

# METLIFE FOUNDATION COMMUNITY-POLICE PARTNERSHIP AWARD WINNER

## Orchard Gardens/ Commons Public Safety Committee

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

### LEAD PARTNERS

Madison Park Development Corporation

Boston Police Department

Orchard Gardens/Commons Public Safety Committee



*Madison Park Development Corporation's renovation of the Orchard developments created quality affordable housing, kept safe by strong community-police partnerships.*

In 2003, Edna Bynoe, the president of the Orchard Tenants Association, and Madison Park Development Corporation community organizer Luz Colón convened a meeting of residents from Orchard Gardens and Orchard Commons, adjoining housing developments in the Roxbury district of Boston. They invited officers and sergeants from the local police precinct. They knocked on doors throughout the development, urging residents to come.

After several years of declining crime during the late 1990s, new data at the time showed that assaults, burglaries and other violent crime in the area were increasing. “Orchard,” as the two developments were collectively known, had for decades held a reputation as one of the most crime-ridden and troubled areas of Boston. Turf wars among young people carved up the neighborhood into warring factions: Young people who lived in Orchard would often face serious problems if they simply walked down neighboring streets due to turf and gang issues. The developments were not immune to Roxbury’s gang violence problems, and there were houses there that were devoted to drug use and to prostitution.

A contributing factor to the increase in local crime was a deep spirit of distrust between Orchard residents and law enforcement. But today, that has changed remarkably. The combined organizing efforts of the Orchard Tenants Association and the Madison Park Development Corporation—growing from that initial community meeting in 2003—helped set in motion a movement that has led to an improved spirit of cooperation between the neighborhood’s residents and the local Boston Police Department precinct—as well as major improvements in safety. Madison Park has also made a particular effort to forge personal connections between the police department

## LEAD PARTNER FAST FACTS

### Madison Park Development Corporation

Established in 1966

Development history:

- ▶ 113 homeownership units
- ▶ 1,173 rental units
- ▶ 125 units of student housing
- ▶ 85,000 square feet of commercial space in formerly vacant buildings

Notable programs and activities:

- ▶ Roxbury Art Series
- ▶ Dudley Pride Coalition
- ▶ Intergenerational community garden
- ▶ Lower Roxbury Youth Collaborative

### Boston Police Department

Commissioner: Edward Davis

Approximate number of sworn officers: 2010

Special initiatives in District B-2:

- ▶ Community-Based Juvenile Justice Project
- ▶ Safe Streets Team/Bike Patrols

and the community's youth. Their successes offer useful lessons to other communities struggling to deal with entrenched crime and poor community-police relations.

## ROXBURY BURNING

The history of Roxbury, Boston, shares aspects of the stories of a number of other urban American neighborhoods that have fallen victim to the downward spiral of crime and disinvestment. The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. led to riots in the neighborhood that vandalized and ultimately chased away many local businesses. A rash of arsons in the following decade—followed by the crack epidemic of the 1980s—continued to damage both the community's physical infrastructure and the residents' sense of safety. Today, the



*Edna Bynoe, neighborhood leader and president of the Orchard Gardens/ Commons Public Safety Committee, was commended by Mayor Menino and Police Commissioner Davis at the MetLife Foundation Award ceremony.*

community is predominantly low-income. Approximately 65% of residents are African-American and 25% are Latino.

Madison Park's history in the neighborhood dates to the late 1960s. The organization hoped to foster a "social, physical, economic, and cultural renaissance" in Roxbury. With a resident-led board, Madison Park has grown into one of the most productive community development corporations in Boston, developing to date more than 110 affordable homes and nearly 1,200 rental units for low- and moderate-income families. Other economic development activities include creating commercial space to attract new business activity, and supporting local arts and youth programs.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to Madison Park's hopes for Roxbury in the early '90s was Orchard Park Housing, drab brick high-rises that came to be seen as the city's most blighted public housing project. "Orchard was the place everyone from the suburbs went to get drugs," says Jeanne Pinado, the executive director of Madison Park Development Corporation. In 1996, Madison Park partnered with Trinity Financial to demolish most of the buildings of Orchard Park and replace them with low-rise, affordable townhouses.

The neighborhood was thoroughly redesigned, avoiding past design failures of public housing. The roads were rerouted to

make them through-streets instead of dead ends. The low-rise townhouses had both front and back yards. They replaced the high-rise barracks with their long, dark hallways and shared entrances—a physical environment that had been conducive to criminal activity. Madison Park was able to complete the rebuilding of the neighborhood with the help of a \$35 million grant through HOPE VI, a Clinton-era program administered through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The work had the aim of fostering an “eyes on the street” approach to community-building and public safety.

