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

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

**Research Study  
Submitted as Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Golden Gate University  
Executive Masters of Public Administration Degree  
Under the Direction of Dr. Joaquin Gonzalez**

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**Abstract**

In the late 1980's the Oakland Police Department pioneered a process that allowed the City of Oakland and Alameda County agencies to close specific properties that contributed to unsafe conditions in neighborhoods. These conditions include run down and/or abandoned homes where owners allow crime to flourish on the property (problem/nuisance properties). The properties can be businesses, apartments or single-family homes. Those who oppose the process feel that it disproportionately affects the poor who cannot afford to fix "blighted" conditions as quickly as more affluent people. They also argue that the process may not be effective because of other possible attracters and causes of crime in a neighborhood. Proponents believe that they must begin to hold people accountable, regardless of economic status, for allowing degrading conditions to exist. Proponents and public agencies often believe shutting down the property will improve safety in the neighborhood.

In this paper, the researcher studied the closing down of the blighted property at 1956 85th Avenue, Oakland, CA. This study gathered and analyzed information from crimes statistics, personal interviews, literature reviews, survey of residents in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and survey of government employees involved in the closure of the problem/nuisance properties. The case study compares two periods: before the problem property was closed and after the problem property was closed.

The research showed a sharp reduction of crime at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue, after the property was shut down on December 2, 2002. It shows that the residents' observations in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue closely match the expectations of the government employees who work on problem/nuisance properties. In addition, the residents in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue felt safer as a direct result of the property closure and rehabilitation.

## 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. The process 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.

There are many groups that believe the policy is not fair to minority populations. Michelle Malkin, writing for *Reason Magazine*, believes that the Seattle, Washington's

application of this process unfairly targets areas in which people cannot afford to fight legal action by government officials (Malkin, Michelle, *Reason Magazine*, Mar 1999). In addition, some feel the process disproportionately affects the poor who cannot afford to fix blighted conditions as quickly as more affluent people. They also argue that the process may not be effective because of other possible attracters of crime in the neighborhood. Proponents believe they must hold property owners accountable, regardless of economic status, for allowing those conditions to exist so that residents have decent and safe neighborhoods.

The researcher believes the closing and rehabilitation of the blighted property at 1956 85th Avenue, Oakland, CA, has caused a decrease in crime at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Oakland, CA. In addition, the residents' and government workers' perceptions of the drop in crime are consistent with the number of crimes reported and drug hot line calls. This paper details research regarding the casual relationship between the activity at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and crime in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The researcher gathered and analyzed information from crime statistics, personal interviews, literature reviews, 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. Internet search engine [www.Google.com](http://www.Google.com) yielded only a few related news articles. The researcher examined numerous databases at the Golden Gate University Library and the Golden Gate University Law Library, as well as a physical search of the relevant sections in each library. The researcher located 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: United States Department of Justice ([www.usdoj.gov](http://www.usdoj.gov)), United States Department of Justice: Office of Community Policing Oriented Services ([www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov)), International Association of Chief's of Police ([www.iacp.org](http://www.iacp.org)), and the Police Executive Research Forum ([www.policeforum.org](http://www.policeforum.org)).

A query of municipal law enforcement agency web-sites was also conducted: Los Angeles Police Department ([www.lapdonline.org](http://www.lapdonline.org)), San Diego Police Department ([www.sannet.gov/police](http://www.sannet.gov/police)) and San Jose Police Department ([www.sjpd.org](http://www.sjpd.org)). The search revealed that the agencies have personnel assigned to problem/nuisance properties, but they did not list any material related to the comparison of the before and after phases of closing down those properties. 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*. (DeVries, 1999)

DeVries outlined Oakland's Beat Health Program as a new method 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 police responses, each week, 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).

The search for the right solution to end crime has been at the top of the public policy agenda for many years. As Thomas Dye stated, "Crime is the central problem confronting any society" (2002, p.58). Many criminal laws have been passed to protect society and contain a sense of "protectorism" in them (Bozeman, 1979, p.61). For



example, speeding laws are made to protect us from high-speed collisions which increase the chance of death during the collision. Laws that give sexual predators additional prison time are an attempt to protect society from those willing to commit sex crimes. The Beat Health program focuses on properties and locations that are so bad the government needs to step in and close them down or force the criminal element off of the property. In one sense, we are protecting the citizens from other citizens who are not able to provide the necessary care for their property. In addition, this program is heavily reliant on the "Institutionalism" policy model (Dye, 2002, p.12). Dye describes "Institutionalism" as "Public policy authoritatively determined, implemented, and enforced by these institutions" (2002, p.12). The program was originally pushed by Sgt. Bob Crawford who realized the power of the concentrated effort of government resources, because they inherently bring "legitimacy," "universality," and "coercion" when necessary (Dye, 2002, p.13-24).

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. As Green-Mazerolle and Roehl state in *Controlling Drug and Disorder Problems: Oakland's Beat Health Program*, "The

program improves the physical appearances of problem locations, alters perceptions of criminal opportunities, and mobilizes citizens and other third parties (such as landlords and business owners) to take action toward eradicating problems on their properties” (1999, p. 83). This also fits in Dye’s description of “rationalism,” which he describes as “policy as maximum social gain” (Dye, 2002, p.16). With that perspective, this program closes one problem/nuisance property for the betterment of the entire neighborhood. There was additional strength given to the link between crime and the specific properties, because the problems were easily quantified using basic crime statistics. The police made it known that valuable public safety resources were being disproportionately spent on the response to repeated calls at specific locations. Kingdon states, “The countable problem sometimes acquires a power of its own that is unmatched by problems that are less countable” (1995, p. 93). With the “Institution” defining the same problem as the community, it gave the community even more ammunition in their call for a response to these chronic problems (Dye, 2002, p. 12).

Before the Beat Health Unit was formed, citizens were forced to call each separate government agency to get a particular form of response to a problem/nuisance property. At that point, there was no centralized group that could galvanize appropriate agencies into a concentrated fashion. Citizens began to complain, and a group called Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) began to hold meetings with public officials calling for concentrated government action at these types of properties. They held a meeting in the gymnasium at Oakland’s St. Elizabeth’s Church, which drew two thousand people who voiced their support to their elected officials about this new strategy. OCO leader Ron Snyder stated, “OCO was behind this measure, because we

had seen it work in a couple of places. Our groups really wanted some action on the houses that were affecting the quality of life in the neighborhoods. Our organization still strongly supports this program as a tool to close problem properties” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2004). Since 1998, OCO has been tracking the progress of the Beat Health Program and offers support any time there is a threat to scale the program down in size. Kingdon describes the activities of special interest groups: “Interest group pressure does have a positive impact on the government’s agenda, and does so with considerable frequency. A group that mobilizes support, writes letters, sends delegations, and stimulates its allies to do the same can get government officials to pay attention to its issues” (1995, p. 49). Kingdon’s statement describes the activities that OCO has engaged in to keep the Beat Health Process at the top of the political agenda, particularly during the initial implementation phase. Support from a well organized community group is crucial to continue the implementation of the program. Paul Sabatier states, “It is absolutely crucial to maintain active political support for the achievement of statutory objectives over the long course of implementation” (1996, p.387). The OCO’s vocal support and pressure on elected officials has kept the focus on problem properties throughout the implementation of this program.

