

WHAT'S THE ROLE OF THE POLICE DEPARTMENT IN BUILDING STRONG TOWNS?

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BY [RACHEL QUEDNAU](#)

One of my favorite things about the Strong Towns movement is the vast diversity of people who are part of it, and the multitude of backgrounds from which they come. I recently had the chance to talk with a [Strong Towns member](#) who is the Chief of Police for the town of Cleburne, Texas about how his work intersects with the Strong Towns mission.

Robert Severance III has a long history of public service in the Dallas/Fort Worth region and has been serving in Cleburne since 2012.

During that time, he's been involved in using data to target crime and safety hotspots, connecting residents to helpful home revitalization resources, and advancing a holistic perspective on community welfare.

Chief Robert Severance III

These initiatives have helped his town grow safer and more prosperous, and are an example of how any of us can build strong towns, wherever we are.

DOING THE MATH ON WHERE LAW ENFORCEMENT IS NEEDED MOST

Under Chief Severance's watch, the Cleburne Police Department implemented Data-Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety (DDACTS), a national model that uses data to locate the areas with the biggest crime and safety concerns, and target them strategically. "We try and use an approach of finding the most effective methods for deploying our law enforcement resources by mapping the crime and mapping the crashes," says Severance.

This approach was implemented in 2013 and data from 2012-2017 shows a whopping 47.9% reduction in crimes as a result of using DDACTS.

HELPING RESIDENTS GET THEIR HOMES UP TO CODE

In January 2018, Cleburne's code compliance department was relocated to fall under the police department's umbrella. This has opened up a unique opportunity for the police department to be a part of home revitalization efforts in the city. They've partnered with some [local nonprofits](#) to help homeowners who may not have the resources to patch a roof or paint a front porch get up to code — and strengthen the community in the process.

"They really do improve the property and make it something the owners and neighbors can be proud of," says Severance. Some police department employees and officers have even volunteered their own time as part of these efforts.

A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON COMMUNITY WELFARE

Severance is adamant that crime and safety are the responsibility of the whole city, and that everyone benefits when everyone feels safe.

As police officers, he says, "We are and we should be part of the community, even though we're paid to give full attention to certain duties. The public can't just say, 'Okay, I pay my taxes. We have a police force so it's their responsibility.' Crime isn't a police problem; crime is a *community* problem."

A Citizens on Patrol program is one way that Cleburne residents take Severance's charge to heart and play a role in preventing and dealing with safety concerns in the community.

He also stresses that the police department deals with far more than just crime, pointing out that traffic fatalities are actually a bigger problem for cities like Cleburne than violent crime. "Traffic collisions nationwide, and certainly in our community, kill far more people than crime does," he explains. "In fact, I can

tell you, in our own community, during the previous two years, we had 14 people die in traffic fatalities and none in homicides.”

Overall Severance sees a direct connection between economic prosperity and safe neighborhoods. Everyone deserves to live on a street where their children can play outside or walk safely to school.

“The economic health of the community has a direct impact on peoples’ quality of life,” says Severance.

How we build strong towns can look quite different depending on our profession or our experience. Rob Severance is building strong towns through his leadership in the police department. **What are you doing to make your community stronger?**

(Top photo from Cleburne Police Department Facebook page)

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