Vallejo’s Neighborhood Law Program is a
two year pilot project, funded by Measure B funds, which will put attorneys on the streets of Vallejo to
tackle the blight and nuisance conditions affecting the quality of life of Vallejo residents. Working
collaboratively with the Police Department, Code Enforcement, Building Department, and bringing
multiple City resources to tackle problems one by one in order of priority will ensure that Neighborhood
Law attorneys have the resources to effectively address the most blighted properties and the worst
nuisance offenders affecting Vallejo’s neighborhoods.

The following is a draft implementation time line for the Neighborhood Law Program (NLP):

- By June 30, 2012 City Council approved the NLP Budget
- By July 30, 2012 Post draft NLP announcements at local law schools
- By August 30, 2012 Posted NLP description and Draft Announcements on City of Vallejo website.
- By September 30, 2012 Seek approval from Civil Service Commission for NLP Attorney Classifications. (Currently scheduled or Monday, September 24th, 2012)
- By October 30, 2012 Seek City Council for approval of salary schedules for positions, finish City Attorney’s Office floor plan changes to accommodate new staffing. (Currently scheduled for October 9th, 2012.)
- By November 30, 2012 Finalize interest list for NLP Attorney, determine finalists.
- December 1, 2012 – March 1, 2013 Contact applicants, issue offers and conditional offers.
- January 1, 2013- March 1-2013 Kick off NLP

The NLP Program

Vallejo’s Neighborhood Law Program is modeled after the City of Oakland’s Neighborhood Law Corps
or NLC program. Created by Oakland City Attorney John Russo in 2002, the NLC is a unique,
innovative community lawyering program. It is best described as “Legal Aid meets the Peace Corps. The program has been tremendously successful, effectively improving conditions in Oakland neighborhoods. Numerous families have been relieved of the burden of living with nuisance liquor stores that attract drugs and violence adjacent to residential areas. The NLC’s lawyers have closed drug houses and prosecuted hotels and motels that act as magnets and havens of prostitution, including child prostitution. The foreclosure crisis, they played a major role in Oakland’s efforts to protect tenants in foreclosed buildings. In Vallejo, the Neighborhood Law Program will help create synergy among the City’s various departments and with the community, driving a collaborative approach to address the worst nuisance conditions on a case-by-case basis. Neighborhood Law Program lawyers will have marching orders to meet with community groups, and affected City Departments to identify those properties that contain the worst nuisance conditions in the City of Vallejo. Then, working with Police, Code Enforcement, Public Works and Building Departments, the attorneys will implement effective remedies to abate the nuisance conditions, up to and including legal action.

NLP Attorneys

The City of Vallejo seeks newly licensed attorneys who have a demonstrated commitment to the public interest for two positions as Neighborhood Law Attorneys. Law School graduates awaiting their Bar results will be considered and may be issued conditional offers.

NLP attorneys will be accessible, motivated and unafraid to roll up their sleeves, and must make a commitment for a period of two years. Under the supervision of the Vallejo City Attorney, these attorneys will be responsible for meeting with community organizations, Police and Code Enforcement staff and elected officials to create a list of nuisance properties negatively impacting the community, prioritizing them.

NLP Attorneys will bridge the gap between Vallejo residents and City Hall, listening and identifying concerns that impact entire neighborhoods, prioritizing problems and devising creative solutions to neighborhood nuisances.

A word about local ordinances

In recent years, deferred maintenance of problematic nuisance properties has resulted in a somewhat tacit acceptance of unkempt and abandoned properties. Efforts to address nuisance conditions in the City of Vallejo have focused on entertaining legislation, with special attention to the diverse opinions of Vallejo’s residents.

However, due to recent current economic conditions, Vallejo has often not had sufficient resources to take full advantage of the impact of enforcing its own local Vallejo Municipal Code, much less engage in the time intensive process of considering new legislation. Even if new legislation could be quickly or easily adopted, the City would remain confronted with reduced enforcement and public safety resources available to enforce those ordinances. Through the NLP, Vallejo will focus on ‘action’ rather than relying completely on new ‘legislation’.
Judicious Legal Action

Should we wait to address issues which bring down the quality of life in our community until such a time when public safety resources are increased? Though public safety resources are and always will be a necessary component of the Neighborhood Law Program, they are not the only, or even the main component. From a legal perspective, public safety resources are necessary to investigate and document criminal activity and nuisance conditions. After investigation and documentation, attorneys will select the most effective legal remedy. Thereafter, public safety resources will only be required as necessary to offer evidence in a declaration or as a witness in a court proceeding.

It should be noted that even if the policy decision were made to invest ‘all’ available resources into public safety, which would certainly help achieve a higher level of enforcement and policing, no solution to the more severe nuisance related problems that plague our community would be achieved. Policing neighborhoods can only achieve so much. Sometimes judicial intervention is necessary.

