

**Improving Wichita Neighborhoods
Through:**

**StopBlight
and**

New Communities Initiative

Update – October 23, 2007



Quick Overview

- StopBlight was first introduced in 2005
- First initiative was new/amended City ordinances passed in November, 2006
- Additional strategies included:
 - Diversion Program
 - Project REHAB
 - START (StopBlight Action Response Team)
 - Increased use of State tax foreclosure legislation

Update Overview

- The following slides will provide updates on:
 - Each StopBlight strategy
 - Role of the New Communities Initiative

City Ordinance: Vacant & Neglected Buildings

- Boarded Building Registration
- Results:
 - 749 cases started
 - 181 (24%) closed
 - 568 active cases remaining
 - 133 (23%) registered with approved action plan (SOI)
 - Civil penalty fees assessed on 66 properties

City Ordinance: Vacant & Neglected Buildings

“I just wanted to let you know that there have been two houses in my area which have been removed as a direct result of the Neglected Building Code. These houses would have most likely stood vacant for several more years, but the owners did not want to pursue the action required in the new code. I believe the new code has proved to be a good tool to help rid my area neighborhoods of vacant and neglected houses.”

Shane Hackworth, Neighborhood Inspector

Dangerous Buildings

- 107 condemnation cases initiated (50% increase over 2006 totals)
- 108 emergency board-ups completed (17% increase over 2006 totals)
- Increased focus on Beat 43 and Beat 44 areas

City Ordinance: Housing Code Amendments

- Increased Penalties; Resident Agents
- Results
 - Repeat offenders of the Housing Code are being assessed significantly higher fines
 - Neighborhood Court judge: ability to assess minimum and/or escalating fines for repeat offenders is proving beneficial (resolving cases more quickly)
 - Dozens of resident agents have been registered for out-of-county owners

Diversion Program: First Time Offenders

- Key Components:
 - First time offenders apply for a six month diversion, during which they agree to abate the housing code violation
 - Housing and Community Services Department offers home repair funds for those who qualify
 - If all terms are met, the charge will be dismissed without prejudice.

Diversion Program: Results

- 11 applications made
- 9 accepted into the program (2 were denied)
- 0 requested assistance from Housing & Community Services
- 0 have complied with their Diversion agreement
- 7 are nearing the end of the Diversion period and those charges will be tried in Municipal Court
- Program will be re-evaluated in 2008

Project REHAB

- Goal: to convert vacant, abandoned property to homeownership using existing State law (KSA 12-1756a)
- Results: 18 properties referred by OCI and evaluated by HCSD; four referred to CHDO to follow up
- No problem properties have been rehabbed to date due to challenges resulting from components of the program design

Project REHAB/REBUILD

- Challenges:
 - Locating owners for proper notification as required by law; getting clear title; difficulties associated with housing rehab; delays in starting the formal foreclosure process; limited funds for rehab (allocated \$154,144 to pilot the program in 07-08).
- Decided to re-design the program to include:
 - Rebuild as an option, to create houses that are functional and marketable
 - Negotiated sales or arranged donations to CHDOs/non-profits

START (StopBlight Action Response Team)

- Concentrated effort by multi-department team in partnership with the community
- Initial area of focus: 13th – 15th , Grove to Poplar
- Strategy: community education and offers of assistance to improve housing and property conditions
 - Team members met with residents, walked the area, knocked on doors, offered assistance

START – Results

	# Properties	# Receiving Ext. Grants	# In Compliance After Assistance Offer	# Not In Compliance After Assistance Offer
Grove – Owner	11	4	5	6
Grove – Rental	21	1	6	15
Grove-Vacant Lots	2	0	1	1
Poplar - Owner	19	8	14	5
Poplar – Rental	12	1	5	7
Poplar – Vacant Lots	2	0	1	1

