

Police department reinstates Crime Free Multi-Housing Program

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The Crescent City Police Department is re-implementing a program they hope will reforge a partnership with the community while reducing crime — the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program.

Police Chief Richard Griffin told the City Council at their Oct. 5 meeting the program was first implemented years ago under by Chief Douglas Plack, but fell by the wayside for various issues. “When I first came on, this was one of my first priorities,” Griffin said. “I wanted to bring it back because I know what good it did back then.”

Sergeant Justin Gill, who used to run the program, said the basics of the program is it’s a partnership between the CCPD, tenants and landlords to create a safe environment for everybody.

“It makes it easier to deal with problem children. It makes landlords more accountable to make apartments a better place to live, dealing with normal things like lighting, locks, fire alarms, stuff like that that a lot of people overlook,” Gill explained.

Griffin said he was excited to bring the program back, believing it

won’t cost his department more than overtime costs for training and implementing the program and producing signs for facilities that complete it.

“We’ve been doing an excellent job this year and I believe in cutting overtime costs,” Griffin said. “This requires an initial training for landlords of eight hours. I expect the costs to be minimal and covered by the department’s existing budget.”

Gill, too, was excited Griffin made it a priority to bring back the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program.

“I saw firsthand how it impacted the community. This is community-oriented policing at its core. This is the philosophy of the police department. For us and our officers, this is a great time to bring it back because we really want to be involved,” Gill said.

The Crime Free Multi-Housing Program starts with eight-hour training designated for apartment owners, management and their management team. As a trained facilitator, Gill walks them through safety protocols, roles of law enforcement, landlord-tenant disputes, fire safety and much more.

“We really get them up to speed and give them the empowerment they need to be present and be well-trained apartment managers, showing them how we can help them and how they can help us as law enforcement,” Gill said.

After the training, they do a Crime Prevention Thorough Environmental Design, where law enforcement goes out to apartment communities and walks with apartment owners and managers to come up with ways to make that community more safe, covering lighting, ingress, egress, fencing, peepholes in doors, appropriately labeled apartments and even shrub height.

“We help them get to a point where their property is going to combat illegal activity,” Gil said.

The third and final phase is a safety social. The apartment community has a celebration, where the fire department is invited and Sgt. Anthony Lopez and Canine Lt. Kai help present the program to the community.

Gill said the program includes a lease addendum, which is the backbone of the program, that says if you engage in criminal activity, you can be kicked out.

“It’s basically zero tolerance for criminal activity,” he said.

Then, every time an officer responds to one of these properties, the management gets notified, such as reports of drug or heroine sales out of an apartment, allowing them to follow up on any lease violation.

The Crime Free Multi-Housing Program requires annual recertification followed by another safety social. And each community receives a big sign touting them as a member of the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program.

“It’s not an easy program,” Gill added. “We had a lot of participants last time that got certified. It just takes hard work, a time commitment and communication between apartment communities and police department.”

He said after 3-6 months of being involved in the program, calls for services went down at participating locations.

Housing Authority Director Megan Miller told the City Council she heard consistently good feedback about the program.

“They felt safer and it inspired more of a community feel. I’m just really happy it’s coming back,” Miller said.

Councilor Jason Greenough thanked them for taking on the program.

“Too often law enforcement is reactive instead of proactive,” Greenough said. “This gives us the opportunity to put it in practice, get involved in the community, to get out there and do something, rather than waiting by the radio and responding to calls.”