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Assessment of Neighborhood Safety Initiative in Designated Geographic Areas of Memphis

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The Public Safety Institute (PSI) at the University of Memphis is an interdisciplinary part of the University community committed to applied research designed to identify and advance best practices to improve public safety.

In 2016, the Memphis Shelby Crime Commission spearheaded development of a five-year community-wide plan to improve public safety called Operation: Safe Community - 3 (the third such five-year community-wide plan). In an agreement between the Crime Commission and the University, the PSI is charged with assessing and evaluating various parts of the plan as they are implemented, both in terms of processes and outcomes.

A key part of the plan is creation of a Neighborhood Safety Initiative (NSI) in certain geographic areas. In consultation with the Memphis Police Department (MPD), the NSI was launched in two MPD precincts in 2017 - Old Allen and Tillman. The Old Allen precinct encompasses the Raleigh and Frayser areas of Memphis. The Tillman precinct is very diverse and includes the University of Memphis area, Highpoint Terrace, Binghampton, Highland Heights and Berclair.

The NSI is designed to increase citizen engagement and impact by building on and strengthening already existing partnerships among neighborhood groups, law enforcement and other government agencies. In particular, the NSI focuses on strengthening the MPD's current system of creating and maintaining neighborhood watch groups and the existing system of "police joint agencies" (PJAs), which provide an avenue for citizens to bring to the attention of public officials crime and blight concerns in particular.

This interim assessment/report looks at the different components of the NSI, the processes involved and some of the outcomes. It contains both conclusions and recommendations going forward.

I give a special thanks to Max Helms, the PSI lead research assistant, who brought various sources of data together into a coherent report; Dr. Angela Madden, PSI research associate professor, who oversaw this research effort; Brona Pinnolis, vice-president for strategic implementation for the Crime Commission, who collected most of the data; and Steve Shular, Memphis mayor Jim Strickland's special assistant for neighborhood concerns, who chairs an NSI working group. And I thank the leadership of the MPD in the Old Allen and Tillman precincts, Steve Lockwood of the Frayser PJA, Rhonda Logan of the Raleigh PJA, Jared Myers of the Highland Heights PJA, the University of Memphis District PJA head TK Buchanan and the many other engaged, committed citizens in these two precincts.

Bill Gibbons, Executive Director
Public Safety Institute

INTRODUCTION

One of many factors to community safety is the level of citizen involvement. Within Memphis and Shelby County, many citizens have stepped up to help improve their neighborhoods and assist with local issues. The Memphis Shelby Crime Commission (MSCC) recognized the potential crime-prevention power of organized groups of citizens in its current Operation: Safe Community (OSC) plan that targets the overall crime rate. The OSC plan aims to establish and maintain a “Neighborhood Safety Initiative” (NSI) to help build and strengthen existing partnerships among neighborhood groups, law enforcement and other government agencies.

Neighborhood watch groups (NWGs), for example, align themselves with their police precincts to help report unusual, and possibly criminal, activity. Police precincts also help educate neighborhood residents on how they can improve safety, not only in their communities, but also in their homes.

Another example of strengthening these partnerships with citizens is through monthly meetings of police joint agencies (PJAs). Leaders of NWGs and other citizens get the chance to address specific concerns in their communities with representatives of numerous agencies such as law enforcement, city/county code officials and health officials.

At the suggestion of the Memphis Police Department (MPD), the NSI effort has focused on the Tillman and Old Allen MPD precincts. The objective of this interim assessment is to determine whether the NSI is meeting the objectives outlined in the OSC plan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Neighborhood Watch Group (NWG) Movement

Neighborhood watches developed out of an effort in the United States to increase citizens’ involvement in preventing crime (Titus, 1984). Through the growth of NWGs, various terms were used to describe these groups such as block watch, apartment watch, home watch, citizen alert, and community watch. The primary approach that these groups take to reduce crime is for residents to report any suspicious activities to law enforcement in hopes of deterring future criminal activity (Bennett, 1990). One of the earliest evaluations of neighborhood watch groups within the United States was of the Seattle Washington Community Crime Prevention Project which started in 1973 (Cirel et al. 1997). This evaluation showed a greater reduction in burglaries in neighborhoods which had NWGs compared to those without. Since the early 1980s, there has been a continuous push for NWG expansion across the United States. According to *The 2000 National Crime Prevention Survey* by the National Crime Prevention Council in 2001, an estimated 41percent of the American population resides in communities that have some form of a NWG. According to the report, “this makes neighborhood watch the largest single organized crime-prevention activity in the nation” (39).

Vacant/Abandoned Properties and Blight

Unoccupied and blighted properties in a neighborhood can lead to higher possibilities of unsafe environmental conditions. Approximately 15 percent of the land in United States cities has been deemed vacant or abandoned; this is roughly the same size of Switzerland. Over 11,500 square miles of useable areas remain neglected (Bowman & Pagano, 2010). Low-income neighborhoods are common areas of vacant and blighted properties and residents point to these properties as hazards to both health and safety (Garvin et al, 2013). Targeting these properties, especially in an urban setting, has shown to have effects on economics and crime (Wachter S, Wong G, 2008; Kondo M, South E, Branas C, 2015). Other studies have shown mixed results (Bogar S, Beyer K, 2016). Low-lying trees and other dense areas of vegetation have been associated with higher fear of crime. These areas limit visibility and can potentially hide possible criminals and other illegal activity (Gobster & Westphal, 2004). Neighborhood conditions can affect human behavior. Some studies have found that blighted properties such as broken-down housing and high littered areas can lead to higher violence and crime (Keizer, Lindenberg, & Steg, 2008; Harcourt & Ludwig, 2006). Branas and others (2018) found that residents near maintained vacant lots not only reported significantly reduced perceptions of crime and safety concerns but also had significant reductions in crime overall, including gun crimes, burglaries and nuisances.