The Boston Police Department and Boston Housing Authority Public Safety Department collaborated with Madison Park and Trinity Financial in this process, particularly in securing the HOPE VI resources. The property management company hired to manage Orchard Gardens also had a close working relationship with these agencies, and crime prevention and public safety were high priorities in its approach to the project.

The rehabilitation coincided initially with remarkable improvements in crime. Comparing 1995 to 2000, aggravated assault at Orchard Gardens dropped by half. Burglary was six times less common. Assault was down by two-thirds. There were 73 drug violations in Orchard Gardens in 1995; in 2000, there were four. President Bill Clinton visited Orchard in 2000 to herald the neighborhood’s turnaround.

Yet the crime statistics that emerged in 2002 and 2003 were disconcerting to Madison Park and Orchard’s residents. Assault was creeping up again. There were increasing weapons violations.

Some of the reasons for these increases were easy to pinpoint. For one, gang members who had once lived in the Orchard projects before the renovation were being released from prison and returning to illegal activity in the area. Yet there were also more entrenched problems. Most notably, there seemed to be a deep reluctance among residents to report crimes if they witnessed them. Some of the youth in the neighborhood wore T-



*Madison Park and its property management company considered crime prevention and safe design during and after the Orchard Gardens renovation.*

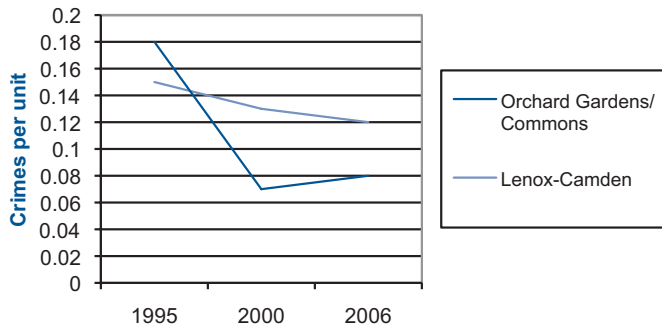
shirts that said “Don’t snitch,” and the older residents seemed fearful of reporting crimes because of the danger of retribution. A culture of fear and resentment had set in. The police were not perceived as allies.

*Madison Park realized they needed to have a comprehensive approach that would grow the level of trust between the community and the police.*

“There were shootings, and people wouldn’t call anybody, even if they saw it,” says Edna Bynoe, 67, a long-time Orchard resident and President of the Orchard Tenants Association.

Madison Park realized they needed to have a comprehensive approach that would grow the level of trust between the com-

### Part I Crime in Orchard vs. Comparison Area



*Orchard Gardens/ Commons public safety partners have largely maintained the reduced crime rates achieved after the redevelopment. Crime at a nearby public housing development has remained high by comparison.*

munity and the police. They also came to recognize that the success of the community safety work was essential for the organization’s economic development ambitions. By the end of 2003, Madison Park’s real estate development and management portfolio accounted for half of the organization’s entire budget. The group controlled roughly 75,000 feet of commercial space, including the Woolworth building on Washington Street, which required a \$7.8 million renovation that was completed in 2001. Madison Park’s ability to attract small businesses to pay rent in their commercial spaces was dependent in no small part on the perception of safety in Orchard.

Faced with these challenges, Madison Park’s Community Action Team set to work.

## BUILDING TRUST

Residents who attended the initial 2003 community meeting with the police aired a broad array of concerns. They said they were afraid of calling 911; the police would show up at the caller’s door, they said, instead of where the incident was happening (making the caller a target for retaliation). Residents said that they had heard a lot of political promises in the past, but that nothing was ever done. They felt also that when the police did react to crimes, they would not react in a timely way.

“We weren’t perfect,” says Captain Paul Russell, commander of the local B-2 precinct. “We recognized that there was a fear

of people wanting to get involved with us, a fear of calling 911.” Russell said that the department had trouble building relationships in Orchard because the B-2 precinct was the busiest in the city. By necessity, they fell into a reactionary mode of responding to crime instead of being able to uproot the conditions that gave rise to it.

Recognizing that the community clearly had come to distrust promises, Colón and the representatives of Madison Park were careful not to overreach in offering solutions. They only committed to form a new public safety committee composed of residents as well as community partners. It was decided that the group would meet monthly and would try to tackle projects that were tangible and doable. “We didn’t promise people that we were going to do anything,” says Colón. “For one, we didn’t have the funding to do it, and secondly, our main goal was engaging residents to take over their communities.”



