

Somebody Needs to DO Something!

Your next door neighbor's garage and yard are full of junk and he never mows. The house across the street from your mom's house has people coming and going 24/7 and the residents scream at their children and each other. The dilapidated house down the street has been vacant for years and years and now animals are climbing into holes in the eaves and into the junk car in the backyard. Somebody needs to DO something!

These situations can and do happen in all kinds of neighborhoods: new and old, wealthy and poor, urban and rural. In Lincoln, when situations require the action or participation of more than one public agency, doing "something" can mean a referral to the Problem Resolution Team (or PRT).

Since it was formed in 1996 at the recommendation of Lincoln Police Department staff, the PRT has used an inter-agency approach to address problem properties. Co-chaired by a Police Department captain and a City Council person, the PRT is comprised of representatives from the Mayor's Office, Health, Animal Control, Weed Control, Adult & Child Protective Services, Mental Health, Fire Prevention, Housing Inspections, Aging Partners, City Attorney, Public Works, Lincoln Housing Authority, the Victim-Witness Unit and Urban Development.

The Problem Resolution Team meets monthly. Team members nominate chronic, repeat, and troublesome complaints or problems at specific locations that affect the quality of life in neighborhoods. The team discusses each problem property's history and all available background information, including past complaints, status of property taxes, and the existence of any property liens. Each department goes out and inspects the property. If two or more departments find the property to be in violation of City Code, the property becomes an active PRT case.

While a property is an active case, team members work to see the whole picture. Is there a pattern of behavior? Are there other problems? What's causing the problems? What can be done to resolve the situation? Often one of the key questions is, "Have we found the family?" Family members can play a major role in understanding the

344 N. 27th Street was a PRT case even before fire caused extensive damage. The house, on a commercially-zoned lot, was demolished and the lot is being sold for commercial use.



big picture. For example, there may be mental issues, drug issues (even legally-prescribed drugs can cause behavior changes), or even criminal issues.

Every situation is unique. Very occasionally resolution is as simple as informing the property owner or resident about code violations. As long as there is a good faith effort to comply with the regulations involved, City/County staff will work with the owner/resident. However, it normally takes considerably more effort and time -- sometimes months or even years. Neighbors selling a house next door to such a property may wish for more speed, but everyone's civil and property rights need to be respected. That can make the process very complicated and involve even more agencies -- even at the state or federal level. For example, the Veterans Administration may be asked to provide assistance if the problem property is owned by or lived in by a veteran.

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Registration of Neglected Buildings

In 2014, Neglected Building Registration became a City ordinance. In essence, its purpose is to financially pressure owners of neglected buildings to DO SOMETHING about properties that have become burdens on the community -- eyesores leading to increased crime and declining property values.

Property owners are required to register vacant, neglected buildings with the City. Registration includes a plan that addresses the neglect. If the plan is followed and completed, the building no

longer needs to be registered. If the plan is not implemented, fines and further fees will be assessed on the property. If not paid by the owner, these then become liens that can -- in extreme circumstances -- lead to the City foreclosing on the property.

This is certainly not the desired end result. In fact, the ideal response to the Neglected Buildings Registration ordinance would be the end of property neglect. In reality, registration of neglected buildings will become an additional tool

for the Problem Resolution Team as they work to address problem properties.

The eight-page Neglected Building Registration ordinance details the "who, what, when, how and why" of neglected building registration. For example, it defines neglected buildings, lists registration requirements and fees, designates enforcement, details penalties, and outlines appeals. To review the whole ordinance, visit the lincoln.ne.gov, keyword: **code**. See Chapter 21.09 of Title 21: Housing.

KURT & THE NEIGHBORHOOD SCAN

Sometimes, you can't—and shouldn't—give up on a good idea. This story is from Kurt Elder, Urban Development GIS Analyst

In 2008, I started working at the Lincoln Action Partnership (LAP) – now Community Action Program – as a community builder for their **Free to Grow (FTG)** program. **FTG**, a nationally recognized program developed in 1994 and still used widely, focuses on small geographic areas where intense effort and resources can be applied to accelerate stability and growth.

As part of **FTG**, community builders evaluate area properties by recording observations about each property and assigning scores to selected facets. Those scores are recorded in spreadsheets. Bar charts created from the spreadsheet identify factors of distress for each property, block face and focus area.

From my experiences in urban planning, geography and policy (and being a data geek), I saw the potential of adding a mapping interface to the analysis. I was beginning to lead the program in that direction when LAP's **FTG** program was phased out and NeighborWorks@Lincoln acquired local **FTG** program rights instead.