METHODS

The University of Memphis' Public Safety Institute (PSI) obtained data from the MPD on the number of active NWGs in both the Tillman and Old Allen precincts for 2016 as the baseline year and the number of new NWGs established in 2017 and 2018 in those precincts. In addition, using NWG boundaries provided by the MPD, the PSI calculated the square mileage covered by active NWGs in both precincts in 2016 and in 2017. (The square mileage for 2018 is in the process of being calculated.)

A representative from the PSI attended monthly PJA meetings in the Tillman and Old Allen precincts to evaluate the meetings and ascertain the issues discussed. These included the Frayser, Raleigh, Highland Heights/Scope of Life Illuminates Destiny (SOLID) and University of Memphis Area PJAs. The PSI representative also attended the monthly NSI working group meetings, held on a rotating basis at both the Tillman and Old Allen MPD precinct stations. The NSI meetings are comprised of the leaders of each PJA along with representatives from various public agencies and private entities. Steve Shular, assistant to Memphis mayor Jim Strickland, chairs the NSI meetings. Attendance at the PJA and NSI meetings allowed the PSI to examine how various entities handled issues brought to their attention by citizens.

Information for this assessment was pulled from surveys distributed at PJA meetings, documents distributed at both PJA and NSI meetings, notes from those meetings and the 311 system. The 311 system allows Memphis residents to request city services online or by the phone. Some problems that can be reported through this 311 system include potholes, trash on highways, abandoned cars and many other non-emergency issues. Although the PSI representative did not attend any separate meetings of individual NWGs, the NWG leaders who attended monthly precinct level NWG meetings did provide feedback to inform this assessment.

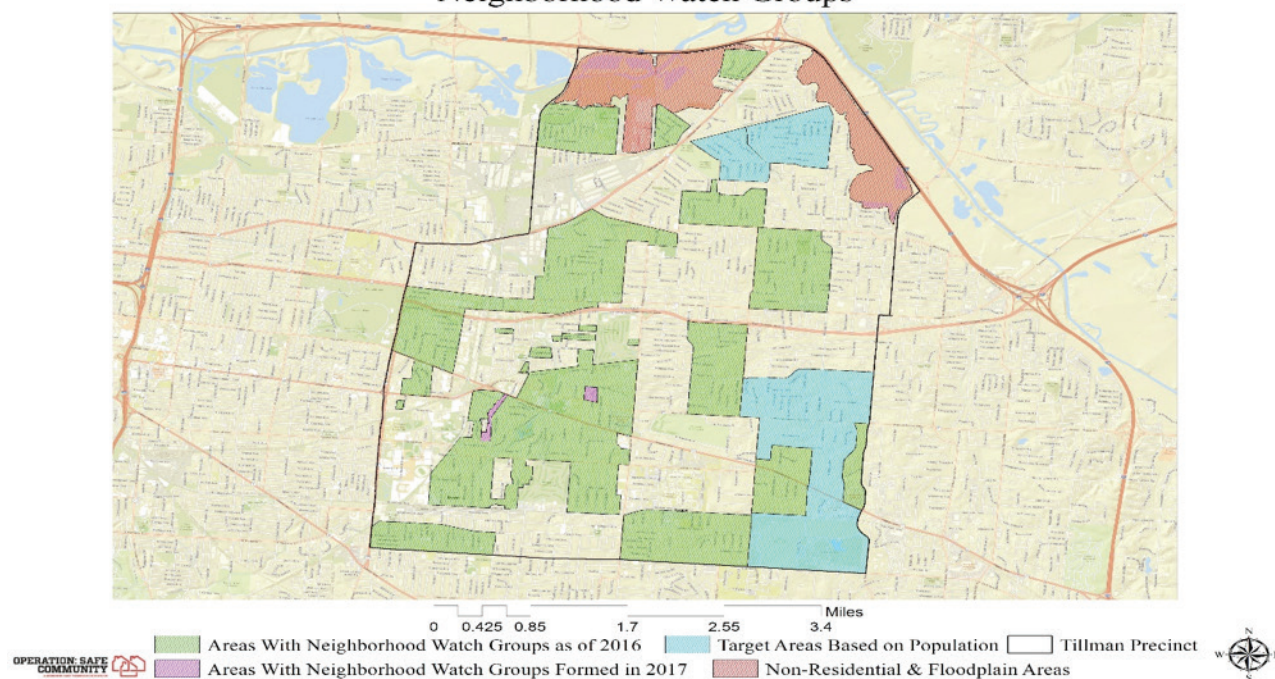
ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Desired OSC NSI Outcome: Ensure all neighborhoods in the NSI geographic areas [Tillman and Old Allen] have active NWGs.

