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AN EVALUATION OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD EMPOWERMENT TEAM (NET) OFFICE IN THE CITY OF ROCHESTER

OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Prepared for:
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2005, the City of Rochester engaged the Center for Governmental Research Inc. (CGR) to evaluate the Neighborhood Empowerment Team Office (NET), which organizationally is a unit within the Office of the Mayor. The objective of the evaluation was to determine whether or not the City could or should consider spending the $8 million allocated to NET in a different way in order to meet the City's service objectives.

This report presents what CGR learned about NET during the evaluation process along with four options that the City may wish to consider in order to meet the performance goals that NET was intended to achieve.

The report is divided into three sections and an appendix. Section 1 presents a summary of how CGR conducted the study and CGR's findings and observations. Section 2 presents CGR's evaluation of NET from five perspectives: a) the context within which NET exists, b) the concept of NET, c) the structure of NET, d) the processes within NET, and e) the people of NET. Section 3 presents four structural options for offering the services currently provided by NET, and some suggested performance measures to aid the City in determining the impact of providing these services in the future. The Appendix provides some key background information CGR collected during the project.

NET was an important component in Mayor William A. Johnson's initiatives to make Rochester a vibrant urban center. To

summarize, based upon what CGR learned - *NET was created to support safe, clean, strong, viable, and attractive neighborhoods by locating City code inspection and enforcement and neighborhood policing services in neighborhoods so that City staff and residents could work as a team to improve the quality of life by reducing urban blight, nuisance and criminal activities.*

NET officially began as an organization on January 1, 1997, and became fully operational with the start of the City's 1997-98 fiscal year. The NET Office was created as a bureau reporting directly to the Mayor. Two groups of existing staff were assigned to the new office: 45 civilian staff responsible for inspections and enforcement of the City and state building and property maintenance codes and other related City codes; and 32 police officers. In addition, 17 new positions were created, primarily to staff six NET offices located in neighborhoods throughout the City. Staff in the NET offices were expected to become advocates for their neighborhoods and to coordinate the delivery of City services.

CGR's evaluation is based on our review and assessment of a large quantity of factual data we were able to gather about NET operations, plus other background information such as internal documents and published articles. CGR also contacted several comparison cities to understand how they provide services similar to those provided by NET. Perhaps most important, CGR conducted a large-scale community involvement process, during which we interviewed over 65 individuals, met with special interest focus groups (e.g., City staff, business groups, neighborhood leaders), conducted eight open public meetings throughout the community, and received telephone, regular mail and e-mail comments about NET. Overall, over 400 people gave us their comments and suggestions. Of this total, approximately 125 were City staff members or elected officials, and more than 275 were members of the public.

CGR's assessment is that NET provides three key functions for the City. First, NET provides city *code inspection and enforcement activities* (along with related record-keeping operations). Approximately 60% of NET staff time is devoted to this function. Second, NET provides neighborhood centers for *community policing activities*. Approximately 30% of NET staff time is devoted to this

function. Third, NET provides decentralized *neighborhood advocacy services* from the six NET area offices. The remaining 10% of NET staff time is spent on neighborhood advocacy services.

Based on what CGR heard during this project, we believe that the City could consider four structural options for providing the three key NET functions in the future. These options range from keeping NET as it currently exists within the Office of the Mayor to eliminating NET as a stand-alone entity and re-integrating its functions into the Department of Community Development, the Department of Environmental Services and the Rochester Police Department.

CGR does not recommend one option over the other, since the City needs to make several key policy decisions before selecting an option. Key variables to be considered include whether or not to continue with neighborhood service centers (a generic name for what are currently the NET area offices) and whether or not to re-organize the functions currently provided by NET. The neighborhood advocacy function, in particular, presents the most difficult structural challenge, because NET currently serves as a major central coordinating hub for citizen requests for service, but NET does not have the authority to direct or control the resources in other City departments needed to respond to those requests. Different options address this challenge in different ways.

Whatever structural option is chosen, the findings in this report strongly suggest that the following issues need to be addressed:

- The City needs to create a process to develop a realistic set of expectations with neighborhood groups and associations about what services the City can provide in order to support safe, clean, strong, viable, and attractive neighborhoods. Currently, CGR believes there is a gap between what residents expect the City to be able to do, and the City's ability to meet those expectations. Once a compact is developed between these groups and the City about what services the local government can realistically provide, that compact can be used to create meaningful performance indicators that measure how well the City provides those services in the future;

- The City should separate the code inspection function from the enforcement function, to put in place a better system of checks and balances, provide another layer of review for enforcement proceedings, and ensure more consistent application of standards across the City;

- The City should invest $65,000 in handheld computer tablets for inspectors to reduce paperwork and duplicate keying of inspection and enforcement records. This would save four or more positions, which could be shifted to do other work or eliminated to produce annual savings of at least $150,000 per year. In addition, the better system would improve City service response times;

- The City should develop a clear set of expected outcomes for the services it provides through NET, and at least once every two years evaluate whether it is achieving the desired outcomes from these programs. As an example, the City could more aggressively use the data currently available in City databases about code violations (the building information system), property value changes (in the Bureau of Assessment records) and changes in criminal activities (using either RPD CrimeStat or 911 Call for Service data) to pro-actively assess the impact of City services within neighborhoods and adjust services as needed to be more effective.

NET currently costs City taxpayers approximately $8 million. Ninety-three percent, or roughly $7.5 million, goes to pay for the salaries and benefits for staff in the 97 full-time and 5 part-time budgeted positions (2005-2006 budget). This includes 67 full-time civilian positions and 30 police personnel.

It is important to understand that most of the expenses currently associated with NET would remain, regardless of which structural option is selected. That is because the statutory responsibility or obligation to perform code inspection/enforcement and community policing activities means these activities cannot simply be eliminated. In the absence of NET, these functions would be transferred to other City departments. Thus, the true incremental cost of NET to the City is the additional cost of providing

decentralized neighborhood advocacy services from the six NET area offices.

CGR concluded that two alternative methodologies could be used to estimate the incremental cost of the neighborhood advocacy function. One method would be to identify the costs of staff in the code inspection/enforcement and community policing functions that existed before NET was created (i.e. pre-NET) and subtract those costs from current NET costs – the assumption being that the difference represents the incremental cost of staff added to support the neighborhood advocacy function. Using this methodology, an internal City review indicated that the incremental cost of NET has been approximately $1.2 million per year in salaries. Adding in employee benefits would bring this total to approximately $1.7 million per year.

The second method would be to review actual current work assignments and determine how much total staff time is *not* currently spent on inspection/enforcement and community policing activities. CGR had to estimate this amount based upon interviews with staff and our observations of work activity, because NET staff do not account for their time in that way. We estimate that an amount of time roughly equal to 9 to 10 full-time equivalent positions is *not* devoted to inspection/enforcement and community policing, i.e. *is* devoted to neighborhood advocacy services. Eliminating 9 to 10 positions would save something in the range of $750,000 in salaries and benefits. This is over $1 million less than the estimate using the first methodology, which assumes that all of the NET staff added above the pre-NET baseline were only assigned neighborhood advocacy responsibilities. However, CGR found that many NET staff added to the pre-NET baseline devote a substantial amount of time to inspection/enforcement activities.

If the six NET area offices were closed, the City would save approximately $200,000 in lease and other costs. Thus, CGR concludes that closing the area offices and eliminating the community advocacy function would likely produce somewhere between $.9 million to $1.9 million in savings per year.

While this is cost is not insubstantial, for that money, the City is providing the services of City staff who are neighborhood

advocates located in the area NET offices. NET staff attend hundreds of meetings per year, answer 50,000 – 60,000 telephone inquiries/requests per year, respond to 10,000 – 13,000 walk-ins at the area offices per year, and provide an ongoing, visible presence which has clearly helped the City address quality of life issues in neighborhoods. This report identifies a number of areas where the City could improve delivery of the services that citizens associate with NET. However, many of these suggestions for improvements can be traced to the fact that NET has been successful in raising awareness in the community about the types of services that are needed to support safe, clean, strong, viable, and attractive neighborhoods.

It is important to understand that NET is one organizational model that was created to help implement City policies and ensure that City, state and federal laws are followed by those who come into, live and work in the City. The City could choose to carry out these functions in a number of different ways. The fact is, however, that the City has to continue carrying out these functions. Many citizens who participated in the community involvement process voiced their concerns about some of the City's enforcement policies. This report addresses their concerns regarding the administration of the City's policies, but does not address the policies themselves, as that was beyond the scope of our project.

In conclusion, the concept of NET was forward thinking, and NET was a creative response to leverage City resources by partnering with the community to meet the need to improve the quality of life by reducing urban blight, nuisance and criminal activities. Despite the many successes of NET over the years, that need is just as great at the end of 2005 as it was when NET started in 1997. The challenge for the City will be to build on the strengths of NET while making improvements in delivering those services that can make Rochester the best mid-size city in the country.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary i
Table of Contents vii
Acknowledgments ix
Section 1 - Summary of Findings 1
The Challenge of the Study 1
The Community Involvement Process 2
NET Goals and Expectations 2
Goal 1 3
Goal 2 4
Goal 3 4
Goal 4 4
Goal 5 4
Goal 6 4
Goal 7 4
Goal 8 5
Summary of the Common Theme 5
Ongoing City Services/ Responsibilities 5
Three NET Innovations 6
The NET Organization Model 7
NET Functions and Resources 7
A Brief Description of NET 7
NET Staffing 9
The NET Table of Organization 10
How NET Resources are Allocated 12
The Primary NET Activities 13
Significant Changes in NET Over Time 14
How NET Measures Workload 16
NET and Other City Departments 17
Section 2 – Evaluating NET 19
NET and the Broad *Context* 21
Positive Impacts 21
Issues/Concerns 23
Summary – NET in Context 29
The NET *Concept* 29

Positive Impacts 31
Issues/Concerns 32
Summary – The NET Concept 34
The *Structure* of NET 35
Positive impacts 36
Issues/Concerns 36
Summary – The NET Structure 39
NET Processes 40
Positive Impacts 40
Issues/Concerns 41
Summary – NET Processes 42
The People of NET 43
Positive Impacts 43
Issues/Concerns 43
Summary – The People of NET 46
Section 3 – Options for the Future 47
Overview 47
Known Changes on the Horizon 48
Option 1 – Retain the Current NET Structure 50
Option 2 – Take Code Functions out of NET – Create a Smaller NEW NET in Mayor's Office 51
Option 3 – Move NET Out of Mayor's Office 52
Option 4 – Dismantle NET as a Separate Unit 53
Suggested Performance Indicators 54
Summary List of Recommendations 57
Appendix 60

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CGR would like to express our thanks to the more than 400 men and women who took the time to meet with CGR, attend one of our meetings, give us a call, or write down and send us their comments. The thought and passion that each of these citizens put into their comments are the best signs that people from all walks of life are interested in and committed to making Rochester a better place.

This report was written by Charles Zettek Jr., Director of Government Management Services. The following CGR staff assisted with the critical research and interviews required to prepare this report: Sarah Boyce, Vicki Brown, Kate McCloskey and Erika Rosenberg.

SECTION 1 - SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This Section provides a summary of what CGR learned during this project. NET services directly touch tens of thousands of citizens and affect countless decisions made each year by property owners and businesses about how to, and perhaps even more important, whether or not to invest in their properties. NET touches and affects so many different people and activities that it truly represents a microcosm of all the decisions and actions that are made by the people within a complex, high density urban area.

The Challenge of the Study

In order to undertake a study of the efficiency and effectiveness of an operation like NET using standard business practices, CGR would ordinarily identify input measures, review routine data such as hours of time spent, direct and indirect costs, etc. and compare these with output measures. Output measures usually quantify activities that indicate the level to which certain pre-defined goals for success have been achieved.

The challenge in evaluating NET has been that the goals identified for NET when it was started were broad and not clearly defined. They also have not been more clearly defined in the years that NET has been in existence. Although the NET organization measures many different activities that it performs, there is very little quantitative information that demonstrates whether or not NET has been successful in meeting the broad goals that NET was intended to accomplish. As a result of the absence of clearly defined goals from the outset and lack of quantitative measurements to give feedback about meeting these performance goals, it is understandable that CGR found many different expectations about what NET was, and is supposed to accomplish.

Once CGR began this project, it became clear that there was not enough time or resources, within the scope of the project, to conduct detailed studies of each aspect of NET. Thus, CGR focused on providing a comprehensive summary of NET and the issues facing the City that NET was intended to address. The intent of this summary is to provide the new administration with a sufficiently broad overview so that it can proceed to make changes that will help meet the goals identified as priorities for Rochester.

The Community Involvement Process

In order to understand NET, CGR initially reviewed over one hundred internal memos, presentations and budget documents, and numerous newspaper articles dating from 1996 to the present, to understand the history of NET and its operations. This review showed that NET internally measures the activities carried on by NET staff, and related subsequent actions such as enforcement activities carried out by other City departments. But what NET does not measure is the extent to which these activities meet the larger goals and expectations held by City leaders and citizens who live, work and own property in the City.

In order to attempt to understand the expectations placed on NET, CGR conducted over 65 individual interviews, and invited over 130 people to subject-specific focus group meetings. We also held six community forums (one in each NET area) and two PAC-TAC meetings (one on each side of the City) that were heavily advertised and open to the public. CGR also encouraged anyone in the community to contact us by e-mail, phone or letter. Through these various activities, from August through November 2005, CGR received comments from over 400 different members of the Rochester community, including approximately 125 City staff and elected officials and more than 275 members of the community. For simplicity, CGR will refer to all those who gave us suggestions and comments, either in person, by telephone or in writing, as *respondent*s.

Because many of the participants in this process were self-selecting, the comments do not represent a scientifically valid sampling of opinions about NET. On the other hand, CGR believes that the comments do represent a fair cross-section of the range of observations about NET, and the role of NET within the City government. Given that there was little relevant quantitative information upon which to draw conclusions relating input to output, CGR has based many of our observations and findings in this report primarily upon what we found through this community involvement process.

NET Goals and Expectations

It was clear from our interviews of City staff/officials and community discussions that there were many different ideas and expectations about what was intended when the NET office was created, and there continue to be many different expectations for

NET. CGR found that there were a number of general ideas expressed about what the NET offices were supposed to do. Some of these goals were identified explicitly during the formative stages of NET. Other ideas were stated as NET objectives. Other ideas were not stated as goals, but were assumed to be outcomes of the creation of NET. CGR also reviewed an internal evaluation of NET conducted for a report to City Council in early 2000 that identified 11 performance objectives. However, these objectives were sufficiently vague to make it very difficult to objectively quantify the impact of NET.

After reviewing all this information, CGR identified three major sources for goals which, taken together, capture what we believe to embody the range of expectations for NET.

The first source was goals for NET developed as part of the initial request to City Council to create and fund NET. The second source of goals relate to themes identified in the 2010 Renaissance Plan for the City (e.g., responsibility theme, opportunity theme). These goals were most clearly expressed in documentation for the annual City budgets. The third source are those CGR heard as the most commonly expressed goals for NET that came out of the community involvement process.

CGR summarized the key ideas from the three sources, and put them into our own words, in order to consolidate the ideas. There is some overlap in the concepts, but within each goal is an idea or statement that is sufficiently unique to warrant keeping it as a separate statement.

The eight goals we have summarized from these sources are listed below by number in order to provide a means of referring back to a specific goal. However, the numbering sequence is not intended to indicate an order of priority, as there clearly was not agreement about priorities among those who participated in the community involvement process.

Goal 1 – NET was intended to support the public safety goals of reducing the sale and use of illegal drugs, the number of vacant properties, and the number of property code violations and also continue to support crime prevention and education programs.

Goal 2 – NET was intended to develop linkages and working partnerships with the Rochester Police Department (RPD), neighborhood groups, community associations, schools and businesses, and work to achieve the public safety goal of safe, clean and attractive neighborhoods.

Goal 3 – NET was intended to support strong, viable and attractive neighborhoods through the enforcement of the City's property code and zoning ordinance and state fire and building codes.

Goal 4 – NET was intended to locate City staff in neighborhood offices in order for neighborhoods to have improved access to City staff and for staff to take ownership of the neighborhoods in their areas.

Goal 5 – NET was intended to provide places in neighborhoods where neighborhood residents could obtain the advice of experts in specific fields, such as experts on the building and zoning codes. Many respondents thought that NET offices would be "mini" or "satellite" City Halls, where citizens could come to obtain information about City requirements and programs, obtain and file forms required for standard processes, and pay City taxes and services bills.

Goal 6 – NET would create a formal linkage between City staff and RPD officers which would create opportunities for both branches of government to support each other to address the important needs of the neighborhoods.

Goal 7 – NET would improve the quality of life in the City, through enhanced enforcement of codes and laws and faster resolution of code and zoning ordinance complaints. NET was specifically intended to improve neighborhoods by taking proactive steps to:

- Reduce urban blight,
- Reduce nuisance activities,
- Reduce criminal activities.

Goal 8 – NET staff would provide the resources to empower citizens to take an active role in making the City a better place to live, work, play and conduct business. The intent was to create a structure where residents could bring their needs to City staff, staff would become neighborhood advocates, and staff and citizens would collaborate to obtain the resources and take the actions needed to meet those needs.