START - Partnerships

- Increased partnerships between departments
 - Neighborhood Svcs, OCI, WPD, Law, Municipal Court, Environmental Svcs, Housing, Public Works, Fire
- Neighborhood partnerships
 - 3 community meetings held with neighborhood stakeholders
- New Communities Initiative
 - Summer youth clean up project

START – Partnerships

From an email series titled: An opportunity presents itself

- You might be able to help me out. I have an elderly female living in the 1500 block of North (Poplar) Green. We found out about her when she had a 15-year old terrorizing her. I noticed her water service from the curb water meter to the house had ruptured. In order to temporarily fix it she had to have a hose run from the meter to the house above ground. Would START team or New Communities Initiative partnerships be able to identify money or a service provider that would make this repair? (Lt. Nolte, WPD)
- I contacted her ... I explained the guidelines ... she turned down the assistance ... said her children would pay for the repairs. (Raymond Davis, HCSD)
- First, thank you Housing for being quick on this. Raymond was in contact with her within minutes of the emails flying. Thank you. I applaud all of you who tried to help her so quickly. (Lt. Nolte, WPD)

START – Next Steps

- All non-compliant properties on Grove and Poplar were recommended for court, abatement, or condemnation
- Law Department will request Environmental Court to limit circumstances for housing and environmental code violations filed for properties not in compliance
- All compliant homeowners and landlords will be recognized at the District I Advisory Board meeting – November 5th
- Housing will continue to work with residents and landlords wanting to apply for financial assistance

Tax Foreclosure Process

- Meetings have been held with County staff to establish process for special tax foreclosure sale, in accordance with K.S.A. 79-2401a
 - City would request special sale by declaring the property to be abandoned and unoccupied for one year
- Discussions were too late to impact August and September (07) sales
- Several test cases have been identified by City staff
 - Awaiting County confirmation of the process

New Communities Initiative (NCI): Quick Overview

- Grew out of prisoner reentry program
- Focused in northeast Wichita where offenders lived prior to incarceration
- Area also has high percentage of public assistance recipients, blighted properties, low school achievement
- Objective of NCI is to positively impact social and physical conditions through coordinated efforts of State, County, City government and USD 259 – in partnership with community leaders and resources

New Communities Initiative (NCI): Quick Overview

The New Communities Initiative:

- Protects and expands affordable housing
- Improves economic integration
- Creates opportunity through better jobs, education, training, human services and other programs
- Decreases crime through proven crime reduction strategies
- Rebuilds community anchors such as schools, libraries and recreation centers
- Engages residents in community decision making

New Communities Initiative (NCI): Selected Statistics

- 2006 unemployment rate in 67214: 44% vs. 32% citywide
- From 2001 to March '07, 66% of all neglected buildings in the city were in 67214
- 2006 high school graduation rate for USD 259 in 67214 was 54% vs. 77% district-wide
- Beat 44 survey results – residents top three concerns are drugs, abandoned houses, gangs

New Communities Initiative (NCI): Current and Proposed Strategies

- NCI strategies are based around:
 - Children and youth
 - Education
 - Economic development
 - Social service
 - Housing
 - Neighborhood safety
- The NCI Policy Group recently decided to authorize a comprehensive Master Plan to integrate all the needed changes and improvements to achieve lasting results.

New Communities Initiative and StopBlight

- While all NCI strategies will improve the area, the following are most directly related to the StopBlight initiative and have been working in partnership with the START team:
 - Housing assessment
 - Short term repairs
 - Long term planning
 - Physical improvements
 - Summer Youth employment program provided a ‘facelift’ to the area by cleaning up alleys and vacant lots, painting house numbers on curbs and planting flowers

CONCLUSION

- **StopBlight and New Communities Initiative** strategies are working!
 - Property owners are paying attention
 - Staff are encouraged
 - Compliance is being achieved
 - Responsibilities are being shared
 - Neighborhoods are being improved
- Programs will continue to be fine-tuned to meet emerging needs.