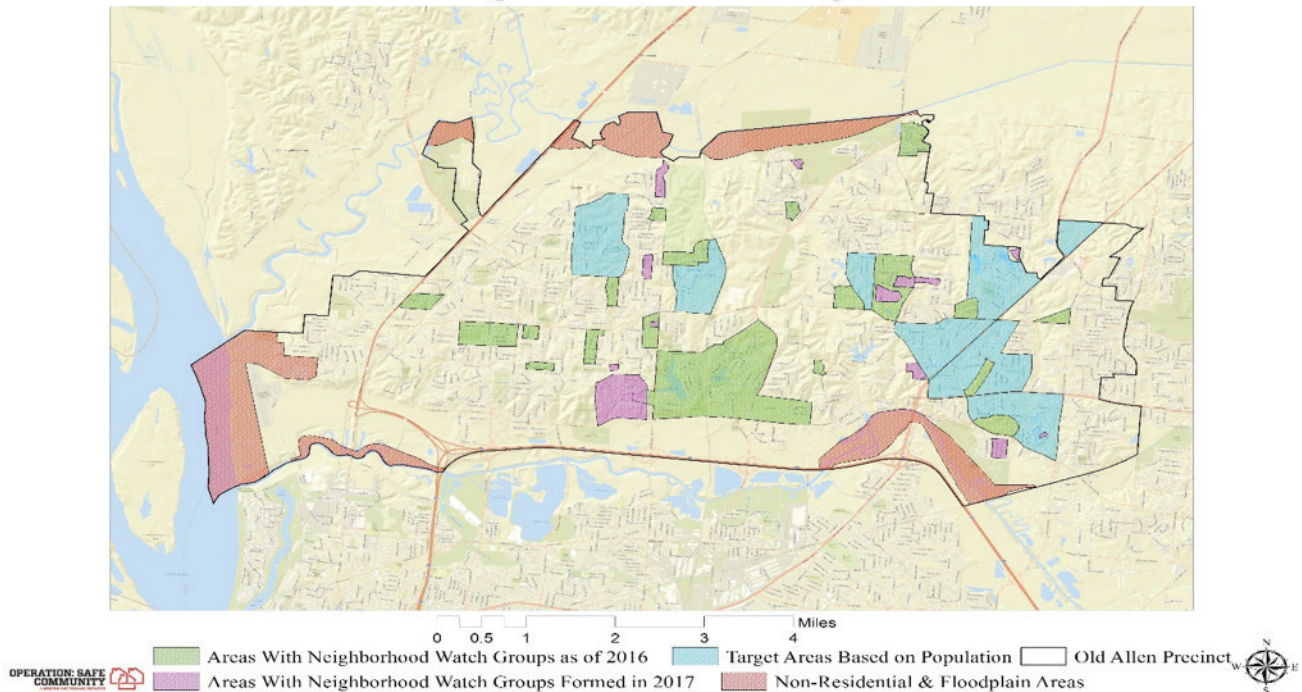
Mapping

Precinct level maps were created for the Tillman and Old Allen MPD precincts to illustrate areas with active NWGs and potential target areas for new NWGs. Based on NWG boundaries provided by MPD, the following maps include all NWGs that were active in 2016 (baseline year) and all that were active by the end of 2017. (Maps showing NWGs active at the end of 2018 are being prepared.) The ‘green’ areas had an existing NWG at the end of 2016, the “pink” areas represent NWGs that formed in 2017, “blue” areas are target areas for new NWGs based on input from the MPD and “red” areas are non-residential.

**Tillman Memphis Police Department Precinct
Neighborhood Watch Groups**

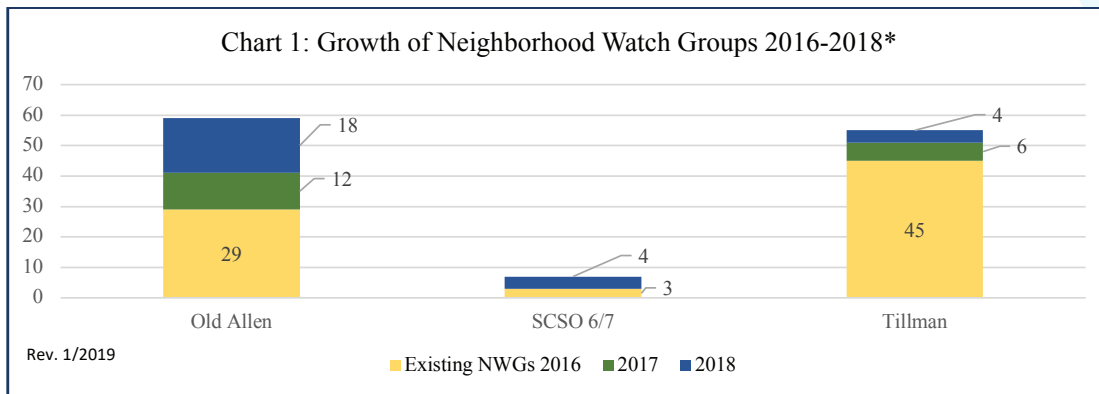


Old Allen Memphis Police Department Precinct Neighborhood Watch Groups



Number of NWGs & Growth

The following chart and tables show the growth of NWGs through 2018 in the Tillman and Old Allen MPD precincts based on information provided by MPD. The annualized goal is to help create and start an active NWG in at least 20percent of those populated areas that do not have a current NWG. (See Map 1 & Map 2.) Chart 1 shows the growth in the number of NWGs in both MPD precincts. (It also includes NWGs in an adjacent Shelby County Sheriff's Office [SCSO] district. That district is included in the District Attorney's community prosecution area, which also includes the Old Allen and Tillman MPD precincts.) Tables 1-3 show the monthly growth of NWGs for both 2017 and 2018. It should be noted that no regular NSI monthly meetings were held in early 2017. The first regular NSI monthly meeting was in April 2017, which is why some months lack numbers. Table 1 shows that active NWGs in the Tillman precinct increased 13.3 percent during 2017 and 7.8 percent during 2018. Overall, from January 2017 through December 2018, active NWGs in the Tillman precinct increased by 21.1percent. As reflected in Table 2, active NWGs in the Old Allen precinct increased 41.4 percent during 2017 and 43.9 percent during 2018. Overall, the Old Allen precinct had an increase in NWGs of 85.3percent from January 2017 through December 2018. (Table 3 shows that NWGs in the SCSO's adjacent district increased zero percent during 2017 and 133.3percent during 2018, for an overall increase of 133.3 percent from January 2017 through December 2018.)



