

HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF NUISANCE ABATEMENT PLAN

SUPERIOR, NE



In recent years, the City of Superior and residents have undertaken a number of activities to help maintain the city's character, including: adopting a Redevelopment Plan (2003), voting to extend for another 15 years a 1% city sales tax to support community improvements and economic development efforts (2004), and adopting a 10 year Comprehensive Development Plan to guide planning through 2024. In 2012, the City adopted a Nuisance Abatement Plan (NAP), intended to help identify, enforce, and abate nuisances such as vacant or unsecured properties, dilapidated structures, junk vehicles, and uncontrolled vegetation.

NAP

In the spring of 2012, the City contracted with South Central Economic Development District (SCEDD) to implement its abatement procedures. SCEDD provided third-party oversight and non-discriminatory review of properties. The community of 1,957 residents was divided into six proposed sections, with one section to be reviewed each year. In 2012, courtesy letters were sent to residents in section one who were deemed likely to be in violation, indicating need for resolution and what steps would be taken if nuisance abatement did not occur by a designated date. Of the 28 blocks and 286 properties reviewed by SCEDD in section one, 156 (55%) were sent courtesy letters. Many were resolved by the designated date, but 52 properties (18%) were declared public nuisances by the City Council and follow up letters were sent requiring the abatement of the identified nuisance by a second designated date. If unresolved, the city can order abatement of the properties and hold the owner responsible for the costs. The City of Superior requested a health impact assessment to inform their decision on whether to move ahead with NAP implementation in section two, scheduled for spring, 2013.

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Team & Partners

The HIA (Dec. 2012 – Apr. 2013) was led by a core team consisting of a city planner and clerk, several public health officials, and input from community members and technical assistance from Douglas County Health Department staff and Human Impact Partners. Funding for the project was provided by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

HIA Scope

The core team developed an initial project scope which was refined based on feedback from a community poll about what constitutes a “healthy community.” The final scope focused on the impacts of NAP enforcement on the local economy, social cohesion, and safety/physical activity. Assessment methods included literature review, key informant interviews, review of community themes & strengths surveys with residents, and quantitative data collection or review.

Existing Conditions

Health of the Community. Residents defined a healthy community as one that has:

- employment opportunities
- residents who have strong ties to each other & work together for the community
- strong economic development
- safe places to walk, play and recreate
- occupied, well-kept housing

Fifty-three percent (53.4%) of residents disagreed or strongly disagreed that Superior's economy was strong, while 71% disagreed or strongly disagreed that there are enough jobs located in town or a short drive away. Sixty-two percent (62%) agreed or strongly agreed that there were support networks in the community that help during times of stress and need. Fifty-three percent (53%) agreed or strongly agreed that there were adequate places to exercise and play in Superior (parks, walking/biking trails, swimming pools, gyms, fitness centers, and so forth).

Nuisances. Of 286 properties reviewed, 55% were contacted about potential nuisance issues. Of these, 59% were resolved by the property owners without further action, 6% are being prepped for demolition by

Health Impact Assessment of Superior NAP

the City and 3% were abated by SCEDD and the property owner was billed for the cost of cleanup. The most prevalent nuisance type identified in the first phase of NAP was debris (43%), followed by dilapidated or unsecured buildings (22%), vacant houses (15%), and vehicles (15%).

Solid Waste Disposal. Prior to the NAP, opportunities for solid waste disposal in Superior included burning on designated days (for paper, wood, and downed vegetation), resident contracts with private trash hauling services, annual city-wide garage sale, and clean-up day dumpsters provided by the City for 2 days each year.

Findings

Overall, the HIA found that continuation of nuisance code enforcement through the NAP supports the community's definitions of a healthy community. Residents of substandard housing, including children, are at higher risk of poor health outcomes from exposure to a variety of nuisances: childhood lead poisoning, injuries, respiratory diseases such as asthma, increased risk for fire, electrical injuries, falls, rodent bites and quality of life issues are linked to substandard housing units nationwide (CDC).

The NAP has the potential to increase the economic strength of the community, improve safety, walkability, and recreation conditions and improve the public's health. Specifically, continued NAP implementation would:

- ↓ Physical Injury
- ↓ Chronic Disease / Obesity
- ↑ Mental Health
- ↑ Positive Child Development Outcomes
- ↑ Social Capital
- ↑ Access to Healthcare
- ↑ Access to Healthy Foods
- ↑ Quality of Life

Healthy Community Poll Comments

A healthy community is...

- "Citizens who take responsibility for self in all aspects: physical, home, mental, etc."
- "We the People, NOT we the Government"

Recommendations

The HIA makes nine recommendations to address impacts of the NAP:

1. Ensure consistency in the definition of *nuisance* and consider the intensity of a violation.



2. Create a public outreach/education plan to describe and explain the NAP process and report findings, including cost.
3. Send Courtesy letters by regular mail before sending by Certified mail.
4. Conduct annual survey on resident satisfaction with NAP program.
5. Consider permanent mandatory trash removal or other solid waste removal/disposal programs.
6. Investigate recycling opportunities for Superior.
7. Identify youth or volunteer organizations to assist residents in nuisance abatement and/or provide the tools to help with clean up.
8. Investigate land bank options.
9. Create and implement a monitoring plan to track ongoing NAP impacts and provide feedback through public reports back to the community. Consider monitoring:
 - a. Resident satisfaction with NAP program; quality of life and community pride assessments
 - b. Solid waste disposal use and cost per year for construction, demolition & white goods
 - c. Average property values by NAP section / City valuation trends
 - d. Law enforcement work load associated with nuisance properties
 - e. Total number (#) of properties reviewed by year; # chronic nuisance properties; # properties receiving courtesy letters, # declared, and # properties for which City is responsible to clean-up
 - f. Annual City budget for clean-up and budget for SCEDD contract
 - g. Number (#) of unmaintained sidewalks; # of unsafe routes to key destinations (schools, parks/ball fields, hospital, downtown district, nursing homes, restaurants, etc.)
 - h. Annual tourism revenue
 - i. Loss of tax revenue from vacant or abandoned properties

A full report is available by request. Contact South Heartland District Health Department: mail@shdhd.org / 1-877-238-7595