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Neighborhood Ownership Plan

*A Flexible, Community-Based Approach to Creating Significant and
Lasting Crime Reduction*



St. Louis Circuit Attorney's Office

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The Power of Community: Sustainable Crime Reduction is Rooted in Active, Educated and Engaged Communities.

A strong partnership among neighborhoods, police officers, prosecutors and judges is the best crime-fighting weapon available in the City of St. Louis. When all the parts of the criminal justice system and community work together to address problems and develop shared solutions, we can achieve long-term crime reduction.

The public is the “800 pound gorilla” in the law enforcement community and when – and only when – citizens assume their power and get involved will St. Louis realize the promise we all know is within our reach. If we all work together each and every day, we can create an environment where criminals live in fear of being held accountable for their actions.

This document is designed to provide ideas for citizens to create their own Neighborhood Ownership Plan to reduce crime and increase the quality of life in their communities.

Every neighborhood in the City of St. Louis has the potential to reduce crime. Individuals in this community who choose to participate in keeping their neighborhoods safe and hold criminals accountable are the most powerful force in crime prevention and reduction.

How do we know these solutions can work? We’ve seen them in action in neighborhoods such as Lafayette Square. Fed up with increasing crime rates, in 2010 citizens in the Lafayette Square Neighborhood formed alliances with neighbors, government and law enforcement agencies and implemented strategies that dramatically reduced crime in their community. In 2010 Lafayette Square experienced its lowest crime levels in five years.

“As a resident and business owner in the City of St. Louis, I know that only I and my neighbors can make my neighborhood a safe place. When we worked together to manage our own crime issues, to patrol our streets and to monitor criminal cases in our neighborhood, we had our lowest rate of crime in five years.”

Michael Petetit
Chairperson, Safety
Committee
Lafayette Square

The Problem: *The Opportunistic Criminal*

Criminal activity occurs when desire, access and ability convene. Criminals select their targets either through careful calculation or by mere random opportunity. Criminals choose where they commit their crimes. They commit crimes in neighborhoods where they believe they have a low risk of getting caught. Vulnerable neighborhoods often have limited street lighting, graffiti scattered buildings, or neighbors unwilling to get involved. Criminals know the neighborhoods that are more likely to tolerate bad behavior and they plan and act accordingly.

The Solution: *The Engaged Community with a Plan*

Criminals fear neighborhoods that don't tolerate crime. Safe neighborhoods do not merely look to government agencies to fix problems; instead, they leverage government resources as their partners in developing joint solutions. Reducing crime in any neighborhood is a serious challenge. However, once the community understands their own collective power in keeping their streets safe, the next step is creating a simple plan and some fortitude to implement it. The facts are clear: neighborhoods that plan and manage their own safety and security have the lowest incidents of crime. When residents take ownership, they discover their collective power to prevent crime from happening in their communities – criminals fear those communities and that power.

“Our police department has some of the best technology available to law enforcement and it certainly impacts our fight against crime. Still, it all pales in comparison to the tremendous impact of citizen involvement. When citizens work with police and prosecutors, it sends a message to criminals that says ‘not on my block, not in my neighborhood.’ That message is more powerful than any technology we can buy.”

Chief Dan Isom
St. Louis Metropolitan Police
Department

Getting Started on Creating Your Customized Neighborhood Ownership Plans: *Reduce Crime and Increase Quality of Life*

It's understandable to feel overwhelmed by the thought of taking on criminals and reducing crime on your block. There are many community-based, crime-fighting tools available for community groups who want to form their own safety committees and Neighborhood Ownership Plans. Several ideas are outlined within this report and have been utilized in the area. Each neighborhood group will want to pick, choose and/or develop a plan that is custom fit just for them.

The best way to get started is to break down the planning and implementation into six basic steps.

Six Steps to Neighborhood Ownership

Step 1: **Set up a preliminary team of neighbors.** Talk with your neighbors and friends and find out who may be interested in forming a team to get the ball rolling. This could be a team as small as three or as large as 10 people. The size of the group is far less

important than the commitment of the people to the tasks at hand: setting preliminary goals for reducing crime and increasing the quality of life in your neighborhood. Utilize this document as a resource for deciding what plans and ideas will work best for your neighborhood.

Step 2: Do a safety assessment. It’s important to know what your neighborhood crime issues are. Does the level of crime in your neighborhood warrant an “Intervention” style approach? This type of approach would be appropriate for neighborhoods with high crime levels, violent crime, and serious specific issues that need to be addressed immediately. Or does your neighborhood warrant a “Support” style approach? This type of approach would be appropriate for neighborhoods with low to moderate crime levels, where you don’t have urgent issues to address but require a sustained and long-term approach to reducing crime. This would also be appropriate as a second-phase approach for neighborhoods that need to begin with an intervention.