*Source: MPD and Shelby County Sheriff's Office

Table 1: Active MPD Tillman Neighborhood Watch Groups

2017				2018			
January	-	July	49	January	51	July	53
February	-	August	49	February	52	August	54
March	45	September	49	March	52	September	54
April	49	October	51	April	53	October	54
May	49	November	51	May	53	November	54
June	49	December	51	June	53	December	55

Table 2: Active MPD Old Allen Neighborhood Watch Groups

2017				2018			
January	-	July	34	January	41	July	56
February	-	August	34	February	41	August	56
March	29	September	35	March	41	September	57
April	32	October	35	April	43	October	57
May	34	November	41	May	56	November	58
June	34	December	41	June	56	December	59

Table 3: Active SCSO Neighborhood Watch Groups - Patrol Districts 6-7
(North End of Shelby County)

2017				2018			
January	3	July	3	January	3	July	6
February	-	August	3	February	3	August	5
March	-	September	3	March	4	September	5
April	-	October	3	April	5	October	7
May	3	November	3	May	5	November	7
June	3	December	3	June	6	December	7

Growth in Geographic Areas with Active NWGs

One of the objectives of the NSI is to increase the geographic coverage of NWGs within the Tillman and Old Allen MPD precincts. To determine the extent to which geographic coverage of NWGs changed within each precinct, the PSI used the area of each precinct in square miles, the area that is either non-residential or floodplain, the area within 2016 NWG boundaries, and the area within 2017 NWG boundaries. (See Table 4.) Using the boundaries of each precinct's NWGs as detailed in the preceding Maps 1 and 2, a program called ArcMap allowed for a determination of the square mileage within any boundary set. The square mileage growth in 2017 is reflected in Table 4.

Table 4: Neighborhood Watch Group Growth within the Geographical Areas of Tillman & Old Allen MPD Precincts

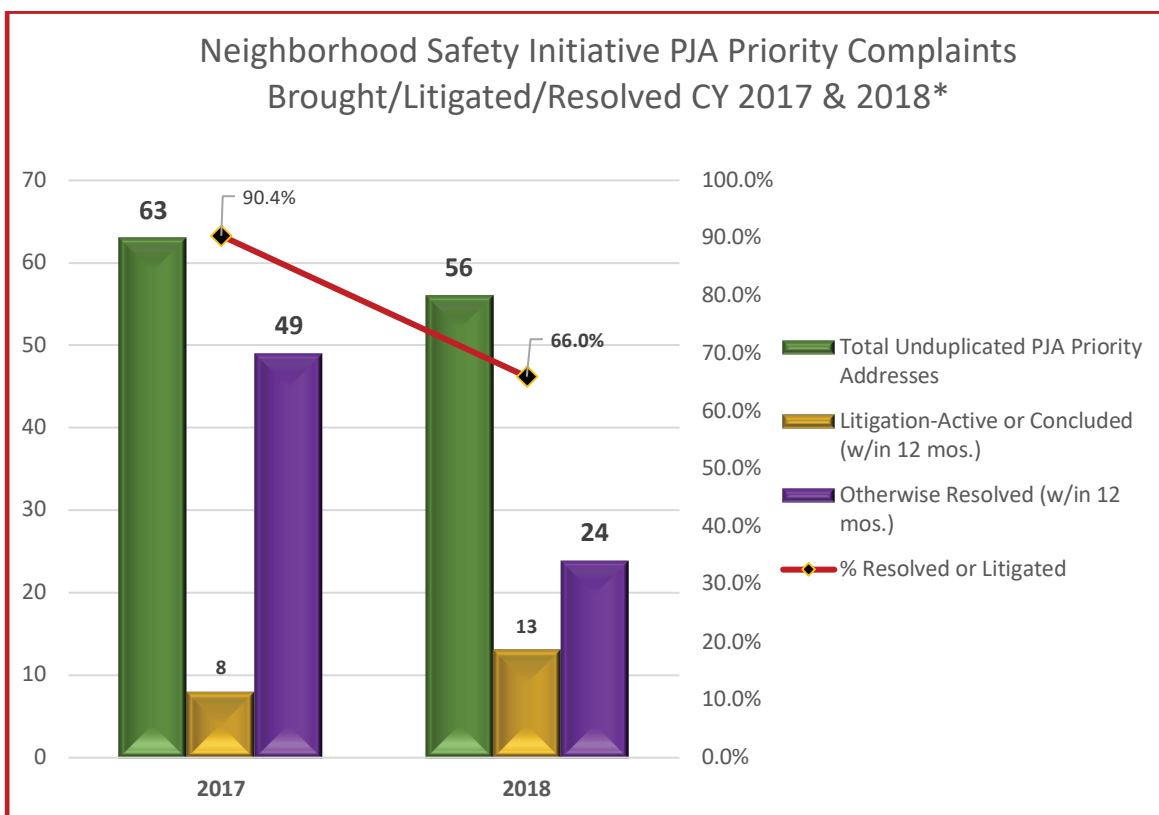
	Old Allen	Tillman
Station Precinct	38.584618	21.521296
Non-Residential & Floodplain	3.720207	1.43428
2016 Neighborhood Watch Groups	3.179657	6.848813
2017 Neighborhood Watch Groups (New)	0.536234	0.025934
All Areas Covered By Watch Groups	3.715891	6.874747
2016 percent Covered	9.12%	31.82%
2017 percent Covered	10.66%	34.22%
Change	+ 1.54%	+ 2.40%

