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CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to identify some of the more important factors in developing active and positive citizen involvement in community Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) efforts. The salience of these factors emerged from experiences acquired in implementing major CPTED demonstration programs in three localities. The findings, obviously, are most applicable to CPTED projects, but it is likely that these factors should be considered during planning and implementing most community crime prevention programs.

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CPTED

CPTED is an approach to reducing crime and fear of crime in a community. It involves a combination of changes in the physical environment with changes in people's reaction to their environment -- a combination of effective design and use of the environment. CPTED includes strategies intended to enhance neighborhood social and economic vitality, increase surveillance through physical planning and social programs, encourage residents to undertake appropriate precautions to secure their premises, and improve communication and cooperation between citizens and local police.

The goal of CPTED is to reduce opportunities for crime that are often inherent in the structure of buildings and the layout of streets and neighborhoods -- in blind alleys, unlighted streets, and dense shrubbery, for example. This approach involves the close cooperation of agencies, organizations, and individuals at all levels. Most important is the local resident who is encouraged to develop an interest and sense of responsibility in doing his or her part to protect the neighborhood from crime. In fact, it is only with the conscious and active support of citizens in maintaining the physical changes and in detecting and reporting crimes or suspicious events that CPTED can work. A key part of CPTED is the change in attitude among residents made possible by the changes in the physical and social environment; reducing the opportunity for crime allows people the freedom to move about their community with less fear of being harmed.

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Demonstration Projects

CPTED has been applied and tested by the Westinghouse Electric Corporation National Issues Center under contract with the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice (NILECJ), the research unit of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. The program, initiated in 1974, involved demonstration projects in three different environments: A commercial strip with adjacent residential housing in Portland, Oregon; four public high schools in Broward County, Florida; and a low-density residential neighborhood in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Several steps were involved in developing and implementing the demonstration projects. The first step was to make presentations to local officials, describing the concepts involved and the likely benefits and costs of the demonstration. After securing approval to proceed, more detailed studies were begun. Reported crime, victimization and fear data, environmental characteristics potentially related to the crime/fear problems, and an identification of possible implementation funding sources were topics of the initial detailed site studies.

A principle adhered to was to involve local site personnel to the maximum extent throughout the process. Without their involvement, participation, and knowledge, the projects would have failed during the early planning phases.

Following the detailed problem assessment came the most difficult step of the process: The development of responsive CPTED strategies

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and directives. Not only did these proposals need to hold the promise of crime prevention and fear reduction but also to be consistent with the interests, willingness, and resources of the local officials, citizens, and users of the environment. These strategies then became part of a concept plan, which also included a draft implementation process and management and evaluation plans. The concept plan was reviewed by the local officials, involved citizens, and NILECJ.

The final demonstration planning step was to prepare detailed work plans, schedules, management plan, evaluation design, and funding plan. Implementation and evaluation were accomplished, following acceptance of the plans.

The experience gained from the CPTED demonstration projects provides the primary basis for the factors now presented,

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Factors Influencing Citizen Participation

Organization Tactics

Key individuals should be identified and their aid enlisted. In any community there are recognized leaders who may or may not hold any formal political or organizational office. These persons can provide vital information concerning existing fiscal, organizational, and human resources. They can identify the persons and organizations who represent the various viewpoints and interest groups within the community. Suggestions can be obtained concerning which groups should be directly involved and which should assume a supporting role in the program. Also, an attempt should be made to enlist their participation in forming and planning the crime prevention effort.

In the CPTED demonstrations, a small set of key individuals was identified by interviewing persons familiar with the community, such as precinct police and neighborhood planners. The identified persons were interviewed in an attempt to enlist their support and to obtain the names of other community leaders. This process was continued until all or nearly all of the influential members of the community were contacted.

Role of outside experts. Outside "experts," whether they represent city hall a few blocks distant or the federal government, may encounter resentment and distrust if they seek to impose ideas, however beneficial, on a community. Members of the community may feel that these outsiders do not know the area's particular needs and will not be responsive to

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local interests. It is essential to enlist the aid of community members in developing and promoting the crime prevention program. Their participation and leadership in developing and implementing the local crime prevention effort is mandatory.

In the three CPTED demonstration projects, the outside consultants first had to satisfy the community (school system in the school demonstration) that no preconceived or packaged solution would be implemented. Rather, the consultants followed a process involving the local population at every step, and gave them the decision role at every decision point. The outsiders were available to perform technical tasks and to assist in preparing recommendations. But the local community, through its formal and informal structure, made the decisions.

Outside groups normally withdraw from a crime prevention program after it has been planned and implemented. Local citizens and formal groups established by the program continue the activity. The outsiders should be available for consultation, but an objective should be to make the program and its participants self-reliant.

Realistic goals should be established. During the planning phase, care should be exercised so that enthusiastic selling of the crime prevention program does not create an expectancy of a rapid and dramatic decrease in crime. In fact, once the program is underway there may be an increase in the reported rate of crime. Increased awareness of crime, publicity on how to report crimes and suspicious events, and projects that increase citizen surveillance may result in a rate increase.

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Citizen awareness of what to expect, and moderate and realistic goals will help allay increased fears or frustration when a dramatic rate decrease does not occur overnight.

Special efforts must be made during the initial stages of a crime prevention program to minimize fears that may develop out of the mere mention that a community is in need of a special crime prevention effort. Moderation should also be exercised in undertaking and overselling citizen surveillance and crime reporting activities. Overly enthusiastic participants can create a "police state" image in localities adopting such efforts.

