



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

2015 Local Government Excellence Awards Program Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

(All programs nominated must have been fully operational for a minimum of 12 months, prior to January 31, 2015)

Deadline for Nominations: March 3, 2015

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: Not in Our City Program

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: Oak Ridge, TN

Jurisdiction population(s): ≈ 30,000

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented for at least 12 months prior to January 31, 2015, to be eligible. The start date [on or before January 31, 2014] should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: November Year: 2011

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington, September 2015. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Mark Watson
 Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: Oak Ridge, TN
 Name: _____
 Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____
 Name: _____
 Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact

Name of contact: Bruce M. Applegate Jr.

Title: Asst. to City Manager Jurisdiction: _____

Street address: 200 S. Talane Ave., P.O. Box 1

City: Oak Ridge State/Province: TN

Zip/Postal Code: 37831 Country: U.S.A

Telephone: 865-425-3570 Fax: 865-425-3426

E-mail: bapplegate@oakridgetn.gov



City of Oak Ridge: Not In Our City Program

History

The City of Oak Ridge is located in Anderson and Roane counties in the eastern part of the state of Tennessee, about 25 miles (40 km) west of Knoxville. It is part of the Knoxville Metropolitan Area and as of the 2010 census Oak Ridge's population was 29,330. Oak Ridge is most famously known as the Secret City for its role in the Manhattan Project.

The City of Oak Ridge was originally developed as a planned community with a goal of providing labor and residency for the burgeoning war effort that was the American response to WWII. In less than



two years the Department of Energy (DOE) constructed a town to employ, house and entertain a population of 45,000. Housing ranged from tent/hutments to 1200 sq. ft. homes that were assigned by rank and originally intended to be temporary in nature.



Residents lived in seven individual neighborhoods with commercial and recreational opportunities within walking distance. Each neighborhood was unique in character in addition to the size and style of home offered. All neighborhoods were connected to employment centers via a fixed

Type "L" House 1945(top), present(bottom)

route bus system that in 1944 was the 6th largest in the nation. There was also a network of greenbelts, bike paths and an off street pedestrian network that lent access to other neighborhoods as well as elementary and secondary schools. In this respect the DOE-constructed town of Oak Ridge placed a high priority on community connectivity, transit, alternative transportation modes and walkability.

In the immediate years following the war effort, Oak Ridge thrived as the home to nationally recognized research scientists and a highly skilled labor force. However, in recent years the housing constructed by DOE in the years between 1943 and 1947 has fallen into disrepair and is now either vacant or blighted.

Not in Our City Program: Program Background

The economic downturn experienced by all communities over the last decade produced a myriad of problems for local governments nationwide. Reduced revenue from building permit issuance, declining property values, and a drastic change in Oak Ridge's housing development put a financial strain on the city government and more particularly the Community Development Department. Instead of viewing these setbacks as insurmountable, city management identified this as an opportunity to double down on neglected community based initiatives. Underutilized city inspectors could now take on additional data collection roles for distressed neighborhoods. Management could begin cultivating additional resources for the rehabilitation of the distressed legacy neighborhoods. Weekly work sessions were held amongst key officials to begin a thorough evaluation of solutions available to the problems uniquely created by the military's neighborhood designs. The "Not in Our City Program" was enacted in November of 2011 as a comprehensive means of addressing these citywide neighborhood issues, with a strong focus falling onto the most distressed and aged neighborhoods.

Program Achievements

The Not in Our City Program (NIOC) is comprised of 8 initiatives: Strengthening of the neighborhood watch, creation of the NIOC Cleanup Container Program, comprehensive reporting on blighted property/property rehab, hiring of a remediation specialist, adoption of an Administrative Hearing Officer, creation of the Oak Ridge Land Bank, and a residential utilities program. The combination of all

these initiatives under the umbrella of the Community Development Department streamlined the flow of information produced through a single branch of our local government, preventing the loss of any data collected. A scaled approach was taken for the implementation of the program encouraging the development of each initiative at a different pace to guarantee adequate attention was paid to guarantee success. The neighborhood watch programs and hiring of a remediation specialist were the first programs to kick off. A remediation specialist was hired with the onset of the program and, Mr. Widner was immediately put to work evaluating the “alphabet homes” throughout the Manhattan District Overlay. The Manhattan District Overlay (MDO) is a historic district covering 8.7 sq. miles (5500 acres) within the Oak Ridge city limits and encompassing roughly 6,000 residential units. These units were not intended to be permanent residential structures, but as the Manhattan Project came to a close, the Federal Government sold all housing units to willing buyers. To date, many of these structures have had few improvements, and continue to house a large portion of Oak Ridge’s 29,500 residents. The evaluations he conducted identified key environmental hazards common to the homes including lead paint, antiquated electrical systems, and most commonly asbestos laden materials. Mr. Widner’s evaluation concluded a majority of the MDO legacy housing suffered deficiencies emphasizing the scale of the issue faced by the city of Oak Ridge.

