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THE PROFESSIONAL VOICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

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<i>Editorial</i>	8	Son — of "Son of Sam": A Travesty in Two Acts
	14	National Police Week and Peace Officers Memorial Day
<i>Merle L. McConnell</i>	14	Our Honored Dead
<i>Paul J. Jankovich</i>	18	The "Blue Knights": Another Way for Police To Relate Successfully With Youth
<i>Robert L. Bingham</i>	22	Guidelines on Ungovernability 55818
<i>Robert Van Oosterhout</i> <i>Robert C. Trojanowicz</i>	25	A Descriptive Model for the Prevention and Treatment of Delinquent Behavior 55819
<i>Jerry J. Tobias</i>	28	Current Trends in Police/Youth Work 55820
<i>Clayton H. Hawkins</i>	31	The San Mateo County Sheriff's Honor Camp Counseling Program
<i>Roger A. Higgins</i>	32	Police Intervention: Where Rehabilitation Begins With the Arrest
<i>H. Richard Bales</i>	34	Sexploitation as a Form of Child Abuse
<i>Carolyn F. Bailey</i>	36	Incest: A Practical Investigative Guide
	38	LEAA Exemplary Juvenile Programs
<i>Glen D. King</i>	42	International Narcotics Control: A Program of Cooperation
<i>Kenneth E. North</i>	44	Guam: The New Drug Mecca
<i>William L. Parker, Jr.</i>	46	What Does the Law Allow: Police Trickery and the Fifth Amendment
<i>Fr. Joseph A. DeSanto</i> <i>Michael Lane</i>	48	Arson Is a Solvable Crime
<i>David M. Hanley</i>	50	Controllable Offenses and Manpower Deployment 55821
<i>Lou Reiter</i>	52	A Day With Sergeant Maynard Jones
<i>Jeffrey M. Temple</i>	56	A Do-It-Yourself Management Test
<i>Robert J. Meadows</i>	58	Perspectives for Change: Expanding the Police Role in Crime Prevention 55822

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1979 (86th)—Sept. 15-20Dallas, Tex.
1980 (87th)—Sept. 13-18St. Louis, Mo.
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1983 (90th)—Oct. 1-6Detroit, Mich.

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Departments

8	Editorial	68	New Members
10	Letters	70	Congressional Highlights
12	Professional News/COPsules	72	Product Patrol
16	Chief's Counsel	74	Calendar of Events
18	Chief's Corner	75	Positions Open
64	Books	76	Index to Advertisers

55822

Perspectives for Change: Expanding the Police Role In Crime Prevention

By ROBERT J. MEADOWS

Many cities are facing serious problems such as public employee strikes, school closings, crime and criminality, and a general decrease in city services. One such problem vexing urban America is the increase in index crimes, especially burglary. While it is true that not all crime can be eliminated, the police and community must seek ways to prevent crime before it occurs.

Police and other municipal officials must plan for crime prevention. Planning for crime control is as important as planning for any other city function. Crime prevention, first of all, requires the participation of many planners and specialists. It is an urban planning function.

Urban planning itself is an interdisciplinary approach, taking its perspectives from a variety of disciplines including engineering, architecture, law, sociology, political science, public administration, geography, and economics.¹ Thus, if urban planning is to be effective in crime prevention, every municipal planning commission should include police input from such a person as a police crime prevention specialist.

This paper will deal with the issue of planning for crime prevention. Every municipal police agency should have a crime

prevention specialist(s). In addition, if crime prevention efforts are to be successful, total commitment is needed from the city administrators, police, planning commissions, and the general community.

Crime in America

Research conducted in Boston has indicated that the average citizen views crime, violence, rebellious youth, and racial tension as the most serious problems facing urban areas.² Some of the urban problems facing the criminal justice system can be alleviated by the responsive action of other segments of the government and community.

The need for a crime prevention specialist is justified by rising victimization rates and the lack of police success in reducing criminality through traditional methods. For example, the victimization rate in urban areas is increasing at an alarming rate. A study of the volume of crime in 1977, as measured by the crime index, reveals that since 1973 the crime index offenses increased 25 percent. Violent crimes rose 15 percent while property crimes were up 27 percent.³ Further evidence indicates that the average American householder in a large American city can expect to suffer one burglary every 1.4 to 3.2 years, depending on the city.