*Madison Park and its partners used HOPE VI funds to transform the Orchard Park highrises into attractive and affordable townhouses, improving neighborhood safety in the process.*



*The work of the Public Safety Committee was critical to building trust between residents and police and resolving crime problems.*

The committee would transform the existing public safety task force into a larger body that would incorporate more residents and partners. Members of the new committee began to schedule regular walk-throughs of the neighborhood with a police captain, providing residents a chance to discretely point out areas of crime and prostitution. “There are 20 or 30 of us on the public safety committee,” says Edna Bynoe, a member.

“They are all over the development, and not just in one section of the development.” This geographical dispersion meant that there were eyes on the street throughout Orchard, and not just in one part of it.

One of the first issues that the committee sought to tackle was the reluctance of the residents to call 911. The police shared with Madison Park that their own resources were ultimately allocated depending on the number of 911 calls from a particular area. Orchard wasn’t receiving as many 911 calls as it should for its level of crime. “You have to call 911 if you want us here,” a police officer told the committee.

To try to overcome the residents’ fear of retaliation, the committee decided to establish a “phone tree.” When a member of the committee witnessed or was made aware of a crime, they

would call other members of the committee, and then several residents would call 911 at the same time. Or, alternatively, residents could call police officers directly or the building management office, which would then call 911. The tactic appeared to work. The committee received monthly police reports on the neighborhood. As many as twenty 911 calls were placed each month after the phone tree began, whereas before there had been hardly any.

The committee also established some ground rules for the meetings to ensure confidentiality and respect. If people did not want to raise a problem out loud, they could write in on a piece of paper and hand it in unsigned at the end of the meeting. A member of the committee could then share the information anonymously with the rest of the members and with the police.

As a goodwill gesture, Officer Al Montgomery also decided to give out his cell phone number to the committee and to residents. He encouraged them to call him directly if they were hesitant to call 911. Other officers followed Officer Montgomery’s lead. These steps began to establish greater faith and cooperation between the community and the police.

The police knew that fostering trust among the community's youth would be an even harder challenge. A hostile mentality toward law enforcement had taken root; it was an atmosphere enflamed by the neighborhood's gang members and crimi-

*“Police officers can be very intimidating to kids and adults,” says Madison Park’s Jeanne Pinado. “It’s nice to break that down.”*

nal elements. Turf issues were also a real and present danger. “There are clear lines that kids know not to cross,” says Harry Smith, who works with Madison Park on the Community Action Team.

The committee thought that one way to increase respect was to get the police involved in kids’ lives in a more supportive, rather than disciplinary, role. To that end, committee members reached out to Officer Cornell Patterson, a master black belt in martial arts. At the beginning of 2004, Madison Park partnered with him to give free karate classes to kids in the local community center. Many youth in the neighborhood had complained of being bullied and had no recourse before to defend themselves. The classes were held on Saturday mornings, at times when young people would otherwise be unsupervised. Kids also crossed turf lines to attend. By 2006, about 60 young people were enrolled in the program.

They also partnered with Captain James Hasson to create a “Youth Day” in the neighborhood. The police would bring their horses and K9 units. Officer Bill Baxter would lead a skit with young people; another officer would lead the kids in musical chairs; and another would serve as the master of ceremonies. The police set up a dunk tank, where kids could sink officers into cold water if they hit a target. “Police officers can be very intimidating to kids and adults,” says Madison Park’s Jeanne Pinado. “It’s nice to break that down.”

Committee members and Madison Park also committed considerable resources to National Night Out to celebrate an eve-



*Officers in Boston Police District B-2 have worked hard to build trusting, cordial relations with local youth.*

ning block party, as well as a program to encourage residents to turn on all their porch lights to create a sense of safety. Over 400 residents came to the National Night Out event last year—in some cases crossing turf lines. The New England Aquarium brought a portable exhibit, and there were activities that allowed residents to create tie-dye shirts, compete in basketball or dance contests and participate in cookouts.

In July of 2008, a tragedy struck the neighborhood that paradoxically may have done a great deal to bring the police department and the community’s youth together. A young leader in the neighborhood was shot and killed on Whittier Street. The 18-year-old young man was involved in one of Madison Park’s after-school computer programs and he was considered a leader among his peers. Officer Kenny Grubbs, recognizing that the kids from the computer lab were grieving, arranged an all-expenses paid trip to Six Flags for them. He also planned

*Improved trust between the police department and Orchard’s residents has, in turn, led to improved information-sharing and crime-solving.*

trips for them to the movies and helped organize a baseball championship that allowed for friendly competition between the police and the community's young people.

