio-economic conditions and the effect of external factors such as: the economy, the availability of drug rehabilitation in the area, and/or community pressure for the drug users to leave the area.

Law enforcement and government agencies continue to look for effective ways to deal with problem/nuisance properties. This research has shown that correcting the conditions conducive to criminal behavior at a problem/nuisance property yields benefits for the entire block, and constitutes well-founded public policy. Particularly in a time of shrinking budgets,

this strategy effectively deals with those properties drawing an inordinate amount of police response. Most importantly, this strategy creates a feeling of increased safety in neighborhoods and ultimately that increases the quality of life for the residents. This should be one of the government's highest priorities.

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