Desired NSI Outcome: On an annualized basis, at least 80 percent of complaints brought to the NSI as priorities will be resolved to the satisfaction of the PJA leadership.

For each monthly NSI working group meeting, each PJA leader is asked to identify priority complaints from his or her geographic area. Chart 2 shows the status of priority complaints that were brought before city and county leaders at the monthly NSI meetings. Only three blight or crime cases per PJA per month are being followed and are listed as “resolved” once they meet the appropriate PJA leader’s satisfaction.

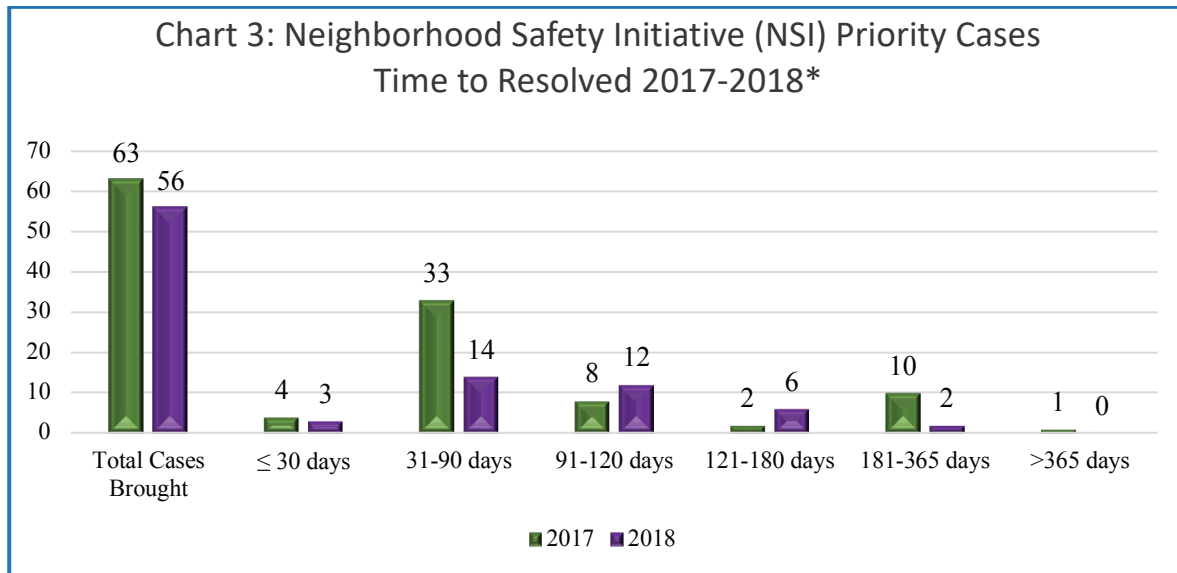
At the end of 2018, 19 (34 percent of the total) of the priorities brought to the NSI monthly meetings during that calendar year remained unresolved. Some of those priorities were brought during the latter months of 2018 and may be resolved in the early months of 2019. At the end of 2018, six out of 63 2017 priority complaints (10 percent of the total) remained unresolved.

Those that are listed as “litigation-active or concluded” means that they were sent to the Environmental Court for further action, which, of course, does not mean all have been resolved. So, the percentages reflected in Chart 2 are possibly inflated in terms of the “resolved” rate.