Summary of the Common Theme

The goals listed above clearly include a wide range of expectations for NET. A common theme appears throughout these goals, however, which CGR summarizes as follows:

NET was created to support safe, clean, strong, viable, and attractive neighborhoods by locating City code inspection and enforcement and neighborhood policing services in neighborhoods so that City staff and residents could work as a team to improve the quality of life by reducing urban blight, nuisance and criminal activities.

Ongoing City Services / Responsibilities

The new NET organization was created to help the City meet the eight goals identified above. However, NET was not created in a vacuum. The City has provided, and continues to provide numerous services through other City departments to meet many of the goals identified for NET.

Two very important ongoing City services and responsibilities (in terms of resources spent and overall impact on the community) are: 1) building and property code inspection and enforcement services and 2) the provision of police services. In addition to these core responsibilities, the City over time has added codes and regulations to improve the quality of life and meet health and safety standards. Municipal code inspection and enforcement functions have traditionally been carried out by civilian employees, and uniformed RPD officers have been responsible for carrying out police functions. Over the decades, the City has provided both the civilian and police functions using different organizational structures.

In addition to enforcement activities, the City has provided pro-active planning and economic development services. Going back to at least the New Deal era, the City has responded to large federal initiatives to improve urban life by periodically organizing

and re-organizing delivery of planning, economic, community development, recreation and citizen support services.

Thus, NET should be viewed as the latest attempt to re-organize key civilian and police services in order to improve delivery of those services to better meet the City's service delivery goals. Most of the functions carried out by NET have to be provided by the City, regardless of the organizational structure for carrying out those functions. However, there were three components of NET that were innovations at the time, and which created a new level of services.

Three NET Innovations

First, in order to achieve Goals 4 and 5, the City created six NET area offices located strategically throughout the City. While the City had historically located specific functions in neighborhoods (e.g., recreation centers, branch libraries, fire stations and police section offices), these were not intended to serve the broader role envisioned for NET as being "mini City Halls", or, as CGR will refer to them, neighborhood service centers. NET area offices provided tangible evidence of the City's desire to invest in neighborhood service centers.

Second, in addition to creating new facilities in the neighborhoods, the City created a new high-level administrative position for each NET area office. Each area NET administrator was charged with becoming the community advocate for an area, and to provide the impetus and resources needed to achieve Goal 8 – "empower citizens."

Third, each NET area office was designed to co-locate both civilian and police staff, so that both code enforcement and crime reduction activities could be coordinated by the NET area administrator based upon the needs identified by the administrator. This formal arrangement was intended to achieve Goal 6. The innovation was, however, an evolution, in that it actually created a more formal structure to support the coordinated efforts between the RPD and the Bureau of Property Conservation that had been started prior to NET.

The NET Organization Model

The Rochester NET organization was modeled on the NET organization developed by the City of Miami in 1992. Miami created 13 area offices located in different ethnic neighborhoods throughout the City, each one under the supervision of a civilian administrator. Miami officials assigned both police and civilians to each office, and decentralized code inspection/enforcement functions out to each NET office. Rochester created essentially the same structure, primarily by moving civilian staff from existing positions and creating several new positions, and by assigning police staff to the NET area offices.

NET Functions and Resources

A key element in the creation of NET was that it was not intended to provide the physical services required to meet the eight identified goals. For example, NET was not given the resources to board up vacant houses, pick up trash and debris, remove snow, etc. Those tasks have to be accomplished by other City departments, based upon requests from NET. The only specific specialized functions assigned to NET were to *inspect* for and *enforce* compliance with municipal codes and state laws and regulations governing buildings, properties and nuisances. Otherwise, NET staff, in particular the NET administrators, were intended to become facilitators, i.e. to *understand* the needs of the neighborhoods, to *identify* resources available (usually within but not limited to other City departments), to *coordinate* those resources through other City departments so that the needs were addressed, and to *communicate* with the neighborhoods regarding the success or lack of success in meeting the needs identified. These expectations meant that the costs of NET were essentially to pay for staff and office space, since the principal service delivered by NET would be staff interaction with people in neighborhoods.

A Brief Description of NET

The NET organization was developed during 1996, and officially authorized by City Council to begin operations on January 1, 1997 to support one of the primary initiatives of Rochester's new Mayor, William A. Johnson Jr., which was to make City government more responsive by developing a network of satellite offices in the neighborhoods. NET was created as a new office reporting directly to the Mayor, and staffed by a combination of new management positions and existing staff and functions moved into NET, primarily from the Bureau of Property Conservation (previously a part of the Department of Community Development

or DCD), and three refuse inspectors from the Department of Environmental Services (DES). In addition, RPD police officers and lieutenants were assigned to work directly from NET offices.

NET was originally designed to include six satellite offices with central support staff located in City Hall. That initial structure still exists. Organizationally, using proposed 2005-06 City Budget figures, NET is budgeted for 71.3 full-time equivalent (FTE) civilian positions, and 29.8 police positions. Adding employee benefit costs to the cost of operations as shown in the budget, CGR estimates that the total budgeted cost of NET is slightly over $8.4 million for 2005-2006.

Two revenue streams are related to NET activity: 1) Monroe County reimburses the City for six NET staff performing property inspection duties for the move-in/move-out program for County Social Services, and 2) fines for municipal code violations, for which the City has budgeted $750,000 in 2005-06. The Monroe County reimbursement legitimately offsets the ongoing expenses of providing NET services. However, in theory, if there were no municipal code violations, the revenue from fines would be zero. Further, the municipal code violations funds are distributed to the General Fund. Thus, CGR has chosen to count only the Monroe County reimbursements of $331,600 as revenues to offset NET expenses, which leaves a true calculated net cost of NET operations to City taxpayers at just over $8 million.

The major cost components are shown in TABLE 1. The cost of police assigned to NET operations is shown in TABLE 1, although technically police NET costs are included in the RPD budget. Thus, TABLE 1 does accurately represent the total of all costs associated with carrying out the NET functions as the currently exist.

TABLE 1 Projected Total Cost of NET Operations for 2005-2006		
Object	**Amount**	
PERSONNEL		
Civilian Personnel - Salaries	$	3,436,700
Benefits (full time x multiplier of .44)	$	1,472,548
Police Personnel - Salaries (from RPD budget)	$	1,927,300
Benefits (full time x multiplier of .51) (from RPD budget)	$	982,900
TOTAL PERSONNEL BUDGET	**$**	**7,819,448**
MATERIALS and SUPPLIES	**$**	**55,500**
SERVICES		
Lease Costs - 3 sites	$	142,300
Utilities, other site costs - 6 sites	$	58,900
Other costs (telephone, printing, postage, materials, etc.)	$	311,900
TOTAL SERVICES BUDGET	**$**	**513,100**
NET OPERATIONS COST	***$***	***8,388,048***
MONROE County Reimbursement for Six Staff	$	331,600
TOTAL PROJECTED COST of NET Operations	**$**	**8,056,448**

Source: 2005-06 Proposed Budget - Page 3-11 and Budget Bureau estimates

NET Staffing

A 2005 City analysis of the staffing changes to NET over time determined that, in the first full year of NET (FY 97-98), 45 civilian staff positions were moved to NET from existing positions elsewhere in the administration, 17 new positions were created (primarily to staff the six new NET offices) and 32 police positions were assigned administratively to NET. TABLE 2 shows the initial full-time staffing of NET and also full-time NET staffing shown in the 2005-2006 budget. TABLE 2 shows that comparable full-time total staffing has increased slightly since the first year of operations and there have been a number of title changes to reflect changing job specifications. However, TABLE 2 also shows that in FY 1997, NET had the advantage of six AmeriCorp and six Public Safety Aide Program staff to assist regular City staff. Thus, total staffing (not counting part-time full-time equivalents) was higher in 1997-98 than at present. Also, as of October 2005, there were four police vacancies and one civilian vacancy, and two civilian positions were filled that are scheduled to be terminated during the budget year.

TABLE 2
NET Staffing Summary: First Year (1997-98) and Current Year (2005-2006)

Position Title	Existing Position or New Title in First Year	Number of Positions 1997-98	Number of Positions 2005-06
NET Director	Existing	1	1
NET Administrator	New	6	6
Assistant NET Administrator			2
Administrator of Code Compliance	Existing	1	
NET Code Coordinator	Existing	2	1
Senior Administrative Analyst	Existing	2	
Neighborhood Conservation Officer (NCO)	Existing	15	28
NCO Trainee	Existing	4	
NCO Trainee	New	2	
Executive Assistant			4
Property Conservation Inspector	Existing	7	4
Administrative Assistant	Existing	2	1
Customer Service Representative	New	6	6
Secretary	Existing	1	1
Senior Service Assistant			1
Clerk I	Existing	1	
Clerk II		3	3
Clerk II with Typing	Existing	2	
Clerk III			2
Clerk III with Typing	Existing	4	6
Clerk III with Typing	New	3	
Clerk Typist			1
TOTAL CIVILIANS		*62*	*67*
Police Lieutenant	Existing	10	8
Police Officer (CPO)	Existing	22	22
TOTAL UNIFORMED		*32*	*30*
TOTAL NET Regular Positions		**94**	**97**
Additional AmersCorp Positions		6	
Additional Public Safety Aide Positions		6	
TOTAL Positions		**106**	**97**

Sources: 2005 NET Analysis for City Council, 2005-2006 City Budget

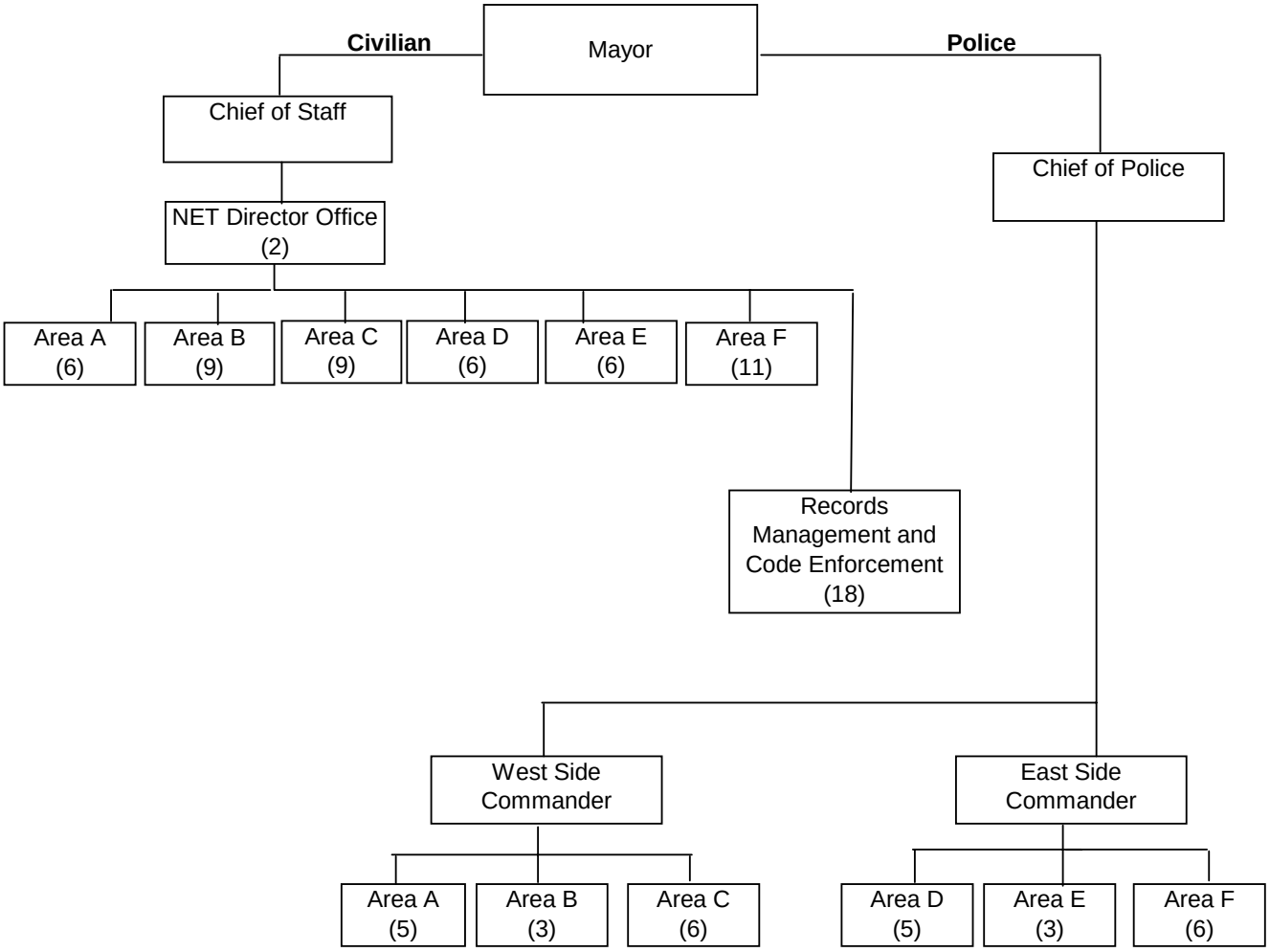
The NET Table of Organization

The civilian staff members in NET are currently organized into three functional groupings: the NET Director's office (located in City Hall), the NET area offices (six located throughout the City) and NET Records Management and Code Enforcement (located in City Hall). The current 2005-2006 budget number of full-time positions assigned to these groupings is shown in the following organization chart. Full-time personnel are supplemented by

seven part-time staff spread across these groupings to meet various needs.

Police staff assigned to NET are organizationally members of the RPD Patrol Division. The Police Lieutenants and officers (Crime Prevention Officers – CPO's) are assigned directly to NET area offices. Prior to the Patrol Division reorganization in 2004, each area NET lieutenant reported to a Section Captain. Post reorganization, the Lieutenants report directly to the East Side and West Side Commanders or their designees.

ORGANIZATION CHART
NET in 2005-2006 Showing Budgeted Full-Time Positions



How NET Resources are Allocated

As shown in TABLE 1, 93% of the total current cost of NET is spent on staffing for NET. Pre-NET, staff performing functions now included in NET were organized and managed as discrete functions. Some civilian staff members with specific inspection functions in zoning or refuse were transferred into NET. However, most of the NET civilian staff came from what used to be Bureau of Property Conservation, which was organized into four discrete units – Administration, Records Management, Property Inspections and Code Enforcement. These staff members were all co-mingled in the new NET organization, and many of them were redistributed to the NET area offices along with the new NET administrators.

Discussions when NET was originated led to the conclusion that the City should create six NET area offices, with a NET office responsible for covering either one or two Neighbors Building Neighborhood (NBN) sectors. Staff members were assigned to NET area offices based upon the relative ratios of housing and population found in the NBN sectors. TABLE 3 compares the number of full-time staff assigned to each NET area office shortly after NET was created with the number of full-time staff assigned to each NET office in the 2005-2006 budget. It should be noted that currently all but one of the civilian positions are filled, but there are four police vacancies, so the positions shown do not reflect actual current staffing.

TABLE 3
NET Area Office Staffing - Full Time Positions

	NET A	NET B	NET C	NET D	NET E	NET F	All Other	TOTAL
	NBN Sectors 1,2	NBN Sector 3	NBN Sectors 4,5	NBN Sectors 5,6	NBN Sector 8	NBN Sectors 9,10	NET Staff	ALL NET STAFF
At NET Start-up								
Civilians	6	7	8	7	5	9	20	
Police	6	5	6	6	3	6		
Total	12	12	14	13	8	15	20	94
2005-2006 Budget								
Civilians	6	9	9	6	6	11	20	
Police	5	5	6	5	3	6		
Total	11	14	15	11	9	17	20	97

Sources: 2000 NET Report to City Council, 2005-2006 City Budget

The Primary NET Activities

The primary activities that consume most of the staff time in NET fall into three categories:

- By far the largest activity for NET is property inspections, identification of violations and initiation of actions to have the violations corrected – what CGR refers to as the inspection/enforcement activity. NET's primary objective is to have violations corrected on a voluntary basis by the property owner. Compliance is preferred to enforcement. NET has 28 budgeted inspectors (Neighborhood Conservation Officers or NCO's) distributed throughout the City at the six NET offices – far and away the largest number of employees in NET. Adding the five Property Conservation Inspectors, this group of staff totals 33, or 34% of total NET staff. This force of inspectors, based upon statistics reported in City budgets for the last few years, conducts approximately 75,000 to 80,000 inspections per year, issues approximately 18,000 notice and orders per year, and issues approximately 5,000 tickets per year. Tickets are referred to either a previously existing housing court or the Parking and Municipal Code Violations Bureau. In addition, NET staff members conduct approximately 9,000 rental unit inspections per year for the Monroe County Department of Social Services and the inspections required to issue approximately 4,000 certificates of occupancy per year.

  A significant activity within NET related to the inspection/enforcement activity is providing the record keeping and administrative support required to maintain the records of the property inspections with enough detail so that the City's actions can be defended if legally challenged. Eleven full-time administrative staff are assigned to the office of Records Management and Code Enforcement, or 11% of total NET staff.