“The public is the 800 pound gorilla in the criminal justice system. When they work with police, prosecutors and the courts, citizens have more power than all law enforcement agencies combined. With citizen support, we have a nearly 100 percent conviction rate.”
 Jennifer M. Joyce
 St. Louis Circuit Attorney

Work with your district police officers to perform a neighborhood assessment of crime so you have the information you need to put together your own Neighborhood Ownership Plan.

Step 3: Prepare a Written Neighborhood Ownership Plan. While it may seem daunting to work with your neighbors to develop a plan to reduce crime, the results of other neighborhoods should help make the task a bit more palatable. The appendix of this document contains various ideas for your team to consider. No two neighborhood plans look exactly alike, as every neighborhood has a personality and issues all its own. Establish priorities and set goals. Don’t try to address too many issues at one time. Take on only what you have the capacity to handle, as it’s better to accomplish a few things that matter, than take on too many plans that you don’t have the

capacity to see through. As you increase the cooperation of neighbors, you can increase the tasks the team takes on.

Step 4: Bring in and Leverage Government Partners. There are many government agencies that are equipped to assist you with development and implementation of your Neighborhood Ownership Plan. The St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, the Circuit Attorney’s Office, your local alderperson, and the City Counselor’s are good places to start. You’ll find other resources in this document to help you get connected to the people and agencies that can help you make a difference. People in these organizations can help you leverage government resources in a way that that will maximize your efforts.

Step 5: Implement Your Plan. It's time to get started on implementation. Be as inclusive as possible. You need leaders, followers and doers. Help everyone find a role in the solutions you've outlined in your plan. If something doesn't work, try something else. Flexibility is key. Celebrate success. Even the small successes are worth celebration. Also, you will likely encounter resistance among your some of your neighbors and obstacles along the way. This is natural as well, and persistence will see this through. Before you know it, your hard work will pay off!

Step 6: Stay the Course. Change and progress take time. Stabilization takes commitment. This is your neighborhood, your home, your life – and it's all worth protecting. The most powerful force in the stabilization of any community are the people who live there. Be prepared for things to get worse before they get better. This is natural, when you are doing big things and when you create big changes. Your partnerships with government agencies can help you through these ups and downs.

"Citizen participation is key to our criminal justice system. The more information judges have, the better equipped we are to make decisions. When citizens work with the authorities to help gather accurate and complete information, we all benefit."

Presiding Judge
Steven Ohmer
St. Louis Circuit Court

Conclusion: *It's Time to Make a Difference*

Significant and lasting crime reduction is only achieved with persistence and courage. The time is now to decide that you want to live in a safe neighborhood where children can play outside safely without fear of being struck by a random bullet; where the elderly can walk home from the grocery store without getting ambushed by street gangs, and where your home is your sanctuary free of predators.

The simple truth is - a neighborhood is only as safe as its residents permit. Every neighborhood has the ability to be safe and productive. Every neighborhood has the potential to reduce crime. This isn't a rich or poor issue. It's not about who has influence in the community and who doesn't. Keeping your neighborhoods safe is about citizens working together, partnering with law enforcement, implementing a plan and taking ownership for your safety.

For more information on how to develop your own Neighborhood Ownership Plan, contact the Community Affairs Bureau at the Circuit Attorney's Office at 314-622-4941.

Appendix 1:

Menu of Options to Consider for Your Neighborhood Ownership Plan

No two Neighborhood Ownership Plans look exactly the same. Each neighborhood has its own unique crime issues and opportunities. The following solutions are ideas for potential inclusion in your plan. Partner with your local police representative to determine what solutions may work best for your neighborhood's specific needs, resource availability and comfort level.

Citizen-Based Solutions: *Solutions Driven by Citizen Initiative and Leadership*

- **Neighborhood Planning Team** – A group of individuals willing to follow the Six Step process to develop a Neighborhood Ownership Plan.
- **Neighborhood Safety Boards** – Long-term committees created by each neighborhood to coordinate the efforts of crime-fighting solutions. Appoint a resident as a coordinating chair to help the team manage the safety goals and plan.
- **Block Captain Program** – Each block in the neighborhood may want to have a point of contact that helps educate and mobilize the residences on that block.
- **Citizen Patrol Unit** – Neighborhood groups assign neighbors to organized units to patrol streets. These members are trained to identify problems and engage law enforcement to intervene when they believe a crime is occurring. The members are also trained to understand the needs of your neighborhood and to report back on problems identified during their patrol.
- **Community Meetings** – Meetings are organized by neighbors and conducted on a regular basis to provide education, information, task assignment, interaction between government agencies and communities, etc.
- **Private Security Teams** – Neighborhoods hire private security guards to supplement police patrol.
- **Neighborhood Watch Classes** – Neighbors are trained on how to keep watch around their neighborhoods.
- **Neighborhood Victim Support Teams** – Trained neighbors help support victims of crimes to ensure they have the support they need to manage through the legal system, and have the emotional support of the community
- **Broken Glass Projects** – Neighborhoods identify problem components within a neighborhood such as a broken street light, graffiti, overgrown lawns, and broken gates that enhance criminal activities and invite crime with the impression that citizens don't care about their neighborhoods.
- **Neighborhood Fundraisers** – Fundraisers held by citizens that provide financial support for plans such as private security guards, cameras, etc.