* Source: Neighborhood Safety Initiative

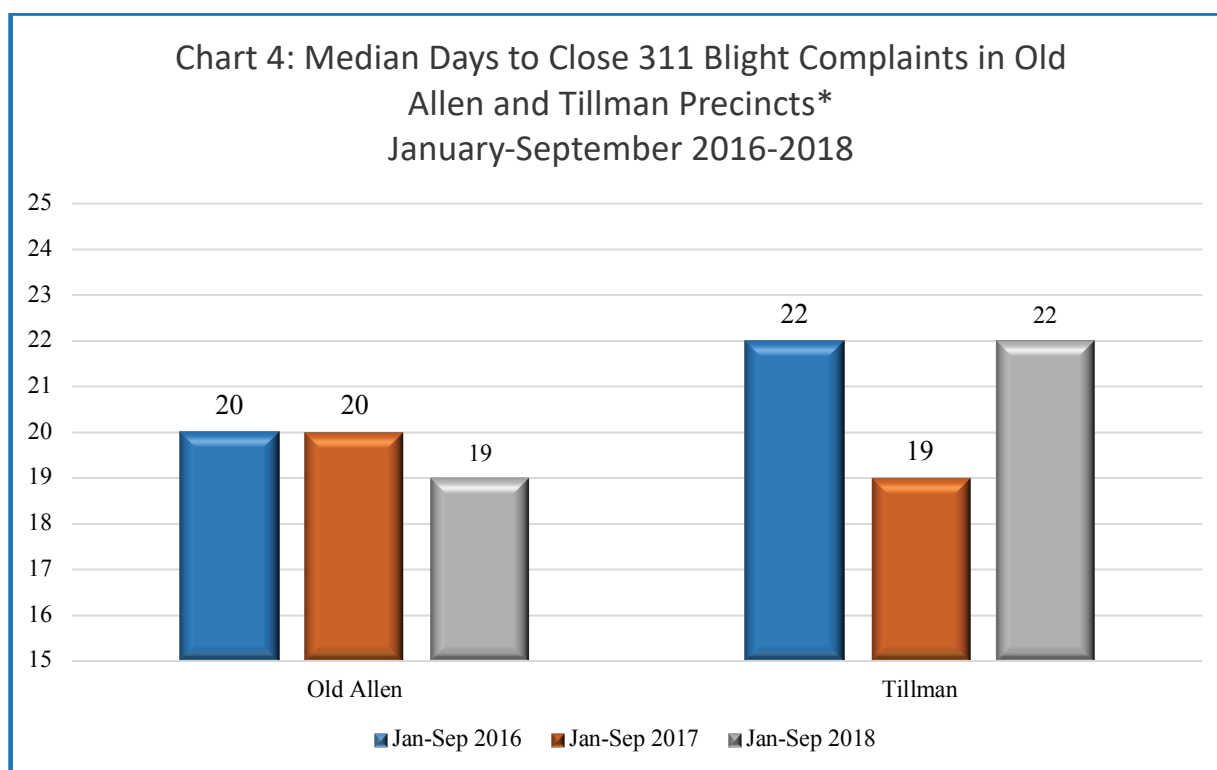
For those NSI priority complaints deemed resolved, Chart 3 shows the amount of time it took for resolution. About half (47 out of 95) of the complaints were resolved within 31-90 days. (25 remained unresolved as of the end of 2018.)



* Source: Neighborhood Safety Initiative

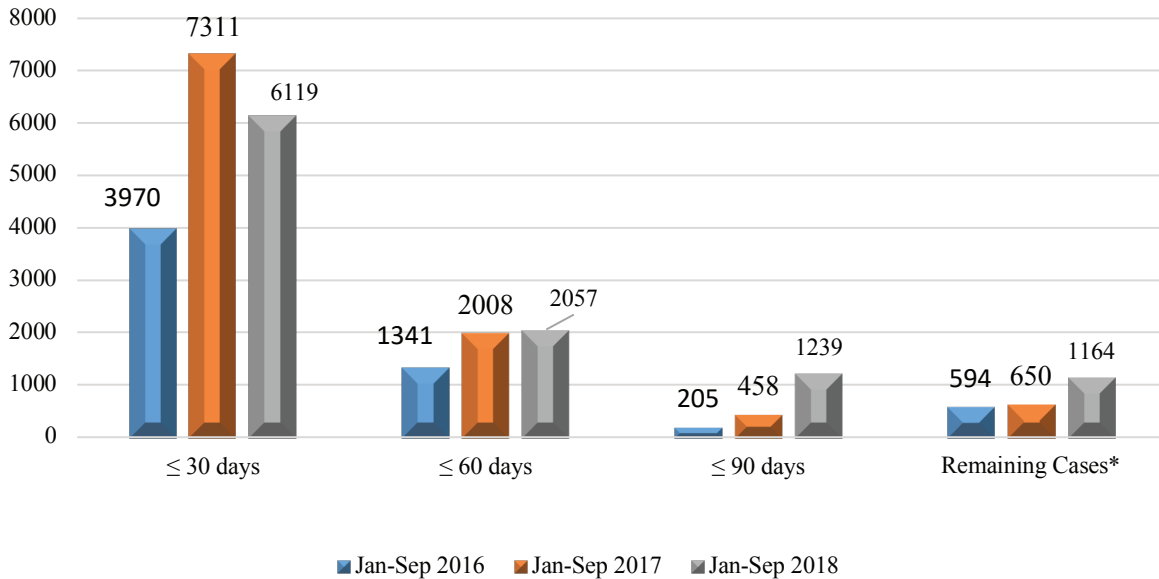
Desired NSI Outcome: Obtain median times to resolution for [certain types of] citizen complaints emanating from the NSI areas below the median times in 2016 (with a goal of ≤ 30 days).

Chart 4 shows the median days to close for certain types of blight complaints in the Tillman and Old Allen MPD precincts during the first nine months of 2016-2018. The median was used due to outliers that caused the average to be skewed. Since 311 receives thousands of complaints each month, only selected categories of blight, which correlate with potential criminal activity, were examined. These include junky yards, substandard and derelict structures, weeds-vacant houses or lots, weeds-occupied houses and picker piles. Other categories were tracked [such as graffiti, abandoned vehicles and illegal dumping] but due to the low nature of complaints are not included on the graphs. Charts 5 and 6 show the number of blight cases in the selected categories that were closed within 30, 60 or 90 days during the first nine months (January – September) of 2016-2018 and include any remaining cases for both the Tillman and Old Allen MPD precincts. Remaining cases include any case that was closed after 90 days or cases that have remained open. One thing that should be noted for the following charts is how the term “closed” changed. For a majority of the time period starting in January 2016, “closed” did not always mean that they were resolved but could have meant that 311 referred the issue at hand to another agency. If the matter was referred, 311 would then mark the issue as “closed” since it was no longer involved with it.



