



A Newsletter from the City of Minneapolis

Working together to build a better future for the Northside

Newsletter features efforts to improve livability in north Minneapolis

Welcome to the first issue of the Northforce. We're sharing this newsletter with you because we want you to know what the City of Minneapolis is doing to create a better future for north Minneapolis residents and businesses. Each issue will highlight a few of the efforts underway to improve livability in north Minneapolis.

These efforts are part of a coordinated, cross-departmental approach called Northforce that involves: Police, City Attorney's Office, Regulatory Services, Fire, Community Planning and Economic Development, Public Works, Communications, and Health and Family Support.

To continue receiving the newsletter, you must subscribe by visiting the City's Web site at www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/subscriptions (then click on "Northforce").

To view the newsletter online, go to www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/residents/north.

Cross-departmental approach addresses Northside challenges

When Jordan residents told elected officials they were fed up with crime, gang activity, neighborhood blight, and ailing housing in north Minneapolis, City leaders listened.

On May 5, 2006, elected officials called a special meeting to ask City staff to find new approaches to addressing the challenges facing the Northside. Staff representing eight departments responded by cataloging the resources already being deployed on the Northside and identifying new ways to work together to increase their effectiveness and boost results.

One example of this improved, cross-departmental collaboration is the coordinated effort to deal with convenience stores that generate high numbers of police calls for loitering, drug dealing and assaults. To reduce criminal activity, police stepped up patrols and employed creative approaches such as imposing geographic restrictions on troublemakers. (An individual with a history of drug arrests placed under a geographic restriction does not have to commit another crime to be picked up. Instead, the person can be ticketed or arrested for simply being in the restricted area.)

The Grocery Store Task Force — which includes staff from Police, Regulatory Services, the City Attorney's Office and Community Planning and Economic Development — took on the most troubled stores. Inspectors took a tough stance on zoning, food, health and business license violations. To avoid losing their license, stores were required to repair torn fences, fix surveillance cameras, close earlier and stop selling single cigarettes and other items used by drug dealers. Police made daily visits to stores to make sure they were following these newly imposed conditions and kept a watchful eye on nearby pay phones and bus stops.

In 2006, 16 Northside stores that generated excessive police calls were closely monitored. Seven convenience stores — that together generated more than 2,000 police calls — had their licenses revoked or were closed through administrative processes. Stores that met the new conditions saw dramatic drops in police calls. One store on Penn Avenue that generated 84 police calls in 2006 has had only six calls to date this year.

Home & Business Initiatives

An update on efforts aimed at attracting new businesses, preventing foreclosure, and building or renovating homes and apartments...

‘Cluster’ developments aim for big impacts on neighborhoods

Make big changes in a small area. That’s the idea behind the “cluster” approach to making a noticeably positive impact on the housing stock and home ownership market of North Minneapolis neighborhoods.

Launched in 2005, the Northside Home Fund is a partnership between Northside neighborhood organizations, nonprofit housing and home ownership organizations, governmental and enforcement agencies, community development organizations, private housing developers and financial institutions. The partners work in collaboration to add value to existing neighborhood and institutional efforts to improve the quality of the housing stock and support a healthy housing market.

This multi-faceted approach aims to bring about improvements that are so noticeable that positive change radiates to adjacent blocks. Many City departments, including the Housing Policy and Development Division of the Community Planning and Economic Development Department (CPED), are partners in the effort.

Six clusters have been identified in the Hawthorne, Jordan, McKinley and Willard-Hay neighborhoods. One cluster, located at 31st Avenue and 6th Street North, was renamed the Hawthorne Eco-Village to reflect the shared commitment to creating an ecologically friendly and economically affordable community.

Eco-Village received a \$500,000 grant from the Home Depot Foundation to transform the cluster into a “green” development that uses energy-efficient building techniques and environmentally friendly urban design practices to create a transit- and pedestrian-friendly neighborhood that is safe and attractive.

The cluster’s development partner, Project for Pride in Living, is acquiring vacant and boarded properties and will replace them with seven new units to be sold to owner-occupants. Groundbreaking for Phase One is this summer/fall.

Livability Efforts

An update on efforts aimed at curbing loitering, improving health, stopping graffiti, reducing blight, and addressing nuisances...