This process can be very difficult to implement at times, because it involves the coordination of many resources at once. In addition, there are often many glitches with cooperating agencies, because separate agencies can have “conflicting priorities in their agency” (Sabatier, p.383). The officers in the Beat Health Unit worked through that problem early on. Through additional political pressure and support from top administrative and elected officials, several powerful regulatory agencies assigned

personnel to work specifically with the Beat Health Unit. This eliminated the necessity to schedule inspections far in advance. In addition, this allowed them to mobilize quickly to respond to serious violations and threats to public safety. Over the years there have been a number of personnel changes in the unit, but the institutional knowledge has remained because of quality training. Non-Oakland Police personnel involvement has varied over time, but they have maintained some involvement nonetheless. 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). 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 the improvements of some properties as well as some property closures conducted by the Beat Health Unit. The authors conducted randomized field experiment on behalf of the Department of Justice. The study looked at 100 property locations in the City of Oakland where the properties had similar crime problems: 50 of the locations were targeted by the Beat Health Unit (experimental group) and 50 locations were not (control group). The researchers used

raw crime data (provided by the Oakland Police Department) and personal on-site interviews for the evaluation. This study encompassed a number of sites that made minor improvements and some of which were seized by the City of Oakland.

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 hot line 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.

#### *Crime and Place*

In May of 2004, a report detailing trajectories of crimes at specific places in Seattle 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 those places draw disproportionately large amounts of police service.

...they [the data] suggest that the general concentration of crime in hot spots follows a consistent pattern over time. Sherman et al. (1989) report that over a year 50.4 percent of all calls for service in Minneapolis occurred at 3.3 percent of all addresses and intersections and that 100 percent of such calls occurred at 60 percent of all addresses. Very similar findings for all reported incidents are found for each of the 14 years observed in Seattle (see Figure 2). Between 4 and 5 percent of the street segments account for about 50 percent of incidents in our data in each of the years examined. All incidents are

found in between 48 and 53 percent of the street segments. (Bushway, Lum, Weisburd, Yang, 2004, p. 6)

Each "micro place" was defined as a city block encompassing both sides of the street between the corners. The study did not take into consideration neighborhoods made up of a group of blocks and did not consider the socio-economic factors of each micro place or neighborhood. This study confirms a clear connection between crime and place. In addition, it appears to support a strategy of crime reduction by focusing on specific places. It illustrated a large amount of calls in relatively few areas. 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.** Making it more difficult to commit crimes by (1) reducing the availability of crime targets; (2) removing barriers that prevent easy detection of potential offenders or of an offense in progress; and (3) increasing physical obstacles to committing a crime.

• **Land use and circulation patterns.** Creating safer use of neighborhood space by reducing routine exposure of potential offenders to crime targets. This can be accomplished through careful attention to walkways, paths, streets, traffic patterns, and location and hours of operation of public spaces and facilities. These strategies may produce broader changes that increase the viability of more micro-level territorial behaviors and signage. For example, street closings or revised traffic patterns that decrease vehicular volume may, under some conditions, encourage residents to better maintain the sidewalk and street in front of their houses.

• **Territorial features.** Encouraging the use of territorial markers or fostering conditions that will lead to more extensive marking to indicate the block or site is occupied by vigilant residents. Sponsoring cleanup and beautification contests and creating controllable, semiprivate outdoor locations may encourage such activities. This strategy focuses on small-scale, private, and semipublic sites, usually within predominantly residential locales (Taylor 1988, chapter 4). It is most relevant at the street block level and below. It enhances the chances that residents themselves will generate semifixed features that demonstrate their involvement in and watchfulness over a particular delimited location. This approach has not proven directly relevant to crime, but it is closely linked to residents' fear of crime.

• **Physical deterioration.** Controlling physical deterioration to reduce offenders' perceptions that areas are vulnerable to crime and that residents are so fearful they would do nothing to stop a crime. Physical improvements may reduce the signals of vulnerability and increase commitment to joint protective activities. Physical deterioration, in all probability, not only influences cognition and behavior of potential offenders but also shapes how residents behave and what they think about other residents. (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. The researchers believe that government employees must address the physical characteristics of an area or the citizens will feel increasingly vulnerable. They write, "In neighborhoods where physical deterioration is more widespread, residents have been

more fearful when the future of that neighborhood has appeared uncertain” (Harrell & Taylor, 1996, p. 18). The researchers state that little is known about how the offenders actually read the specific features, but that they play a role in the determination of the criminal to commit a crime.

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. The broken windows theory is based in the ability to address the small problems that lead to increased neighborhood disorder. Kelling and Wilson wrote,

Social psychologists and police officers tend to agree that if a window in a building is broken *and is left unrepaired*, all of the rest of the windows will soon be broken. This is as true in nice neighborhoods as in run-down ones. Window-breaking does not necessarily occur on a large scale because some areas are inhabited by determined window-breakers whereas others are populated by window-lovers; rather, one unrepaired broken window is a signal that no one cares, and so breaking more windows costs nothing. (Kelling & Wilson, 1982, p. 31)

Broken windows are representative of any condition that shows people that an area is unkept or uncared for by residents. If the negative conditions are left in place, then they will inevitably lead to neighborhood decay and higher crime rates. This theory is widely referred to by law enforcement throughout this nation when discussing crime reduction strategy and it certainly can be used when justifying the closing down of



problem/nuisance properties. A blighted and unkept property could be seen as the beginning of neighborhood decay. Conversely, the closure and rehabilitation of the property may stop the decay of the neighborhood. There has not been much direct research to prove or disprove the broken windows theory; however, it is still widely referred to justify crime prevention policies.

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. (See Appendix D for a more complete diagram of associated crimes) Many of these may not be reflected in the crime reports or other official police reports for a variety of reasons: resident fatigue in reporting crime, which can happen because residents do not think the police can or will do anything about the problem; and when the problem is an incivility, but not a crime, police do not take reports

leaving gaps in police information files; also, even if the problem complained about is a crime, for certain types of crimes (drug dealing and prostitution) if the police do not see it happening when they arrive at the scene then the patrol officer is not required to take a report. While the police may have a role in stemming drug dealing on privately-owned properties, particularly the role of notifying the property owner of his/her obligations to rid the property of the problem, place management practices of the owner will have the biggest influence on whether the drug sales will stop. The Drug Dealing guide, mentioned above, supports the link between management practices, crime, and place.

