



Community Policing to Achieve a Cultural Shift: Boulder, CO

Transforming Nightlife with Collaborative Policing Methods

The City of Boulder is home to over 100,000 citizens, including the University of Colorado and 27,000 students. Several focusing events have taken place over the years that have brought issues surrounding alcohol abuse to the forefront and have prompted community reaction. These issues have included DUI-related deaths, civil disturbances, binge drinking, and under aged consumption and abuse. Community response included the formation of an Alcohol Advisory Group consisting of City of Boulder and CU officials who collect informational data and identify problem locations for specific problem-based response, increased enforcement efforts, University involvement and broad-based stakeholder meetings. Evolution has taken these efforts to where the City of Boulder is today. There is an active Responsible Hospitality Group (RHG), with frequent collaboration with major stakeholders.

Problem Statement

Boulder, similar to many other cities, is currently experiencing conflict between residents and patrons' competing interests for late-night vitality and quality of life in the Downtown area. The Downtown Pearl Street Pedestrian Mall, opened in 1979, is home to numerous and eclectic shops, restaurants and bars. A recent economic impact study assessing the impact of the Downtown hospitality industry showed that close to 50 percent of sales tax revenue is generated by the hospitality industry. Much of these funds are funneled into a general fund to provide valuable services to the community, including police patrols Downtown.

However, in recent years, expensive lofts and condominiums have begun development on the west and east ends of the Pearl Street Mall. The resultant change has brought economic stimulus to the community, but not without cost. Regulatory departments and enforcement agencies have found themselves caught in the middle of trying to address residents' concerns while maintaining the vitality and economic contributions generated by late-night dining and entertainment.

Over the past 10-15 years, alcohol abuse has been at the forefront of concern for the community. Various under aged DUI related deaths, alcohol fueled disturbances, neighborhood conflicts, and related confrontations between the police, neighbors, and the community drove the need for solutions.

It was apparent that sustaining these problems was a culture that fostered the notion that alcohol use and abuse was a “right” inherent in the passage to adulthood and facilitated by risky drinking practices in college. The Community of Boulder therefore aimed to shift this culture away from rampant abuse to a more responsible consumption philosophy.

Although groups of stakeholders each undertook creative initiatives to address community concerns, there was a prevalent lack of collaboration and limited overall success. Recognizing that change would require a cultural shift to diffuse into the community, the City reoriented to utilize principles of community policing to implement long-term solutions with ongoing collaboration among diverse stakeholders.

Stakeholders

- The Boulder Police Department
- The City of Boulder
- City Council
- The Downtown Boulder Business Improvement District
- Community Members
- Hospitality Vendors
- The University of Colorado
- Transportation Officials

Process

Redevelopment Planning and Initiatives

Several community efforts were put in place as an initial effort to respond to community concerns. An Alcohol Advisory Group was formed in 2006 consisting of community leaders and business representatives. Community policing efforts were put into play to begin collaboration in an effort to facilitate change. Neighborhood associations were formed to begin dialogue between the permanent residents and the transitory student residents in the housing areas adjacent to the University. Response by the police included increased enforcement and educational campaigns and involvement in the various groups. Despite the creativity and drive behind these initiatives, stakeholders were still generally operating in silos, and as a result, success was limited.

In 2005, the City of Boulder was awarded a grant by the Responsible Hospitality Institute (RHI) to formulate a community-wide response around the concept of responsible hospitality. The intent was to identify problems and formulate community-wide responses brought about through collaboration between affected stakeholders. The Responsible Hospitality Group (RHG) was formed initially with funding from the grant and is now a self sustaining organization that meets monthly. Members include all facets of the industry,

from restaurants and bars to package sales, University, City of Boulder and police representatives.

The development of the RHG matched the community policing philosophy of the Boulder Police Department. Best defined by the cooperation and dialogue generated between the policing agency and the members of the community, the crux of the community policing concept is that no one stakeholder can resolve an issue alone. Members of the police department remain active in the RHG.