The police department's sympathetic involvement in the community-wide process of healing has helped to cultivate a new spirit of mutual understanding. "The public safety committee has been a tremendous asset," says Captain Russell. "Communication with the residents is the biggest thing in our work, and it is a lot easier said than done."

## TEAMWORK

Improved trust between the police department and Orchard's residents has, in turn, led to improved information-sharing and crime-solving. The police recall in particular an incident in 2006. A drive-by shooting occurred shortly after a ceremony marking the renovation of a community ballpark paid for in part by the Boston Red Sox.

Immediately after the shooting, an Orchard resident called the police and provided a description of the car and its occupants. An officer helping to direct traffic around a construction project in nearby Dudley Square heard the call go out over the radio. Soon after, he noticed a car stuck in line that matched the description. He walked casually over and was immediately able to make arrests. "If you can get information to the police, they can do their jobs," says Pinado. "In the past, people wouldn't have called right away."

The community's input through the public safety committee has also helped the police adjust their tactics. One issue that Orchard residents had repeatedly raised was that police cars were often parked in their neighborhood, but it was rare that the police officers themselves were accessible and visible. Orchard Gardens subsequently became one of the first Boston neighborhoods to get a "Safe Street Team"—a bicycle patrol of 17 officers—beginning in August of 2007.

The Safe Street Teams were made possible by Edward F. Davis, who took over as commissioner of the Boston Police Depart-

ment in late 2006. Davis brought a new commitment to community policing. The teams were an extension of his work as a commissioner in Lowell, where he tried to make the police more visible and accessible in that city's diverse ethnic communities, and had gained the trust of residents there. Orchard's team has allowed residents to know their officers by name, and has improved information-sharing. Sgt. Joseph Horton, supervisor of the Orchard team, says he has given residents his cell phone number and they call him even on his nights off. The police see this approach as having contributed to dramatic drops in certain types of crime since their deployment in August of 2007. Housebreaks in Orchard are down by half, and car robberies have been cut in third from their former levels.

The community has also benefited from a particularly close relationship between the local precinct and Luz Colón. In 2005, the Boston Police Department awarded her the title of "Crime Fighter of the Year" for her work in organizing the public safety committee and facilitating the self-defense classes. "She is an incredible woman," says Captain Russell. "She just cares. Through her work, residents are stepping forward."

Captain James Hasson, Russell's predecessor, had such respect for the public safety committee that he began to advocate for



*A Boston Police Safe Streets team helped strengthen alliances between residents and police officers who worked together to improve the neighborhood.*

them during the Boston Strategic Multi-Agency Response Team meetings, or “B-Smart,” an initiative launched in 2005 that brings together representatives of the police and multiple other city services to a common meeting. His relationships and the visibility of the committee’s work have ensured that damage to the community’s infrastructure is not left untended; broken streetlights are promptly fixed and repairs made promptly. The committee’s voice at the B-Smart meetings has also led in some cases to investment opportunities: the local housing authority, for instance, committed at the committee’s request to mowing an empty lot full of weeds that was a haven for drug dealers and crime in the neighborhood. Madison Park subsequently bought the lot, and is now developing twenty subsidized houses for home ownership there. They will be the first non-rental units in Orchard.

## MAKING WAY FOR INVESTMENT

Madison Park’s ability to carry out its larger mission of economic development in the neighborhood has been supported in other ways by the work of the public safety committee. Harry Smith points out that there have been examples where the improved information-sharing between Madison Park and the precinct has allowed rehabilitation projects to take root.

A former crack house on Orchard’s Zeigler Street is an example. In 2006, a resident who attended the community safety committee meetings came to a meeting and said, “Listen, I can’t deal with this any more. There’s no bathroom so they’re going to the bathroom outside. There’s prostitution and there’s drugs.” The information was relayed to Captain Hasson, who subsequently went into the house and was able to cite various violations not only of the law but also of building safety codes. The Police Department contacted the city and began a process whereby the building was rehabilitated by Pine Street Inn, a non-profit organization that provides support and transition housing to homeless individuals.

An apartment building on Ruggles Street that was known as a haven for drug dealers became a similar success story. Madison Park knew that its landlord and its residents were being provided rent support by the U.S. Department of Housing and



*Jeanne Pinado, director of Madison Park Development Corporation, noted the importance of public safety organizing to the success of economic development around Orchard.*

Urban Development’s Section 8 program. Captain Al Goslin offered to provide historical crime data for the property to Madison Park; they were able to use this data to lobby HUD to withhold financing from the landlord. With HUD’s support, Madison Park was then successful in convincing the owner to sell the property to them. The building has since been renovated and rid of illegal activity, yielding 43 quality affordable housing units. Ninety percent of the units are rented to families making less than 30% of Boston’s median income.