In 1996, Dan Fleissner and Fred Heinzmann, Ph.D., published an article titled *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design and Community Policing*. They noted that citizens and police can work together to solve problems with environments that are conducive to crime. They discuss several successful crime reduction strategies centered on changing the environment. Most notably, they list the importance of building regulations and civil actions: "Local governments can be encouraged to use building codes as well as inspection and enforcement powers to increase environmental security...Civil actions can be used against building owners or tenants to control criminal activity or the inappropriate use of property" (Fleissner, Heinzmann, p. 3). The use of civil remedies to abate problem properties has become more accepted as a viable crime reduction strategy that not only drops crime but also creates an environment where citizens feel safer. In addition, it creates a sense of trust between the community and government employees.

*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. In practice, third-party policing invokes formal, noncriminal controls imported from the regulatory wing of civil law. Though the ultimate target of police action remains a population of actual or potential offenders, the proximate target of third-party policing is an intermediate class of nonoffending persons who are thought to have some power over the offender's primary environment. (Buerger & 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" (Buerger & Mazerolle, 1998). The strategy can disrupt drug markets and reach criminals that have not been reached by traditional criminal laws. In addition, the eviction of the drug dealers "is effective for disrupting the drug trade and abating its impact on the immediate environment..." (Buerger, Mazerolle, 1998, p.9). The article discusses similar processes in other cities and appears to support the process as a successful public policy.

*Shortcomings of Literature*

Surprisingly, there may not be much information available regarding the aftermath of a project closure because much of the research is done at the beginning of a legal action to close a problem/nuisance property. In order to convince a judge, the municipality of a government agency must show a nexus between the property and crime.

After the home is seized, there is no need for further action on behalf of the City, so they may not study data regarding the aftermath. This search shows there is a need for additional detailed analysis of the effects of this process and whether the closure of a home has an effect on the crime at the specific location and in the immediate neighborhood. In addition, there is a lack of empirical data regarding the citizens' perceptions of crime in these neighborhoods, before and after the official action is taken by the government agency.

## METHODOLOGY

The Dependant Variable will be the crime in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue from 01 Jun 2000 – 31 May 2004 (the time period being studied). The collection of this data presents its own obstacles. Individuals on the block and/or police personnel may not have reported crimes appropriately. There are a number of factors that can effect 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 is 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 data were offense reports, drug hot line calls, a qualitative survey of residents on the block, and a qualitative survey of police/government employees that work on problem/nuisance properties. Police officers assigned to the Beat Health Unit and officers in the Patrol Division are responsible for monitoring the property after the seizure to ensure that the criminal element does not return. The researcher interviewed the Beat Health officers and other government employees to gather any information they may have regarding an increase or decrease in crime on the property. The researcher gathered information from the files containing information on the property at the Beat Health Unit. These files document any official city actions taken at the property. In addition, members of the City Attorney’s Office confirmed official city actions taken against the owner and property, as well as offered

opinions about the nexus of crime in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the specific property at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

The independent variable is the closing of blighted property at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and the research explores a causal relationship between the blighted property and the crime in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The time periods studied are the following: June 1, 2000 – December 1, 2002, introduction of independent variable, then December 2, 2002 – May 31, 2004. Information regarding the introduction of the independent variable is reliable and has been verified through multiple sources: Oakland Police Department receipts for the cost of the board up, and personal account of the police officer present at property closure.

A qualitative survey of residents was conducted in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue to determine the perceptions of crime on the block and at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. (See Appendix A for a list of respondents interviewed) The survey instrument first determined whether or not the resident lived in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue for the entire study period of the project. Residents present before the introduction of the independent variable were asked four questions. Questions were designed to ascertain if there was a perceived decrease in crime at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue after the introduction of the independent variable. The last question determined if the resident feels 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 reflects their 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 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue or the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue until each

survey question was answered. Each question was read verbatim from the questionnaire and the answers were recorded by placing a check mark or circle next to the selection of their choice. The 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue has a large Spanish-speaking population, so there was an independent Spanish speaking translator present at each survey. A translator read the questions from a prepared translation of the survey instrument to ensure consistency (Appendix B).

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. This data is 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 survey may be affected by people's perception of crime or ability to recognize an illegal act. In addition, individuals on the block may choose not to participate in the survey, and some individuals may lie because they may have been involved in illegal activity themselves.

After formulating the initial Citizen Survey (Appendix A), the researcher conducted a focus-group pilot test at the East Oakland Senior Center. They offered constructive criticisms and pointed out ambiguities contained in the questions. The researcher made the appropriate corrections based on the responses. The respondents stated that it would be best for the researcher to conduct the survey in uniform, because

they are aware of illegal activity within blocks of the survey area. In addition, the survey was reviewed by a respected scholar of Public Administration at Golden Gate University, San Francisco, CA.

The researcher formulated a survey for government employees (Appendix C) 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 providing a brief background on the property and using their experience, respondents were asked to gauge the impact of the property closure on crime at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Respondents were also asked to assign a percentage range that they believe the crime would drop at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Lastly, respondents were asked to gauge whether or not they believe residents feel safer in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. 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 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 property 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. After reading the information, the respondents were directed to activate a link that automatically connected them to the web-based survey. Survey Monkey tabulated



the results of the survey and provide the raw numbers to the researcher

([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)). 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 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue decrease the crime rate at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue?

2-Did the government's action taken and subsequent sale of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue decrease the crime rate in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue?

3-Does the actual increase/decrease of crime in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue match the perceptions of the residents in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and government employees?

*Operational Definitions:*

I- *Abating* means causing the nuisance to cease, in this specific case is an eviction of the owner and seizure of the property- then the subsequent sale of the property.

II- *Blighted or Blighted 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.

III- *Crime* means the rate of crime measured by Oakland Police Department Offense Reports and Drug Hot line Calls.

IV- 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.

Members of the Beat Health Unit are technically government employees, but I will separate them out when necessary.

- V- 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.
- VI- *Government Employees* represent members of city and county public agencies, including the Oakland City Attorney's Office, that work on blighted properties.
- VII- *Nuisance Property*: same as *blighted property*.
- VIII- *Problem properties*: same as *blighted properties*.
- IX- *Safer* is a subjective term. It will be used in the survey instruments to measure a person's perceptions relative to their likelihood of being a victim of a crime and/or their general perception of crime in their neighborhood.

*Operational Hypothesis:*

I believe abating the blighted property at 1956 85th Avenue has caused a decrease in crime at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. In addition, the residents' and government workers' perceptions of the drop in crime are matched by the numbers of crimes reported and drug hot line 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). The researcher has made hundreds of arrests for narcotic related offenses and has taken hundreds of crime reports in East Oakland. The researcher has

had hundreds of conversations with drug sellers and users regarding the methods and patterns of the illegal drug trade. 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 hot line calls, and interviews with industry professionals.

