



NORTHforce

A Newsletter from the City of Minneapolis

Working together to build a better future for the Northside

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About this newsletter

The Northforce Newsletter, launched in May 2007, highlights some of the City's efforts to improve livability in north Minneapolis.

To subscribe to this newsletter, visit the City's Web site at www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/subscriptions and click on "Northforce." To view past newsletters online, go to www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/residents/north.

About Northforce

Northforce is the City's coordinated strategy to address the challenges facing the Northside and integrates the work of City departments and community partners to address safety, health, housing, economic and infrastructure issues.

This coordinated strategy builds on the resources already being deployed on the Northside and uses new and creative ways to improve livability in north Minneapolis.

To learn more about Northforce, visit the City's Web site at www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/residents/north.

City and County issue a message to youth –

If you carry a gun, there will be consequences

Recognizing that a more coordinated effort is needed to reduce juvenile gun violence, City and County leaders recently unveiled an aggressive initiative that spells out tough penalties for kids who carry guns.

Highlights of the new Juvenile Gun Offender Initiative, which will be applied consistently throughout Hennepin County, include:

- New court-sanctioned penalties for youth caught carrying BB, replica or real guns. Penalties include probation, classroom gun education and out-of-home-placement.
- Strong, consistent enforcement of the Hennepin County youth curfew law.
- Strong, consistent enforcement of new replica firearms ordinances.
- Aggressive, street-level policing efforts aimed at getting juveniles with active warrants and a history of prior gun offenses to turn themselves in.
- Increased supervision of juveniles on probation for prior gun offenses.

"Our goal is to get guns – real and fake – out of the hands of kids and off our streets," said Minneapolis Police Chief Tim Dolan.

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Tracina Coward and Lafayette Whimper, members of the Minneapolis Youth Congress, joined the Minneapolis mayor, City Council members and police chief, along with the Hennepin County attorney and sheriff at a May 20 news conference announcing a coordinated City/County initiative aimed at reducing juvenile gun possession.

Home & Business Initiatives

City steps up property inspections along Lowry Avenue corridor

This spring, teams of City employees are making a concerted effort to inspect every one of the 145 properties along the Lowry Avenue corridor from the Mississippi River to the western city limits

The inspections, which began May 15, were prompted by concerns about the negative impact that blight can have on this visible and important east-west link between north and northeast Minneapolis. It's also an effort to protect the significant economic development and infrastructure investments both the City and Hennepin County are making along the corridor.

To make Lowry corridor properties safer, cleaner and more attractive, teams are conducting full interior and exterior inspections of all commercial/industrial businesses as well as multi-unit rental properties. They're also doing curb-to-alley inspections of the exteriors of all homes along the corridor. Except for exterior nuisance violations, most orders will be issued shortly after the inspection. Corrections will be due within 30 days.

To ensure a thorough approach, employees from the Problem Properties Unit, Business Licensing, Food Safety, Construction Code Services, Environmental Management, Fire and Zoning are all participating. These departments are taking a coordinated, team approach to avoid duplicating orders and to reduce the interruptions to the businesses being inspected.

The initial inspections should be completed by mid-June. Tentative plans call for a similar inspection effort of the Lowry Avenue properties east of the river later this year.

Lowry Avenue is in the midst of a major Hennepin County public works initiative aimed at spurring private investment and making the corridor more attractive and user-friendly for the people who live and work in the area. The project involves a complete rebuild of the roadway, enhancing boulevard streetscapes and making room for bike lanes and public transit.

The City is also working to revitalize key commercial areas along the corridor. Penn-Lowry Crossings is an \$8 million redevelopment project that houses the Family Dollar Store, Aldi grocery, Subway restaurant and the Employment Action Center. Other recent enhancements include the fire station at Lowry and Morgan and the renovated North Regional Library.

Interest-free loan program aims to help areas hard hit by foreclosures

The City has developed a new loan program — Minneapolis Advantage — to help rebuild the housing market in the 18 neighborhoods hardest hit by mortgage foreclosures and lessen the impact of vacant and boarded buildings.

The Minneapolis Advantage program offers qualifying buyers a \$10,000 interest-free loan that can be used to help cover down payment and closing costs. If the buyer lives in the home for five years, the loan would be fully forgiven. The money can also be used to make needed home repairs.

Under the pilot program, funding is limited to approximately 50 purchasers, and buyers are required to:

- Qualify for a traditional fixed rate mortgage
- Agree to homeownership counseling
- Purchase a home in one of these neighborhoods: Beltrami, Central, Cleveland, Folwell, Harrison, Hawthorne, Holland, Jordan, McKinley, Near North, Phillips West, Phillips Midtown, Phillips East, Powderhorn Park, Ventura Village, Webber-Camden, Whittier or Willard-Hay. (Additional financial assistance offered through neighborhood associations may be available to homebuyers purchasing homes in the Folwell, Harrison, McKinley and Webber-Camden neighborhoods.)

Homebuyers must apply for a Minneapolis Advantage loan through their first mortgage lender. To learn more, call (612) 588-3033 or visit the Greater Metropolitan Housing Corporation's Housing Resource Center at 2148 44th Ave. N. between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Thursday. Information is also posted at www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/cped/minneapolisadvantage_home.asp.

Livability Efforts

Convenience stores now required to stock some staple food items

In April, the City Council amended the ordinance governing grocery stores so that convenience stores are now required to stock a minimum amount of staple foods that are used for meal preparation (protein, fruits, vegetables, bread and dairy products).

This action results from concerns about the poor availability of fresh, healthful food in neighborhoods served only by small stores that predominately stock snack foods and tobacco products. The City will soon be issuing a clear set of guidelines to help store owners know what food goods they must have on hand.