The need for prevention activities is further indicated by statistics on apprehensions of burglars and the return of stolen property. On the average, there is only one arrest for every six reported burglaries.⁴ Burglary and other index offenses have no social or geographical constraints. A recent statewide survey in Maryland asked citizens to name the most important problems facing their community.⁵ The most frequently mentioned problem was crime and criminality (49 percent), followed by economy (24 percent), and provision of public service (13 percent).

The police, unfortunately, are limited in their resources and manpower to combat crime. Moreover, without assistance from other sources, cities are going to become further eroded through crime. As suggested by some writers, there is a vicious downward spiral as the declining economic tax base within American cities is accompanied by continued immigration of unskilled,



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post-graduate courses in public administration.

uneducated, and discriminated against peoples who impose heavy burdens on city services such as welfare, schools, police, courts, and correctional systems.⁶ Many police agencies, likewise, are understaffed and/or ill-equipped to combat these crime problems effectively. If the opportunities present themselves, many persons will turn to crime to counteract their deprivation. Thus, many persons will become victims of crime either through accident or carelessness.

At this point, I would like to offer a definition of crime prevention. Crime prevention involves the recognition, anticipation, and appraisal of a crime risk and the initiation of some action to remove or reduce that risk.⁷ This preventive approach is the joint responsibility of city administrators, police, and the citizens. It is a proactive approach. Before discussing the criteria for expanding the police role in crime prevention, it is important to address some concerns related to crime prevention.

The Concept of Defensible Space

The concept of defensible space must be recognized by the crime prevention specialist.⁸ As discussed, the combination of crime, vandalism and the unattended decline of facilities has led to growing anxieties and expressions of fear on the part of urban residents. In public housing projects, security personnel are becoming increasingly expensive and difficult to support from overextended city and housing authority budgets. Studies have further indicated that traditional police strategies of routine preventive patrol have had questionable effects in crime prevention.⁹ Therefore, the concept of defensible space takes the position that physical construction of residential environments can elicit attitudes and behavior on the part of residents which contribute in a major way toward insuring their security. Under the theory of defensible space, the form of buildings and their groupings enable inhabitants to undertake a significant policing function. The concept of defensible space stresses two basic kinds of social behavior: territoriality and natural surveillance. In viewing territoriality, people are affected by the physical design of their surroundings to abandon claim to any part of the outside world. In public housing, for example, most families experience the space outside their apartment unit as public; and, therefore, they relegate responsibility for all outside activity to the public authorities. Thus, residents in these settings view the hallways, stairways, lobbies, parking lot areas, as a no-man's land in which criminals can operate at their leisure.

This lack of privacy forces many residents to become oblivious to their environment, and in turn, look to the police to solve the problem of criminality. The opportunity for crime becomes more probable due to the impersonal nature of these surroundings. The residents are unable to differentiate the intruder from the neighbor.

In natural surveillance, the assumption is offered that as housing units become more personalized, through private hallways and parking lot areas, the possibility of crime decreases due to the number of human observers; that is, as people live in more personalized settings with limited public access, they become more observant of strangers and their actions. The residents develop an increased sense of responsibility to their surroundings.

Surveys from the New York City Housing Authority Police Departments show that the specific areas within the building

¹FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1977, p. 305.

²Jeffrey C. Ray, *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* (Sage Publications, 1977).

³Jeffrey, op. cit., p. 194.

⁴Jeffrey, op. cit., p. 223.

⁵Kelling et al., *Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment* (Police Foundation, 1974), pp. 10-49.

⁶Selected authors, *Managing the Modern City* (International City Management Association, 1971).

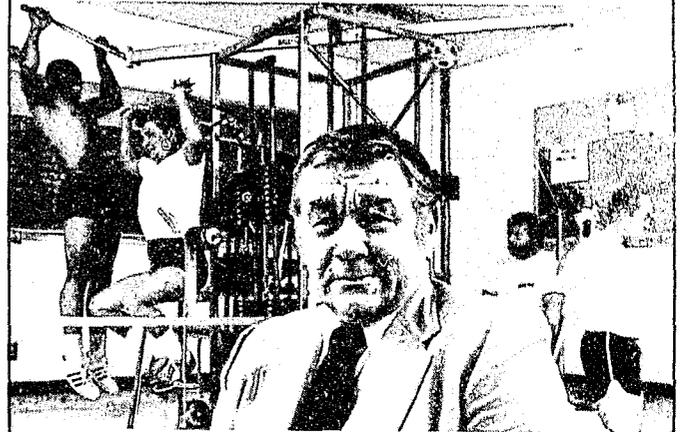
⁷Newman, Oscar, *Architectural Design for Crime Prevention* (NILECJ, 1973), p. 17.

