Cincinnati Housing Authority Builds Safety into Project

by Leslie Hand

Since 1971, the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority has been renovating the public housing development of Millvale. Improvements have included completely new prefabricated gable roofs, refurbished building exteriors, additional outdoor lighting, a number of new sitting areas and large and small playgrounds. Individual yards were created by moving sidewalks further away from the buildings, along with the addition of low brick walls to subdivide front and rear yards. These extensive efforts were an attempt to salvage an unattractive, deteriorating and unpopular project.

Approximately a fourth of the 573 units planned for renovation had been completed by the architectural firm of Glaser and Myers, Inc., when Henry Stefanik, housing authority executive director, decided to obtain additional planning and research assistance. William Brill Associates was selected. WB/A's assignment was to prepare a comprehensive security plan for Millvale and evaluate the effectiveness of the existing architectural designs for the proposed renovations in terms of their impact on the problems of crime.

The WB/A approach for developing the *Millvale Safety and Security Evaluation* is founded on Oscar Newman's theories of "defensible space." Newman determined how specific architectural characteristics, symbolic and real, facilitate or deter residential criminal activity. By subdividing housing developments into smaller lots and locating playgrounds, sitting areas and parking lots adjacent to dwellings, buildings and building clusters, security is enhanced.

Aspects of Plan

The specific designation of property and the provision of desirable activity areas foster territorial attitudes and

provide for social interaction and communication. Residents then begin to feel responsible and eventually can become instrumental in curtailing destruction of their habitat.

In order to recommend an appropriate safety and security plan for Millvale, WB/A determined the environmental characteristics that either contribute to crime or make it difficult for the residents to form the supporting relationships necessary for protecting their environment. This involved an extensive survey of 22 percent of Millvale heads of households plus observations during a series of on-site visits and discussions with residents, management personnel and guards.

From the analysis, WB/A determined that the proposed renovations for Millvale would assist in the reduction of crime. Some additional recommendations, not covered under the planned renovations, were made. Millvale's physical division into two distinct sections, north and south, created various problems for residents. Dwellers passing between north and south had the option of using a connecting road, Beckman Street, or a short cut path through the wooded area, both of which alternatives were seen as exceptionally dangerous. In addition, the council headquarters management and maintenance office and community center are located in North Millvale. The interview data pointed out that the resident council is operating with very little participation from residents in South Millvale. An important element to the success of a comprehensive security plan would be a strong and active resident council with broad participation among residents.

WB/A suggested that a well-lit walkway to improve access between the two sections be instituted, to strengthen the perception of Millvale as a unified housing environment, increase resident participation in Millvale activities and expand the potential network of supporting social relationships.

One of the important concepts necessary to the security of large multifamily housing sites is the surveillance of site activities from apartments. The study recommended increasing the visibility of the small sitting areas and playgrounds. It was felt that residents should be able to monitor the activities of their children, friends and strangers in areas adjacent to their home from convenient locations within the house.

Ways for more extensive control of undesirable pedestrian circulation and access to the site needed to be instituted. Residents living in apartments at the bottom of a large hill in South Millvale suffered interference in their backyards from children running up and down the hillside. WB/A suggested additional fences or hedgerows to close off these backyards from the perimeter of the site. A gateway to define the formal entrance to the housing site as a symbolic barrier separating the interior site areas from the public city streets also would be helpful.

Long Term Solutions Sought

The recommendations to improve the visibility and effectiveness of guards on the site and the installation of unit-hardening equipment including solid core doors and window locks, are viewed by WB/A as minimally beneficial. It was felt that they create a false sense of security and in effect isolate residents within fortress walls. Criminal activity is a social sickness not to be solved by locks and bolts alone. Long-term solutions should aim at providing a neighborhood that residents wish to identify with and feel like protecting. By providing various means for residents to actively and effectively control social behavior, a community is maintained.

One such long-term solution was achieved when the architects converted the barrack-like housing into esthetic, individualized units by adding gable roofs and refurbishing building exteriors. This setting provides

ABOVE—Millvale public housing before renovation.   LEFT & BELOW—Attractive new design features deter crime while boosting residents' pride in their housing.

residents with a way to assimilate middle-class norms and pride in ownership.

The most interesting aspect to emerge from the *Safety and Security Analysis* is that it seems to confirm that apparently minor features of design can serve as major determinants in the reduction of crime. By comparing the criminal victimization data from the renovated and unrenovated areas, the success of improvements was measured. In the renovated areas fewer criminal victimizations, less fear of crime and behavioral alterations due to crime were reported. Not a single successful burglary occurred in the sampled households in renovated areas as compared with 20 successful burglaries which occurred in the sampled unrenovated areas. Residents in the renovated areas also perceive their environment as less dangerous. Situations such as being alone at home at night, using the back door at night, walking from a bus to the house, talking with a friend in front of the house and crossing the project were perceived as significantly safer. Respondents there worried less that their children would be assaulted in the project or going to and from school. Residents also altered their behavior less by leaving on lights, TV or radio when they were out.