Health impact surveys are used to improve cluster development plans

Intuitively, we know that poor lighting, littered streets and crime concerns keep adults from relaxing walks and kids from healthy outdoor play. Understanding the connection between physical surroundings and health, the Department of Health and Family Support is conducting health impact surveys in the six cluster redevelopment projects on the Northside.

In the coming weeks, volunteers will be knocking on doors to complete surveys in four clusters. (The Jordan Pilot and Cottage Park cluster surveys are done.) Surveys results will be shared with the neighborhood associations and organizations working on redevelopment designs for the clusters.

By documenting the connection between surroundings and health, redevelopment planning can take a more holistic approach that creates opportunities for physical and mental health. The Health Department will also use the data to beef up its applications for grants that fund the many health initiatives on the Northside.

Inspections sweep nets results – Housing code compliance climbs

Overgrown lawns, peeling paint, broken windows and junk littering front lawns are more than nuisances and housing code violations. They’re livability problems that send a negative message about a block, drive down property values and hamper efforts to attract middle class families to neighborhoods.

When Jordan neighbors told City leaders they wanted more aggressive inspections to combat lax property maintenance, Regulatory Services responded by initiating a curb-to-alley inspection sweep of all 26,438 homes in the 3rd, 4th and 5th wards. To accomplish the massive effort, 14 interns were hired to help with the regular workload in other parts of the city so that veteran inspectors could walk through Northside neighborhoods five days a week from May through October.

In all, inspectors found 38,228 violations — mostly for peeling paint, damaged trim, junk in the yard, and unmowed grass. Homeowners who couldn’t afford to make the improvements were connected with volunteer organizations. Today, 90 percent of these violations — 34,405 in all — have been resolved.

Housing Code Compliance

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Because some of the inspections weren't completed until autumn, residents were granted extensions so they could wait for warmer weather to paint or make other outdoor repairs. Regulatory Services will re-inspect these properties in the coming weeks and anticipates that 98 percent will be corrected by early July. The remaining violations will continue through the legal process.

Inspectors received notes of appreciation from residents who were pleased to see the City taking a more aggressive stance on property maintenance. Regulatory Services cautions, however, that the long term success will be measured by how well the newly improved properties continue to be maintained. Northside residents are reminded that they should call 311 to report abandoned vehicles, garbage piles or other property maintenance concerns.

Sign the kids up for PAL

If you have children between the ages of 5 and 17, you can sign them up for PAL (Police Activities League). It's an opportunity for kids to play sports, attend summer camp, go on field trips, make new friends and meet positive role models. And, it's free! Members get a T-shirt, quarterly newsletters, and regular mailings about PAL activities. PAL is located at 4119 Dupont Ave. N. For more information, call 612-673-2121 or visit <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/police/about/pal>

Safety Initiatives

An update on efforts aimed at preventing fires, curbing crime, and improving housing safety...

Keeping an eye on vacant houses

Police look at a vacant house and see a "neon sign" inviting problems. Thieves may use these homes to hide from police and stash stolen goods. They also use the homes as a base to make calls for pizza deliveries or cab service — calls that eventually end in robberies. Vacant homes can also be a site for drug deals, illegal drinking parties and prostitution.

Although the number fluctuates as the foreclosure rate changes, the Northside has the largest number of condemned or boarded properties in Minneapolis — currently, 156 out of the city's total of 450. Because of the public safety threat these homes pose, City staff make a special effort to keep a watchful eye on these properties. Regulatory Services and the Fire Department monitor vacant buildings weekly to verify they're secure. If they're not, Regulatory Services ensures the

buildings are boarded up to prevent trespassers from entering the home.

When trespassers do get in, clearing out a vacant property requires police visits and the involvement of other City departments. In one recent instance, police officers were following up on a party house complaint when they found squatters in a vacant fourplex without heat. Leaking water combined with illegal gas and electrical hook-ups posed life-threatening dangers. Police contacted the Water division to get the water shut off and worked with the Regulatory Services and Fire departments to get the home vacated and secured.

Knowing that vacant homes are targets for copper thieves, the Police and City Attorney have also employed trespassing restrictions to keep the most prolific copper pipe thieves away from neighborhoods with several vacant homes. (Thanks to this restriction, an individual does not have to commit a crime to be picked up. Instead, a person who has stolen copper in the past and now has a restriction can be ticketed or arrested for simply being in the restricted area.)