As part of the “Not in Our City” program, in August 2013 the Oak Ridge City Council adopted an Ordinance expanding the Rental Inspection Program for our rental housing stock to include those constructed during the years 1942-1945. An overlay zone district has been created for this geographic area titled the Manhattan District Overlay (MDO). Many of the homes and multiple family dwellings located in this district have fallen into disrepair for a variety of reasons. However, it is particularly true for those which have become rental property. The structural integrity of these homes may be questionable, and environmental violations are common. In addition, the safety of some residents may be at risk due to continued failure of landlords and/or tenants to comply with the health and safety standards for these dwellings, especially electrical standards. Concentrations of homes with these characteristics have resulted in blighted neighborhoods with high crime rates and low property values. This has become a significant problem for those home owners who maintain and take pride in their property and want to raise a family or retire peacefully as the value of their homes continues to fall and crime is further enabled in

their neighborhoods. Recent figures have the number of total registered rental units at 274, with 25 citations and 22 of those violations addressed. Pending additional returns from the 3rd mailing group another 195 registrations have been completed. Continued participation by lessors and lessee's guarantees an increased quality of living for those residing in the City of Oak Ridge.

A symptom of the economic downturn in most communities has been an increase in the cities crime rate. Oak Ridge citizens lamented the fact that thefts/ burglaries were up and they were suffering the initial emotional effects of a theft as well as declining property values. The city responded through the NIOC by consolidating citizen complaints and bringing them to the Oak Ridge Police Departments attention. An increased involvement of the ORPD with neighborhood watch groups began early 2012, and the participation between the two yielded tremendous results. The burglary rate saw a decrease by approximately 18% dropping from 258 crimes reported to 212 crimes reported. Similarly a reduction of 13.4% was experienced in thefts reported was dropping the number of reported occurrences from 868 to 752.

As with all cities some of the unique traits we held proved to also develop into some of our largest problems. The military neighborhood designs from the 1940's provided only on street parking for the vast number of residences lining the area now contained within the MDO. The lack of off street parking combined with the large number of rental properties within this district created an overcrowding effect which reduced the utility of public roads. Residencies with multiple tenants often led to double if not triple the number of vehicles parked along busy neighborhood streets creating issues for daily drivers. Lack of storage space on these rental property lots also led to the accumulation of other vehicles, boats, and Recreational vehicles in public right of ways. The negative effect of junk vehicles on neighborhoods is undeniable and having identified this as a key issue within the NIOC plan the city engaged in solving this problem. Regulations prohibiting the parking of vehicles in lawns, acceptable areas for parking, and length of parking duration were adopted in March of 2012 and implemented June 18th of the same year.

A central facet of the NIOC was the need to achieve effective stewardship over the properties that ultimately fell into the cities hands. The inability of private parties to intervene and bring blighted properties back from their dilapidated state, left few options for the city to pursue. Rather than allow these

properties to continually fall into the hands of individuals interested in minimal improvements the city founded the first Land Bank in the state of Tennessee in 2013. The Land Bank Committee was by far the most ambitious aspect of the NIOC, and now acts as the primary means for the consolidation of residential property attained from private residents. Contractors working with our remediation specialist, were employed to safely demolish unfit homes, and prepare the lots for future projects. Currently the city holds 22 properties which will ultimately be resold to the public for private development. The expectation is that the cycle of purchasing, demolishing, and reselling empty lots to developers will yield a profit which can continue to expand the program. Current appraised value of the cities holdings are vastly greater than the initial seed money spent, and suggest return revenue will indeed match and exceed expenses. The city's control over the demolition process has also allowed for a stronger more environmentally friendly approach to be used, resulting in an increased quality of work and no environmental accidents on site to date.

Future

Major steps have been made using the incremental approach to the Not in Our City program, and the list of successes will continue to grow through the previously enacted plans and the maturing of the strengthened blighted property reporting, administrative hearing officer, and residential utilities initiatives. Oak Ridge has recently produced an econometric analysis covering property attributes and their effect on property values. The regression analysis confirms that several of the initiatives properly address issues depressing the local property market. The data also suggests new housing attributes to focus on as a means of increasing the property value of a residence. These advanced analytics will become even more useful as data continues to be mined from the implemented NIOC initiatives.