- The second significant activity is the work carried out by the police officers assigned to NET - what CGR refers to as the community policing activity. The nature of proactive police work makes it much more difficult to identify specific actions that can be quantified. NET statistics do reference certain police activities such as noise ordinance tickets issued,

prostitution arrests, and drug house closures. However, the NET police officers clearly provide much more value than those statistics measure. For example, they assist PAC-TAC programs located in the NET offices, they conduct neighborhood patrols and investigations and they assist NET civilian inspection and enforcement actions when necessary. The 22 police CPO's represent the second largest group of staff in NET, who, along with the eight lieutenants, represent 30% of the total staff assigned to NET.

- The third major activity is the work carried out by NET staff, primarily those located in the NET area offices, to provide proactive assistance and support to citizens, businesses and neighborhood groups – what CGR refers to as neighborhood advocacy services.

Theoretically, since the two major activities identified above represent 75% of the full-time staff in NET, the remaining 25% of staff time is devoted to neighborhood advocacy services. However, a substantial amount of the time of the remaining NET civilian staff is also spent on inspection and enforcement, either reacting to requests for service and/or information, or assisting with record-keeping tasks. Based upon discussion with NET staff and our observations of their work activities, CGR estimates that at a minimum one-half of the remaining administrative staff time for NET administrators, customer service representatives and NET site clerical support is spent on inspection and enforcement activities. This leads to the conclusion that only about 9 to 10 full-time equivalent civilian positions (which equates to 10% of the time) are available to carry out non-code inspection/enforcement neighborhood advocacy activities expected of NET.

Based on this analysis, CGR concludes that the amount of time devoted to the three major activities carried out by NET is spent in the following manner: approximately 60% of total time is spent on code inspection/enforcement activities, 30% on community policing activities and 10% on neighborhood advocacy services.

Significant Changes in NET Over Time

NET was created as a new way to try to deliver City services directly to neighborhoods more effectively. Once NET became operational, pressures to change and improve created the need for

NET to evolve. TABLE 3 illustrates how NET adjusted staffing among the area offices to meet changing demand for services. While staffing patterns shifted, the core organizational structure of NET was maintained.

The largest functions for NET, in terms of allocated staff time, are clearly the code inspection and enforcement functions. CGR developed a comprehensive review of the history of property codes going back to the 1980's and tracked major changes to how the City inspected properties and enforced the codes up through the present.

In CGR's view, two significant changes to the code inspection and enforcement functions occurred as a result of NET. The first significant change occurred in 1997, when NET was formed. At that time, the code inspection function was decentralized when code inspectors (NCO's) were assigned to NET offices, and placed under the administrative supervision of the NET area administrator. Enforcement operations remained centralized in the Records Management and Code Enforcement unit in City Hall, with two staff (who were under a supervisor) assigned authority to issue code violation tickets. The second significant change occurred in 2002, when all NCO's were assigned responsibility for enforcement as well as inspection, at which time NCO's were given the authority to issue tickets.

In addition to the changes in responsibility, workload on NET has increased, as measured by some key indicators. Some of the increase in workload is a function of changes to codes intended to enhance the quality of life in the City, for example, changes to the Certificate of Use and Noise Ordinance codes and expansion of the Certificate of Occupancy requirement for single family rental structures that clearly increased inspection and enforcement requirements. Additional increases to the work can be traced to changes in the housing and building stock in the City, increased numbers of vacant properties, changes in social behavior within the City, and the stresses caused by the changing Upstate economy.

How NET Measures Workload

NET counts and reports two different types of performance measures, in the format used by the City for publication in its annual budget. The City budget indicators focus on *demand* indicators and *workload* indicators. The budget, of course, identifies both the financial and personnel resources allocated to each function identified in the budget. Thus, using a combination of demand and workload indicators, it should be possible to calculate efficiency measures for a particular function.

CGR, however, has chosen not to use the demand and workload indicators given for NET in City budgets in this evaluation, for several reasons. First, many of the indicators have changed over time, which invalidates year-to-year comparisons. Second, it is clear that the indicators reported do not adequately describe or quantify the wide range of tasks carried out by NET staff. Third, a number of the indicators are not measured very precisely, thus using them would not present an accurate description of the quantity of NET activities. CGR reviewed more detailed NET monthly operating statistics, which are ultimately summarized into the indicators reported in the annual budget. These provide more detail and measure more specific activities than the budget numbers, however, the same limitations apply.

CGR identified what we believe are the most comparable workload measures for major NET activities for the past 10 years. As shown in TABLE 4, these measures indicate that total workload for NET inspection and enforcement activities have increased substantially.

TABLE 4
NET Workload Changes 1993-04 to 2004-05 - Selected Comparable Statistics

	Pre-NET	*NET Begins*				
	1993 - 94 Actual	**1997-98 Actual**	**2001-02 Actual**	**2003-04 Actual**	**2004-05 Actual**	**% Change 93 to '04**
Cases Originated	11,866	13,066	19,546	20,000	18,276	54%
Inspections Made	72,072	71,750	80,920	81,500	NT	
Cert. of Occupancy Issued	3,168	2,745	3,697	4,500	4,360	38%
Notice & Orders Issued	11,833	18,007	20,314	20,000	19,870	68%
Referrals to PMVB	927	1,101	3,896	4,500	5,974	544%

Notes: PMVB = Parking & Municipal Violations Bureau, NT = not tracked in a comparable manner

Source: City budgets

NET activity indicators are also useful for identifying what NET believes are its most important tasks, and what functions are being

performed. From these indicators, it is possible to understand what NET believes are important measures to describe NET activity in the areas of code inspection and enforcement (e.g., number of inspections made, number of cases opened and closed, number of cases referred to enforcement, etc.) and citizen interaction (e.g., number of meetings attended). A further discussion of these indicators follows in Section 2.

NET and Other City Departments

As already noted, NET staff has subject matter expertise about the City and state building codes and the City's nuisance ordinances. However, other City departments also have inspection and enforcement responsibilities and capabilities. Thus, NET staff need to work with these other departments when they take actions that affect properties in neighborhoods.

CGR identified 26 civilian staff in other departments who are conducting code inspection work, and have the authority to initiate enforcement actions if necessary to correct code violations. For police functions, all uniformed members of the RPD have the same ability to conduct the type of proactive enforcement activities and issue tickets as the officers and lieutenants assigned to NET.

The Rochester Fire Department (RFD) Fire Marshal's office has inspectors certified in all New York codes, and conduct annual inspections of all commercial properties and bi-annual inspections of three-or-more-family properties (NET inspects one-family rental and two-family homes at least every five years under the Certificate of Occupancy regulations). The Fire Marshal has the authority to immediately close down a business or have a building vacated for public health and safety reasons. The RFD currently has 12 staff certified for code enforcement activities.

The Department of Community Development (DCD) currently employs 14 inspectors, 10 in the Bureau of Buildings who are subject specialists (electrical, plumbing, building construction and elevator inspectors) and two neighborhood conservation officers in the Bureau of Zoning who are zoning experts.

The Department of Environmental Services (DES) conducts refuse inspections on a daily basis as part of its routine refuse collection process, but does not have full-time designated refuse

inspectors. (Note: a half-time refuse inspector in DES is a recent addition). Two refuse inspectors (code enforcement officers) and a senior code enforcement officer were transferred from DES to NET when NET was created.

NET requires the assistance of other City departments to undertake physical improvements on a property if the property owner fails to take corrective action and the City needs to intervene. For example, board-ups of vacant houses are made by DES. DES also provides crews to cut high grass and weeds and clean up vacant City-owned lots. The only property improvement action NET specifically undertakes is to hire a private contractor to mow high grass and weeds on private property where the property owner fails to maintain the property to the standards set by City code.

NET staff notify staff in other departments about the need for follow-up services either by phone, e-mail or memo/work order. Each operating department has its own internal routing and prioritization process. As discussed in Section 2, the fact that multiple departments are necessarily involved in providing response to citizen service requests can lead to breakdowns in communication and delivery of services.

NET relies on the City's Law Department and the Parking and Municipal Code Violation Bureau for follow-up needed to collect the payment of fines associated with tickets issued in accordance with the requirements of City code. The Law Department also provides assistance resolving the many day-to-day issues associated with inspection and enforcement proceedings against thousands of properties per year.

NET staff have worked with Law, RPD and City administrative staff to initiate changes to the City code to improve the City's ability to reduce or eliminate criminal and nuisance activities that affect the quality of life in neighborhoods. For example, the City's aggressive campaign to attack illegal drug activity and related criminal activity, especially as it has spill-over effects on neighborhoods led to NET proposing changes that resulted in the enhanced certificate of use program.

Finally, NET staff interact with planning and economic development activities initiated or supported by DCD and the Economic Development Department (EDD). DCD and EDD have access to resources that help neighborhood development activities and provide support for individual property owners. In particular, the Neighbors Building Neighborhoods (NBN) office in DCD manages community funding programs that could be used to support requests made through NET offices. Thus, coordination of NET and NBN objectives is important.

SECTION 2 – EVALUATING NET

In Section 1, CGR presented a summary of NET – why the NET organization was created, the civilian and police resources dedicated to NET, what NET does, and the role NET plays as one of the units within City government. This provides the background for evaluating NET.

As noted in Section 1, however, it is very difficult to evaluate NET in the traditional sense of relating input (resources spent) to output (goals accomplished). There are five key reasons why it is challenging to evaluate NET:

- The goals and objectives set for NET when it was created do not, in most cases, lend themselves to quantifiable measures that can be used to determine success,

- The performance measures reported by NET have changed over time, which limits the ability to make multi-year comparisons,

- Almost all of NET's current performance indicators measure process, not outcomes. NET performance indicators count how many inspections were made, how many notice and orders were issued, how many meetings were attended, etc. But these indicators do not measure the impact on neighborhoods of these activities.

- NET activities affect tens of thousands of people who live and work in the City and own City property. For many of these people, NET is *the* connection they have with City government. Thus, NET represents everything that is both good and bad about dealing with the City. In CGR's role as a neutral third party during this project, we were struck by the observation that nearly every one of the over 400 people we interacted with has strong personal feelings about NET and what it represents. It appears to us that these emotions and feelings tend to make it more difficult for folks to assess NET with a fair and balanced perspective.

- Perhaps most challenging of all, NET is an organization that exists within a complex, dynamic local, regional and global environment. While NET impacts this environment in some specific ways, the demands on NET services, its ability to respond to those demands, and the impact of its responses are all affected by the dynamics of the environment. NET is a microcosm of all the pressures and challenges facing City government. NET, like City government, is facing many challenges that it has little control to affect. In many ways, NET is engaged in trench warfare against the social and economic forces that are driving changes in City neighborhoods. Thus, as in trench warfare, NET has to define success in small, measurable increments. It is far easier to measure the number of tickets issued, abandoned cars towed, properties boarded, than it is to measure whether or not these actions have cumulatively made a difference in the quality of life, when there are so many other variables that also affect the quality of life.

Given these challenges, CGR has organized its observations and recommendations using five perspectives, ranging from a high-level perspective (the context of NET) to a focused perspective (the people of NET). By drilling down from a high-level focus to a detailed focus, CGR will be able to present a more comprehensive assessment of both how NET drives change in neighborhoods, and how other forces affect NET's ability to

achieve the goals stated in Section 1. To reiterate, these goals can be summarized in the following statement:

NET was created to support safe, clean, strong, viable, and attractive neighborhoods by locating City code inspection and enforcement and neighborhood policing services in neighborhoods so that City staff and residents could work as a team to improve the quality of life by reducing urban blight, nuisance and criminal activities.

The five perspectives for evaluating NET are: context, concept, structure, process and people. Within these perspectives, CGR will identify both positive impacts as well as issues/concerns (which suggest areas of improvement), and will, where appropriate, differentiate between the civilian versus the police NET operations to assist in assessing how well these operations work under the current NET structure. CGR will suggest several key performance measures that the City should consider using to evaluate the functions provided by NET in the future.

NET and the Broad *Context*

NET exists within the broader context of the needs and expectations of the members of the City community, and the services the City government provides to that community. What has been the impact of NET within that context?

Positive Impacts

A large majority of respondents expressed to CGR that NET has had a positive impact within the community. In this *broad* context, it is clear that NET did meet all of the goals identified. As CGR drills down into lower-level perspectives, it will be apparent that NET met some goals better than others.

It would take a long report to list the accomplishments of NET over the eight years since it was created. The performance indicators referenced previously are one measure of the impact of NET on a day-to-day basis in addressing quality of life issues. In addition to day-to-day operations, however, NET staff, especially in conjunction with other City departments and neighborhood folks, have carried out many targeted programs to enhance and improve neighborhoods throughout the city. One example would be the Operation UPLIFT initiatives – carried out by multiple

agencies and targeted on specific streets to address everything from property code violations to drug houses. Another example would be NET's Challenged Streets Program, which include city staff, residents, neighborhoods groups, landlords and churches to plan and put in place proactive strategies aimed at improving key neighborhood streets. These and many other examples have been presented in the annual City budget presentations.

Most respondents believe that NET had the biggest impact in its first two or three years. This is entirely understandable. NET was a new organization. Staff was energized to make the kinds of impact desired from the outset. Community expectations were high, and neighborhoods and community members wanted to create a new sense of working together. Putting six NET offices out in the community gave symbolic impetus to the new staff/community linkages. Perhaps most important, because the model of locating City staff in neighborhoods was new, and the need for this type of City/community collaborative effort was so great, there were many opportunities to make positive changes. As a result, there was a lot of positive feedback about NET as clear improvements were obvious in both the physical environment and in attacking some of the more visible criminal activities. TABLE 4 (Section 1) illustrates the point. Pre-NET, Notice and Orders issued were 11,833, which jumped up to 18,007 the first full year of NET.

TABLE 4 also shows that, over time, baseline NET inspection and enforcement activity indicators have leveled off. However, many more compliance and enforcement activities have been added to NET's workload. Recent examples include the enhanced certificate of use requirements and additional noise ordinance regulations. The total number of budgeted full-time staff in NET has remained fairly constant, and the amount of work based on activity indicators has increased. In short, it appears that NET staff are currently working as hard as or harder than when NET was initially formed. Since NET was created to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods, how can NET have had all these successes and yet still have apparently more demand for its services than when it started?

Issues/Concerns

NET became fully operational effective with the 1997-1998 City budget. Thus, NET staff have been working on accomplishing NET's goals for over eight years. And yet, it is clear that there is as much demand for NET services as ever. From the broad context, then, the question has to be asked – what has been the impact of NET in helping to "*support safe, clean, strong, viable, and attractive neighborhoods* ?"

NET has been a part of multi-faceted City efforts such as the NBN initiative, economic development programs, the new zoning ordinance, the many difference police department initiatives, etc. As noted previously, NET has just been one element of the City's comprehensive, inter-related efforts to make the City strong, viable and attractive. Thus, it is impossible, from a broad, City-wide perspective, to determine the extent to which NET has had an impact on the outcome of the current state of the City.

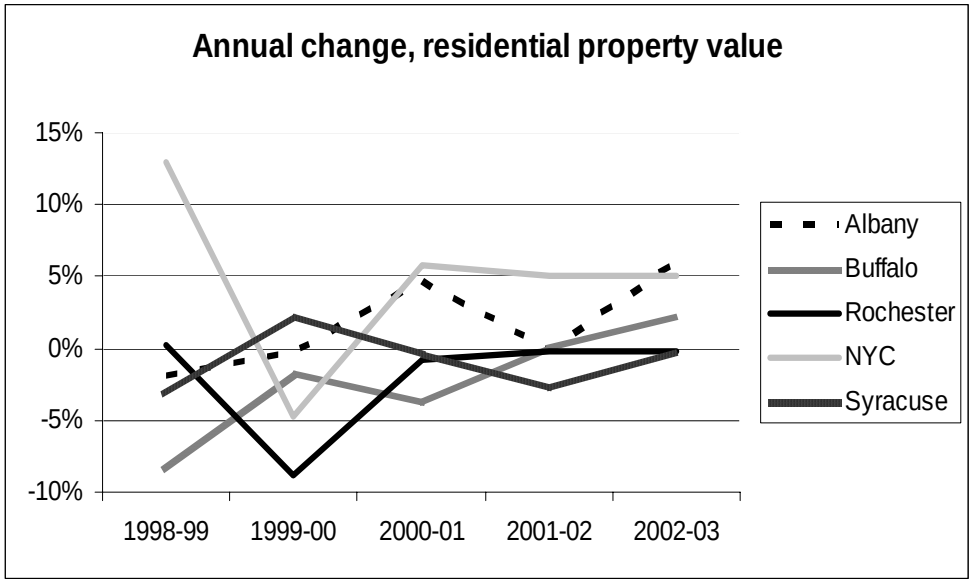
However, NET was specifically intended to be the City's primary organization for combating blight, and a key organization (along with the RPD) for addressing quality of life issues (nuisance and criminal activities). Clearly, NET has been vigorously addressing these issues since it was formed. Also, NET activities have improved the quality of life in some neighborhoods – there is substantial anecdotal evidence to demonstrate that. But, it is not clear to what extent NET activities have made a difference overall, in the context of the whole City.