### *Surveys*

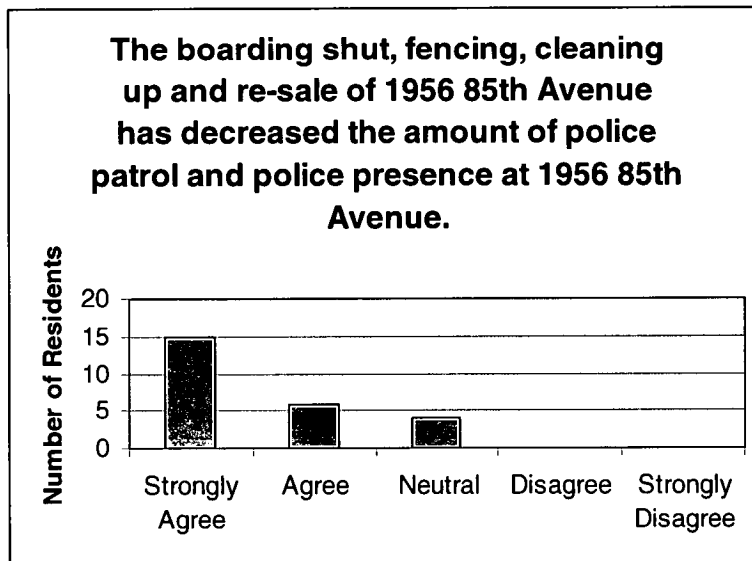
#### *Resident Survey*

The researcher surveyed the residents in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Only one person was interviewed per residence. There were a total of 34 possible respondents, with 33 of the respondents actually responding to the survey, representing a 97% response rate. The responses were collected on three separate site visits to the block on the following dates: August 21, 2004, August 29, 2004, and September 23, 2004. 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 present before December 2, 2002 (Group 1), and 8 respondents present on/or after December 2, 2002 (Group 2). Twelve of the interviews were conducted in Spanish using translators. The translators used were City Of Oakland employees and used the Spanish survey as the guide for questioning. (See Appendix B for Survey Translation) Each translator was trained by the researcher to ask questions in a uniform pattern. The researcher prepared a matrix of respondents, the date the survey was taken, whether present before December 2, 2002, and the language in which the survey was taken. (See Appendix E) Although the respondents were not asked how long they have resided in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 20 voluntarily provided the information, which the researcher noted in Appendix E. The most passionate respondents were the ones

closest to 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. They generally felt most strongly about the positive changes because of the closure of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Many citizens provided stories about the criminal activities of the residents of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue before the property closure. It should be noted that Group 2 was given a brief description of events surrounding the closure. They were then read only one statement, and asked to provide their opinion. (See Appendix F for a detailed description of respondents' answers)

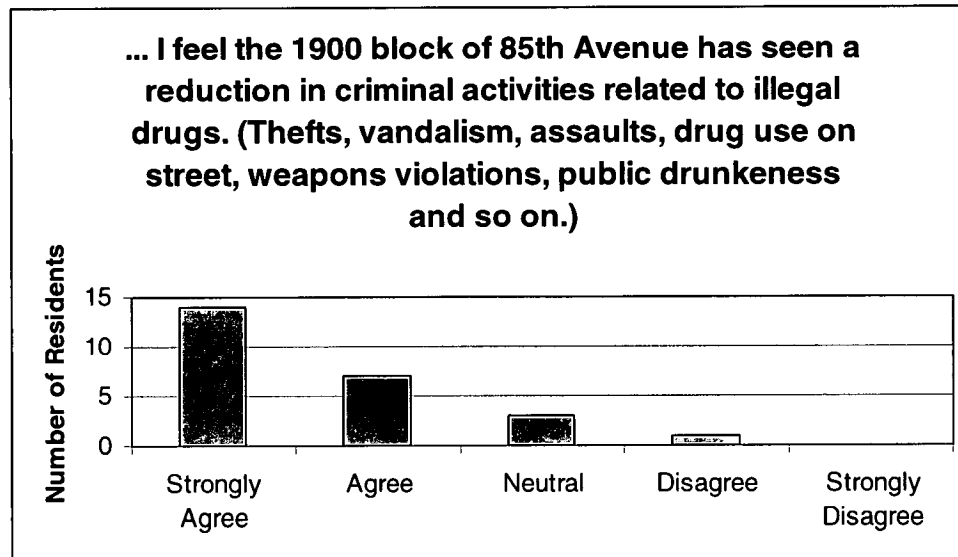
*Group 1*

1- Statement presented: *The boarding shut, fencing, cleaning up and re-sale of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue has decreased the amount of police patrol and police presence at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.* Sixty percent (15) of the respondents 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.



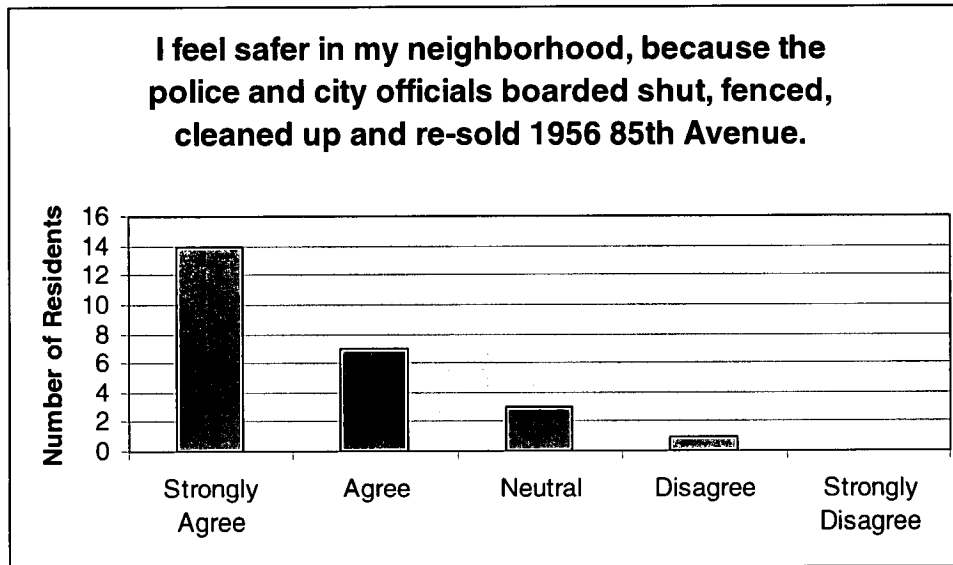
The response to this question tends to show that the residents clearly perceive less police presence at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. None of the residents disagreed with the statement, and the highest category was strongly agree.