⁸Pierce, Edward, "The CPTED Concept," part of "A Special Report: Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design," in *Nations Cities* (National League of Cities, December 1977), pp. 16-17.

⁹Pierce, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

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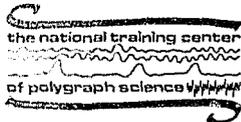
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which are most vulnerable are the elevators, entrance lobbies, and the rear fire stairs and hallways. All areas are public in nature but screened from public view.

To understand fully the seriousness of the defensible space concept, one must look at the St. Louis Pruitt-Igoe Housing Project.¹⁰ Due to rising crime rates and repeated acts of vandalism, the entire project was razed ten years after its construction. The crime rates were attributed to the lack of defensible space and social interaction and the design and isolation of stairways, elevators, lobbies, and other characteristics typical of public housing. The design of this project created a natural environment for crime. The costs to provide police protection and to repair repeated damages to the project were phenomenal. City officials eventually agreed that the project had to be destroyed.

It should be clear to the reader that the concept of defensible space is indeed a very real concept, particularly in the area of public housing. In essence, the way apartment buildings and housing complexes are designed has everything to do with crime patterns and citizen attitudes. Residents who feel isolated from neighbors are far more frightened of crime than those who feel a sense of contact with neighbors. High-rise buildings with a large number of families and their guests sharing a single entry make it impossible to distinguish neighbors from intruders. Low-rise buildings and multi-story buildings with exposed stairs, on the other hand, produce a higher degree of familiarity with nearby families.

There have been many other studies concerning the physical environment and crime. Public parks, for example, are potentially dangerous places in most cities due to the fact that they have legitimate use during the day but are abandoned after 5:00 or 6:00 p.m., whereupon they become hangouts for social deviants.¹¹ Foliage, which is attractive to look at, is also dangerous. It provides excellent cover for the criminal. It has been suggested that parks have multiple uses at night, such as concerts, cafes, and other activities which will increase pedestrian surveillance. Such approaches have been tried in Central Park, New York City. City planners and police officials must realize that proper design of public housing, streets, and parks, where surveillance is high, will reduce the potential for crime.

Thus, the concept of defensible space must be recognized by police officials. It is an important concept to recognize in planning for crime prevention. The quality of police response to crime situations is related to the physical layout of buildings, parks, streets, and other public areas.

Approaches to Crime Prevention

The remainder of this paper will stress some specific approaches to crime prevention. One such approach is crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). In discussing CPTED, we see several levels emerge: (1) physical security of apartment buildings, streets, parks, air terminals, etc.; (2) physical security involving doors and windows; (3) social planning or educational programs aimed at the potential victim; and (4) physical-social planning with emphasis on science and research.¹² It is a combination of all these levels that set the framework for contemporary crime prevention programs.

On the first level, CPTED can be achieved by the proper construction and space allocations of buildings, transportation systems, parks, etc. In Portland, Oregon, for example, blighted areas were transformed into small plazas to encourage citizen utilization during the evening hours. The city of Hartford, Connecticut, has also initiated a CPTED program. This was the first project involving an entire neighborhood. Among the approaches used in Hartford to overcome criminality were closing and narrowing one-way streets to change traffic patterns.

In the second level, we find the concept of sturdy locks, doors, and windows. A look at the Oakland, California, Building Code will serve as an explanation of this level.¹³

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The Code goes on to state:

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- C. Louvered windows shall not be used within eight feet of ground level, adjacent structures, or fire escapes."

It is clear that security codes are steps in preventing crimes through mechanical means. Many communities have such codes, but the question is, are the codes being enforced? Is there a crime prevention staff available to offer advice and assistance? Security surveys could be provided to determine areas of security weaknesses. These surveys would also provide more contact between the police and the community. Security surveys should not be done in a perfunctory manner. These surveys should be completed systematically and include any safety or security weaknesses and recommendations for a course of action. Many law enforcement agencies provide security surveys for businesses and residences.

In the third level, community involvement is encouraged for crime control. There are many examples of programs being instituted throughout the country where citizens are taught crime prevention procedures. Citizens on this level must be mobilized through the creation of community groups. Programs such as Neighborhood Watch and block clubs serve as examples of this approach. The point is that police officials must encourage these programs. Residents must understand the crime problem and approve solutions. Police and other local government planners must be involved in this delicate planning process as well as in the training of these volunteers. In essence, the crime specialist's role is to stimulate action at the group level.