The success of the renovations so far is apparent. The actual incidence and success of burglaries was notably reduced as well as residents' fear and alterations in their behavior. Yet experience over the years has shown that the success or failure of housing developments is directly related to the services delivered by the management program, the manager and the management staff. An effective security program will depend on the combination of physical improvements and competent management. In order to achieve an accurate verification of this phenomenon, an analysis could be made when all the renovations are completed. Millvale may hold one key to some of the social problems besetting public-housing projects today. □

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Measuring Residential Security

By William H. Brill

The Dade County, Fla., Management Improvement Program is coming to grips with some of the fundamental issues critical to the design of a housing security program. These issues include assessing the severity of the security problem, defining the most frequent crimes, the relationship of crime to site design and the design of individual housing units. Another vital question is who is victimized, and under what circumstances.

These issues form the backbone of any security program. Yet, as it stands now and Dade County is no exception—there is usually little data to go on. Police data is usually not specific enough, is often hard to get and to use, and frequently understates the problem because crime is invariably underreported in low-income areas.

No Means for Assessment

These limitations have generally meant that problem assessment as a formal planning step is often slighted. Administrators are often forced to make judgments based on intuition, their own fears or fantasies or on the basis of a dramatic criminal act. Hard facts are rarely available.

A second fundamental issue is the approach taken to meet the problem, however the problem might be defined. Should tenant patrols be emphasized, for example, or should reliance be placed on improved site

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design and electronic devices?

What is done in a particular project is usually based on an assessment of the problem, the available resources, and, on how one perceives the scope of security in housing. Should a security program, for example, be directed at simply preventing or stopping vandalism, burglary, and robbery, or should it include measures designed to limit interpersonal violence among residents, as well as measures intended to reduce the residents' fear of crime and the way in which they are restraining the use of their environment because they have either been victims or are afraid of being victims.

Whatever the security planner's perception of the problem might be, he usually has f,w alternative strategies from which to select. He is not only limited by the absence of good data, but by the absence of good theory. There are few theoretical propositions or hypotheses to use in determining alternative measures for preventing or restraining criminal activity in housing environments.

In Dade County, the third inescapable issue we found is that of evaluating the success of what is ultimately done. Although in most cases evaluation is not done formally, it does occur. Judgments are made about what seemed to work and what did not, and conclusions are transmitted to others in the field who have similar interests. The difficulty, as in the problem assessment and planning phase, is that few hard facts are available. Conclusions are usually based on anecdote, casual observation and "a feeling" that things are better or worse.

Demonstration Site Established

One of our objectives under the Management Improvement Program in Dade County was to help develop and test methodologies and approaches that would increase understanding of these issues. Our demonstration site has been Scott/Carver Homes, an 850 unit public housing

project that has most of the problems generally associated with a sprawling low-rise project.

One of the first steps taken to solve the problem assessment issue was to develop a means of measuring the "vulnerability" of Scott/Carver Homes to crime. The methodology, called a vulnerability analysis, is intended to be applicable to any housing environment. It includes three components: (1) a resident survey that measures the residents' victimization rate, their fear of crime and the degree to which they are altering their behavior because they are either afraid of being victimized or have actually been victimized; (2) an examination of the housing site—lighting, location, and areas likely to be scenes of crime; this involves surveying access from outside, identifying unassigned areas and other features that would make residents unlikely to protect these areas or identify them; (3) unit-by-unit security inspection.

Program Devised from Study

The Dade County security plan based on the vulnerability analysis involves the formation of small social clusters of roughly 80 families each. These clusters are intended to provide the first line of defense in the area of security. We are hoping that by breaking up the project into smaller social units we can humanize it and give families the precious support that a neighborhood provides.

From a practical standpoint, however, we know it is not enough simply to announce the formation of clusters and expect them to take hold. We know they need to be reinforced if they are going to work. We therefore plan to accent their designation with limited architectural improvements; the clusters have already been color coded. But our principal "reinforcer" has been the environmental fund. This fund, made available under the Management Improvement Program, operates under a system whereby each cluster receives

several thousand dollars to spend on the environment of the project in a way it sees fit.

The environmental fund is intended not only to insure that resources are spent in a sensitive way, but also to give the clusters a happy and productive enterprise around which to organize. This approach probably represents one of the first times small groups of public housing residents have been given this kind of opportunity and responsibility.

Our security plan, therefore, consists of coordinating both physical and social improvements. Individual units will be made safer on the basis of the findings of our vulnerability analysis, and limited site improvements will also be made. We also intend to strengthen the social cohesion of the residents by organizing them into clusters and reinforcing these organizations architecturally and by giving these cluster organizations freedom to allocate resources to improve their own environment. Additional components of our security program include increased coordination and planning with the local police department. This will take the form of planning groups at the project level to be composed of residents, authority staff, and police officials.