2- Statement Presented: *Since 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue was boarded shut, fenced, cleaned up and re-sold, (or as long as you have been here) I feel the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> 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 (14) of respondents 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 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue caused the perception of the reduction of crimes related to drugs in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

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

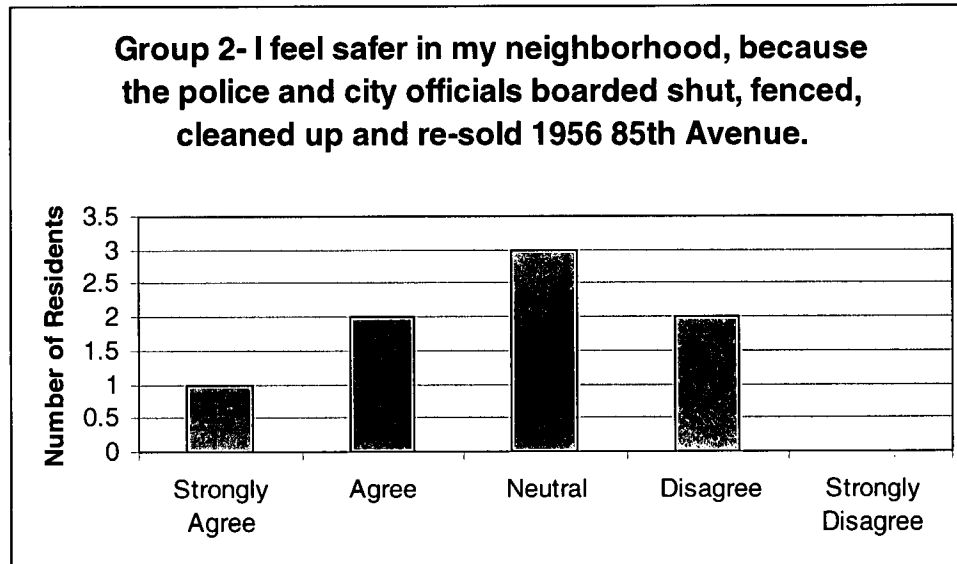


The responses to this question tend to show that residents feel safer because of the property closure and rehabilitation.

The combined responses from Group 1 show that the community clearly perceived an increase to their safety and security in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and their responses tend to show a nexus between the crime and safety in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the closure and rehabilitation 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

#### *Group 2*

1- Statement Presented: *I feel safer in my neighborhood, because the police and city officials boarded shut, fenced, cleaned up and re-sold 1956 85<sup>th</sup> 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 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the closure of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. As noted earlier, this group was not present before the closure and rehabilitation of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It should be noted that some of the respondents stated that they heard about some of the problems at the problem property before the closure from other residents from Group 1. This shows that the house had enough effect on some residents that they discussed it with new residents that moved into the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

#### *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. (See Appendix G for a detailed list of responses to the government employee survey)

1- Statement Presented: *The police activity at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> 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),



11% (2) agreed, 22.2% (4) had no opinion, 5.6% (1) disagreed, and no one strongly disagreed.

**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%

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 citizens in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

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 strongly agreed, 33.3% (6) and/or agreed, 44.4% (8), 22.2% (4) had no opinion, and no one disagreed or strongly disagreed.

**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%

The clear majority of government employees feel that the closure of the property decreased the amount of crime in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

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, 38.9% (7), and/or agreed, 16.7% (3), 38.9% (7) had no opinion, 5.6% (1) disagreed, and no one strongly disagreed.

**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%

Government employees felt that citizens would feel safer, but the majority was not as strong as other questions.

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%.

**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%

The majority felt that crime would drop 61-100% after the property was closed and rehabilitated. This shows that employees believed there was a strong nexus between the property and crime on the property.

5- Question Presented: *What percentage do you believe police activity has decreased in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> 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%.

#### 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%

This response shows that employees believe crime would drop in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue, but not as high a percentage at the specific property of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Even though the researcher provided a brief summary of the property closure and rehabilitation, several possible respondents contacted the researcher and stated that they were not comfortable with the survey, because they would need more information to make an informed opinion. Several voiced apprehension in rendering an opinion, because they are not familiar with the entire area. They stated that there were so many factors involved, it was very difficult to offer an opinion since they did not work on the project themselves. This suggests that some government employees believe that a wide array of socio-economic or other conditions play a role in the extent to which the block will see an actual drop in crime.

#### *Offense Reports*

Offense reports are completed by police officers or citizens when documenting the occurrence of a crime. As noted in the methodology section, offense reports can be an indicator of criminal behavior in a neighborhood. This measure is dependent on the

willingness of citizens to report crimes to the police and the police recording them on the appropriate report. The researcher looked at two periods to compare the crime statistics. The first time frame was June 1, 2000 – December 1, 2002 (Period 1), before the closure of the property. The second time frame was December 2, 2002 – May 31, 2004 (Period 2), after the closure and boarding up of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

*Period 1*

In the 29-month period, there were 69 crime reports completed (25 reports at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 44 at other locations in the block). The crimes can be listed in three categories: Drug Offenses, Violence and/or Guns, Miscellaneous and/or thefts. (See the chart below for details) There was an average of 2.2 crime reports per month (64/29) during the period. Some of the crimes occurred in other residences, and it is not possible to determine if the problem property was involved with those crimes. (Note: There were similar calls in both periods of measurement, and they may have a proportional effect in each period.)

**Period 1, Offense Reports: June 1, 2000 – December 1, 2002**

	Drug Offenses	Violence and/or Guns	Misc. Reports and/or thefts	TOTAL
1956 85 <sup>th</sup> Avenue	21	1	3	25
1900 Block of 85 <sup>th</sup> Avenue (Street and houses)	10	19	15	44
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>69</b>

*Period 2*

In the 18-month period, there were 13 crime reports completed (1 report at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Ave, and 13 reports at other locations in the block). The crimes can be listed in three categories: Drug Offenses, Violence and/or Guns, Miscellaneous and/or thefts. There

was an average of .7 crimes per month (13/18) during the period. It is not possible to determine if the problem property was involved with those crimes. (Note: There were similar calls in both periods of measurement and they may have a proportional effect on both periods.)

**Period 2, Offense Reports: December 2, 2002 – May 31, 2004**

	Drug Offenses	Violence and/or Guns	Misc. Reports and/or thefts	TOTAL
1956 85 <sup>th</sup> Avenue	0	0	1	1
1900 Block of 85 <sup>th</sup> Avenue (Street and houses)	0	5	7	12
TOTAL	0	5	8	13

*Comparison*

In Period 1, the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue 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 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the crime for the entire block of 1900 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Clearly, the amount of offense reports dropped after the closure of the property. In addition, at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue 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 residence and in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The dramatic drop of crime reports at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue between the two periods is responsible for a large portion of the total drop in crime for the block.

*Drug-Hotline Calls*

The Drug hotline is used to report crimes related to narcotics trafficking in the street and specific properties. This number is widely advertised by the Oakland Police Department and other crime prevention personnel. There is no specific information detailing the amount of residents familiar with this number. This measure is dependent on the willingness of citizens to report crimes to the police via the drug hotline. Two periods were looked at to compare the crime statistics. The first time frame was June 1, 2000 – December 1, 2002 (Period 1), before the closure of the property. The second time frame was December 2, 2002 – May 31, 2004 (Period 2), after the closure and boarding up of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

*Period 1*

In the 29-month period before the closure, there were a total of seven drug hot line calls. Two calls specifically detailed drug activity taking place at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The callers stated that drug dealing was taking place at the house with heavy foot traffic day and night. A second call stated that 4-6 males were dealing drugs on the property. Five calls provided details of dealing on the street and next to two other houses on the block. There was an average of .24 calls per month (7/29) during the period.