Still believing in the mapping tool, I began a

conversation with Rick Noyes, also a community builder, about how to assess or scan Lincoln's neighborhoods more efficiently. Our collaboration yielded a technological framework (i.e. the use of PDA's) and a collection process. We looked into monetizing the assessment process, but the return on investment was not enough and the project stalled.

As an Urban Development Department staff member in 2009, I proposed the idea to both NeighborWorks@Lincoln and the University of Nebraska's Community & Regional Planning program. Both organizations were interested and a partnership was formed with the Urban Development Department. The partnership further refined the idea/process and sought community support.

In early 2010, the Woods Charitable Fund awarded a grant for a pilot project to help Lincoln neighborhoods concerned about vacant and neglected properties, graffiti, weeds, litter and other problems. That first **Lincoln Community Scan** project assessed the condition of every home in two Lincoln neighborhoods and compiled the information into databases. This allowed the neighborhood residents to pinpoint their biggest concerns,

set the most appropriate improvement goals and find resources to correct problems.

From 2010 through 2014, the Woods Charitable Fund has awarded three grants totaling \$137,500 for **Lincoln Community Scan**. More than 350 neighborhood residents and UN-L students have assessed about 12,700 properties in eight Lincoln neighborhoods: Clinton, University Place, Everett, Irvingdale, Woods Park, Havelock, Indian Village and Hartley.

Information from **Lincoln Community Scan** has helped neighborhoods rehabilitate problem homes and remove junk cars. Many residents said their work with the **Scan** improved their perception of their neighborhoods and showed them the impact of even one neglected property. **Community Scan** data provided additional documentation in support of the Neglected Building Registration ordinance, which was enacted in 2014.

Community Scan information was also shared with the City of Lincoln's Public Works & Utilities Department, which contributed to additional funds for sidewalk repair and/or replacement in at least three neighborhoods. Being able to pinpoint the areas with the most problematic sidewalks was pivotal.

As they continue to assess more of Lincoln's neighborhoods, the **Community Scan** partners continue to develop new collaborations and purposes that benefit all of Lincoln.

Good ideas matter!

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Hoarding is often a problem that triggers PRT involvement. It is a phenomenon that cuts across all economic and geographic boundaries. Usually neighbors only end up reporting hoarding if it has spread outside of the house and garage. If, after referral to the PRT and inspection, the property is found to be unsafe or hazardous, it will be red-tagged. Typically, hoarding becomes hazardous when access to the furnace, water heater, or water shut off valve is blocked. Once the house is red-tagged, the resident/owner may not live there until the hazards are addressed. The PRT works with community organizations that provide temporary housing and other support services to the resident/owner.

Sometimes the resident, their family, or other volunteers can clear out/clean up enough to comply with public safety regulations. Again, as long as there is a good faith effort, City/County staff will work with the owner/resident. Eventually, if the problem persists and the property repeatedly becomes unsafe or hazardous, the City Health Department may need to step in and "abate" the problem – basically, clear out hazardous accumulations. Nui-

sance abatement costs are assessed to the property and, if not paid by the property owner, become a lien on the property. In 2014, nuisance abatement costs were assessed on 20 properties. So far in 2015, over 15 properties have been assessed.

In rare instances, repeated abatement liens have resulted in the City acquiring a property as a result of unpaid liens. When that happens, the City needs to decide what to do with the property. The overall goal is to get the property back into private ownership and on the tax rolls, but each situation is unique, so the best way to accomplish that varies. It is also another whole story for a future newsletter issue!

What can you do, as a concerned neighbor? You can bring problem properties to the attention of City staff by filing a "City Service Request" on the City's Citizen Action Center (lincoln.ne.gov, keyword: **action**) or leaving a message on the Neighborhood Hotline (**402-441-6300**). This is one instance where being brief is not the best route -- your detailed observations can make the evaluation process more efficient and timely.

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TIMELY TIDBITS

Olga Kanne Retires

Olga Kanne, long-time UDD employee, was presented with the Mayor's Award of Excellence on August 10th for her exemplary customer relations and productivity. Those very skills, along with her cheerful attitude, will be greatly missed because her last day at UDD was August 14th. In her 25 years as a Housing Rehab Specialist, Olga assisted over 800 low- to moderate-income homeowners using interest-free loans to rehabilitate their homes. Along the way she helped homeowners identify and repair housing deficiencies, detect and abate lead-based paint issues, and get bids and manage construction. When she saw the need, she helped homeowners connect with other community resources as well. We'll miss you! Enjoy retirement!