What indicators could be used to determine whether or not NET's activities have had a positive impact overall in the City? CGR was able to obtain comparative data for two city-wide statistics that relate directly to NET's goals. First, if NET's efforts are successful, that should have some affect on demand for housing in city neighborhoods. A good indicator of demand for properties in residential neighborhoods is the change in assessed property values for homestead properties (one-, two- and three-family properties). NET's efforts should also have an impact, in some way, on crime rates within neighborhoods. A good indicator of change in criminal activity is the change in all crimes (index crimes).

As noted below, certainly, there are multiple factors that influence demand for housing and criminal activity, many of which cannot be affected by NET activities. On the other hand, comparing Rochester to other cities over the time period that NET has been in existence might show whether or not NET made Rochester better off than cities that did not have a NET structure.

CHART 1 compares the percent change in homestead assessed values comparing Rochester to Albany, Syracuse, Buffalo, and New York City, from 1997 (NET's first year) through 2003 (the last year comparable data are available). CGR added New York City, because that was consistently mentioned by respondents as the best example of how efforts to attack blight and crime could improve a city.

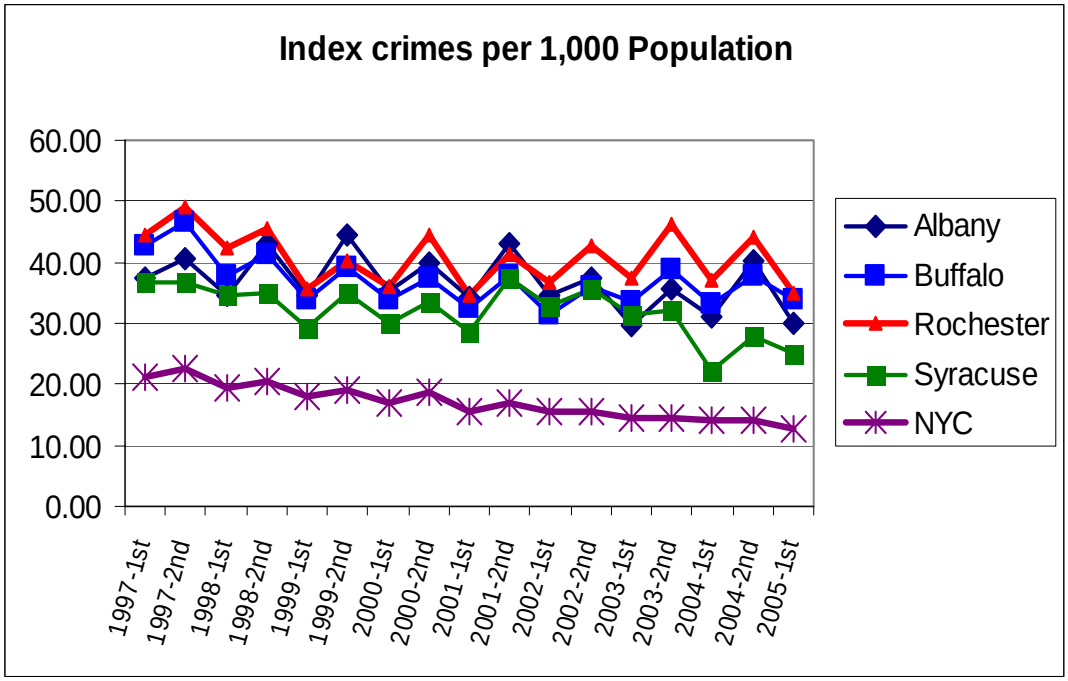
CHART 1
Changes in Value of Residential Property –
Major Cities in New York State - 1998 through 2003



Source: Taxable Value for Schools for HOMESTEAD PROPERTY from NY State Office of Real Property Tax Services

CHART 2 shows the changes in overall crime (index crime) from 1997 through 2004 comparing the same five cities.

CHART 2
Comparison of Total Crime Rates –
Major Cities in New York State - 1997 to 2005



Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics – Department of Criminal Justice Services

CHARTS 1 and 2 indicate that trends in Rochester are entirely consistent with trends in the comparison cities. However, Albany, Syracuse and Buffalo do not have a decentralized organization comparable to NET. New York City does have mini-City Halls, but they are so much different than Rochester as to make operational comparisons not very useful. These charts do not indicate that NET, in and of itself, has significantly positively affected residential assessed values or crime statistics for Rochester as a whole.

Other indicators also raise questions about the impact of NET from the City-wide perspective. In 2000, there were approximately 2,000 vacant structures throughout the City. By late 2005, that number had increased to approximately 3,000. In the 2000-2001 budget, NET reported its actual workload of 1,100 drug houses. In the 2004-2005 budget, NET reported its actual workload as 1,203 drug houses. In the 2000-2001 budget, NET reported 19,621 actual notice and orders issued for property code

violations. In the 2004-2005 budget, NET reported 19,870 actual notice and orders issued.

CGR also obtained information from The Housing Council in Rochester that indicates the types of challenges facing the City, such as a high number of rental units, high foreclosure rates, high family mobility and high vacancy rates. Their findings are based on 2000 census data, but the findings help explain why NET activity indicators have not declined. One conclusion in particular seems ominous in terms of the impact on City neighborhoods. According to City assessment records, as of July 2005, there were 40,951 single family houses in the City, which represented 77% of the total of all single, two- and three-family houses in the City. However, according to a Housing Council analysis, many single family homes that used to be owner occupied are being converted to rental properties, as measured by the increase in three-or-more bedroom apartments reported in the City. Thus, as the market converts more housing units to rental properties, this is likely to increase demand for code inspection and enforcement in the City.

These indicators demonstrate why many respondents in the community involvement process stated an overall frustration with NET in particular, and City efforts in general. From the perspective of the City as a whole, it does appear that quality of life issues have been treading water for the past five years, despite the obvious expenditure of money, time and effort exerted through NET.

Many theories were suggested to CGR why this is the case, but most respondents agreed there are two compelling reasons. First, the City as a whole is subject to economic and social forces that are beyond the control of the City government to affect. Second, while NET and other City initiatives are successful on selected streets or in selective areas, what happens is that the underlying causes of crime and blight are simply shifted from one street or area to another within the City. Thus, it appears that for every neighborhood area where there were improvements, another area was degraded.

This leads CGR to conclude that, to a large extent, the criticisms and frustrations voiced about NET across the community are at least partly a consequence of unrealistic expectations about what

NET, and to a larger extent City government, can do to combat social ills that are manifested in blight, nuisance activities and crime. NET had a highly visible impact its first two to three years, but then became bogged down in the day-to-day effort to keep ahead of continuing deterioration in many City neighborhoods. Having created a high level of expectations at its inception, NET staff has been unable to sustain the rate of growth of improvements delivered in the initial years. This has led to many in the community stating that NET is not meeting their expectations for continuously improving the City. And, to the extent that, overall, many City neighborhoods have been at best treading water the past five years, they are right.

It should be noted that CGR received many passionate negative comments during the community involvement process about the City's enforcement policies. In particular, the enhanced Certificate of Use policy, and its subsequent enforcement, has raised a high visibility campaign against what some claim to be heavy handed and punitive policies and procedures. During the CGR community involvement process, a number of respondents argued vehemently that policies such as the certificate of use, the nuisance point system, the use of tickets, and in fact, the whole enforcement process are creating an unintended consequence of disinvestment in the City, which is exacerbating the decline of many neighborhoods.

On the other hand, one of the clear intentions behind creating NET was to structurally link police and civilian staff to improve the City's ability to close down illegal activities. City staff cited numerous examples where the use of civil codes such as the zoning ordinance and building codes allowed the City to close illegal activities more rapidly than would have been the case using standard police processes. Thus, the City's use of aggressive tactics to close down businesses that severely negatively affect neighborhoods can be understood as a rational response to the ongoing social pressures described above.

Another topic that generated much passionate discussion from many respondents was the question of accountability. Currently, nearly all of the City's code enforcement activities are directed against property owners. This has become a matter of policy for

the City, primarily because the property is an asset that has value, and the assumption is that the owner of the property would take action to correct code violations in order to protect the value of the property. However, many respondents pointed out that "properties" don't create the problems that result in violations, people do. Therefore, many property owners stated that the City should push responsibility for many actions onto the people who are in fact causing the problems, rather than property owners.

Pursuing this topic in more detail was beyond the intent or scope of this project. CGR was told that the City has periodically in the past considered whether or not to adjust its policy to more aggressively hold tenants responsible for their actions, but has not done so, partially because it has been thought that landlords can exercise their rights to hold tenants responsible and take actions against them, including eviction.

However, Chapter 52, Section 3.C. of City code does state that "enforcement may be pursued against an owner, mortgagee or vendee in possession, operator, assignee of rents, receiver, executor, trustee, lessee, agent or any other person, firm or corporation directly or indirectly in control of the premises or part thereof, *or any person, regardless of said person's relationship to the property* (emphasis added by CGR) found to be violating any of the codes enforced under this chapter. Thus, City code does permit enforcement actions to be taken against persons on a premises, not just property owners. Two cities that CGR surveyed – Baltimore and Columbus – specifically spell out responsibilities for tenants in their housing codes, such as keeping interiors and exteriors of buildings clean and free of trash and debris, and violators are subject to enforcement proceedings. Thus, Rochester may want to again revisit this question and study whether or not to modify City policies regarding assignment of responsibility for certain code violations.

A discussion about the merits and legality of sections of the City code and strategies for using those codes is beyond the scope of what CGR was asked to do for this project. Certainly, City Council has passed ordinances in response to the types of pressures identified above that continue to degrade the quality of life in City neighborhoods. Continuing debate about the correct

policies to address these issues needs to take place in the legislative and judicial branches of government.

However, the City may want to consider conducting a study to determine whether or not these major enforcement strategies have, in fact, produced the desired results, or if, on balance, they are counter-productive to the City's best interests. For example, a number of respondents suggested that City enforcement policies may, in fact, be a major contributing factor to the high number of vacant structures in the City. The City should consider undertaking a detailed analysis of the history of a sample of vacant structures to determine if there are certain patterns of inspection and/or enforcement actions that can be used to predict if a property will become vacant. The City could use that predictive model to take proactive steps to keep properties from becoming vacant.

Summary – NET in Context

NET can demonstrate many victories in eliminating blighted properties, stopping nuisance behavior, closing drug houses and improving selected streets and neighborhoods. However, the City overall continues to have roughly the same blight and crime as it had five years ago. Given that NET clearly has had a positive impact on reducing blight and crime in some neighborhoods, it is likely that, overall, the City would have been worse off without the efforts of NET. But, it is not clear that NET has actually improved the quality of life overall in the City in the past five years. Overall, NET has helped *stabilize* the City's neighborhoods, but it has not, on the whole, been able to improve property values or reduce crime.

The NET *Concept*

When NET was conceived, it was intended to create neighborhood-based centers to provide citizens better access to City staff, to locate quality of life (code inspection/enforcement) staff in neighborhoods, and to co-locate civilian and police staff. As noted in Section 1, Rochester modeled NET on Miami, which had co-located civilian code inspection and enforcement and police officers in NET offices.

In order to determine how other leading cities have organized themselves to provide services similar to NET, CGR surveyed a

number of standard comparison cities to determine whether or not, in 2005, they support mini-city halls (neighborhood service centers), have decentralized inspection/enforcement, and locate police services in the mini-City Halls. TABLE 5 summarizes the results of CGR's survey and follow-up telephone interviews.

TABLE 5
Centralized or Not - How Selected Cities Compare in 2005

City	Neighborhood Service Centers		Centralized Inspection/Enforcement		Police Located in Neighb. Centers
	Yes/No	*How Many*	*Yes/No*	*Field Offices*	*Yes/No*
Baltimore	Y	6	Y	Y - 4 offices	N
Charlotte	Y	1	Y	Y - 4 offices	N
Columbus	Y	4	Y	N	N
Miami	Y	13	Y	Y - 3 offices	N
Buffalo	N	na	Y	N	N
Syracuse	N	na	Y	N	N

Source: CGR survey

Clearly, the idea of neighborhood service centers is one that has been embraced by progressive cities outside of upstate New York. Each city surveyed by CGR houses somewhat different services from their decentralized office, and they are called different names to convey specific meanings within each city. Miami still uses the name "NET" for its 13 centers, Baltimore refers to them as "Community Action Centers", and Columbus uses the term "Neighborhood Pride Centers." But the concept of locating some key city services in neighborhood service centers, run by managers who can help obtain services for residents and serve as neighborhood advocates is the same in all four cities.

One of the advantages of locating NET offices in different neighborhoods is that it allows the different offices to tailor delivery of services to the needs of the particular neighborhoods. This was certainly the intent when Miami initially developed NET offices, and CGR heard from many respondents that Rochester's individual NET offices have different demands on their time based upon neighborhood differences.

However, TABLE 5 shows that all of the cities have centralized inspection and enforcement, even though several have field offices

for that function, and none of the cities locate police offices in the neighborhood service centers.

Of particular interest, Miami significantly restructured and downsized its NET offices in 2003. According to Miami's NET Director, in an interview with CGR, city officials felt strongly that code enforcement had become inconsistent across the city, due to the fact that some NET offices had emphasized code enforcement, while others had focused on more neighborhood-friendly, proactive functions. Under Miami's original NET model, which began in 1992, and was the model used by Rochester, Miami's NET offices housed 7 to 10 employees, including police and code enforcement officers. Under the 2003 re-structuring, both code enforcement and police were re-centralized. Thus, Miami's NET offices are currently staffed by an administrator and two clerical personnel. Each office has assigned to it two refuse workers and a truck to provide quick response to keep neighborhoods clean as requested by the NET office, however, the workers and trucks work out of the central public works department. Work stations are available for police to work at the NET offices, but they are not required to report there.

Positive Impacts

Nearly all respondents believe that having NET area offices in Rochester has been very positive, and that this has significantly increased access to City staff and fostered City staff and neighborhood interaction. NET staff develop a different perspective from those who work in City Hall, and several high-level City officials indicated that NET staff provide a highly valuable set of "eyes and ears" that help ensure that City government is responsive to the needs of neighborhoods. In addition, respondents noted that the different NET offices were responsive to the needs and characteristics of the neighborhoods in which they were located. Respondents appreciated the fact that NET was not designed to provide a "one-size-fits-all" service.

Most respondents who commented on the subject indicated that there were many benefits to co-locating police and civilian staff. While each set of staff had their particular job focus, working side-by-side in the same office clearly improved coordination of joint

responses and sharing of information and ideas that provided improved service to the community.

Issues/Concerns

Nearly all respondents also voiced strong concerns about the impact of closing some or all of the NET offices. Neighborhood association and community group leaders in particular stated that the NET offices provided both a symbolic and practical link to the community, and the City needed to retain some type of neighborhood service centers. PAC-TAC volunteers were also adamant about the need to retain NET or some other neighborhood based office, in light of the police section offices having been closed as a result of the RPD patrol division reorganization in 2004. NET offices are the PAC-TAC gathering points, and are tied into the NET police officer work area.

While nearly all respondents expressed the belief that the concept of neighborhood offices was correct, many also expressed disappointment that the implementation of the concept has not turned out as expected, primarily for two reasons.

First, in order to be responsive to residents, neighborhood offices need to be open during hours that meet the needs of residents. When NET offices first opened, the prime office hours were 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., but offices also had at least one NCO available from either noon to 9 p.m. or 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Over the past several years, all of the NET offices have standardized on being open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays. NET civilian staff may be in the buildings after 5 p.m. for meetings, but are not routinely scheduled for office hours after 5 p.m. NET police officers on the 3 p.m. – 11 p.m. shift are not scheduled to be available for public inquiries, with the exception that they do coordinate with PAC-TAC teams.

NET data compiled in 1999 indicated that approximately 90% of calls for service to NET occurred between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. on weekdays. However, this measurement may have been self-fulfilling once residents learned that the offices were closed in the evenings and on weekends. Three pieces of evidence indicate that NET needs to re-consider extending the civilian office hours, and

perhaps opening on Saturday mornings. First, NET after-hours calls are rolled over to the DES City Service Line (428-5990) that is staffed around the clock. There were 1,555 calls for service answered by DES in 2004 (an average of 4.2 calls per day when NET offices were not open). Second, many respondents in person and in writing stated that in order for NET to be more responsive, NET offices should be open at least some evening hours. Third, a Harris Interactive poll conducted in 2000 for the City indicated that both residents and association leaders polled wanted to see NET hours extended or replaced with evening and weekend hours.

The second shortcoming of the NET decentralized office concept is that NET offices never reached their potential to become full service neighborhood service centers. At a minimum, some respondents expected the City to identify certain times where City staff with specialized knowledge that could be useful to people in the neighborhoods would come to the NET office. That concept of bringing City Hall to the neighborhoods was never really accomplished. However, the neighborhood service center concept can also be, at least partially, accomplished through the use of kiosks. The City Bureau of Information Systems (IS) recently installed two information kiosks on a test basis. These permit access to the City's publicly available information and allow people to pay certain bills online. As funding permits, creating electronic information access at NET offices would take them a step closer to fulfilling the neighborhood service center concept.