Safety Initiatives

Reducing youth gun possession

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Here's what a juvenile convicted of a gun offense can expect under the new guidelines:

1. First time in court for a youth with a BB or replica gun: probation, 40 hours of education on the dangers and effects of guns and 60 hours work without pay. If the youth does not complete the 100 hours, then 4 to 6 weeks of out-of-home placement.
2. First time in court for a youth who has a real gun or has fired a BB gun: probation, 4 to 6 weeks of out-of-home placement followed by 40 hours of education on the dangers and effects of guns. If the youth does not complete these requirements, then 4 to 6 months of out-of-home placement.
3. A youth who is already on probation and has a real gun or has fired a BB gun: probation, 90 days at Red Wing or a similar program followed by 40 hours of classes on the dangers and effects of guns. If the youth does not complete the program, then 6 to 12 months of out-of-home placement.
4. Any youth with a prior gun offense who has a new gun offense: out-of-home placement for 6 to 15 months followed by probation.

If a gun — real or replica — is pointed at another person in the course of a robbery or used to commit a crime, the penalties are more severe.

“Through the joint efforts of the entire criminal justice system in Hennepin County — local police departments, the Sheriff's office, the County attorney, probation and district court — we will be arresting kids with guns and getting them off the streets,” said Sheriff Rich Stanek.

“With strong, consistent consequences, we are making it clear to youth that it's safer not to carry a gun,” said Mayor R.T. Rybak.

The Juvenile Gun Offender Initiative was crafted through the work of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee (CJCC). The committee works behind the scenes to discuss issues that require cooperation among the many parts of the criminal justice system. “The CJCC has made juvenile gun violence a priority and, thanks to their efforts, we now have a stronger, more consistent approach for dealing with this serious problem. The committee will be monitoring the initiative's progress to ensure that it is having a measurable impact on reducing the number of youth with guns,” said City Council Member Paul Ostrow, who chairs the CJCC.

Redesigned, high-tech police squad cars hit the streets

The Minneapolis Police Department unveiled the first of its newly redesigned and upgraded patrol cars April 29. The black and white Fords feature a look that harkens back to the 1970s combined with a new motto and cutting edge technology.

The department is transitioning from its all-white design to black and white squads because they're easier to see and more readily identifiable as police cars. The new squads also introduce a new motto that highlights officers' dedication to their work and commitment to the people in the community: *To Protect with Courage, To Serve with Compassion*.

While the black and white design harkens back to the 1970s, the crime-fighting technology inside probably wasn't even dreamed of 35 years ago.

Technological enhancements inside the squads include:

- **Mobile Data Computer** that allows officers to quickly get accurate information.
- **Digital cameras** that allow automatic and continuous video data collection. Whenever the squad's lights are activated, a camera records the scene.
- **Traffic signal preemptors** that allow the squad to change traffic signals so that it can get to the scene more quickly and safely.
- **New sirens** that emit a low frequency amplified bass sound that drivers feel as well as hear. The vibrating siren penetrates today's more soundproof cars to get drivers' attention.
- **Automatic License Plate Recognition** which can match license plates to databases to identify stolen vehicles, convicted felons, wanted individuals and vehicles involved in Amber Alerts.



The Minneapolis Police Department took delivery of the first 20 of their newly designed squad cars April 29. The remainder of the 200-car fleet will be gradually replaced over the next five years.

You Can Help

Mentor a child

If you think you could help close the gap between available mentors and the 500 Minneapolis children still waiting for a Big Brother or Big Sister, contact Big Brothers Big Sisters at (651) 789-2400 or www.bbbs.org.

Mentors play an important role in helping a child succeed. Studies have shown that kids who have a caring adult in their life are 46 percent less likely to begin using drugs, 52 percent less likely to skip school and 30 percent less likely to act violently.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is the oldest mentoring program in the country and offers several options for adult volunteers to work with young people ages 7 to 13. Mentors are asked to make a one year commitment and meet with the child two to four times a month. Volunteer options include meeting with a child at his or her school, including the child in your family activities or spending one-on-one time with a child.



As part of the effort to encourage City employees to volunteer to mentor a Minneapolis child, City leaders recently hosted an information fair about the process for becoming a Big Brother or Big Sister. The mentoring partnership stems from Minneapolis' plan to prevent youth violence by helping to ensure that every young person has a trusted adult in his or her life.

Call 311 to report problems

The City can't fix a problem if it doesn'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.

Livability Efforts

Getting tough on problem properties

Recognizing the negative impact that problem businesses have on public safety and quality of life, the City Council took action against several establishments.

The Council revoked Johnny A's liquor license and imposed financial sanctions and operating conditions on Gabby's Saloon. Both actions stemmed from the excessive police calls and the negative impact these establishments have had on adjacent neighborhoods.

The Council also revoked 45 rental licenses held by a group that bought properties under a scam operation that eventually resulted in Northside neighborhoods dealing with problems resulting from vacant, foreclosed homes.

TJ Waconia Lawsuit

Thanks to a first-of-a-kind lawsuit filed by the City and the Folwell, McKinley and Webber-Camden neighborhood organizations, a judge ordered the appointment of a third party receiver to take control of 141 residential properties in north Minneapolis that were owned or controlled by TJ Waconia and its straw buyers.

The order gives the court-appointed receiver the authority to manage the properties, a first step toward getting these homes into the hands of new, responsible owners. TJ Waconia's practices resulted in a significant number of foreclosures on the Northside.

Local libraries will add Sunday hours

Starting June 1, 13 more Hennepin County libraries will be open Sundays from noon to 5 p.m. Nearby libraries that will be adding Sunday hours include:

- Brooklyn Park
- Downtown Central
- Golden Valley
- North Regional.

Libraries that already had Sunday hours will continue to be open on Sundays.

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