



Uniting community members to transform our neighborhoods is at the heart of what we do.

Vol. 77
Jan. 1, 2025

<https://ccc-cultivatingcommunityconnections.net>

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Please visit our web site at:

<https://ccc-cultivatingcommunityconnections.net>

Contact Us At:

CultivatingCommunityConn@gmail.com

Happy New Year!

Our History

Cultivating Community Connections (CCC) was formed in 2017 with the goal of strengthening communities. Since 2017, we discovered that the best way to utilize the talents of our members in pursuit of our goal was to concentrate the majority of our efforts on Prince George's County. The lessons we learned in that one county, we continued to share so that our work could be applied by CCC members of all communities.

Our Successes

Our biggest successes came from forming an advocacy group made up of community leaders from 10 different communities in northern Prince George's County. This advocacy group is called **Movers and Shakers**. The Movers and Shakers have met with elected officials and agency heads seeking to partner in finding solutions to problems and highlighting areas of concern for County residents. By working with other community leaders, we have forged strong bonds that open the lines of communication. These bonds allow us to gather information about challenges that all of our communities share and better communicate with officials about the depth and breadth of issues. Our successes have included: stopping a significant loss of revenue due to unreported new development construction, working on environmental concerns, and informing community members about remedies when community concerns go unaddressed.

Our On-Going Work

Both CCC and Movers and Shakers continue to work hard to improve County services. While there have been some improvements, and we have established a good working relationship with many key County personnel, there continues to be several areas where progress is frustratingly slow. For example, Movers and Shakers had multiple meetings with 3-1-1 and Code Enforcement. Currently, when residents report issues to 3-1-1 that get directed to Code Enforcement (Dept. of Permitting Inspection and Enforcement- DPIE) there has been an improvement in speed, but not in the actual enforcement or follow-through. **So, Movers and Shakers is going to take a new route towards finding solutions, while simultaneously expanding our membership and formalizing the relationship between Cultivating Community Connections and M&S.**

Our Plan

For the last few years, Movers and Shakers has worked with DPIE to examine the data the agency collects. We have also had numerous meetings with DPIE, County elected officials, and 3-1-1 agency leadership to discuss findings and seek solutions.

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What Do You Think?

Cultivating Community Connections would like to know about the people in your community that are making a difference. Tell us who they are and what they are doing. Email us at:

CultivatingCommunityConn@gmail.com

Our Leadership Team

Carol Jenkins- founder

Jeff Jenkins- co-founder

Melissa Daston- *Movers and Shakers* past president

Carol Relitz- web administrator

Thank you for supporting CCC's efforts to strengthen communities.

We have asked for more complete data, particularly looking for information beyond what percentage of cases are closed in a 30 day time frame. It appears that meaningful metrics of how progress on cases reported to 3-1-1 are being addressed is not being collected. It is entirely possible that what would be meaningful in the eyes of the public and what is meaningful in the eyes of the agency are two different things. Therefore, Movers and Shakers' plan is to develop their own metrics and roll out a pilot program to test and fine-tune those metrics. **We will build on our most successful strategy- forging relationships between community members that are already working to address a specific issue.** In the case of residential properties that have significant maintenance issues or other on-going code violations, our plan is to utilize CCC's on-line resources to build a data base and feedback system that measures the quality of customer communication and agency responsiveness.

All communities are aware that one abandoned property, one dilapidated home; brings down the property value for the surrounding neighborhood. The Department of Permitting, Inspections, and Enforcement (DPIE) advertises that properties that are in disrepair should be reported to 3-1-1. In many of our communities, there is a single person who does the bulk of the 3-1-1 reports. Currently, each of these reporting community members has their own record keeping system and their own method of dealing (or not dealing) with unresolved issues. Our plan would: 1) connect these people to each other, 2) use a consistent method of record keeping, and 3) combine community members' efforts to advocate for improved outcomes.