Police credit a recent change in the law for boosting the effectiveness of trespass restrictions as a crime prevention tool. Thanks to a change in the law, the penalty for the third violation has risen from 90 days in jail to 365 days and a \$1,000 fine.

Another recently enacted ordinance has helped ensure that vacant properties don't remain vacant for as long. Regulatory Services monitors vacant homes and tracks down owners to ensure they make repairs and get the property re-occupied or sold.

Previously, the cost of having a home listed on the City's Vacant Building Registration list was \$400 per year — not enough of an incentive for some owners to act quickly. In October, the City raised the annual price of having a property on the list to \$2,000 to give owners a greater incentive to take corrective action quickly.

Unfortunately, the timeframe is much longer when the home is in foreclosure. In these cases, there is often a lengthy legal process required before a foreclosed home can be fixed up, sold or demolished. In the interim, Regulatory Services makes sure that the building is secure, the grass is mowed and rubbish is collected.

In an effort to reduce foreclosures, the City's 311 information service was enlisted to help homeowners find agencies that can help them avoid losing their homes. Depending on the specific situation, Minneapolis 311 call center agents put callers in touch with the Homeownership Preservation Foundation, the Northside Residents Redevelopment Council or Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity.

Coming Up

Here's an update on upcoming events and opportunities for involvement...

Healthy Living presentation

- **Thursday, May 3**
5:30 to 6:30 p.m.
Heritage Park Community Room, 1000 Olson Memorial Highway

Northside resident Evelyn Rhines will share low cost tips for fitness activities you and your children can do together. The presentation, sponsored by UCare, is part of "Get Fit Twin Cities," a four-month fitness challenge sponsored by Steps to a Healthier Minneapolis, an initiative of the Minneapolis Department of Health & Family Support. To register for the free event, call (612) 673-3485.

West Broadway Alive! meeting

- **Tuesday, May 8**
6:30 to 9 p.m. (presentation at 7 p.m.)
800 West Broadway Ave.

West Broadway Alive! is a planning process aimed at laying the groundwork for revitalizing West Broadway through North Minneapolis. At this meeting, attendees will be asked to react to draft strategies for the commercial core from Fremont Avenue North to I-94. Possible strategies include creating a "brand" identity to promote the area, using public art and streetscaping to enhance the area's attractiveness, and finding ways to expand the mix of businesses in the corridor.

This is the fourth of five public meetings seeking public input into the West Broadway Alive! plan. After the fifth meeting — set for July 17 — the plan will be refined and forwarded to the Planning Commission and the City Council for adoption later this autumn. For more information, visit <http://wbalive.info/>.

4th Precinct Advisory Council

- **Tuesday, May 15**
6:30 p.m. - meet and greet / 7 p.m. - meeting
1925 Plymouth Ave. N.

Northside residents and businesspeople are invited to come and meet officers, hear Inspector Lee Edwards' report on precinct activity, and learn about work under way at the precinct. Attendees may also bring addresses of problem properties. Police Advisory Council meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month. For an agenda, contact Mary Rainville at (612) 673-2947 or mary.rainville@ci.minneapolis.mn.us.

Comprehensive Plan forum

- **Thursday, May 17**
4 to 6 p.m.
Capri Theater, 2210 Oliver Ave. N.

The City is updating its Comprehensive Plan, a long-term vision that guides growth and physical development. You're invited to come and discuss three themes that will shape the Minneapolis of the future: sustainability, heritage preservation and urban design. For more information, call (612) 673-2098 or visit www.minneapolisplan.info.

4th Precinct open house

- **Friday, May 18**
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
1925 Plymouth Ave. N.

In recognition of National Police Week, the 4th Precinct invites you to its annual open house. Stop by to see displays staffed by officers and civilians from the Police Department as well as displays from the Fire Department and Hennepin County Water Patrol. Displays will be outdoors, so dress accordingly. If you have questions or would like to volunteer or make a donation, please call Mary Rainville at (612) 673-2947 or e-mail mary.rainville@ci.minneapolis.mn.us.

You Can Help

City workers can't do it alone! Here are some ways you can help us be more effective.

Call 311 to report problems

We can't fix a problem if we don't know about it. If you see graffiti, abandoned vehicles or piles of garbage, call 311. Operators will make sure the right department hears about your concern. They will also respect your request to remain anonymous. Calls are answered Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. (You may also report problems by visiting the City's Web site at www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us and using the box entitled "Tell the City about.")



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