21st & N is Telegraph District

Nelnet and Speedway Properties have been selected as developers of the 21st and N Street area. The partnership, known as EaDo (for east downtown) will create a new 20-acre neighborhood called the Telegraph District. EaDo's proposal was one of two proposals submitted as part of an Invitation for Redevelopment Proposals (or IFRP) and it goes well beyond the 5.3 acres included in the original IFRP, stretching between Antelope Creek Park and Antelope Valley Parkway (formerly 19th Street), K Street and O Street.

Nelnet plans to move hundreds of jobs into a renovated former Windstream office building at 401 S. 21st Street. One of the attractions of the Telegraph District will be a "live-work" environment that will be attractive to those who like to use alternative transportation.

More than 300 new residential units will be developed in the Telegraph District, including owner-occupied town homes, rental apartments, lofts and live-work spaces. Existing historic buildings will be restored and repurposed and new contemporary structures added for



The final stage of plantings for the **West O Historic Highway Project** was completed this past spring. Funded through the Nebraska Department of Roads' Transportation Enhancement Program, the whole project is looking terrific — the historical interpretive plaza at 3rd & O, the streetscape improvements and the trail connecting from West O Street to the Salt Creek Levee trail.

additional office, housing and retail uses. The redevelopment process is underway now, but most of the visible changes will really get rolling in 2016.

Lighting the Bridge

The Elaine Hammer Bridge will be getting a new look this fall. A lighting feature along the arch and bridge deck will be added to the bike and pedestrian bridge located at 27th & Y Street. At nighttime, subtle changes of color will add a new and distinctive feature to the N. 27th Street corridor. Work will start late summer and is expected to be finished by November 1.

A \$32+ million project is being proposed for the Haymarket, at Canopy and P Street — south of the Pinnacle Bank Arena and Hyatt Place hotel. Two impressive tenants, Hudl and Nelnet, are developing plans to occupy a new seven-story, 140,000-square-foot office building with 10,000 square feet of retail space on the first floor. The building is expected to be located on the northwest corner of the Canopy and P Street intersection. Construction is planned to start this fall.



Riders of one of the elevators at the University Square parking garage feel like they are in an aquarium. The wrap adds fun for Children's Museum goers and is easy to clean and maintain. City Parking Services are experimenting with elevator wraps in other garages as well.



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PLACE MATTERS TO YOUR HEALTH

In 1510, the phrase “*Hic Sunt Dracones*” appeared on one of the first European globes. Translated as “*Here Be Dragons*,” the phrase meant dangerous or unexplored territories. It provided a warning to travelers about the unknown. Throughout history, maps have helped us define, explain and navigate our way to a desired destination. Today’s sophisticated mapping technologies educate us about how our location in the world – even our very street address – influences and impacts us.

The acclaimed PBS series *Unnatural Causes* had a clear message: “place matters” when it comes to health. The series stressed that “Health is more than health care...the jobs we do, the money we’re paid, the schools we attend, the neighborhoods we live in [are] as important to our health as our genes, behaviors and even medical care.” In 2014, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Commission to Build a Healthier America issued “*Time to Act: Investing in the Health of Our Children and Communities*,” a landmark report emphasizing the connection between community development and health.

For many years, the Community Health Endowment of Lincoln (CHE) has helped create a successful health care safety net in Lincoln. CHE is fully aware that health disparities and inequalities exist locally. Inspired by the *Unnatural Causes* series and the Commission to Build a Healthier America, CHE undertook the *Place Matters Community Mapping Project* to better

understand the role of place in our own community’s health.

In collaboration with the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, the City of Lincoln Urban Development Department and NeighborWorks@Lincoln, information on demographic, socioeconomic and health indicators was gathered at the census tract level. The resulting maps — a gallery of geographic impressions — were carefully studied and analyzed. Each map provided new insights and understanding. Based on those insights, CHE saw the potential for an even healthier community in the “health beyond health care” concept. To reach for that potential, CHE developed new priorities and a funding mission.

However, the impact can be still greater. As a tool for policymakers, health and human service providers, funders, educators and corporate partners, the *Place Matters Community Mapping Project* can be used to translate data into action throughout the community. The better we understand Lincoln, the more effectively resources can be targeted to improve our “place.”

View more about *Place Matters* at chelincoln.org, the CHE website. Use these visual representations of Lincoln to become acquainted with your city in a new way. The information may be expected or startling, but there are no dragons — only opportunities to navigate our way to a healthier and more prosperous place for all of our residents — wherever they live. Because place does matter — **THIS** place matters.