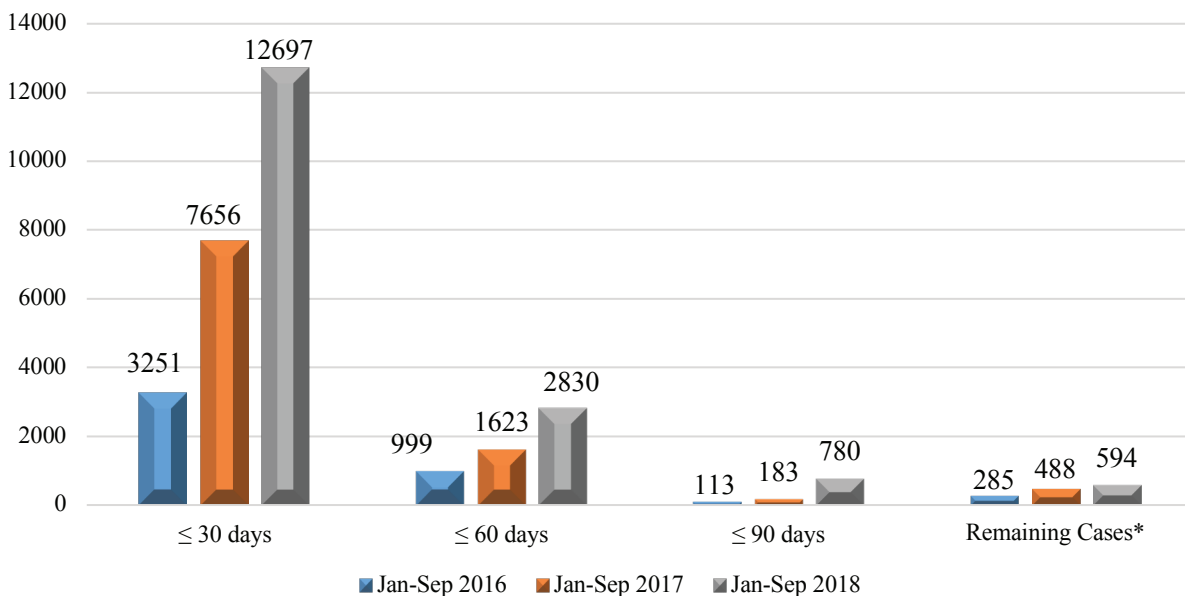
* Source: City of Memphis 311

Chart 5: Days to Close 311 Blight Cases in Tillman Precinct*
January-September 2016-2018



* Source: City of Memphis 311

Chart 6: Days to Close 311 Blight Cases in Old Allen Precinct*
January-September 2016-2018



* Source: City of Memphis 311

Surveys of Citizens Participating in PJA Meetings

At the end of this assessment, Tables 5 and 6 show the breakdown of PJA participants surveyed for feedback on various government agencies and private entities invited to participate in the PJA meetings. This survey tool was used twice in 2018 in order to evaluate agencies and private entities on their responsiveness during these meetings. For the most part, many of the PJA participants felt satisfied or very satisfied both times, although the satisfaction level was higher overall in the second survey. There does appear to be a correlation between level of satisfaction and whether PJA participants were aware of a particular agency's or private entity's presence.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on analyses of all available data as described above, as well as observing the process used at PJA meetings, the PSI provides the following conclusions:

- 1) The number of NWGs has grown but not at a fast-enough pace to reach the desired outcome. There must be a grass roots, intensive effort to obtain the pace needed.
- 2) Most PJA community participants who expressed an opinion on feedback surveys were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with each of the organizations participating. This indicates that PJA community participants are appreciative of the opportunity to interact with various organization representatives.
- 3) The leaders of both the PJAs and the NWGs are very active within their communities and are highly knowledgeable about the issues affecting their areas. They also are very dedicated to solving issues and working with various entities to achieve results.

The PSI has developed the following five recommendations:

- 1) Neighborhood Watch Group Development. A ramped up, grassroots effort must be made to recruit NWG leaders and train new groups. Otherwise, a majority of residential areas will remain unorganized.
- 2) PJA Participant Feedback. PJA community participants would often mark several organization representatives as "Not Present" on the feedback forms although one or more representatives were in attendance. One reason for this could be new community members attending the meetings who may not know who is representing each organization. It would be beneficial for participating representatives of public and private entities to display a name card which identifies his or her name and his or her organization. The Raleigh PJA already has implemented these name cards. Alternatively, the PJA leadership could call on each representative to give any sort of report he or she may have.

3) Agency Accountability. Public agencies are not required to have representatives attend PJA meetings or to be prepared if in attendance. Often some agencies which do have representatives present are not prepared to discuss matters on the agendas even though agendas have been provided beforehand to help insure preparation. Some sense of accountability should be implemented in order to ensure that agency representatives are both present and prepared. There should be a section added to the survey of citizens participating in the PJA meetings asking them if they felt the representatives were prepared for the meetings. In addition, there needs to be a commitment by various agencies to fast track priority complaints brought to the NSI working group. There needs to be a sense of urgency in addressing these priority complaints.

4) Community Partnerships. More community members should participate in PJA meetings, especially NWG leaders. Inviting other community leaders, such as business owners, could help bring in resources to solve some of the community issues.

5) Mid-Month Reminders. Reminding the government agencies of priority items may assist with getting them resolved faster, especially if an agency was absent from the previous meeting. If an agency is not able to have the problem fixed by the next meeting, the agency representative should come prepared to discuss the status of the problem and what steps are next.