A number of respondents noted to CGR that co-locating civilian and police staff did not eliminate the inherent conflicts that arise when each side has different priorities. Because RPD staff remained within the RPD organization, there would periodically be differences of priorities between what RPD command staff needed and the needs of the civilian NET administrator. This typically results in the NET office appearing to be unresponsive to requests from the neighborhoods that come through the NET office, even though RPD NET officers may be responding to a different need within the same neighborhood (or other neighborhoods) as identified by RPD command staff.

Co-locating civilians and police cannot resolve this conflict, which is inherent to the structure of NET, as discussed in the next subsection. However, apparently, the cities surveyed have reduced the potential for these conflicts to occur by not co-locating police and civilians in the first place. (Miami, by changing its structure, has also eliminated the conflict.)

Some respondents commented on locating property code inspectors in the NET area offices. Several said it was beneficial, because it provided easier access for citizens to the inspectors (NCO's). Some respondents believe that decentralizing the NCO's has resulted in significant variation in how the codes are enforced between NET areas. This issue will be discussed below in another subsection.

Clearly, the issue of where to place code inspectors is one faced by all the cities surveyed. TABLE 5 indicates that while some cities have decided to locate code inspectors in a few number of sites around the City, every City CGR contacted had code inspectors report organizationally to one central office. A top official in Miami summarized why they decided to recentralize code enforcement by noting that NET offices couldn't be both a "sword and a shield" for City neighborhoods. Some NET offices emphasized code enforcement activities, while others focused on more neighborhood friendly, pro-active functions, which clearly led to uneven enforcement of the codes when viewed from the entire City perspective. The same issue faces Rochester, as will be discussed in more detail later in this report.

Summary – The NET Concept

When Rochester developed the ideas for NET, the concept of placing NET offices (City service centers) in neighborhoods, putting code inspection and enforcement operations in NET offices, and co-locating civilian and police at these offices was sound, and Rochester could also follow Miami's model. However, the only piece of that concept currently followed by cities surveyed by CGR is the concept of mini-City Halls/neighborhood service centers. Miami concluded in 2003 that its model for NET needed to be modified to re-centralize inspection and enforcement and police operations.

The *Structure* of NET

As described in Section 1, the organizational structure of NET was modeled on the NET structure in Miami. The NET structure in Rochester, however, was also the result of four key decisions made when NET was created.

First, the NET office (which would be the equivalent of a bureau within discrete departments) was placed in the Mayor's organization structure, with the NET Director becoming a member of the Mayor's senior management team. This was done for two reasons. First, since the NET area offices were intended to become neighborhood mini City-Halls, it was most appropriate to have these administered from the Mayor's office. Second, since the area NET administrators were intended to *facilitate* delivery of City services, but were not given the resources to *deliver* the services, it was anticipated that the weight of the Mayor's office might be needed to ensure inter-departmental cooperation to address priorities.

Second, because NET was intended to specifically address blight and quality of life issues in neighborhoods, the 45 positions providing property code inspection and enforcement services and records management for those functions were transferred from the Bureau of Property Conservation in DCD and assigned to NET.

Third, since NET was intended to address neighborhood crime issues, and because creating a civilian/police team would increase opportunities to take proactive measures against nuisance and criminal activities, 32 positions in RPD were assigned to NET.

Fourth, new civilian staff was hired to manage the six NET area offices. The new high-level NET Administrator title was created for the managers of each NET office (at a salary scale consistent with that of City bureau heads), as well as additional customer service representatives and clerks.

Given eight years of experience with this structure, what changes, if any, should be considered? The previous subsection indicated that the City should consider re-centralizing code inspection and enforcement and police staffing. Additional suggestions for improvement are also made, based on the following:

Positive impacts

Many respondents indicated that the new NET structure made three improvements to what existed before.

First, making the NET office report directly to the Mayor elevated the importance of the function, and enhanced the ability of NET staff to obtain assistance from departments. Second, co-locating NET civilian and police staff both improved the City's capability to respond to problems and improved citizen access to both police and civilian staff. Third, combining inspection and enforcement staff from DCD and DES and locating them in the NET area offices created opportunities for daily interaction with members of the community.

Issues/Concerns

There were four primary concerns raised by respondents about the structure of NET.

First, there were many comments regarding the cost of NET. Many respondents expressed the belief that NET costs could be significantly reduced or eliminated. Others felt that NET, in fact, should have more staff, because existing staff could not keep up with the workload.

There has been much debate about what the City would save if the NET office were to be eliminated. It is important to understand that most of the expenses associated with NET would remain, regardless of whether or not the *structure* of NET is changed or eliminated. That is because the code inspection and enforcement services and the community policing *functions* would not disappear, they would simply be transferred elsewhere in the City. Thus, the only question is – What are the marginal costs of providing the services that are *not* associated with code inspection, enforcement and police functions?

One internal City estimate is that the incremental cost of the NET staff (added over time to baseline operations pre-NET) resulted in increased costs of approximately $1.2 million per year in salaries.

Adding in benefits (per CGR estimate) would bring that total to approximately $1.7 million.

CGR, however, considered this question from a different perspective. The City's analysis assumed that all of the new staff added since the baseline is devoted to tasks other than inspection, enforcement and policing. However, this is clearly not the case. For example, a substantial portion of each NET Administrator's time is spent on inspection and enforcement issues. Thus, CGR posed the hypothetical question – "How much of total *current* staff time is *not* spent on inspection, enforcement and policing activities." As described in Section 1, CGR believes that the amount of time available within NET to carry out community advocacy and support activities would only translate to about 9 to 10 full time equivalent positions. A reasonable estimate for the cost of these positions is $750,000 in salaries and benefits.

Further, if the NET area offices were closed and all staff could be re-centralized within an existing City facility, the City would save approximately $200,000 in lease and other costs. Adding office savings to the two different salary cost estimates reviewed above, CGR estimates that the City could save in the range of approximately $.9 million to $1.9 million per year if it eliminated the NET structure, closed the NET area offices, terminated 9 to 10 civilian staff and folded the remaining staff into existing departments.

Another issue raised was the challenge in making the civilian/police combination in NET work as anticipated. While in theory the NET administrator was responsible for managing both civilian and police officers in the area office, the NET administrator in practice only had dotted line authority. The RPD lieutenants and CPO's remained under the direct command and control of the RPD command structure. Typically, the NET civilian and police staff work well together to accomplish common objectives. Problems arise, however, in two ways. First, if there is a difference in priorities between the NET administrator and RPD command, the officers (understandably) respond to the RPD priorities. Second, the resources devoted to officers in NET are the responsibility of the RPD, not the NET Administrator. Thus, resource shortages in the RPD that impact the NET offices are

beyond the control of the NET civilians. This has led, at various times, to NET offices not being staffed with police officers at the levels budgeted, which in turn has led to complaints about lack of service from NET offices.

Another example of an issue created by structurally linking police officers with NET has been the impact of the 2004 reorganization of the RPD patrol division. As a result of that reorganization, RPD closed its seven neighborhood section offices and consolidated them into two offices - one east-side and one west-side. According to many respondents, this created expectations in the neighborhoods that the NET offices were the sole remaining locations where citizens could have direct access to RPD officers. PAC-TAC respondents, in particular, indicated that this put additional expectations on NET RPD officers to provide the support previously provided out of the section offices. Some respondents also felt that there were increased calls for police services and walk-in traffic directly to the NET offices, although this could neither be confirmed or denied due to the lack of a consistent logging process in the various NET offices.

The third structural issue is whether or not NET's ability to respond to neighborhood needs has been hampered as a result of the fact that NET does not deliver the staff, material, equipment and funds to actually perform the work required to address property code violations. NET is totally reliant on other departments to board vacant houses, remove trash and debris, tow vehicles, remove graffiti, remove snow, etc. It was never the intent for NET to have these capabilities – however, many complaints about lack of service are directed at NET but are not necessarily the fault of NET. To the extent that NET is a service coordinator, all NET has control over is to request service on a timely basis. If other departments have different priorities for providing service, that is outside of the control of NET staff.

However, many respondents, both members of the general community as well as City staff from all departments, indicated that problems in cross-department communications clearly lead to service delivery breakdowns. There are two related issues that the City needs to address in this area.

First, the City should standardize on a single system incoming requests for services that are received either in person, by phone or by e-mail. The City currently has two sophisticated call center systems, the 311 system operated by the RPD, and the system operated by the Office of Customer Satisfaction (OCS) in DES. NET has no integrated system – each office tracks incoming calls by hand, even though, in total, NET reported an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 incoming telephone calls in each of the past few years. Those calls just cover the hours when NET offices are staffed. When NET offices are closed, calls to NET roll over to the OCS. Given the number of incoming calls, NET needs to become part of a large call answering system.

Second, NET does not have a uniform process for tracking requests for service from organizations and individuals, and for tracking the status of those requests from inception of the request to delivery of the service. Each NET administrator has his/her own system of tracking requests and work activity. This helps explain why communications back to service requestors is reported to be so variable.

The fourth structural issue raised is whether the City could create a better structure to coordinate community development planning and resources. Several respondents noted a frustration with the lack of a coordinated approach to demolishing vacant structures in the City. Many respondents also noted that while one of NET's roles is to help identify financial and other resources that neighborhoods and property owners can use for physical improvements in their neighborhoods, DCD is the agency that actually has the fiscal resources and determines how to allocate them through several different processes. Although most respondents on this issue gave high marks to the NET administrators for doing the best they could, many also stated the frustration that, in particular the NBN planning process was not well coordinated with the needs identified by NET.

Summary – The NET Structure

The structure of NET – its place within the organization of City government – has affected the ability of NET staff to meet service delivery expectations. Since NET does not actually have the

resources available to large operating departments, NET staff need to rely on their ability to request, coordinate and track delivery of services. While being located in the Mayor's office does give NET an implied authority that can be used to help deliver services, that authority has to be used judiciously. The lack of an integrated system to track incoming calls and requests for service hampers NET's ability. The lack of coordination, especially between NET and bureaus within DCD has also been a problem. These issues should be addressed going forward.

NET Processes

NET is a study in contrasts when analyzed in terms of processes. Since any of the NET inspection and enforcement activities can result in legal proceedings, NET processes for these activities have become highly formalized over the years, as NET has learned what records are needed to help the City with its cases. NET interacts with the Law department and the Bureau of Parking and Municipal Violations on a very frequent basis, and the process of hand-offs and communications works well. On the other end of the spectrum, as previously noted, NET lacks some basic systems for tracking service calls and internal requests for service, and providing systematic status reports. CGR addresses NET processes below.

Positive Impacts

The records management processes in NET have evolved over time (having been carried over in the move from the Bureau of Property Conservation). A complete paper record of all activities for each inspection/enforcement case is maintained by NET, and the Building Information System (BIS) contains the electronic history of actions on a property-by-property basis. The combination of these two systems has proved very effective in providing the records needed for any legal actions. BIS information is also available to NET administrators for tracking the history of actions on properties.

NET also collects and reports a wide range of demand and workload statistics, some of which were referenced in Section 1. The statistics collected on a daily basis help NET management track the work activity occurring at each NET office.

Issues/Concerns

In June, 2005, CGR delivered a report to the City Clerk, in her role as Records Management Officer, in which CGR evaluated the records management processes of NET as well as other City departments. That report concluded that although the NET central records management process was thorough and well organized, it was also an extremely paper-intensive process. CGR estimates that automating the processes, in particular by purchasing hand-held tablet computers for inspectors in the field, and having them key their field reports directly into the central database, could conservatively save the equivalent of 4 FTE clerical positions and .75 of an inspector position. The June, 2005 report estimated a one-time investment of $62,000 (rounded up to $65,000 for budget purposes) and annual ongoing expenses of $22,000 (rounded to $25,000) for the equipment. CGR's estimate of the value of the time saved (in FTE's), minus annual operating costs, would produce annual savings of at least $150,000. The City could either shift the positions saved to other work (as suggested in Section 3), or eliminate the positions once automation was completed and capture the $150,000 annual savings. (Note: IS is currently developing new user-friendly "screens" for inspectors, which will be ready for NET's review by early 2006. This is among key first steps in moving toward automation.)

A second concern regarding processes in NET, which was raised by a number of respondents, is that NET staff involved in the advocacy and service functions need to improve communication, especially in reporting the tracking of activities and giving feedback to those who request services. This may be addressed through training (project management tracking skills) as well as developing a systematic tracking and reporting system within NET, as suggested in the previous subsection addressing structural issues.

A final concern involves the different processes required for inspection activities versus enforcement activities. Prior to NET, the Bureau of Property Conservation, and, we were told, its predecessor organizations, made a clear differentiation between the group of employees who conducted inspections and reported violations, and the group of employees responsible for issuing citations and pursuing enforcement. When Bureau staff were

moved into NET, this separation continued as only two NET staff were responsible for ticketing.

However, in 2002, all NCO's in the NET offices were given the responsibility to enforce (ticket) as well as inspect. This change was based on the desire to push reduce response times between inspection and enforcement and push accountability for enforcement out to the inspectors. Based upon feedback from many respondents from both the community and City staff, this change has not improved service, and there is almost universal agreement that a clear separation between inspection and enforcement should be put back in place.

The primary reason for separating these two functions is for quality control purposes. Once a ticket is issued, it initiates a series of increasingly complex and costly series of steps for both the City and property owners. In the Bureau of Property Conservation, and in NET for the first four years, enforcement responsibilities were split between two senior staff (overseen by a supervisor) who, in effect, had to convince themselves that the property code inspectors had made appropriate and consistent judgments about what to cite as violations. While this two-step process may, to some people, have appeared inefficient, from what has been reported to CGR, it provided an invaluable internal control to ensure that enforcement was warranted before proceeding. In effect, this two-step process provided a system of checks-and-balances. Ensuring that enforcement is the appropriate action is particularly important because once an enforcement action is initiated, this has financial consequences to a property owner that can rapidly escalate and, in ultimately end up in the City foreclosing on the property.

Summary – NET Processes

NET activities require many processes – information management processes, activity tracking processes, interactions with other departments, and communications with the public, to name some major examples. CGR's evaluation of NET identified three specific processes that should be addressed. Doing so will improve the delivery of services and save staff time, which can either be redeployed or reduced to produce direct budget savings.

The People of NET

NET provides its services to the Rochester community through staff members. Therefore, the success of NET in meeting its goals and expectations rests on the knowledge, skills, ability and dedication of the men and women who work in NET. As discussed above, the inspection, enforcement and policing functions within NET have existed and will continue to exist independent of the NET structure. The neighborhood advocacy and neighborhood function was a new addition with NET, however, and it added to the organization the need for a special set of skills. In short, with the exception of some of the records management positions, almost every job in NET puts staff in constant contact with the public. Further, the inspection and enforcement tasks often put NET staff in adversarial positions with people they meet. Thus, perhaps the most important attribute of a successful NET employee is that he/she be skilled at, and like dealing with, people.

Positive Impacts

The community involvement process provided CGR with a wide range of comments about the people of NET, but there was wide agreement that, on the whole, the people of NET are hard working, dedicated, knowledgeable, helpful and critical to the job of supporting safe, clean, strong, viable and attractive neighborhoods. Residents from the community, in particular, cited example after example of specific NET staff, from the inception of NET through today, who have made a difference, in both small and large ways. Many people in NET have gone, and continue to go way beyond the basic requirements of the job to assist both individuals and groups, and it is clear to CGR that members of the community recognize and appreciate the positive impacts NET has made in their lives.

Issues/Concerns

A number of issues and concerns about NET staff were raised during this evaluation. To some extent, this was a function of the community involvement process itself, because many of those who participated were motivated to do so because of a negative incident with NET. While considering the information we

collected, CGR tried to identify consistent patterns of issues/concerns raised that might indicate issues with the system and not just individuals. Individual performance appraisals are appropriately handled through the City's management processes. But CGR noted several systemic issues that the City should address.

First, many respondents, including City staff, commented on the high-stress level created by the nature of most NET jobs. There are several reasons for this. At the top level, NET Administrators are expected to meet a wide range of expectations, and to be responsive almost around the clock. The first NET Administrators had to basically invent their jobs, which included an incredible range of responsibilities, from building coalitions to closing drug houses. The pressures of the job clearly lead to a high burnout rate, as five of the original six NET Administrators have moved to other jobs. Based on anecdotal comment other high-level positions within the City government experience a much lower turnover rate.

On-the-job stress is clearly not confined to just the top level positions in NET, however. Inspectors and police officers, by the nature of their jobs, face the potential for interpersonal conflict on a daily basis. Administrative staff, especially in the NET offices, are often overloaded with requests for service and/or help. Since NET offices are, in fact, service organizations, with essentially an open door policy, it is impossible to predict when requests for service might be made. This problem is compounded by the fact that NET has a very lean administrative staff, which limits the ability of management to move staff resources around to meet changing needs.

CGR believes that many of the behavior patterns that result in the types of inappropriate customer service skills reported by respondents are caused by the high stress situations NET employees encounter. Two suggestions for improvements were consistently mentioned by respondents. First, NET civilian employees whose jobs put them in constant one-on-one situations that require conflict resolution skills in the field should receive specialized training, similar to or the same as conflict resolution training received by RPD officers. Second, NET administration

needs to identify how to create more staff time so that staff can be more flexible to meet unanticipated and unpredictable demand. As noted above, records management efficiencies should free up time in at least four FTE equivalent positions. This would create a perfect opportunity to use those positions to improve internal flexibility within the organization.