After the City of Vallejo filed for Bankruptcy and police staffing levels were reduced, some Vallejo residents unwillingly resigned themselves to accepting high levels of crime or blight in their neighborhood, believing that there were no resources to resolve the nuisance issues, thinking to themselves that ‘that’s just the way it is’. Thankfully, many residents have refused to accept such a fate, and have organized themselves into various neighborhood and community groups, coming to Council meetings, demanding solutions in Vallejo’s time-honored tradition of community involvement and participation. Like these indomitable residents, lawyers in the NLP will not accept that’s ‘just the way it is’. NLP attorneys will aid and work with residents, building and developing an already existing ethic within Vallejo of community participation and activism to bring about solutions to problems. They will serve as the link between the residents and City Hall, and will identify the resources needed to resolve problems.

A solution oriented approach ... The Neighborhood Law Program offers an actual solution to identified severe nuisance conditions in our community.

Vallejo’s Neighborhood Law Program will involve the lawyers in grass-roots community organizing to identify and resolve problems caused by blight, criminal nuisance and related issues. Attendance at community meetings, and establishing relationships with community residents and organizations such as the various Neighborhood Watch programs, local neighborhood associations, CCRC, Fighting Back and the Vallejo Alcohol and Tobacco Coalition. Community involvement will be crucial to identifying nuisance conditions. The support of the Police Department and Code Enforcement staff will also be important for developing information and sufficient evidence to mount a legal action, if necessary. Each identified nuisance will be prioritized, analyzed and the evidence gathered. Then, we will simply select the appropriate remedy for each severe nuisance condition plaguing the community, and methodically go down the list to resolve each issue.
Here are some of the issues Council has identified in previous meetings, and an explanation of how the Neighborhood Law Program would undertake to SOLVE them.

1) **Chronic Nuisance Properties**: NLP Attorneys are tasked with identifying possible Chronic Nuisance Properties from a variety of sources: police, community groups, site visits. With the assistance of public safety, code enforcement, and neighbors’ participation and assistance, attorneys will identify appropriate locations for enforcement. The VPD will do the initial investigation and documentation and then the NLP Attorneys will take over the role as negotiators and supervisors of the abatement, working with property owners to formulate a plan to remedy the chronic nuisance problems at various locations. Potential properties including multi-family apartments with excessive calls for service, liquor stores or other businesses that are magnets for loiterers and produce sidewalk trash, etc., and problematic bars. The initial stage will be on gathering admissible evidence to document the problem. The next step will involve a definite-term period where the attorneys will engage with the property owner to pursue a mutually agreeable settlement, which includes rehabilitating the business or property and having it behave like a good neighbor in order to avert legal action. If the agreed-upon rehabilitation period doesn’t work, legal action will be undertaken. Funds derived from fines and fees will help fund the costs and salaries of the NLP attorneys.

2) **Property maintenance and receiverships**: NLP Attorneys are tasked with solving nuisance conditions where lack of maintenance has been excessive. These are properties where code enforcement has been unsuccessful in obtaining abatement notwithstanding efforts to administratively cite. NLP would work with code enforcement staff in the following ways:

   - Assist with implementation of the State’s 1000-a-day fine for unmaintained properties in foreclosure.

   - Identify and pursue receiverships on a case by case basis for appropriate properties that have not been abated even after numerous administrative citations. The goal would be to obtain abatement.

   - Train Code Enforcement Staff in the compilation of evidence and writing of evidentiary reports that can be used to support subsequent legal action.

3) **Blighted/unsafe rental housing**: NLP Attorneys would work with housing advocates, tenant advocates and building officials to identify blighted and unsafe rental housing and use State Law and the Vallejo Municipal Code to compel property owners to provide safe, habitable housing for Vallejo residents.
4) **Prostitution:** NLP Attorneys would work with neighborhood groups to identify properties used to facilitate prostitution (i.e., private homes, fake massage parlors, etc.) and take legal action to shut those illegal businesses down. NLP Attorneys would explore with the Mayor’s Task Force on prostitution and with the District Attorney’s Office ways to more effectively prosecute violations relating to prostitution within the City of Vallejo and implement remedies designed to keep offenders out of a targeted area.

5) **Special Projects/ Grass roots organizing:** NLP Attorneys would work with those communities whose members are not yet organized into neighborhood groups, but who may nevertheless have their share of nuisance problems. They will promote organization and assist in identifying both problems and solutions. They will serve as the facilitators between the citizen’s concerns and the possible solution.

**Staffing and Budget...**

The NLP program would be presented to new attorneys through law school on-campus events. NLP attorneys would be selected from those qualified attorneys who have demonstrated a commitment to the public interest. Experience and backgrounds in community organizing and community activism are desirable. Those attorneys and 3d year law students interested in being considered for NLP Attorney positions are encouraged to submit cover letters, resumes and writing samples to the City Attorney’s Office by October 30, 2012.

Although NLP Attorneys will be paid a reduced salary, they will be presented with a unique opportunity to make a difference in the quality of life of our community, and to be part of the ‘turn-around’ of Vallejo, as well as the freedom to think ‘outside the box’. Since the job is a two-year commitment only, NLP Attorneys will not feel beholden to anyone, and will be incentivized to bring speedy resolutions to the neighborhood’s problems.

**Budget**

Budget approved via City Council Resolution (FY 2012/2013 Budget; Measure B)