Michigan Municipal League

Hubbard Farms Emergency Alert System

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Better Communities. Better Michigan.

PROJECT DETAILS:

NAME:
Hubbard Farms
Emergency Alert System

DATE:
2010-Present

CATEGORIES:
Historic Preservation
Community Organizing/
Messaging/Technology

INSPIRATION:
A historic neighborhood struggling with an increase in property crime looked for an affordable and effective tool to mobilize neighbors and protect their historic housing stock.

THE GIST:
Utilizing a free cellphone texting system intended for organizing flash mobs, a neighborhood developed a text message alert system to notify neighbors of crimes and calls for assistance.

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Hubbard Farms
Emergency Alert System

PROJECT SCOPE:
60+ participants in the Hubbard Farms neighborhood of Detroit.

Overview:
The Historic Hubbard Farms neighborhood struggled with a rise in petty property crimes and home invasions, in particular vagrants who preyed on vacant houses for either scrapping or squatting. Residents, frustrated by poor police response times, utilized free flash mob cell phone technology to mobilize themselves to help one another and secure vacant properties in their community.

Accomplishments:
➤ Created a system where neighbors can notify each other of emergencies through a simple text message system

➤ Averted several home invasions, preventing the theft or damage of tens of thousands of dollars in personal property

➤ Identified multiple perpetrators and assisted police in at least 4 arrests

➤ Built a sense of empowerment in a neighborhood struggling with crime

➤ Strengthened community connections that have led to new neighborhood social events like strolling dinners and meet-ups

Budget:
No cost, outside of individuals' cellphone bills.

Funding:
None

Equipment:
To participate, individuals must have a cellphone with texting capabilities.

Organization:
Organizer creates an account on website of GroupMe (www.groupme.com).
Organizer then adds participants through the GroupMe site.

Participants:
There is a limitation of 100 people allowed in the system through GroupME.

Actions Taken:

1) **SETUP SYSTEM:**
    Visit GroupMe (www.groupme.com), or equivalent flashmob/mobile organizing software, to set up an account for your group.

2) **SOLICIT NEIGHBORS:**
    Tap in to existing communication methods in your community, such as neighborhood email listserves, neighborhood fliers, or traditional door knocking.

3) **REGISTER PARTICIPANTS:**
    Through the GroupMe website, insert participants' phone numbers. They will receive a text message confirmation and a notice will go out to the entire group.

4) **DEFINE ACTIONABLE EMERGENCIES:**
    From the beginning it's important that a core group of participants establish what types of emergencies the group is willing to respond to. Hubbard Farms Text Group typically responds to:

    - When home security systems go off and the owner is not able to immediately respond
    - When a squatter is present in a vacant building
    - When a petty crime such as theft or breaking or entering is witnessed
    - Emergency boarding up of vacant homes

    The group does not respond to instances that present an immediate threat to anyone's safety including drug deals or gun violence.

5) **STAY SAFE:**
    Establish ground rules that include prohibiting confrontation. The role of responders is primarily to assist if someone is in immediate danger or stay at the scene until the police arrive to be a witness.

6) **ALWAYS CALL 911:**
    This system is not intended to replace calls to 911. It is important to stress to participants to call 911 first, and then contact the neighborhood group through the text messaging system.

Lessons Learned:

➤ Establish appropriate messages to share over the texting service. Since each text may be costing participants, its important only essential texts pertaining to the emergency and the immediate response are used.

➤ People will not always understand the system and how it is used, especially at first. It is important to have patience and an organizer of the group that keeps the group focused and true to its original purpose.

➤ Make sure people understand that they will regularly be receiving text messages and should consider their phone package before joining.

Experts:
Bob Anderson, robert_andersen@me.com

Similar Projects:
Neighbors in the West Village of Detroit utilized a similar system in 2012 to stop the scrapping of a historic mansion in their community.

The Center for 21st Century Communities

Building 21st century communities

Experts from around the world—in academic, business, and public sectors alike—agree that investing in communities is a critical element to long-term economic development in the 21st century. Michigan's future depends on its ability to attract and retain knowledge-based workers. Central to attracting this priceless commodity is *place.* Research proves that successful 21st century communities effectively leverage the assets summarized in this brochure. Learn more and stay engaged at mml.org.

Who we are...

The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. We are a nonprofit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs; our people are dynamic, energetic, and highly approachable, passionately and aggressively pushing change to achieve better communities and a better Michigan.

What we know...

Never before have so many diverse interests, from academic researchers to the business community to government leaders, shared a single conclusion: Michigan's future depends on its ability to attract knowledge-based workers. And what is central to attracting this priceless commodity? *Place,* specifically vibrant 21st century communities.

What we offer...

Through its Center for 21st Century Communities (21c3), the League provides education, technical assistance, public outreach, and unprecedented access to experts and resources. The 21c3 is a "one-stop-shop" for communities interested in creating and sustaining livable, desirable, and unique places that attract the highly skilled, creative, and talented workforce of the next century.

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