LIMITATIONS

Responses to the PJA Satisfaction Survey may not include all members within these PJA groups. Another limitation within this same survey is the understanding from the survey respondent. It seems that some of them do not know which agencies are present and may have altered their feedback because of it. For example, nearly 17 percent of respondents from one of the meetings indicated that the District Attorney's Office was not present, when a representative actually was in attendance. Implementation of Recommendation 2 should help address this problem.

Table 5: PJA Participant Feedback 2018-1

ORGANIZATION	VERY SATISFIED	SATISFIED	DISSATISFIED	VERY DISSATISFIED	NOT PRESENT	N/A
CITY BEAUTIFUL	14 (17.1%)	38 (46.3%)	4 (4.9%)	5 (6.1%)	1 (1.2%)	20 (24.4%)
CLEAN MEMPHIS	14 (17.1%)	36 (43.9%)	7 (8.5%)	6 (7.3%)	1 (1.2%)	19 (23.2%)
CODE ENFORCEMENT	6 (7.3%)	39 (47.6%)	11 (13.4%)	10 (12.2%)	3 (3.7%)	13 (15.9%)
DISTRICT ATTORNEY	5 (6.1%)	23 (28.0%)	4 (4.9%)	4 (4.9%)	9 (11.0%)	37 (45.1%)
GROUND SERVICES	3 (3.7%)	18 (22.0%)	10 (12.2%)	6 (7.3%)	5 (6.1%)	40 (48.8%)
HCD	5 (6.1%)	19 (23.2%)	3 (3.7%)	4 (4.9%)	3 (3.7%)	48 (58.5%)
HEALTH DEPARTMENT	13 (15.9%)	35 (42.7%)	5 (6.1%)	5 (6.1%)	1 (1.2%)	23 (28.0%)
MEMPHIS & SHELBY COUNTY CRIME COMMISSION	7 (8.5%)	42 (51.2%)	5 (6.1%)	3 (3.7%)	1 (1.2%)	24 (29.3%)
MEMPHIS 311	5 (6.1%)	24 (29.3%)	15 (18.3%)	7 (8.5%)	7 (8.5%)	24 (29.3%)
MEMPHIS POLICE DEPARTMENT	25 (30.5%)	41 (50.0%)	1 (1.2%)	3 (3.7%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (14.6%)
MLGW	3 (3.7%)	18 (22.0%)	11 (13.4%)	6 (7.3%)	13 (15.9%)	31 (37.8%)
SHELBY COUNTY PUBLIC AFFAIRS	11 (13.4%)	37 (45.1%)	1 (1.2%)	3 (3.7%)	4 (4.9%)	26 (31.7%)
SOLID WASTE	6 (7.3%)	24 (29.3%)	14 (17.1%)	10 (12.2%)	7 (8.5%)	21 (25.6%)
TN ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL	1 (1.2%)	21 (25.6%)	7 (8.5%)	4 (4.9%)	7 (8.5%)	42 (51.2%)
TRUSTEE	15 (18.3%)	32 (39.0%)	4 (4.9%)	2 (2.4%)	1 (1.2%)	28 (34.1%)

Table 6: PJA Participant Feedback 2018-2

ORGANIZATION	VERY SATISFIED	SATISFIED	DISSATISFIED	VERY DISSATISFIED	NOT PRESENT	N/A
CITY BEAUTIFUL	5 (16.7%)	9 (30.0%)	6 (20.0%)	1 (3.3%)	2 (6.7%)	7 (23.3%)
CLEAN MEMPHIS	6 (20.0%)	10 (33.3%)	7 (23.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.7%)	4 (13.3%)
CODE ENFORCEMENT	9 (30.0%)	14 (46.7%)	2 (6.7%)	2 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (10.0%)
DISTRICT ATTORNEY	3 (10.0%)	10 (33.3%)	3 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (16.7%)	9 (30.0%)
GROUND SERVICES	6 (20.0%)	8 (26.7%)	5 (16.7%)	1 (3.3%)	3 (10.0%)	7 (23.3%)
HCD	6 (20.0%)	8 (26.7%)	2 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.7%)	12 (40.1%)
HEALTH DEPARTMENT	8 (26.7%)	14 (46.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.3%)	3 (10.0%)	4 (13.3%)
MEMPHIS & SHELBY COUNTY CRIME COMMISSION	8 (26.7%)	12 (40.1%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)	7 (23.3%)
MEMPHIS 311	4 (13.3%)	10 (33.3%)	5 (16.7%)	1 (3.3%)	4 (13.3%)	6 (20.0%)
MEMPHIS POLICE DEPARTMENT	15 (50.0%)	11 (36.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (10.0%)
MLGW	4 (13.3%)	9 (30.0%)	2 (6.7%)	1 (3.3%)	6 (20.0%)	8 (26.7%)
SHELBY COUNTY PUBLIC AFFAIRS	6 (20.0%)	8 (26.7%)	1 (3.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.7%)	1 (3.3%)
SOLID WASTE	5 (16.7%)	10 (33.3%)	4 (13.3%)	2 (6.7%)	4 (13.3%)	5 (16.7%)
TN ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL	7 (23.3%)	6 (20.0%)	3 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (16.7%)	9 (30.0%)
TRUSTEE	0 (0.0%)	11 (36.7%)	2 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (26.7%)	9 (30.0%)

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