Our work in Dade County will not provide all the answers to the problems of security in housing environments. But thus far, we have developed a reliable series of instruments to measure a housing environment's vulnerability to crime. We are testing an approach that goes beyond those taken by others in the past and which already indicates a high probability of success. ✍©

in print

It was impossible to read this book without the continuous reminder of the fate of Friedrich, 81, father of a close friend. Friedrich was a German who had survived the concentration camps. He was a superb violinist who was attacked one day in the elevator of his Queens apartment house for the few dollars in his pocket. Savagely beaten, something inside him snapped, and he died a few months later, victim, as far as could be ascertained, of a broken spirit and a broken heart.

A bit less than three years ago, the editors of this book, Jack and Sharon Goldsmith, sat in my office. They had just received a grant from the Administration on Aging, and they were designing a conference for an area of very rapid change, crime against the elderly. Together, we surveyed all the major practitioners in the field. They proved to be diligent in their search, and visited many others, as well, as they sought out the best ideas and research.

The conference that resulted, the National Conference on Crime Against the Elderly, was held at the Statler-Hilton in Washington for 3 days during June of 1975. About 160 persons attended the various sessions, and some excellent discussions were conducted. Out of the mass of presentations the Goldsmiths selected 15 of the papers and grouped them under three headings: "Patterns of Crime against the Elderly"; "Criminal Victimization of the Elderly"; and "The Criminal Justice System and the Elderly Victim." Readers of *Challenge* will recognize some of the materials, since the Van Buren and Sherman/Newman/Nelson articles were first printed there, while Cunningham and Lawton have written parallel materials for us, discussing some of their findings.

Some gerontologists and criminologists have been guilty of a serious neglect: they assumed that since the elderly are victims of crime at a lesser rate than their percentage in the population, the problem of crime for them is relatively unimportant. Nothing could be further from the truth. William Brill has begun to show the enormous power that fear has in immobilizing the person in multifamily housing, by a factor of 10-20 times the actual incidence of crime. The limitation of lifestyle can be overwhelming, and this was the fact that some researchers have neglected to study and understand. As a result of the fear of being victimized, the older person hesitates to shop, to open the door, to participate in community, social and recreational activity.

One solution, of course, has been the construction design of age-segregated housing. The studies of Van Buren and of Sherman and his associates discuss this in detail, and their general conclusions are the same as those of housing authorities throughout the U.S.: elderly housing works and is essentially safe for the older person. This does not solve the problem of going out of the building, but it creates a refuge that is increasingly utilized, just as fortresses were successfully used in the Middle Ages.

The conference and the book highlighted some newer explorations in coping with the effects of crime, which is defined broadly to include white collar crime. (We are reminded by Attorney-General Evelle Younger of California that in one six-month period twice as much money was lost in Los Angeles by the elderly in con games such as "bank examiner" and "pigeon drop," as was lost by the banks to robberies.) Medical quackery, consumer frauds, and mail frauds all are covered in his discussion.

Phyllis Brostoff presents a very creative use of criminal events to serve as a case-finding process in the District of Columbia. In essence, the social workers of the various District agencies were called upon to follow up on problems that police uncovered in the course of their daily activities. In the process, the problems created by crime are sometimes solved, along with others. (It is a surprise to discover that about one-tenth of all purse snatchings result in arm or shoulder injuries to the woman victim.)

David Friedman follows up with the report of an LEAA-financed study undertaken in the Bronx, where actual assistance was given to the victims of crime, shaped to the needs **uncovered** by the incident, as well as those created by the event. He describes case after case where with thoughtful, sensitive treatment, the person's life was, to some extent, straightened out, after some rather dreadful events had threatened to destroy or seriously cripple it.

Perhaps we are approaching a turning point in our awareness of crime and the consequences of criminal activity. To date, we have tended to think of the consequences of crime as purely a personal matter: a person is injured, robbed, or in some way the victim of a tragic criminal act. What happens afterward is strictly that person's affair. But is that the way it should be? When we view the extraordinary fragility of the life of the older person; the bitterness of rejection by society at large; the eating up of meager assets by inflation; the successive insults of the aging process itself; the inability to work creatively at economically productive tasks; the dispersal of the reassuring family—in the light of all the foregoing—the impact of crime on the old can be catastrophic.

Perhaps we need to reexamine the role of the victim and the total impact of crime. If the given crime has strong social causes (and increasingly this is being asserted in the courts), then the consequences for the society must imply some form of either correction, assistance, or restitution on the part of the society for the victim. Here again the elderly can prove to be pioneers. Our collective sense of guilt for our neglect can perhaps push us to devise new solutions, rather than have us assert that the incident that happens to the older individual is an individual event out of a social context.

This book assembles some fine materials presented by the best practitioners. For those concerned about the elderly, and for that matter, those concerned about crime, it is an enlightening and significant contribution.

—Morton Leeds
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