A second theme that emerged from respondent comments was lack of consistency among NET staff. This issue affects NET services in a number of different ways.

Many respondents identified concerns about the wide range of performance by NET Administrators. The NET Administrator position is clearly a very challenging job. As the leader of the NET area office and chief administrator of NET services through that office, the job requires the administrators to be generalists in neighborhood rehabilitation for attacking urban blight issues; skilled communicators to assist, enable and empower the community in the neighborhood; and experts in the codes that are being enforced.

Being an expert in code inspection is a critical requirement, because the NET Administrator supervises the NCO's working out of the area office. The NET Administrator has the authority and responsibility to ensure that inspection, and ultimately enforcement actions are accurate, fair and consistent, and meet the needs of the particular NET area. The NET administrator serves as the first-line supervisor of NCO's and thus has to determine when and how to make judgment decisions about individual cases from the neighborhood. Thus, many respondents stated that NET Administrators should receive at least the 120 hours of basic state building code training, and the 26 hours of annual training required of NCO's.

Even after this training, the fact that six different Administrators will use their judgment to apply standards that are most appropriate to the needs of their neighborhoods almost guarantees that there will be inconsistent inspection and enforcement across the City. To some extent, this has to be expected, since the intent in creating six NET area offices was to encourage services tailored to the needs of each neighborhood. On the other hand, the City needs to strike a balance between being responsive to special local

circumstances and the need for consistent application of the codes throughout the City.

These are two strong arguments for recentralizing code inspection and enforcement services. First, this would eliminate the need for NET administrators to become code experts. They could then devote all of their time and resources to the community advocacy function, while the central code services administrators would become the code supervisor experts. Second, having NCO's report to a smaller number of direct supervisors in a central unit would improve the consistent application of inspection and enforcement services. As noted previously, CGR strongly recommends that inspection and enforcement functions be administered separately, as a means of ensuring an appropriate system of checks and balances.

NET Administrators are also responsible for being advocates for their neighborhoods. While most respondents stated that the NET Administrators recognize this is one of their primary responsibilities, there was a wide range of opinion about how well the Administrators are meeting the needs of the neighborhoods. CGR was surprised that many comments were made about how Administrators had never walked or visited specific neighborhoods in their area. Since these comments were made by community group leaders, it appears to CGR that there is a perception gap that should be corrected. We suggest that, at a minimum, every NET administrator certify, as part of their routine evaluation process, that they have met with the recognized community leaders in their areas and walked or inspected every street in their area at least once every six months.

Summary – The People of NET

There was one comment that was consistently made to CGR by the over 400 people who contributed to this project – "NET staff have a hard job." This does not mean that every person in NET works hard, nor is everyone perfect. NET is no different than any other organization in the public or private sector. But, there is almost universal understanding that the requirements of the jobs in NET put NET staff in stressful situations that require a wide range of skills. The City could assist NET staff to provide even

better service to the public by making the improvements suggested above.

SECTION 3 – OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Overview

NET as it has evolved exists as a structure for managing people and resources in order for the City administration to provide services and meet the goals identified in Section 1. However, these same services and goals could be met through other administrative structures. Prior to NET, the City was organized to provide these services in another way, and clearly different cities that CGR reviewed are organized differently than Rochester. In fact, Miami, which was the model for the Rochester NET structure, re-organized and substantially changed its NET offices in 2003, in response to many of the same issues that CGR found are currently a concern in Rochester.

In this section we provide a conceptual outline of four options that the new Mayor and City Council could consider in order to provide the services to meet the City's goals noted in Section 1. We also present examples of performance indicators that could be used to evaluate outcomes of NET activities, rather than just the NET activities themselves (the need for which was discussed in Section 2). At the end of this section, CGR provides a summary list of the recommendations that are contained in this report. This provides a basic check-off list that can be used to verify whether or not actions were taken on the report recommendations.

CGR developed the list of options based upon suggestions made through the community involvement process. We included options where we heard support from a substantial number of respondents. One additional possible option was considered but not developed further by CGR for this report, because it was only mentioned by a couple of respondents. That option was to create a larger NET operation in the Office of the Mayor by centralizing a number of the services presently provided in operating departments (as outlined in Section 2). Creating a larger, centralized NET operation seems to CGR to be completely inconsistent with what we heard in the community involvement

process, and runs counter to the experiences in comparison cities, especially Miami, which recently de-centralized its NET operations. Other options could be developed as some variation of these four basic options, but we believe the four presented here convey the range of choices available to the City going forward.

CGR will not attempt to estimate the costs of the various options, since we assume that any of the options could be implemented, at least initially, at little or no additional cost above what is currently budgeted for NET. Only option 4, completely dismantling NET, would result in significant cost savings, ranging from $.9 million to $1.9 million, based upon the assumptions outlined in Section 2. For all of the options, CGR assumes that the four FTE savings from automating records as recommended in Section 2 would be available to re-allocate to other uses within each option, and we will identify how we would recommend re-allocating those positions.

Before presenting the options, however, it is important to recognize that there are several factors on the horizon that will likely affect the demand for resources for whichever option is selected; and to identify to what extent we believe the various options would address the concerns noted in Section 2. It is important to review several factors that could affect the decision about which option to choose.

Known Changes on the Horizon

CGR believes that there are several factors that the Mayor and City Council need to take into account as they consider NET and/or any successor organization(s) in the next year or two.

First, many respondents expressed deep concern about the fact that, with the closing of the neighborhood police section offices because of the patrol division reorganization that occurred in mid-2004, the six NET area offices provide the only remaining opportunity for direct neighborhood interaction with police officers. Clearly, one of the decisions that the City needs to make is whether or not to continue to use the current NET area offices as sites from which to provide neighborhood level services.

Observation – until a clearly defined plan for providing neighborhood level services is developed and initiated, closing the six NET area offices so soon after closing the police section

offices could appear, at least symbolically, to indicate a significant retraction of the City's commitment to the neighborhood advocacy strategies of the past 12 years and could create a strong negative reaction from across the community.

Second, several significant changes are going to occur in the next 6 to 12 months that will require the City to commit more resources and/or change current procedures followed by NET at this time. Four changes known at this time are:

- The Lead Paint program. Based upon City Council action on December 20, 2005, the City will be undertaking a pro-active lead paint program. The legislation assumes that six full-time staff will have to be dedicated to the program.

- New York State Certificate of Occupancy (C. of O.) inspections. Currently, the City conducts C. of O. inspections whenever a multi-family house is sold, or, for multi-family or renter-occupied single family homes, C. of O. inspections are required every five years, in accordance with the requirements of Part 1203 of Title 19 of the New York Compilation of Codes, Rules and Regulations. However, New York recently passed changes to 19 NYCRR 1203 that will require the City to inspect every multi-family and renter-occupied single family home every three years, starting in January, 2007. Currently, the City issues approximately 4,000 C. of O.'s per year, or 20,000 every five years. Going to a three-year cycle would require 6,000 – 7,000 C. of O.'s per year. At an average time per C of O inspection of six hours (includes the initial inspection, three follow-up inspections, which is the reported average, and paperwork), this projects to an additional 12,000 to 18,000 hours per year, or approximately six to nine FTE's at an average work year of 2000 hours.

- Changes to Housing Court. New York also recently passed legislation that changes the procedures for the use of Housing Court to adjudicate enforcement of judgments for municipal code violations. It is not yet clear to what extent this will change the City's current processes for handling code violation tickets through the municipal code violation bureau, or otherwise pursuing remedies through the court system, the City's law department anticipates that some processes are likely to change. The impact on staff resources is unclear at this time.

- A major change in property ownership has occurred in the last few years as rental properties have become viewed as a major asset class for investment purposes. Although Rochester has apparently not yet been affected by this phenomenon as severely as cities where rental properties have become a hot investment, both City staff and local real estate experts interviewed for this study indicate that there is a growing trend for Rochester properties to be purchased by investment consortiums that package and re-package properties to sell as parts of portfolios to investor owners from anywhere in the world. This has affected the City's ability to identify property owners who are responsive to the City's notification of code violations. This has the potential for becoming a serious problem, if it places additional burden on the City to assume responsibility for maintaining properties and adds to the time and cost of locating and notifying a responsible and responsive owner of the property.

Trends in the past few years also suggest that the City needs to plan for more specialization of inspection and enforcement staff. For example, after the new zoning code was adopted in 2003, DCD created one new position as zoning inspector (later adding a second inspector), and zoning enforcement was removed from the list of NET inspector responsibilities. As noted in Section 1, certain areas of code enforcement have always remained independent of NET. The City may very well find that the demands of the lead paint program and the stepped up certificate of occupancy requirements create the need for more subject matter specialists who understand the rules and regulations and can provide these services more efficiently and effectively than Neighborhood Conservation Officers, who have to be generalists due to the nature of the wide range of their job responsibilities.

Observation – a trend toward subject matter specialists argues for more centralized delivery of those services, to ensure consistent training and uniform application of proper practices throughout the City.

Option 1 – Retain the Current NET Structure

Summary – NET would remain a bureau of the Mayor's Office and continue as it is currently organized, but re-focused to address the concerns identified in Section 2, in particular, making a clear

separation between the inspection and enforcement functions. The total number of civilian staff and police staff would remain as shown in the 2005-2006 budget. As noted above, changes on the horizon may require additional staff and/or other resources to meet additional workload or requests for service. However, initially, four FTE's could be obtained from the efficiency gains from automating records. The current six NET area offices would remain open and staffed with a NET administrator, support staff, NCO's and current police staffing levels.

Primary advantages:

- Minimizes disruption to the existing organization and positive connections built with the community,
- Ensures direct access to the Mayor for resolution of cross-departmental or other issues that need the attention of the Mayor's office.
- Retains central administrative oversight to coordination of neighborhood quality of life services provided by the City.

Primary disadvantages:

- Retains the structural impediments identified in Section 2,
- Does not re-energize the provision of services in the same way as a new approach.

Option 2 – Take Code Functions out of NET – Create a Smaller NEW NET in Mayor's Office

Summary – code inspection and enforcement and related records management functions would be put back into the operating departments. Twelve to fourteen FTE's would remain in the NEW NET. NEW NET would remain an office within the Mayor's staff. NEW NET staff would re-focus on building partnerships within neighborhoods and becoming service advocates and coordinators – moving toward the mini-City Hall concept and away from an enforcement agency. NEW NET civilian staff would be divided three per NET area office, with a central administrator in City Hall. Property code inspection and enforcement would be put in DCD or its successor organization, because DCD has other inspection functions (zoning and buildings) and housing and project development is responsible for

the vacant housing demolition program. Some or all NCO's could be located in the NET offices. Two refuse inspectors would be assigned back to DES. RPD would continue to assign lieutenants and CPO's to the NET offices to continue providing police support services from those locations unless or until RPD makes operational changes to neighborhood policing.

Primary advantages:

- Allows NEW NET staff to re-focus on creating linkages and coordinating City services for neighborhoods and creating more responsive mini-City Halls while retaining NEW NET status as a high priority by retaining in the Mayor's office,

- Re-integrates inspection and enforcement functions into departments with more resources and already existing service functions,

- Provides another layer of high level administrative oversight (a department head) over code inspection and enforcement to address the issues identified in Section 2.

Primary disadvantages:

- NEW NET staff would still face the challenges of coordinating service and response from operating departments,

- Neighborhoods that are used to dealing directly with NCO's as NET representatives may perceive a loss of service from the NET area offices.

Option 3 – Move NET Out of Mayor's Office

Summary - CGR envisions this option to be similar to Option 2, but involves moving NET out of the Mayor's Office. The most obvious department to put NET into would be DCD or its successor. Current NET operations would be split into two units - the neighborhood advocacy unit (described in Option 2 as NEW NET) and the inspection/enforcement unit. CGR would integrate NBN with the NEW NET, which would combine the advocacy and resource planning functions and eliminate duplication of effort. NEW NET, as in Option 2, would continue to staff the

current NET offices, along with RPD officers. Refuse inspectors would be re-integrated into DES.

A variation that might be considered would be to have the inspection/code enforcement unit assigned to the RPD rather than DCD. The rationale for this is that one command structure (RPD) would identify the priorities for responding to quality of life issues and issuing tickets. This would ensure that all of the appropriate resources – civilian and police – were coordinated and responsive to the same administrator. RPD has experience in supervising civilian operations. RPD also has the most experience training personnel how to handle interpersonal confrontations – an issue noted for inspectors in Section 2. This would be an out-of-the box experiment, however, it may be worthy of more discussion.

Primary advantages:

- Integrates NEW NET and other community development staff (particularly NBN) which will foster a more integrated approach,
- Re-integrates inspection and enforcement functions into departments with more resources and already existing service functions,
- Provides another layer of high level administrative oversight (a department head) over code inspection and enforcement to address the issues identified in Section 2.

Primary disadvantages:

- NEW NET would be responsible to a department head rather than the Mayor directly,
- NEW NET staff would still face the challenges of coordinating service and response from operating departments.

Option 4 – Dismantle NET as a Separate Unit

Summary – Under this option, the code inspection and enforcement functions would be re-integrated into either DCD (or RPD), as discussed in Option 3. The DES refuse inspectors

would revert back to DES. The community advocacy function could be assigned to NBN and integrated with its activities. If the mini-City hall function is desired, it could be administered out of the Mayor's Office of Communications and Community Affairs. NET area offices could be retained as sub-regional police offices for community policing work, with RPD civilian support for quality of life responses needed in the field. NET as an organization would cease to exist, with the NET functions disbursed and funded out of the various departments.

Primary advantages:

- If the community advocacy functions were completely absorbed by existing staff in other departments, this option could produce personnel savings of from $.7 million to $1.7 million. Another $200,000 in savings could be realized if the NET offices were closed. However, if the mini-City hall concept is followed, this would eliminate most or all of the potential savings, depending on how the mini-City halls are staffed.

- This would clear the deck for a different approach,

- Combining the old NET advocacy and NBN resource planning functions might provide a newer, more integrated process for providing service to neighborhoods.

Primary disadvantages:

- This would clearly disrupt existing relationships and service expectations until these had been replaced with a new model,

- Staff disruptions are likely to result by assigning existing staff additional new responsibilities, along with disruptions caused by staff reductions.

Suggested Performance Indicators

This report contains many different suggestions for how the City could improve the services currently provided by NET. These improvements can be summarized as:

- Improving the use of data;

- Changing structures and systems;
- Providing more support for staff.

Measuring whether or not the structural and system changes occur in the future should be easy – the City can develop a checklist and periodically review what changes were made. A list of all the suggested improvements in this report is included in the Appendix.

However, measuring the *results* of these changes will be more challenging. In fact, as noted several times in this report, the City should focus more attention on identifying indicators that help demonstrate whether or not the actions the City takes create the intended results. In the case of the services provided by NET, CGR believes that the City should consider two new ways to measure the results of the services provided by NET.

First, the City should develop ways to measure how well staff are meeting the expectations of those who either use NET services (those folks for whom NET is providing the advocacy function), or who are affected by the NET code inspection/enforcement function. These are two different functions, and thus require two different customer survey instruments for the results to be useful. The City should take steps to develop a process and an instrument to solicit feedback from each of these two groups of customers. NET management could use that feedback to identify future improvements.

Second, NET and/or other City staff (e.g. DCD planning staff) should consider new ways to use data that is currently available in City databases. For example, the City could look at:

- changes in values of properties from the City Assessor;
- trends and patterns of code violations from the Building Information System; and
- trends and patterns of police incidences, either using CrimeStat information or 911 calls for service information.

CGR believes that the trend data from these three sources could be used to track changes that would be useful to the City in two ways.

As one example, the City could analyze assessed value and crime/call for service data. Crime/call for service data is available at the address level, so it can be aggregated to any desired area. The assessment information is available for what are called value neighborhoods. The City is broken into approximately 130 value neighborhoods, which is certainly a fine enough level of detail to determine local change patterns. As noted in Section 2, tracking changes in just these two indicators would help provide very useful feedback about whether or not directed City programs are effective.

As another example, the City could analyze inspection and enforcement information that is available in the BIS system going back at least to 2000. This data could be extremely useful for identifying patterns that might be early warning indicators for neighborhoods and properties beginning a downward transition. With an early warning, the City may be able to initiate pro-active steps to reverse problems in the early stages.

In particular, the City could focus on using the BIS information to develop an understanding of the dynamics of vacant buildings in the City. It is quite possible that a study would identify ways to predict what are likely to become vacant buildings, based on certain indicators such as the number, type or frequency of events recorded in the BIS data. At the very least, the City could use this information, along with the assessment and CrimeStat information, to determine whether it would be more cost effective to demolish or rehabilitate vacant structures based upon location. CGR recently learned that the City has recognized the importance of this issue by initiating an internal study of vacant properties.

CGR identified many other areas where focused studies could or should be conducted about specific operations or processes that involve NET functions in some way, but that could not be studied in detail in this evaluation. Examples of areas for further study are: 1. an evaluation of the costs and benefits of the Certificate of Use program, 2. an evaluation of the impact of the use of tickets and the imposition of fines on home ownership, 3. an evaluation

of the impact of directed property code enforcement on property values in various neighborhoods.