Police response to alcohol abuse reoriented to a combination of enforcement, community collaboration and education. An officer position dedicated to alcohol enforcement and education was established within the Department. The focus of this position has evolved to address policing licensing establishments, youth alcohol enforcement and education. One full-time officer is assigned to this position with the part-time supervision of a sergeant. Separate grants were also obtained to focus specifically on under aged consumption and enforcement at establishments.

Members of the Police Department also partnered with members of the University of Colorado to begin an education program for all in-coming freshmen. Student residents in the community are now offered "How to throw a safe party" information packets. New students are briefed on the laws and community standards regarding alcohol use and abuse. A University Hill team of officers is in place to deal specifically with concerns surrounding the residential and business districts adjacent to the University campus.

Previously, the members of the police department were responsible for training service staff in topics related to false identification, responsible service, and legal considerations. This created a strain on police resources as this was the only training recognized by the Beverage Licensing Authority. The Police Department petitioned to allow outside vendors such as Safe Serve and TIPS to provide server level training. Members of the police department also developed a four hour class directed towards mid-level management staff and focused on topics centered on administrative, criminal, and civil liability. That class is currently taught by a Police Sergeant and the Alcohol Officer. Increased training specific to the industry is now channeled through the RHG and is recognized as a mitigating factor by the Beverage Licensing Authority in the event of an alleged violation.

In addition, the Police Department reconfigured staffing for the Pearl Street Mall by adding additional officers on the evening shift, provided DUI Last Drink Information which helped develop expanded late-night transportation routes, and continues to participate in RHG monthly meetings.

Outcome

What community policing has taught members of the City of Boulder is that problems are best resolved through effective collaboration and communication. Through the use of a grant by the Responsible Hospitality Institute, the tenets of community policing, and a great deal of hard work by concerned stakeholders, change is taking place. The concept of responsible hospitality is slowly diffusing into the culture of the community. A Responsible

Hospitality Group has been formed and the Police Department has shifted emphasis and increased community involvement. Specific gaps such as late-night transportation have been filled, and neighborhood concerns have been addressed.

A cultural shift is slowly taking place in the manner in which hospitality industry employees approach their daily duties and the manner in which they operate their business. Police Department members are now active in areas beyond enforcement, including sponsored training, RHG involvement and intervention. Community policing principles are at play in resolving issues surrounding the hospitality industry in a more proactive rather than reactive response.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

A challenge that reverberates today is developing a streetscape design that is oriented to pedestrians while reducing attractiveness to panhandlers and homeless demographics. The City has addressed these issues by instituting an ordinance against aggressive panhandling, but the presence of persistent yet not 'aggressive' panhandlers persists downtown. The City also opted to play classical music outside the main transport hub, a primary gathering place for transients, and also switched to a planter design that is not easily used as seating. The challenge now has shifted to sustaining the momentum. Diffusion is a slow process that requires time and momentum. Early adopters are on board and continue to provide the impetus for change. The RHG is becoming a self-sustaining organization, but the membership seems to have reached a plateau. Keeping members interested and continuing growth of the RHG will be the largest challenge. Spreading the word that responsible hospitality will lead to a positive bottom line has become the key focus of the group.

Jurisdiction

The City of Boulder is a growing community sitting at the foothills of the Colorado Rocky Mountains. Located approximately 30 miles northwest of Denver it is the home to the University of Colorado, numerous governmental institutions and large and small business predominately in the high tech and information arenas.

Funding

The City of Boulder received a grant from the Colorado Department of Revenue (CDR) in 2005 and a grant from RHI in 2006 to enhance community response to responsible hospitality and enforcement.

Spin-off Projects

One spin-off as a result of this process was a shift in orientation by the City of Boulder Beverage Licensing Authority (BLA). Previously, board members would only recognize training offered by police department members as a mitigating circumstance in the event of a violation. By responding to the request for more options by police department staff and

members of the hospitality industry, outside training is now accepted. Also, open dialogue has been established between the BLA members, members of the police department, and members of the hospitality industry. In addition, BLA members have attended training with members of the hospitality industry, which has led to breaking down barriers and developing a shared perspective.

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