**Period 1, Drug Hotline Calls: June 1, 2000 – December 1, 2002**

	Drug Hotline calls
1956 85 <sup>th</sup> Avenue	2
1900 Block of 85 <sup>th</sup> Avenue (Street and houses)	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>

*Period 2*

In this 18-month period, there were a total of 3 drug hotline calls. All three of the calls detailed drug dealing on the corner of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue at Olive Street. The activity was at the intersection between the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 2000 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. There was an average of .16 calls per month (3/18) during the period.

**Period 2, Drug Hotline Calls: December 2, 2002 – May 31, 2004**

	Drug Hotline calls
1956 85 <sup>th</sup> Avenue	0
1900 Block of 85 <sup>th</sup> Avenue (Street and houses)	3
TOTAL	3

*Comparison*

In Period 1, there were .24 calls per month and .16 in Period 2. This represents a 33% reduction of calls to the drug hot line between Period 1 and Period 2. This comparison tends to show a drop of drug activity at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the 1900 block 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The drug hotline calls in Period 1 described specific drug activity next to specific houses or in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The drug hot line calls in Period 2 described drug dealing at the corner of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue at Olive Street, which is the intersection to the east of the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It should be noted that there were no calls to the hot line reporting any activity at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This represents a 100% drop of drug hot line calls reporting drug activity in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This shows that the activity in the 1900 block has not moved to other houses or introduced another variable to the study.

*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. The property was in disarray with large amounts of drug paraphernalia in the area. He met with the owner and determined that she was allowing drug dealing to take place on her property and was not capable of stopping the illegal activity. After the property closure on December 2, 2002, he monitored the property on a regular basis. He conducted site visits, monitored drug hot line calls, and talked to citizens in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. In his opinion, the crime at the house stopped and the crime in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue dropped as a direct result. He stated that numerous citizens have contacted him with positive comments about the closure. He believes the closure and rehabilitation of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue has decreased the crime in the block and constitutes a valuable crime reduction strategy.

Sergeant Michael Poirier, Supervising Sergeant for the Crime Reduction Team in the area of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue, provided specific information on criminal history of the residence. He stated that his officers made numerous arrests at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue prior to the closure and rehabilitation the property. Once the property was closed on December 2, 2002, the drug dealing stopped at the property. The closure brought less people involved in the drug trade into the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. He has noticed an overall decrease of criminal activity in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

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 problems in the entire block. The amount of drug dealing occurring on the property was likely responsible for bringing a criminal element into the neighborhood. Based on her work on the project, she believes that the closure of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue dropped the crime rate not only at the specific property but in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue as well. Sergeant Robert Crawford, a nationally recognized expert in problem/nuisance properties and 40 years of law enforcement experience provided background information into 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 is likely the case at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

*Research Questions*

1-Did the government's action taken and subsequent sale of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue decrease the crime rate at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue?

Yes. The survey of residents showed that 84% believed that crime dropped at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The survey of government employees showed that 72.1% of government employees believed that crime would drop because of the closure and rehabilitation of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The offense reports show a 94% reduction in crime at the location. The drug hot-line calls show a 100% reduction at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The interviews conducted, with relevant case workers, support the drop in crime rate at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

2-Did the government's action taken and subsequent sale of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue decrease the crime rate in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue?

Yes. The survey of residents showed that 84% believed that crime dropped in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The survey of government employees showed that 78% of

government employees believed that crime would drop because of the closure and rehabilitation of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The offense reports show a 73% reduction in crime at the location. The drug hot-line calls show a 53% reduction in the 1900 block 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The interviews conducted, with relevant case workers, support the drop in crime in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

3-Does the actual increase/decrease of crime in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue match the perceptions of the residents in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and city staff?

Yes. The residents overwhelmingly perceived a decrease in crime at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The majority of residents, 84%, indicated that they feel safer in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue since 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue was closed and rehabilitated. The government employee surveys showed that they felt that crime would drop significantly at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The interviews of government employees matched the perceptions of the residents in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research showed a reduction of crime at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue, after the property closure and rehabilitation. This provides compelling evidence that closing problem/nuisance properties is a viable strategy for reducing crime and changing the environmental conditions conducive to criminal behavior. The residents overwhelmingly indicated an increased sense of safety, and 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 shows that the residents' observations in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue closely match the expectations of the government employees that work on problem/nuisance properties. This means that governmental 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 resident in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue as well as the analysis of the offense reports and drug hot line calls.

When there is an abatement of a problem/nuisance property, the owners are given numerous opportunities to make positive changes to the conditions. After numerous court proceedings and/or due process hearings, the court can order corrective measures. This provides the owner with numerous opportunities to make the appropriate changes. If the corrections cannot be made by the property owner, then the conditions should be corrected by the government. The property cannot be allowed to attract crime into the neighborhood and affect the safety of the other residents in that neighborhood. In

addition, specific properties should not be allowed to draw a disproportionate amount of police services on a permanent basis. Police resources are stretched very thin in Oakland, and this represents a viable strategy for changing the conditions that draw an inordinate amount of police time and attention.

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

*Policy Recommendations*

*Target Group: Government and Police Managers*

- 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.
- Look for additional tools to shut down/rehabilitate problem/nuisance properties and seek additional regulations to strengthen our 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 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. 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 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and other areas. This will increase the 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.

- Provide training to police and government officials. The training should highlight the advantages of this strategy to the overall safety in the neighborhoods. The training will create buy-in on the part of employees, because they will see that their hard work has paid 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 government. If agencies set different priorities, it may slow the amount of multi-agency problem/nuisance property inspections. If anything, the amount 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 solves the problem for the long term. In the end, this strategy will reduce the drain on valuable police and government services.

*Areas for Further Research*

- Research Additional Indicators of Crime- There are other ways to measure crime in the neighborhoods. Other measures may offer additional or more specific insight into the total impact of crime and safety in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The most prevalent, 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 at a later time.
- Research on a Larger Scale- 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 External Influences- Research into the socio-economic factors and changes within them could offer additional insight into the strategy and 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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**APPENDIX A**

**Resident Survey**

I am a college student at Golden Gate University conducting a research project regarding the house located at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. I am attempting to assess the impact on criminal activity in the neighborhood as a result of the boarding shut, fencing, cleaning up and re-sale of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. I am going to ask you several questions that relate to the property at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and your perceptions of crime on this block.

1- Have you lived here before December 2, 2002?

- Yes
- No

Based on your observations and perceptions, please respond to each of the following questions choosing one answer that best reflects your feelings. The answer choices range from: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. I will repeat your choices after each question.

2- The boarding shut, fencing, cleaning up and re-sale of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue has **decreased** the amount of police patrol and police presence at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

3- Since 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue was boarded shut, fenced, cleaned up and re-sold, (or as long as you have been here) I feel the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> 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.)