Studies like this would help the City to more clearly understand the impact of NET activities and whether or not those activities are, in fact, a cost-effective way to achieve the goals that were identified when NET was created. At a minimum, however, the City could internally develop some basic trend indicators using BIS data, and create maps, using the City's Geographic Information System (GIS) software, to illustrate current activity and trends for neighborhoods.

To illustrate how this information could be used, CGR obtained BIS data from July 2004- June 2005, to plot where high grass and weed and trash and debris violations occurred, where vacant buildings are located, where buildings are located that have been in the system for at least a year (i.e., long term problems), and where new violations occurred during the past year. A summary review of CGR's findings, and the maps we created through GIS, are included in the Appendix.

In summary, CGR believes that the City could use readily available data to assess the impact of City services on neighborhoods and become more proactive in adjusting services to be more effective.

Summary List of Recommendations

This report contains many different suggestions for improving NET and/or city operations in general. Many suggestions were made by respondents through the community involvement process. Listed below are suggestions and specific recommendations offered by CGR in the report. This list does not include the various suggestions either mentioned or implied in the description of options for the future.

- Create a process to develop a realistic set of expectations about what services the city can provide to support safe, clean, strong, viable, attractive neighborhoods.

- Separate code inspection function from the enforcement function.

- Invest $65,000 in handheld computer tablets for inspectors

- More aggressively use the data currently available in City databases about code violations, property value changes, and changes in criminal activities to assess the impact of City services.

- City should consider studying whether or not to modify City policies regarding assignment of responsibility (e.g., owner vs. tenant) for certain code violations.

- City should consider studying whether or not its enforcement strategies have produced the desired results, or are counter-productive (e.g., does enforcement contribute to high number of vacant structures).

- Consider extending NET's civilian office hours, and perhaps open on Saturday mornings.

- Standardize on a single system all incoming requests for services received in person, by phone, or email.

- Create a uniform process for tracking requests for service from organizations and individuals, and for tracking the status of those requests from inception of the request to delivery of the service.

- Lack of coordination between NET and DCD bureaus should be addressed.

- Provide training for NET civilians in conflict resolution.

- NET administration needs to identify how to create more staff time so that staff can be more flexible to meet unanticipated and unpredictable demand.

- Re-centralize code inspection and enforcement.

- NET administrators should meet with the recognized community leaders in their areas, and should walk or inspect every street in their area every 6 months.

- City should develop survey instruments to measure how well staff are meeting expectations of those using NET services, and those who are affected by the NET code inspection/enforcement function.

- Consider conducting an evaluation of the costs and benefits of the C of U program.

- Consider conducting an evaluation of the impact of the use of tickets and the imposition of fines on home ownership.

- Consider conducting an evaluation of the impact of directed property code enforcement on property values in various neighborhoods.

APPENDIX

Appendix 60
Section 1 – Overview 61
Section 2 – The Community Involvement Process 61
Internal Phase 61
External Phase 62
More Specifics on External Comments 68
Survey Form 69
Section 3 – Using Data to Assess Neighborhood Changes 71

Section 1 – Overview

This Appendix is intended to provide background information to supplement the findings and recommendations contained in the main report of the evaluation of NET. The Appendix is divided into sections based upon a specific topic, as described in the Overview at the beginning of each section.

Section 2 – The Community Involvement Process

Overview. This section describes the process used by CGR to collect impressions about NET from both the providers of NET services (city staff) and receivers or users of NET services (members of the greater community). Overall, more than 400 people were either directly interviewed by CGR, or they participated in focus groups, and/or gave CGR their thoughts by phone, printed mail or e-mail correspondence. We have also summarized the major ideas, comments and suggestions offered as part of this process. In order to protect respondents and to ensure the ideas do not simply represent a narrow special interest, we have only listed ideas that were expressed by a cross section of respondents.

In August 2005, CGR developed and implemented a multi-faceted plan to encourage the community, both within and outside City Hall, to provide feedback to us on the NET program. As a result of this process, we conducted approximately 65 individual interviews; met with 18 special interest focus groups, held eight "open houses" or public forums throughout the City, and received 81 voice mail, regular mail and email comments.

The community involvement process consisted of internal and external phases.

Internal Phase

The internal phase took place between August and November, and included individual interviews and/or focus groups with City leaders and staff members. The breakdown follows:

- 8 elected City leaders
- 47 civilian NET staff members at all levels of the organization
- 3 former NET civilian staff members
- 5 key RPD staff, including the acting Police Chief and the East and West Commanders
- 7 NET lieutenants

- 12 NET CPO's
- 13 DCD staff members
- 8 DES staff members
- 5 Finance and Budget staff members
- 5 RFD staff members
- 3 Law Department lawyers
- 10 other City staff members in the following areas: City Council staff, NBN, Economic Development, Parks and Recreation, Communications, Information Systems

External Phase

Between September and November, CGR made a concerted effort to obtain comments from the community-at-large. We held focus groups for business, neighborhood and NBN leaders; informal public open houses in all six NET areas; two evening focus groups for PAC-TAC volunteers; and provided regular mail, email and voice mail opportunities for individuals who wished to comment but could not attend a scheduled public session.

Business, Neighborhood and NBN leaders

CGR identified business contacts by working with the City's Departments of Economic Development and Community Development. We sent individual invitations to nearly 60 business people inviting them to meet with us to discuss NET. A total of 16 business representatives attended focus groups designed for:

- bar/restaurant/entertainment businesses
- industrial/commercial businesses
- neighborhood commercial/retail businesses

We also held separate evening focus groups for neighborhood association presidents and NBN sector chairs, and 23 of these leaders provided feedback at two evening sessions. Following up on their remarks, CGR invited a handful of these leaders to a second discussion to discuss their recommendations regarding NET.

Sessions for the Public and PAC-TAC volunteers

To promote our six October open houses for the public, we sent press releases to all major news media, and had City Communications, working under our editorial direction, develop and deliver Public Service Announcements (PSAs) to local television and news media. As a result of these

efforts, CGR staff appeared on four separate media programs to talk about the NET evaluation and opportunities for people to comment. In addition, we posted information on our web site (www.cgr.org) about the various ways of providing feedback to us.

We also developed fliers (including key information in Spanish) announcing these open house sessions and arranged to have the fliers available for the public to pick up at City library branches and NET offices. Rochester police also made them available at Police-Community Interaction Committee (PCIC) meetings.

We subsequently mailed information about the open houses to neighborhood association presidents, NBN sector chairs and staff of neighborhood groups encouraging them to use the information in messages to their own members. (An example of the outcome of this effort was that the 19th Ward Community Association mailed postcards to every association member about the open house in that area.)

Finally we asked NET police to encourage PACTAC coordinators to invite the volunteers in their areas to two special sessions in late October especially for PACTAC.

As a result of all of these steps, CGR attracted 142 individuals to the six open houses for the public and the two sessions for PAC-TAC volunteers. Information on these forums is noted below.

Public Sessions (people could drop in to talk any time between 4 - 7 p.m.)

Oct. 12, Holy Apostles Urban Center, 8 Austin St. – 6 attendees
(*Spanish interpreter was available*)

Oct. 13, The Corner Place, 983 Monroe Ave. – 23 attendees
(*Sign language interpreter was available*)

Oct. 18, Dazzle Theatre, 112 Webster Ave. – 13 attendees

Oct. 19, Carter Street Community Ctr., 500 Carter St. – 10 attendees
(*Spanish interpreter was available*)

Oct. 20, Maplewood Library, 1111 Dewey Ave. – 22 attendees

Oct. 26, 19th Ward Community Assn., 334 Thurston Rd. – 27 attendees

PAC-TAC Evening Sessions

Oct. 17, Eastside PAC-TAC, Dazzle Theatre, 112 Webser Ave. – 14 attendees

Oct. 24, Westside PAC-TAC, Edgerton Recreation Center, 41 Backus St. – 27 attendees

We encouraged the 142 individuals who attended one of these eight forums to fill out a survey. In total, 121 persons completed surveys, including 12 who returned them by mail. From the information that was provided we learned:

- 109 were Rochester residents
- 87 were single family home owners in Rochester
- 21 operated a business in Rochester
- 21 were landlords in Rochester

As part of our survey, we also asked participants to tell us their NET office area and received the following answers: NET A - 17 individuals; NET B – 20; NET C – 26; NET D – 16; NET E – 15; and NET F – 9. Two participants reported they deal with more than one NET area.

Major Themes Based on Community Feedback

Participants surveyed through the open house/PAC-TAC forums listed a wide range of issues that they said should be addressed in their neighborhoods (e.g., drugs, prostitution, loitering, trash, traffic violations), and overwhelmingly said the City should have a "high involvement" in addressing the problems they listed. When offered a scale on which 1 equaled "low involvement" and 5 equaled "high involvement," all but 7 of the 114 people who answered this survey question listed their answers as a 4 or 5 (high involvement by the City).

When asked if NET is the best way to address the problems they identified, 68 said *yes*, and 37 said *no*. However, when asked how they would measure the City's effectiveness in addressing the problems they had identified in their neighborhoods, the answers were mixed, ranging from praise for NET to significant frustration with the organization.

A Total of 289 External Contacts

In addition to all of the above external contacts, CGR received 53 statements from the public via mail or email and 28 voice mail messages from individuals who provided their names and phone numbers. We also talked to two other City landlords, key staff at The Housing Council, and members of the NYS Coalition of Property Owners and Businesses.

Overall, the external phase of the community involvement process resulted in CGR having contact with 289 individuals.

We summarize the feedback we received from all individuals (internal and external phases) under "Major Themes" below, and then provide additional information on key "external" concerns.

- The original concept of having "mini-City Halls" was visionary, but the concept was never realized.

- NET's mission today is unclear.

- Often, NET and other City departments do not communicate well. As a result, many processes (e.g., demolitions, board-up of vacant properties) appear to residents and neighborhood leaders to be fragmented and unnecessarily time consuming.

- In many cases NET has been successful in closing drug houses, and also addressing illegal use of corner stores, high grass/trash & debris issues, loud noise, absentee homeowners, landlords who do not make needed improvements to their properties, assisting landlords with noise issues that impact their tenants, etc. In many other cases citizens view NET as being minimally or not at all effective in addressing such issues. Depending on one's point of view NET either needs more resources (e.g., inspectors, officers) or it is "a total waste of money."

- There is no clear, consistent job description and defined skills for NET administrators – they range from being pro-active and energetic to being clearly uninterested in the communities they are assigned to serve. Specific comments about administrators ranged from being poor choices to head NET operations in their areas to receiving very high praise from some respondents.

- The quality of property code inspections within NET offices and between NET offices varies dramatically. Some inspectors are very knowledgeable, others are not. Some NCO's appear to do the minimum required in response to repeat complaints, while others are actively working with property owners to resolve issues. There are a number of NCO's who elicit complaints from property owners for being overly aggressive. Lack of consistent oversight over inspectors was an issue that was voiced repeatedly.

- In the years since NET was established, foreclosures are up and numbers of vacant properties have risen.

- With some exceptions, NET police officers are viewed as valued sources of information and assistance, especially since the 2004 reorganization of the Police Department. Residents value the fact that NET police are familiar with their neighborhoods, their primary responsibility is "quality of life" not "calls for service," and they provide training/support for PAC-TAC foot and bicycle patrols.

- Because of the heavy demand for calls for service on regular RPD officers, however, NET police can rarely count on having access to needed resources to effectively address quality of life problems, and in some areas are also frequently tapped to answer calls for

service. As a result, quality of life issues often linger, go unaddressed, or are only partially addressed.

- Many residents – and often even people within RPD – are not sure what problems NET police handle and what regular RPD officers handle, and how to route requests/calls effectively and efficiently.

- One goal of co-locating NET code enforcement and police was to enable them to work jointly, as appropriate, to address neighborhood issues such as drug houses. The concept is effective in some areas but not in others, and even within NET offices there is wide variation, as some inspectors do not work very often with officers. Residents tend to think of the civilian and police components as separate entities of NET.

- NET is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday. This schedule is not any more convenient for people who work a regular business week than the hours at City Hall. NET, like City Hall, is also closed on holidays.

- NET offices provide many people who are uncomfortable and/or afraid of dealing with City Hall or who have found it a bureaucratic place, an avenue for addressing issues in their neighborhoods and for learning about what is going on in their neighborhoods (e.g., crime patterns). This appears to be particularly true for residents who participate in active neighborhood groups.

- The City's new Certificate of Use (C of U) program – designed to eliminate small- and medium-size problem businesses – elicited especially strong response. It was labeled "illegal," "unfair," "Gestapo-like" by some, and lauded by others for preventing businesses (e.g., fronts for drug operations) from opening and also reducing the need for police officers to repeatedly respond to such operations.

- The enhanced nuisance abatement legislation adopted by City Council in 2003 was primarily designed to broaden the City's ability to target problem locations that severely affected quality of life issues in neighborhoods. However, bar/restaurant/entertainment representatives maintained the ordinance is being used by the City against them, and making it difficult for them to do business. As a result of violating the ordinance a business can be given "points" (e.g., 4 points each for a dirty sidewalk, for not having a proper fire extinguisher). NET, in conjunction with the City Law Department, can move to shut down establishments accruing 12 points in six months or 18 points in one year.

- The City's new noise ordinance was also raised as a concern, but not to the same extent as C of U or nuisance points. The major concern was that the new noise ordinance allows NET to ticket for any noise that extends past the property line after 10 p.m. If

enforced, business people said, late-night café outdoor seating areas in the City would not be in compliance as conversation can be considered noise.

- Some landlords see the City's ability to seek administrative search warrants when they or their tenants deny NET inspectors access to the property, a serious invasion of privacy and an illegal activity undertaken by the City and they vigorously urged CGR to include recommendations regarding administrative search warrants in this document. As this is a legal issue, CGR has not commented on these issues, as it was outside the scope of the report.

- Unlike the City's 24-hour customer service line (428-5990), which contacts residents to see if their complaints have been resolved, NET does not routinely do follow-up calls. As a result, many residents feel the focus within NET is on process, not resolution. Or as one person put, "if you don't get results or feedback, why have it?"

- Numerous comments were made that some staff answering phones at NET offices need more training in being "customer friendly."

- City staff raised a number of issues, including the following:

  - There is a need for NET to be involved in developing a priority listing for demolitions for the whole City.

  - There is a need to better manage vacant properties.

  - There is a need to better incorporate NBN into NET.

  - Boundary issues exist between NET and DCD building inspectors who handle new construction for which permits are issued. The main concern is there is not a clear process for enforcement, and problems can stay in limbo.

  - There is a need for a clearer understanding between NET inspectors' responsibilities and DCD's zoning inspectors' responsibilities.

  - The Fire Department can work well with NET during regular office hours regarding emergency incidents (e.g., issues related to stability of a structure, safety issues related to building condition), but says the same is not true after hours or on weekends, when NET is closed.

  - Fire Department and NET inspectors are expected to be on site for certificate of use inspections at the same time. However, under current scheduling procedures, that is not happening. As a result, business people often have two inspections, which can be frustrating to them.

- Refuse code enforcement is not consistent, since each NET area has different priorities. (Note: NET staff also noted issues related to enforcement because at times NET staff must address refuse issues with property owners for which they have no first-hand knowledge.)

- Quality of Life issues need more police focus – in terms of resources and equipment – and the chain of command over NET needs to be strengthened.

More Specifics on External Comments

The following is CGR's summary of some of the comments that were repeated most often during the external phase of our community involvement process.

NET Has Too Much "Power" and Is "Inconsistent"

- Property owners can meet with an inspector and be cited for various violations, make the required improvements, and subsequently be cited for new violations on follow-up inspection(s). This issue was repeatedly raised by property owners.

- A property owner's relationship with NET is related to who is conducting his/her inspections. Who serves as NET administrator is often another important factor. There were many comments from residents about inadequate oversight of inspectors in some NET offices, "selective" or uneven enforcement, and abuse of power by particularly aggressive inspectors. (CGR notes there were also numerous comments that inspectors within NET have been very helpful in maintaining properties in neighborhoods.)

Why is the Property Owner Always Held Accountable?

- Under City regulations, property owners – not tenants – are held accountable for code violations that are the direct result of tenant actions (e.g., holes in walls, unlicensed tenant vehicle on property).

    - As a result, some landlords do not call the police for disturbances/problems at their properties, for fear they will be cited/fined by NET for tenant-caused damage that results in their properties having code violations.

    - Numerous landlords complained that the tenant community has been conditioned by NET, though its procedures, to retaliate against a landlord or as a way to get out of paying or delay paying rent.

Nuisance Point System Makes Some Businesses Weigh Whether to Call the Police

- Some business people said they are "afraid" or "will not" call the police when there is illegal activity in or around their property out of fear that they will have nuisance points assessed against the property, potentially jeopardizing one's ability to keep the business open. One comment summarizes this concern - "I know outside pay phones are used for drugs or people are pushing drugs out of a house, but I won't complain because it will put a spotlight on me."

- Bar/restaurant/entertainment representatives agreed they "weigh" whether to call police or NET for assistance and risk getting nuisance points. They called the point system unfair because it makes a building owner responsible for the acts of tenants or customers. They said "responsible people (are) being made responsible for the irresponsible acts of others."

