



## A REDEFINED BUILDING DEPARTMENT HELPS REVITALIZE A COMMUNITY

### CITY OF LINCOLN PARK, MICHIGAN

REDEFINE  
SERVICES.  
RETHINK  
STAFFING.  
REALIZE  
SAVINGS.

Lincoln Park, Michigan is a community of roughly 37,500 in an area of cities and communities known as "Downriver," southwest of Detroit. Like many suburbs of Detroit, Lincoln Park was hit hard by the economic downturn and foreclosure crisis.

The state appointed Brad Coulter as the Emergency City Manager in July 2014. It quickly became apparent to Mr. Coulter upon his arrival that one of the first items on his priority list needed to be addressing the problems associated with the building department. "Frankly, it was a mess," explained Mr. Coulter. "Permit turnaround time was six weeks- or not at all. We were not customer friendly and the department's inefficiencies created a bottleneck in the city for any construction or new development."

Mr. Coulter and his staff realized these problems would not be changed overnight. "The entire department needed an attitude transformation. The culture needed to change and the only way to do that was by bringing in a third party firm that specialized in running building departments."

#### PRIVATIZATION SPED-UP TRANSFORMATION

Privatization can sometimes be a sensitive issue; however, this was not the case in Lincoln Park. Frustration levels with the building department

was at an all-time high in the community, it was clear a change was needed. Mr. Coulter and his team understood that third party firms are under constant pressure to perform in order to get paid. "By going this route, we were able to plug them in and run with it, rather than take the precious time required to rebuild the entire department from scratch," explained Mr. Coulter.

Lincoln Park conducted a national search to find the firm that would best fit their community and be able to hit the ground running. After interviewing four firms, SAFEbuilt was ultimately selected to partner with the city. A three year contract was signed in which SAFEbuilt collects 68 percent of the department's revenue, similar to the cost of staff.

Mr. Coulter shared that one of the aspects Lincoln Park liked best about SAFEbuilt was its national footprint. SAFEbuilt serves over 300 communities in eight states, and with that, comes the ability to leverage best practices from across the country. SAFEbuilt also brought innovative technology to the table, including an automated permit tracking software that delivers prompt turnaround times for inspections and permit requests.

#### IMPROVED CUSTOMER SERVICE

For some communities, the decision to privatize the building department boils down to dollars

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and cents- saving money. While partnering with SAFEbuilt was certainly a financially sound decision for Lincoln Park, the main impetus in working with a third party firm was to improve customer service. "SAFEbuilt has brought a level of expertise and professionalism to the building department that the city has not seen in a very long time," said Mr. Coulter. "The culture has completely turned around, we are getting way more done with the same amount of people and the complaints flowing in about the building department have all but disappeared."



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Registering rentals helps control blight and can act as a form of crime prevention to help keep the city safe.

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SAFEbuilt does not adopt a one-size fits all approach in any of its partnerships because each community has a different set of needs and goals. In Lincoln Park, the focus was on revitalizing the city. "The building department is at the heart of the community," explained Mr. Coulter. "You need development to grow the tax base. Property tax revenue constitutes half of the city's total revenue, so supporting real estate and property improvements is key to reviving Lincoln Park."

SAFEbuilt also focused on maintaining and stabilizing property values. The department is working towards getting all rental properties in the city registered. Registering rentals helps control blight and can act as a form of crime prevention to help keep the city safe.

When Mr. Coulter was appointed Emergency City Manager, the city was given a clean slate and an opportunity to move on and learn from the past. This fresh start relied heavily on SAFEbuilt and the belief that the building department could be turned around. "They've done a great job so far," lauded Mr. Coulter. "They have met and exceeded our expectations and I expect more great things moving forward from SAFEbuilt."

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SAFEbuilt's partnership with Lincoln Park was just a piece of the puzzle in a much larger effort to come together as a community. A change in culture, along with some staffing changes, has made a noticeably positive difference in the attitude of the community and helped perpetuate the city's core values:

- Integrity
  - Customer Service
  - Responsive
  - Friendly
  - Team Oriented
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