The fourth level simply involves an understanding of human interaction with the physical environment (as discussed under the topic of defensible space). This level implies planning with man in mind. In planning, city managers, in conjunction with the crime prevention specialist, must consider the sociological aspect of the environment. In essence, the modern police administration must look at the total picture and see to it that physical design, citizen participation, and police activities work together. The planning, zoning, public works, and traffic engineering units can also stress criminal opportunity reduction principles in both their general and specific urban development activities.

In planning for an urban crime prevention program, care must be given to the selection of qualified personnel. Crime prevention is a relatively new concept. It should be as much a part of a police department as the investigation or traffic division. A police crime prevention specialist should be a member of the municipal planning commission. Since municipal planning commissions draw maps/plans recommending the general location, character, and extent of streets, alleys, viaducts, waterfronts, parkways, parks, playgrounds, public buildings, and other structures, it becomes clear that the police crime prevention specialist should have input in these decisions.

The crime prevention specialist should be trained in crime prevention theory and practices encompassing the areas of elec-

¹⁰Pierce, op. cit., p. 15.

¹¹Richardson, James F., *Urban Police in the United States* (Kennikat Press, 1974), p. 163.

¹²Selected authors, *Understanding Crime Prevention* (National Crime Prevention Institute Press, 1978).

¹³White, Thomas et al., *Police Burglary Prevention Programs* (National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, 1975), p. 3.

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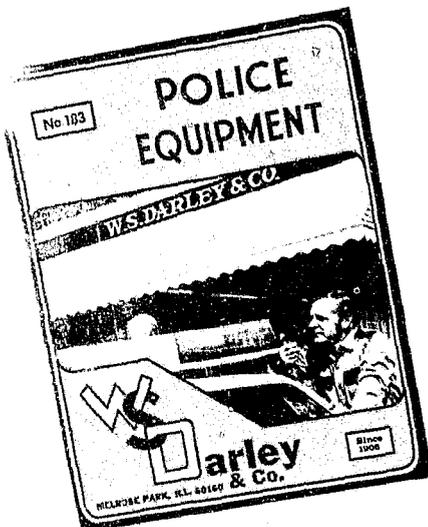
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tronic, procedural, and physical security procedures. The crime prevention specialist must also possess a knowledge of relevant municipal laws and ordinances. The specialist must be knowledgeable of crime patterns and programs to reduce criminality. The position of a crime prevention specialist is a very sensitive and demanding task.

The most well-known of the CPTED efforts is being carried out by the Westinghouse Corporation under LEAA (Law Enforcement Assistance Administration) funding.¹⁴ The program encompasses physical, social, law enforcement, and management techniques to achieve its goal of reducing crime and the fear of crime. The objectives are to be carried out through zoning ordinances, intrusion detection systems, building security codes which require construction techniques, and materials that tend to reduce crime and safety hazards. The Westinghouse study also encourages modification of physical elements of the street environment by eliminating on-street parking and providing centralized parking areas. It is clear that there is much to be done in this field.

Implications and Concerns

In theory, these approaches to crime prevention offer a practical solution to urban crime problems. However, when any new urban program is planned, subsequent skepticism and criticism will undoubtedly follow. The police administrator must be prepared to defend crime prevention programs by presenting evidence of success from other communities. In other words, the administrator must show that crime prevention would reduce the pressure for expansion of the criminal justice system. Thus, the priorities for implementation should be:¹⁵

1. Discussions of plans with community leaders.
2. Review of existing, planned, and potential physical and social programs.
3. Review and analysis of community crime patterns.
4. Consensus among decision makers, planners, and law enforcement officials concerning crime prevention utility.

These priorities must be addressed before any successful crime prevention project can be implemented. Selected rank-and-file officers must be convinced that their role as law enforcement officers is merely being expanded to include crime prevention. Naturally, there are going to be additional costs; but if these programs can increase personal security and the quality of the life they can be shown to be cost effective. Unfortunately, some communities will not be receptive or prepared to integrate such approaches as CPTED principles into city operations. The successful use of CPTED ideas will require the assistance, support, and cooperation of many agencies, organizations, and individuals within the community.

Another dimension to be considered is the internal implications of a new crime prevention program. Some officers may not be supportive of these approaches and may reject such programs out of misunderstanding or disagreement. Thus, a participative planning approach is needed to assure optimum cooperation. Program objectives must be clear. Furthermore, the most educated and motivated officers must be selected as crime prevention specialist(s). In sum, if city administrators and other concerned personnel are going to be successful in establishing crime prevention programs, they must be concerned with the scope of the program, the authority and responsibility, community acceptance and participation, costs, and the selection and training of crime prevention specialists.