Prosecuting People Who Can't Afford to Do Repairs Doesn't Help the City

- There aren't adequate grant and loan programs for property owners who cannot afford to do repairs required by NET. Prosecuting such people doesn't help the City. (Note: This comment, which was made many times, was also made by NCO inspectors.)

Specific Concerns About the Certificate of Use Program

- There were property owners who complained that the C of U program puts an unfair burden on small and medium-sized businesses in the City.

Resource Issues Impact Whether Quality of Life Issues Get Addressed

- A neighborhood group produced a long list of unlicensed vehicles in its NET area that a representative said has repeatedly been submitted to the NET office. The response has been, in essence, "we can only handle so many at a time."

- Some residents complained NET is aggressive about going after "low hanging fruit" (e.g., high grass/weeds, trash/debris but, peeling paint, missing gutter) but doesn't have the tools to deal with drug houses, prostitution, and other issues of significance.

Survey Form

A copy of the survey form distributed by CGR to participants in the community involvement process is included on the following page. Responses to these forms were compiled and summarized to identify key ideas that were incorporated into this report.

NET Survey – October 2005

The Center for Governmental Research (CGR) has a contract with the City of Rochester to evaluate the NET program. Your answers will be helpful to our recommendations. (Use the back of page, if needed.)

1. **What are the top 3 problems that need to be addressed in your neighborhood?**

_____

_____

_____

2. **To what extent should the City be involved in addressing these problems?** *(Circle one)*

Low involvement 1 2 3 4 5 High involvement

3. **How would you measure the City's effectiveness in addressing these 3 problems?**

_____

_____

_____

4. **Is NET the best way to address these problems?** ___*Yes* ____ *No*
5. **If not, do you have a better suggestion?**_____

_____

_____

6. **List your top 2 expectations of NET?** _____

_____

_____

7. **If you could do 3 things to improve NET what would they be?**

_____

_____

_____

8. **What other organizations (if any) do you think should also be directly involved in solving the problems?** _____

_____

9. **Are you a landlord in Rochester?** ___*Yes* ____ *No*
10. **Do you operate a business in Rochester?** ___*Yes* ____ *No*
11. **Are you a resident of Rochester?** ___*Yes* ____ *No*
12. **Name (optional)** _____
13. **Phone (optional)** _____

Your NET office area or location _____

Section 3 – Using Data to Assess Neighborhood Changes

Overview. The Building Information System (BIS) is a major database, maintained by the City, that includes information about properties within the city. The database can be queried by different variables to produce information that is useful for managing changes happening on a property-by-property basis. Since property addresses are included in the database, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology can take individual properties and map them, based upon selected variables. These maps can then indicate changes occurring on a neighborhood by neighborhood basis. This can be particularly useful for both planning purposes and to help identify early warning indicators.

During this project, CGR learned that the City has not, as yet, used the BIS data to map out property change characteristics that could be useful for planning. Based upon questions raised during the community involvement process, CGR was interested in learning whether or not there were patterns regarding the locations of certain types of property code violations and other patterns that might suggest different ways for the City to manage its response to fighting blight.

What follows are examples of how BIS data could provide answers to questions about the impact of certain properties on neighborhoods. The maps were generated by CGR using GIS software, based upon data provided by the City from BIS.

Example 1.

QUESTION – Are vacant buildings concentrated in certain sections of the city?

RESPONSE – Using the vacant building report as of 11/17/05, CGR developed TABLE A-1, and the following MAP A-1. TABLE A-1 shows that vacant buildings in each NET area, and also shows the percentage of housing units in each NET area from the 2000 census. Although not all vacant buildings are vacant houses, this comparison is a reasonable indicator that NET areas B,C and F have a higher proportion of vacant buildings than the other areas, relative to the 2000 housing unit baseline. However, it is also important to note that a substantial number of vacant buildings are scattered throughout the entire city. A higher level of detail would show specific neighborhoods where there are clusters of vacant buildings. Thus, the city may wish to explore whether or not the policy should be to devote resources to addressing vacant structures throughout the city, or in selected neighborhoods with high concentrations.

TABLE A-1 Vacant Buildings By NET Area compared to Number of Housing Units in 2000			
Net Area	**# of Buildings**	**% of Total Vacant**	**% of Housing Units**
	Vacant 11/17/05		**2000 Census**
A	197	6.6%	12.7%
B	647	21.8%	12.2%
C	653	22.0%	18.0%
D	172	5.8%	22.2%
E	265	8.9%	12.6%
F	1033	34.8%	22.3%
Total	**2967**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

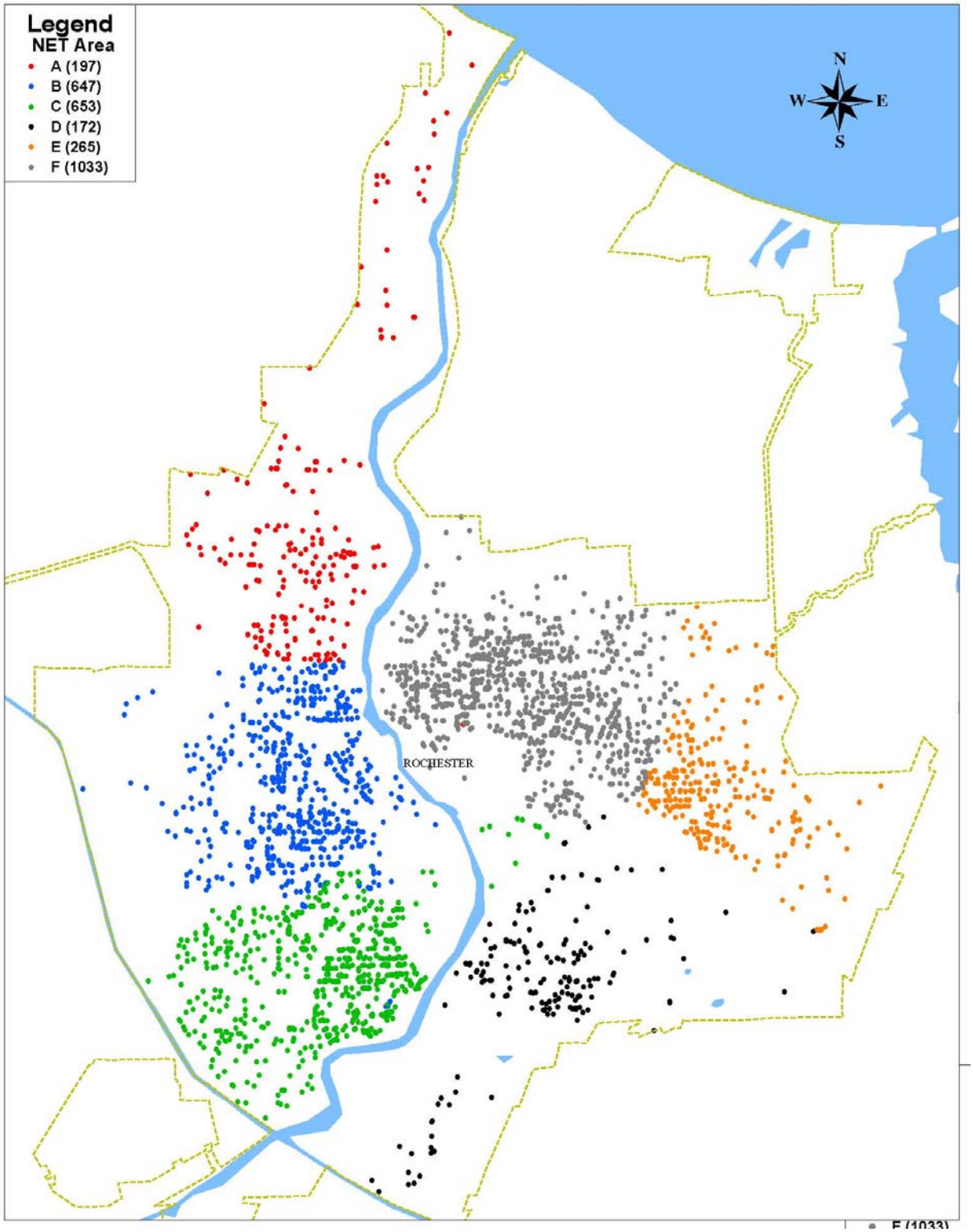
Example 2.

QUESTION – How many long-term problem properties (i.e. properties which have violations that have been in the system for at least one year) are NOT vacant buildings.

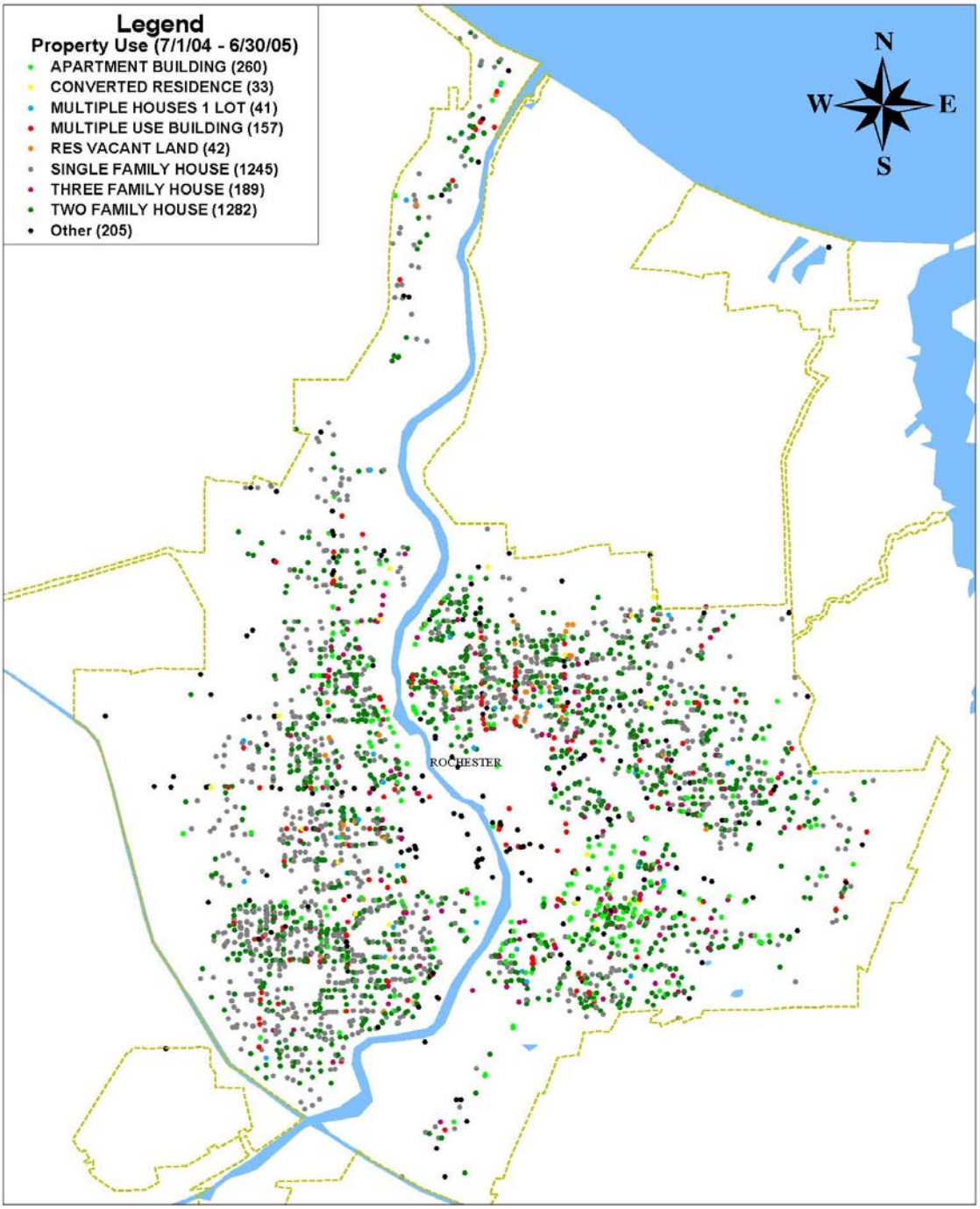
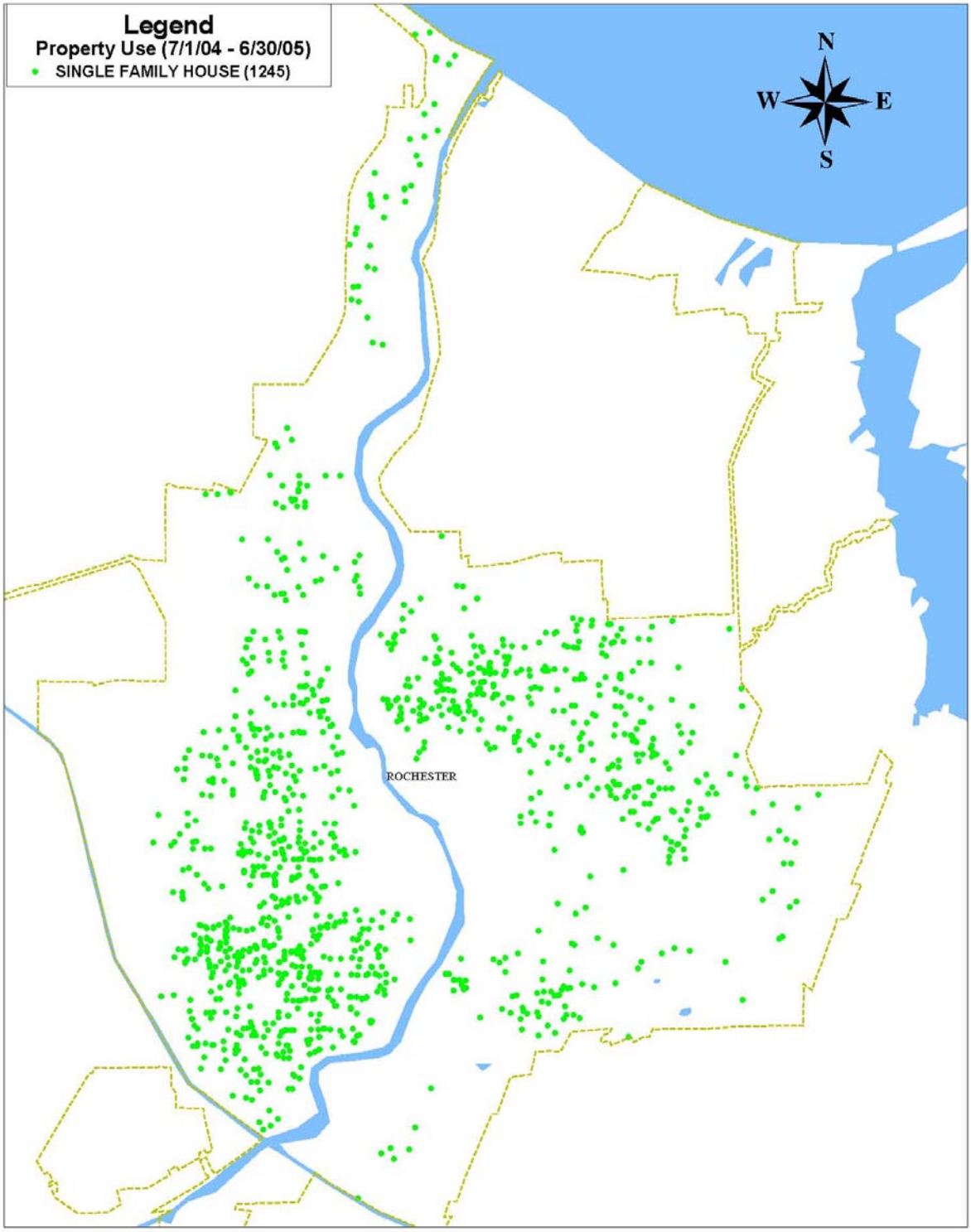
RESPONSE – CGR used the BIS data for properties that had open cases on July 1, 2004 and were still open on June 30, 2005 (i.e. the cases had been in the system for at least one year), and called these "long-term problem properties". Several respondents stated the assumption that most of the "long-term" problem properties are vacant buildings. CGR compared the 11/19/05 vacant property list to the long-term problem list, and dropped out those properties that were both vacant and long term. The result was MAP A-2. This shows that there were 3,454 buildings located throughout the city that have been long-term problem properties and are not vacant. Perhaps most striking about MAP A-2 is that these properties are distributed throughout the city. This type of analysis could help the city identify what neighborhoods need to be targeted in order to protect those neighborhoods from declining.

MAP A-3, which is a subset of MAP A-2, shows the location of just single family houses that are NOT vacant but have been long-term problem properties. MAP A-3 shows that the 1,245 houses are spread throughout the city. Since single family housing stock is crucial to the viability of city neighborhoods, this map indicates where the city may need to target resources to ensure that these long-term problem properties do not become vacant structures and contribute to neighborhood decline.

MAP A-1
Location of Vacant Properties as of 11/17/05



MAP A-2
Location of Long-Term Problem Properties That Are Not Vacant Buildings



MAP A-3
Location of Long-Term Problem Single Family Houses That Are Not Vacant Buildings