An Example to Illustrate the Problem

In one quiet residential neighborhood, on a cul-de-sac, there is an abandoned single-family home. Multiple reports have been filed to 3-1-1 going back at least 5 years. According to pgatlas.com, the owner of the home lives in another state, about 600 miles away. It is also easy to find additional information on-line that logically leads to the conclusion that the property owner is elderly and living with a younger relative. The home was last reported to 3-1-1 at the beginning of August 2024. The information about the owner was given with the report and the report also stated that there were numerous notifications of violations already posted on the front door. Clearly, no one has gone in or out of that front door in a very long time.

As of now, the only feedback to the reporting community member from 3-1-1 or DPIE has been the word "Inspection" on the on-line official record. There have been at least 3 new, colorful violation notices added to the collection on the front door. The local council member's Constituent Services Liaison was contacted and has been a big help in providing updates. Another member of Movers and Shakers has asked several people in DPIE to look into the situation. Based on information provided from the wonderful liaison, there is reason to believe some referrals for abatement have been made, but no information has been provided to the original complaint. **When there is no notification, no updates to the record, a community member assumes that nothing is being done. The negative perception about agency responsiveness spreads throughout the neighborhood and beyond.**

Lost Revenue

While this is just one home, the issues of long-standing property disrepair and lack of communication are not isolated cases. These problems damage the reputation of the County. (Continued on page 3)

This perceived inaction is why one realtor tells clients not to purchase a home in Prince George's County. Potential revenue is lost when tax payers are directed away from our County or those homes that are bought are devalued because of an abandoned property.

New Year, New Perspectives

Cultivating Community Connections is fortunate to have talented and dedicated members who have expertise in many areas: web management, marketing, project management, data analysis, advocacy, just to name a few. All of these skills will enable CCC to guide and distribute the critically important work of Movers and Shakers. Where the two groups have previously worked independently, their efforts will become much more collaborative. Specifics about the structure of that collaboration will emerge, as necessary, to meet our new perspective- leading the way with generating constituent-based data.

From the perspective of constituents who currently utilize 3-1-1 reporting and the limited publicly reported agency performance data, it appears that DPIE measures departmental effectiveness by a Key Performance Indicator (KPI).

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/key-performance-metrics> Specifically, what is reported is how quickly a case is closed. Having this narrow focus leads inspectors to close cases quickly. This results in not taking the time to fully investigate or communicate with the resident that filed the complaint. It also leads to a lack of institutional motivation to push forward on cases that are difficult and therefore time-consuming.

What we feel would be more useful is to track performance metrics. According to Indeed Career Guide, "Performance metrics aid in implementing strategies for meeting objectives across all aspects of an organization. Tracking performance metrics can drive planning for improvements, adjustments and changes to a business's processes to meet goals."

Here are some performance metrics that would better serve residents, and increase collection of fines, which would ultimately increase County revenues:

- Provide the report-filing party with specific routing, i.e. agency, department, name of inspector, etc.
- Utilize automated updates to inform reporting party of rerouting to higher authority, follow-up inspection, referral to legal action, etc. (Note: Some referrals require the action be done confidentially. If this is the case a simple statement can be made, i.e. "Action has been taken- details are confidential.")
- Utilize automated notification to agency requiring that the on-line record be updated.
- Create a better survey of customer satisfaction and consider motivational action to increase percentage of customers responding to the survey.

We realize that what CCC and Movers and Shakers is asking is a tall order. The likelihood of the agencies and County leadership carrying out these changes at our request is not good. **However, if CCC and Movers and Shakers can create and implement better tools while simultaneously uniting more community members around the improved systems, we stand a much better chance of getting institutional up-grades and better service for all community members.**

If you wish to become a reporting party for 3-1-1 issues in your neighborhood, please contact us at: CultivatingCommunityConn@gmail.com

Please check our web site for future newsletters
and other updates:

<https://ccc-cultivatingcommunityconnections.net>