Community leaders and general citizenry must be convinced of the benefits of crime prevention. Crime and the fear of crime affects us all. Municipalities need to draw on all their resources to attack the problem of crime.

Another implication or concern of the crime prevention specialist is the phenomenon of displacement. While helping indi-

viduals and groups to reduce their risk of becoming crime victims, the specialist may not reduce the crime risk for the entire community. In other words, crime prevention programs may affect criminal behavior but not criminal motivation. If an opportunity to commit a burglary at one residence is reduced due to security precautions, then the offender may seek a better opportunity on the next street or in another community. Thus, we have displacement. If opportunities to commit a particular crime are reduced, the offender may try another crime or wait until another time or place.

However, the concept of displacement is not entirely negative. Some "low skill" offenders may be unlikely to commit offenses in strange neighborhoods or communities. These "low skill" offenders may not be prepared to commit other crimes. In other words, certain offenders may be deterred from criminal behavior by the action of some citizens. In addition, the crime prevention specialist may argue that he has partially succeeded in managing crime patterns.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As suggested in this paper, city administrators must plan for crime prevention as they would for any other project. Target areas must be identified and people must be educated in crime prevention methods. It is clear that the police are limited in their ability to control crime effectively. With the constant threat of urban financial crisis, it has become apparent that in some cities the hiring of more police and the purchase of further police hardware will become increasingly difficult. City officials cannot wait any longer; they must create crime prevention programs within the concepts of defensible space and CPTED. As expressed by Tom Moody, mayor of Columbus, Ohio:

"City officials have a responsibility to find ways to prevent crime. We are all struggling for new and diversified solutions in crime prevention; original ideas are always welcome. The impact that crime prevention through environmental design can have on the safety and general well-being of your community is reason enough to give the idea due consideration."¹⁶

Traditional crime efforts alone are not sufficient in reducing crime. Planning and education are necessary for change. Therefore, when any program is initiated, it must have the support and understanding of city officials. In this era of change, there must be police leaders who are receptive to contemporary programs designed to meet changing societal needs. These leaders must implement crime prevention programs and appoint specialists who are sensitive to crime problems.

Crime prevention programs vary in scope and technique, and crime prevention specialists must be prepared to implement programs directed at specific groups such as senior citizens, schools, businessmen, residential apartment dwellers, and single-family home dwellers. The specialists must have a basic understanding of crime causation, victimization rates, recommended electric procedural, and physical security measures that could be utilized by the citizen.

The police role in crime prevention must be expanded. There must be a more utilitarian approach in crime prevention. Traditional methods of crime control have proven to be inefficient in crime prevention. The contemporary police agency must take a proactive stance against crime. Likewise, local governmental leaders must be responsive to police attempts in reducing criminality by allocating funds for crime research and personnel training. As our society changes, our governments and police agencies must meet these changes through innovative efforts of crime control. There must be mutual cooperation and understanding. ★

¹⁶White, op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁷White, op. cit., pp. 49-53.

¹⁸Wilson, James Q., *Thinking About Crime* (Vintage Publishing Company, 1975), p. 24.



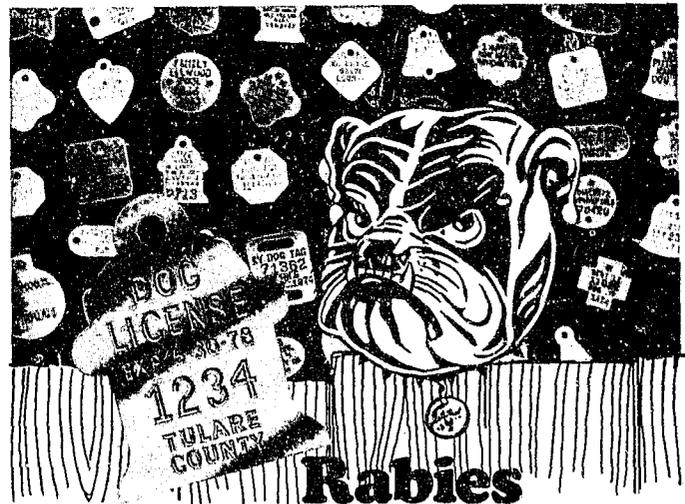
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