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City of Duluth Communications Office

411 West First Street, Duluth, Minnesota 55802
218-730-5230 | www.duluthmn.gov | Don Ness, Mayor

For more information contact Pakou Ly, Public Information Coordinator 218-730-5309
or Amy Norris, Public Information Coordinator 218-730-4312

DATE: 05/09/2011

SUBJECT: Blight and Nuisance Project succeeds in improving safety and quality of life

BY: Pakou Ly, Public Information Coordinator

Blight and Nuisance Project succeeds in improving safety and quality of life

[Duluth, MN] – The City of Duluth’s pilot project to reduce blight and nuisance crimes is getting a boost. The project was selected among only a handful statewide to receive an additional \$88,000 from the Office of Justice Programs. The Duluth Blight and Nuisance project, coordinated through the Duluth Police Department and the City Attorney’s office was started in 2010 to convene public and private partners to develop new approaches to ongoing nuisance and blight concerns.

The components of success for this project encompass developing a community prosecution model, building a community collaborative to reduce blight, making positive impacts through the use of community intervention, and a close working relationship between Police and a Community Prosecutor seeing victims and problems firsthand. The program pinpoints and connects people with resources but also prevents duplicative services among providers and partners by promoting consistent open communication.

Tricia Hummel, Assistant Director with the Office of Justice Programs, indicates the following reasons for Duluth’s award: progress in achieving objectives and measuring outcomes; demonstrating effective “system change” in addressing nuisance crimes; and developing effective partnerships.

“We are appreciative of the OJP for awarding us an additional grant. In the first year of this project we have seen an incredible community response. Project staff has built trust and positive relationships with businesses, landlords, and community members. We are also holding chronic offenders to a higher standard. Our neighborhoods are cleaner and safer because of this innovative project,” said Police Chief Gordon Ramsay.

In the first year, Duluth Police officers issued fewer citations for public consumption of alcohol, littering, possession of tobacco by minors, and trespassing while increasing citations for chronic offenders. Duluth Police Officers and the City Attorney’s office have developed positive working relationships with downtown businesses through regular meetings and increased visibility.

Landlords and property owners are directly engaged to increase the safety and livability of homes resulting in cleaner neighborhoods and a decrease in police calls to specific properties.

The project also developed a new model to increase prosecution of blight and nuisance crimes and diligently follows chronic offenders to ensure fulfillment of treatment and counseling plans with the possibility of a stayed sentence, if an offender reaches full compliance.

“This project demonstrates the importance of community partnerships and the need to always challenge ourselves to look at new models and new approaches. We appreciate the OJP’s support to continue the good work of addressing chronic community issues. The project is another critical tool to help make Duluth a safer and better place to live and work,” said City Attorney, Gunnar Johnson.

In its second year, the Project was recognized by Duluth LISC at their annual luncheon along with other city partners in fighting blight. Project staff, Community Prosecutor Theresa Neo and Officer Dave Drozdowski, also received an *Own It, Solve It* award from Mayor Don Ness at the State of the City event for their creative approach to reducing nuisance crimes. The original grant was for \$300,000 and covered the project staff through the end of 2011. The supplemental grant funds will help sustain the position of an Assistant City Attorney through 2012 while the Duluth Police Department has committed to maintaining a police officer on the project beyond the grant period.

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