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

4- I feel safer in my neighborhood, because the police and city officials boarded shut, fenced, cleaned up and re-sold 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**APPENDIX B**

Spanish Translation of Resident Survey

Se esta llevando acabo un estudio de la propiedad en el **1956 de la Ave 85**. Estamos asesorando los problemas que causaban las actividades ilegales de esta propiedad.

Le voy hacer unas preguntas, basandose en su observación de esta propiedad. Favor de responder: esta deacuerdo, neutral, no esta deacuerdo.

**1. Tiene usted vivido en esta casa desde Diciembre 2, 2002?**

- Si
- No

**2. Desde que la ciudad y la policia limpio, acerco y vendio la propiedad en el 1956 de la Ave. 85, la presencia de la policia en esta propiedad a vajado?**

- ❖ Esta deacuerdo fuertemente
- ❖ Esta deacuerdo
- ❖ Neutral
- ❖ No esta deacuerdo
- ❖ No esta deacuerdo fuertemente

**3. Desde que limpiaron, acercaron y vendieron la propiedad en el 1956 de le Ave 85 usted ha visto menos actividades ilegales relacionadas con drogas, robos, asaltos, pistolas en esta cuadra ?**

- ❖ Esta deacuerdo fuertemente
- ❖ Esta deacuerdo
- ❖ Neutral
- ❖ No esta deacuerdo
- ❖ No esta deacuerdo fuertemente

**4. Se siente mas seguro(a) porque la policia y los oficiales de la ciudad limpiaron, acercaron y vendieron esta propiedad?**

- ❖ Esta deacuerdo fuertemente
- ❖ Esta deacuerdo
- ❖ Neutral
- ❖ No esta deacuerdo
- ❖ No esta deacuerdo fuertemente

APPENDIX C

Government Employee Survey

I am a student at Golden Gate University conducting a research project regarding the rehabilitation (boarding shut, cleaning, and subsequent re-sale) of the house located at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The work on the property was completed by various members of city and county agencies. The previous owners were accused of participating in significant criminal activity at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue. In fact, over a 29-month period before the property rehabilitation, there were 25 police reports completed listing 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue as the location of a crime (21 of those reports listed as narcotics offenses). There were a total of 64 crime reports completed on the entire block for the same 29-month period (including the 25 from 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Ave). On December 2, 2002, 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue was boarded shut, cleaned, and after a period of negotiation- a third party sold the property. It is now occupied by what appears to be responsible property owners.

I am assessing the *perceptions* of various stakeholders involved in the rehabilitation (boarding shut, cleaning up, and possible re-sale) of problem properties. Although you may not have participated in the boarding shut, cleaning up, and subsequent re-sale of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue, your professional judgments and opinions are relevant to my study. Individuals who work on problem properties expect specific results from this type of action. Given the brief background information on 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue and based on your experience with these types of properties, please answer a short web-based questionnaire (5 short questions).

Your specific answers will be kept strictly confidential!! I will compile all of the answers and only discuss the groupings of each answer. (The website will not ask for your name or any identifiers.) Use your mouse to select the web-link below and it will direct you to the questions.

Based on your observations and perceptions of the property rehabilitation process, what are your responses to the following statements? Choose the answers that best reflect your opinions. The term "police activity" means crimes reported at that location, self-initiated arrests by officers, and drug hotline calls.

Thank You for your valuable opinion.

WEBSITE!!!! Link: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=23341608758>

1-The police activity at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue has **decreased** since the property was boarded shut on December 2, 2002, cleaned up, and subsequently re-sold.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- No Opinion

- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

2- The police activity in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue has **decreased** since the property was boarded shut on December 2, 2002, cleaned up, and subsequently re-sold.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- No Opinion
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

3- Residents in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue feel **safer** because the police and city/county officials boarded shut, cleaned up, and subsequently re-sold 1965 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- No Opinion
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

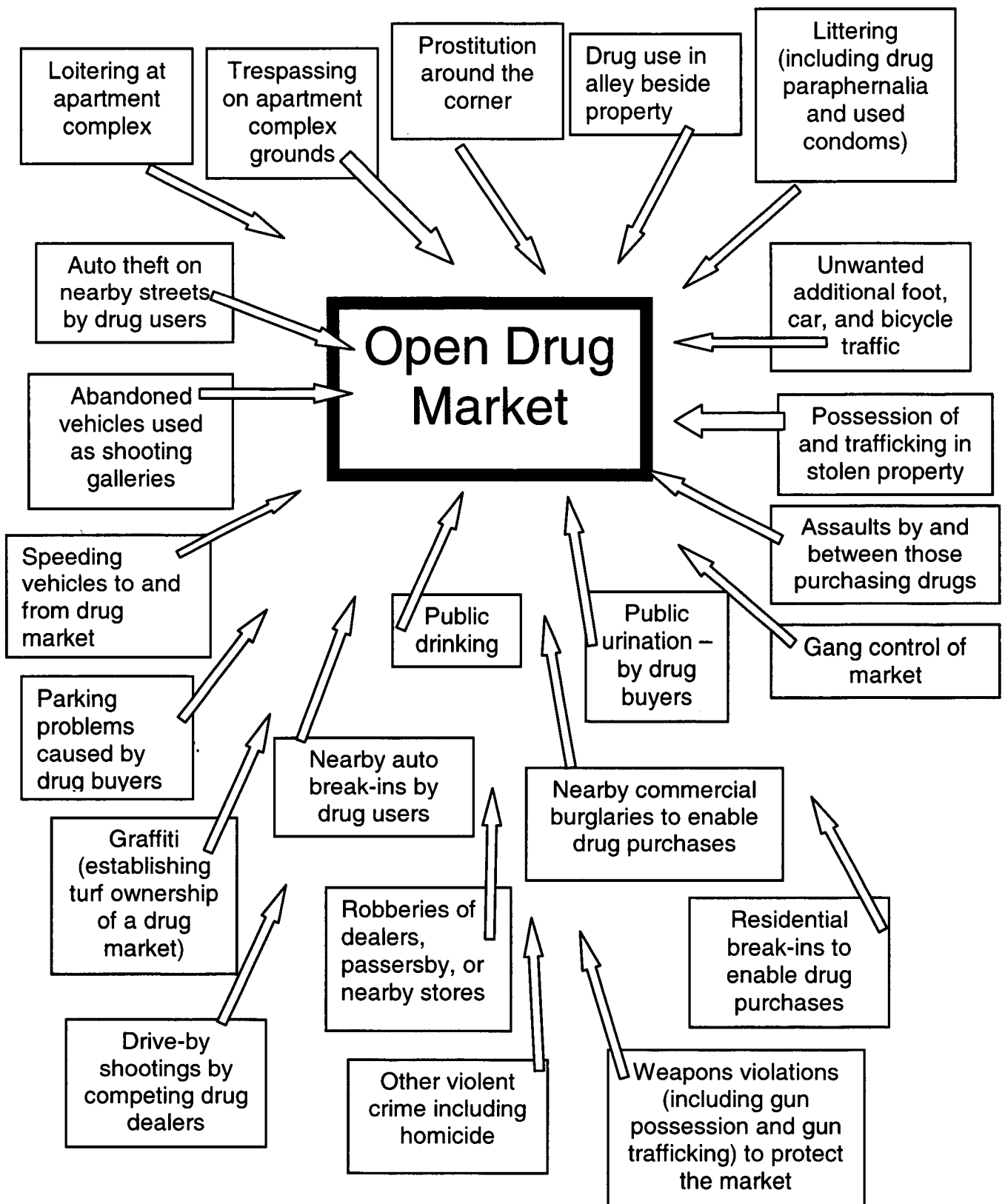
4-What percentage do you believe police activity has **decreased** at 1965 85<sup>th</sup> since the police and city/county officials boarded shut and cleaned up 1965 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue on December 2, 2002.