“No one gives you money to do public safety organizing,” says Jeanne Pinado. Yet the collaboration that made these Madison Park projects possible would likely not have happened without the groundwork of the public safety committee.

The best objective measure of Orchard’s success may be to compare its crime statistics to the nearby public housing development of Lenox-Camden. The number of crimes per unit has risen 3% there since 1995, while they have decreased overall by 18% at Orchard. Since the public safety committee became active, rape and attempted rape is down in the target area by 40%, vehicle theft by 29%, burglary by 24% and aggravated assaults by 25%.



*The successes at Orchard indicate how community policing might work at its best. “There is a new spirit of collaboration and coordination in the neighborhood,” says Sharon Russell-Mack, the property manager for Orchard, and a long-time resident.*

“I think the committee has made the community safer, and has done their job in making the community clean,” says Colón, “and the opportunity was then open for Madison Park to come in and do something.”

## A NEW SPIRIT

The successes at Orchard indicate how community policing might work at its best. “There is a new spirit of collaboration and coordination in the neighborhood,” says Sharon Russell-Mack, the property manager for Orchard, and a long-time resident. “It has brought a sense of ownership to this community, with people taking responsibility for the community as a whole.” Ms. Russell-Mack says that though greater Roxbury still struggles with crime, some of the positive developments in Orchard have nonetheless extended past the neighborhood’s borders, spilling over onto Dudley Street and toward the South End.

For police departments, Orchard’s success suggests that cultivating friendly personal relationships within a community can go much further than simple law enforcement.

There is some apprehension among the residents that funding cuts from the city government could affect the community-policing model established in Orchard, especially since this approach has so far served them well. Robberies, housebreaks, and overall crime are down significantly over the last year. Overall, reports of assault are half what they were in 1995; drug violations are almost a fifth of their former levels. Real problems still exist in the neighborhood, and Roxbury as a whole still struggles with gang warfare and violent crime. But the spirit of the residents in Orchard trends toward hope.

“It’s so much better,” says Edna Bynoe, who has lived in the neighborhood for four decades. “Building trust was the first step.”

## PARTNERSHIP INFORMATION

### WINNING PROGRAM

Orchard Gardens/Commons Public Safety Committee

### APPLICANTS

Madison Park Development Corporation  
Boston Police Department

### INCEPTION DATE

2003

### KEY PARTNERS

Orchard Gardens Residents Association  
Orchard Commons Residents  
Maloney Properties Resident Services Department  
Boston Housing Authority  
Security Services, Inc.  
Vine Street and Orchard Community Centers  
Project HIP-HOP

### FUNDERS

Roxbury Trust Fund  
Boston After School & Beyond

### PRIMARY POLICE CONTACTS

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*Photos courtesy of: Madison Park Development Corporation*



## MetLife Foundation

### LOCAL INITIATIVES SUPPORT CORPORATION – COMMUNITY SAFETY INITIATIVE

LISC is the nation's leading community development support organization. Since 1980, LISC has helped resident-led, community-based development organizations transform distressed communities and neighborhoods into healthy ones – good places to live, do business, work and raise families. By providing capital, technical expertise, training and information, LISC supports the development of local leadership and the creation of affordable housing, commercial, industrial and community facilities, businesses and jobs. LISC established the Community Safety Initiative in 1994 to support strategic alliances between community developers, law enforcement and other key stakeholders in troubled neighborhoods. The partners' work creates strong, stable and healthy communities by reducing persistent crime and disorder and spurring economic investment.

### METLIFE FOUNDATION

MetLife Foundation, established by MetLife in 1976, is a long-time supporter of LISC's community revitalization programs. In 1994, the Foundation made a \$1 million leadership grant to pilot the Community Safety Initiative. MetLife and the Foundation have also made below-market rate loans and grants of more than \$76 million to the organization. For more information about the Foundation, visit [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).

### COMMUNITY SAFETY PAPER SERIES

This publication is part of a series published by LISC's Community Safety Initiative as part of the MetLife Foundation Community-Police Partnership Awards program. Sponsored by MetLife Foundation since 2002, the Awards celebrate and promote exemplary community safety strategies bolstered by collaboration between police and neighborhood leaders. For other case studies and papers in this series, please visit [www.lisc.org/resources](http://www.lisc.org/resources).

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