- **Public Awareness and Education** – These types of ideas include bringing in public speakers such as prosecutors, police officers, city officials, creating community newsletters, and leveraging community newspapers and the media to share information and educate the public.
- **Neighborhood Surveys** – Conduct a survey of your neighbors to determine what they believe the areas safety needs are, assess how they feel about getting involved, what they would be willing to participate in, etc.
- **Purchased Engravers and Invisible Markers** – Engravers and invisible markers can be purchased by neighborhoods to encourage citizens to permanently mark valuables (televisions, electronics, etc) so if they are stolen and recovered, they can be returned to the rightful owner.

Government Partnerships: *Citizens Leverage Government Agencies for Enhanced Education and Resource Allocation*

- **Neighborhood Orders of Protection** – An order by a judge prohibiting a criminal from going into a part of the city as either a condition of bond or probation.
- **Dedicated Beat Officer** – Collaboration between a neighborhood and the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department in which a beat officer is specifically assigned to a neighborhood to patrol, educate, and support the coordination of crime-fighting efforts.
- **Police Partnerships** – Initiatives in which neighborhoods form important partnerships with police to best leverage police/public resources and allow neighbors to get to know the officers who are assigned to patrol their neighborhoods.
- **Police Substation** – Citizen-funded office within a neighborhood that provides an easy-access location for citizens to interact with a beat patrol person, report crime, and get information on programs and activities in their neighborhood.
- **St. Louis Police Citizen Academy** – Citizens can participate in this academy to learn more about police department activities and public safety.
- **Circuit Attorney Office (CAO) Partnerships** – Initiatives are created with the Circuit Attorney’s Office of Community Affairs that help citizens learn how to navigate the criminal justice system. The Circuit Attorney’s Office will educate the community on the criminal justice system and how the community can be its own best advocate.
- **Alderman Partnerships** – A partnership with your St. Louis City Alderperson to engage him/her in helping to support a neighborhood safety plan for a better use of government resources.
- **Victim Impact Statements** – Victims provide statements to judges to ensure a judge understands how specific crimes and criminals negatively impact their neighborhood. This is very helpful during the sentencing period.
- **Neighborhood Impact Statements and Appearances** – Victims and witnesses of crime are a powerful tool in the criminal justice system. Cooperation and court appearances can support better prosecution of criminals. Residents in partnership with the prosecutor on the

case, give statements to the Court on the impact a particular crime or type of crime has on their neighborhood.

- **Crime Report Monitoring** – Neighbors work with police to understand what type of crime most impacts their neighborhoods and monitor effectiveness of solutions.
- **Problem Properties** – Neighborhoods work with their Alderperson and the Problem Properties Department at City Hall to understand procedures that can address properties that are creating problems in a neighborhood.

Technology-Based Solutions: *Technological Solutions Operated by Citizens*

- **Cameras** – Place privately purchased cameras throughout your neighborhood as both a crime prevention tool and a tool that can catch crime while in the act.
- **Square Share** – Use of a centralized secure computer system to allow safety volunteers and plan managers to access information relevant to crime and safety, including calendars for citizen patrol, message boards and pictures for Neighborhood Orders of Protection. One sample program that has worked for Lafayette Square is Square Share software.
- **Neighborhood Website/Blog** – A neighborhood-controlled website that serves as a communication tool for neighbors to monitor crime, patrol schedules, provide crime alerts, etc.
- **Email Distribution Crime Alerts** – An email alert system that keeps neighbors informed of criminal activity, court dates, schedules, etc.
- **On-Line Calendaring** – A system that allows people to sign up for Mobile Patrols and other citizen-driven initiatives.
- **Crime Alert Phone Chains** – Phone chains in which citizens call each other and inform them of important information within the neighborhood.

Appendix 2:

Resources/Reference:

www.slmpr.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Police Department site that can provide you with:• Crime mapping information• Crime statistics• Police contact information
http://www.circuitattorney.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Circuit Attorney site that enables you to search data on criminals, sex offenders, and find victim services information. July 2011 will include data on Neighborhood Orders of Protection
www.vinelink.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MOVANS sign up
www.courts.mo.gov/casenet/base/welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Missouri Casenet allows you to look up the criminal records of individual and view the status of ongoing legal matters
http://stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• City site that can provide information regarding all city government departments