- 0-20%
- 21-40%
- 41-60%
- 61-80%
- 81-100%
- No Opinion

5-What percentage do you believe police activity has **decreased** in the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue since the property was boarded up on December 2, 2002 and subsequently re-sold.

- 0-20%
- 21-40%
- 41-60%
- 61-80%
- 81-100%
- No Opinion

**APPENDIX D** (\* Developed by Rana Sampson, may copy with attribution.)



Identifying snowball crimes can help police determine priorities for problem-oriented projects. In addition, mapping crimes, as these illustrations depict, may also convince community members and the police to explore more creative solutions than directed patrol, stings and repetitive arrests. In the case of prostitution markets, these solutions should involve nearby businesses, health and social service agencies, as well as lawmakers.

\*\* Developed by Rana Sampson, may copy with attribution.



**APPENDIX E****Survey Matrix for the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue**

Nu.	ADDRESS (85 <sup>th</sup> Ave)	DATE SURVEY TAKEN	PRESENT BEFORE 12-2- 02	LANGUAGE
1	1901	8-21-04	Yes (4-8 years)	English
2	1905	8-29-04	Yes	English
3	1906	9-23-04	Yes (30 years)	English
4	1909	8-21-04	Yes (7 Years)	English
5	1912	9-23-04	Yes (6 Years)	Spanish
6	1915	8-29-04	No	Spanish
7	1918	8-29-04	Yes (5 Years)	English
8	1922	9-23-04	No	English
9	1923 "A"	No Contact	(3 Attempts)	
10	1923 "B"	8-29-04	Yes	English
11	1923 "C"	8-29-04	No	English
12	1923 "D"	8-29-04	No	English
13	1924	9-23-04	Yes (3 Years)	English
14	1927	8-29-04	Yes	English
15	1930	9-23-04	Yes (30 Years)	English
16	1931	8-21-04	Yes (3-4 Years)	English
17	1935	8-21-04	Yes (13 Years)	English
18	1936	9-23-04	Yes	Spanish
19	1944	8-21-04	Yes (4 Years)	English
20	1945	8-29-04	Yes (18 Years)	English
21	1946 "A"	8-21-04	Yes	Spanish
22	1946 "B"	8-21-04	No	English
23	1946 "C"	8-21-04	Yes (3 Years)	English
24	1951	8-21-04	No (1 Year)	Spanish
25	1956	8-21-04	No (5 Months)	English
26	1957	8-29-04	Yes (12 Years)	Spanish
27	1959	8-29-04	No	Spanish
28	1962	8-21-04	Yes (28 Years)	English
29	1965	8-21-04	Yes (7 Years)	Spanish
30	1967	8-21-04	Yes (6-7 Years)	Spanish
31	1968	9-23-04	Yes (15 Years)	English
32	1974	8-21-04	Yes	Spanish
33	1975	8-21-04	Yes (8-9 Years)	Spanish
34	1983	8-29-04	Yes	Spanish

**APPENDIX F**

**Survey Matrix for the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue- Worksheet**

Citizen Survey (People living on the block before December 2, 2002)

Question 1 (Have you lived here before December 2, 2002? Yes)

TOTAL= 25

Question 2- (The boarding shut, fencing, cleaning up and re-sale of 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue has **decreased** the amount of police patrol and police presence at 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.)

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15	6	4	0	0
60%	24%	16%	0%	0%

Question 3- (Since 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue was boarded shut, fenced, cleaned up and re-sold, (or as long as you have been here) I feel the 1900 block of 85<sup>th</sup> 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.))

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14	7	3	1	0
56%	28%	12%	4%	0%

Question 4- (I feel safer in my neighborhood, because the police and city officials boarded shut, fenced, cleaned up and re-sold 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.)

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14	7	3	1	0
56%	28%	12%	4%	0%

Citizen Survey (People who moved to block after December 2, 2004)

TOTAL= 8

Question 4- (I feel safer in my neighborhood, because the police and city officials boarded shut, fenced, cleaned up and re-sold 1956 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.)

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	2	0
12.5%	25%	37.5%	25%	0%

**APPENDIX G**

*Government Employee Survey Results*

1. 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.			
		<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	61.1%	11
<b>Agree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	11.1%	2
<b>No Opinion</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	22.2%	4
<b>Disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5.6%	1
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	0%	0
<b>Total Respondents</b>			<b>18</b>
(skipped this question)			0

2. 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.			
		<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	33.3%	6
<b>Agree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	44.4%	8
<b>No Opinion</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	22.2%	4
<b>Disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	0%	0
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	0%	0
<b>Total Respondents</b>			<b>18</b>
(skipped this question)			0

3. 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 1965 85th Avenue.			
		<b>Response</b>	<b>Response</b>

		Percent	Total
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>38.9%</b>	<b>7</b>
Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	16.7%	3
<b>No Opinion</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>38.9%</b>	<b>7</b>
Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	5.6%	1
Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	0%	0
<b>Total Respondents</b>			<b>18</b>
(skipped this question)			0

4. What percentage do you believe police activity has decreased at 1965 85th since the police and city/county officials boarded shut and cleaned up 1965 85th Avenue on December 2, 2002?

		Response Percent	Response Total
0-20%	<input type="checkbox"/>	0%	0
21-40%	<input type="checkbox"/>	16.7%	3
41-60%	<input type="checkbox"/>	11.1%	2
<b>61-80%</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>27.8%</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>81-100%</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>27.8%</b>	<b>5</b>
No Opinion	<input type="checkbox"/>	16.7%	3
<b>Total Respondents</b>			<b>18</b>
(skipped this question)			0

5. 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?

		Response Percent	Response Total
0-20%	<input type="checkbox"/>	5.6%	1
21-40%	<input type="checkbox"/>	16.7%	3
41-60%	<input type="checkbox"/>	11.1%	2

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<b>61-80%</b>		<b>22.2%</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>81-100%</b>		<b>22.2%</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>No Opinion</b>		<b>22.2%</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Total Respondents</b>			<b>18</b>
<b>(skipped this question)</b>			<b>0</b>