Neighborhood meeting locations. Experience in the demonstration projects has shown that in some areas residents are reluctant to invite neighbors into their homes for crime prevention meetings. They fear that some of those who attend might later return to steal items observed in the home. It may be desirable to conduct such meetings in a neutral but accessible location, such as a community center, school, or church.

Formalize citizen participation structure. Interested citizens may attend one meeting and unless committed to a specific task, or at least to a specific organization, may not be active again. It is desirable to have a mechanism whereby those who wish to participate can be accommodated immediately. Also, individuals who attend meetings or somehow express interest, even though they prefer not to be active in the effort, should be placed on the distribution list for program

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communications. Later, when a need develops that is in accord with their interests, they may decide to volunteer.

Coordination

Identify existing organizations and programs. Key persons can help identify community groups and various improvement projects, either proposed or underway, that could offer support to a crime prevention effort. The identification of such activities should not be limited to those which originate or are targeted for the program area, or are concerned only with crime prevention. There are many organizations or projects at municipal, state, and federal levels that can affect the community of interest. It is important to identify and investigate these organizations and projects since they may possibly assist in funding crime prevention strategies, help identify other funding sources, and provide potential human and technical resources. It is also important to coordinate with existing groups to avoid overlapping responsibilities.

The Portland demonstration was closely linked to a major redevelopment effort in the planning stage, the Union Avenue Redevelopment Plan. CPTED strategies were integrated into the Plan so that physical and social changes could achieve both crime prevention and area economic and physical revitalization objectives. An existing business organization and community groups established when the area was part of a Model Cities program also provided a good community base for establishing a CPTED program.

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Encourage cooperation between groups and agencies. When several citizen organizations are attempting to bring about changes in the project areas, competition for funds is likely. Thus, an early management objective should be to identify what is planned for the community by various groups (particularly concerning security-related projects) and to create mechanisms for interorganization cooperation so that a broader base of community support can be achieved, relevant information can be distributed and shared, and strategies for fund raising can be developed.

Mutual understanding must be fostered, particularly in areas where public officials are involved in the program. Public officials may be tempted to provide project direction, as well as guidance, while community participants may be reluctant to offer criticism. Officials, including the police, should be knowledgeable concerning community relations and communications. Although involvement with the police, particularly, is an essential part of the CPTED effort, planners must proceed with caution, especially in poorer areas where the mere presence of police in a community meeting may stop or curtail conversation. It is important to determine the general attitude of the citizens to the local police before attempting to involve the police directly. If a problem exists, care should be exercised in how and when the police should be involved. But it is essential for the police to be active and accepted participants if the crime presentation program is to succeed. An analysis of previous crime prevention programs reveals that

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efforts initiated, directed, and led only by the police are generally not as successful as those in which citizens have control.

There may develop a general feeling of support within a community for one strategy, while one small area may not accept the approach or prefers an alternative idea. Some CPTED strategies are amenable to implementation in small areas, such as within a few-block area. For example, block watch projects, in which residents observe their neighborhood closely and report suspicious activities to the police, can be implemented in small areas.

Community Interests

Program should not displace current residents. Major rehabilitation efforts which are part of a general crime prevention program may attract higher income levels and have the effect of displacing existing residents. Although a goal should be to improve the quality of life, experience in the Minneapolis residential neighborhood demonstration has shown that residents will strongly resist any attempts to plan them out of the neighborhood. Although there was some modification of this attitude later on, as residents recognized the need to attract more taxpayers to the area, they were still emphatic in insisting that whatever was to be implemented should be for the benefit of the present population, not to price them out of the community. Some citizens were concerned that community improvements would result in higher real estate taxes and rents, forcing them to move from the area to something even worse than before the program.

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Local needs and interests should be foremost. Experience in the demonstration projects has shown that citizen-initiated and citizen-supported programs are more likely to be effective on a long-term basis. Residents and users of the community must feel that the CPTED projects are working for them, in their best interests, or they are not likely to participate in the program.

Program responsive to changing needs. Communities differ and so do their needs. And the needs and concerns of a given community will change over time. Citizen participation is dependent upon being responsive to these changes and keeping the citizens informed of the program's progress. The actual form of a CPTED project will vary with the community's needs and should be flexible enough to accommodate change.

Communication

Keep citizens informed. Group meetings are helpful for reaching the actively involved citizen. Information centers maintained in local community buildings and businesses can reach a larger segment of the population. The local press and broadcast media can reach a larger audience with public service announcements and news features. The news media, however, usually regard a crime prevention program as less newsworthy with the passage of time.

In the Minneapolis demonstration, distribution of a free community newsletter was found effective in providing ongoing information to the target audience. The newsletter informed citizens of progress and

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decisions to be made in the project, announced meetings, and offered advice on individual crime prevention techniques. To maintain interest, the newsletter carried general news of interest to the community.

Change attitudes through education. CPTED or any crime prevention project should be designed in the best interests of the community. In some cases, however, educational efforts may be necessary to demonstrate that it is in the self-interest of everyone to help reduce crime and the fear of crime. If a project is to be successful, there must be a substantial gain envisioned for the citizens or they will not participate. Providing meaningful information can help educate individuals about crime problems and prevention, and may help change citizen attitudes about supporting and participating in the program.

Local ordinance education. Citizens participating in crime prevention activities, such as Block Watch Clubs and citizen patrols, should be aware of local ordinances so that they do not unwittingly violate laws. For example, citizens should be aware of what constitutes trespassing. Such organized surveillance groups should establish standard procedures for members to use when reporting crimes. These procedures should minimize danger to the citizen and maximize the accuracy of the information conveyed to the police. The legal status of such groups should be determined prior to implementation, and the police informed. Some jurisdictions may require official police identification for such activities as patrols, and FCC licenses are required if radios are used.

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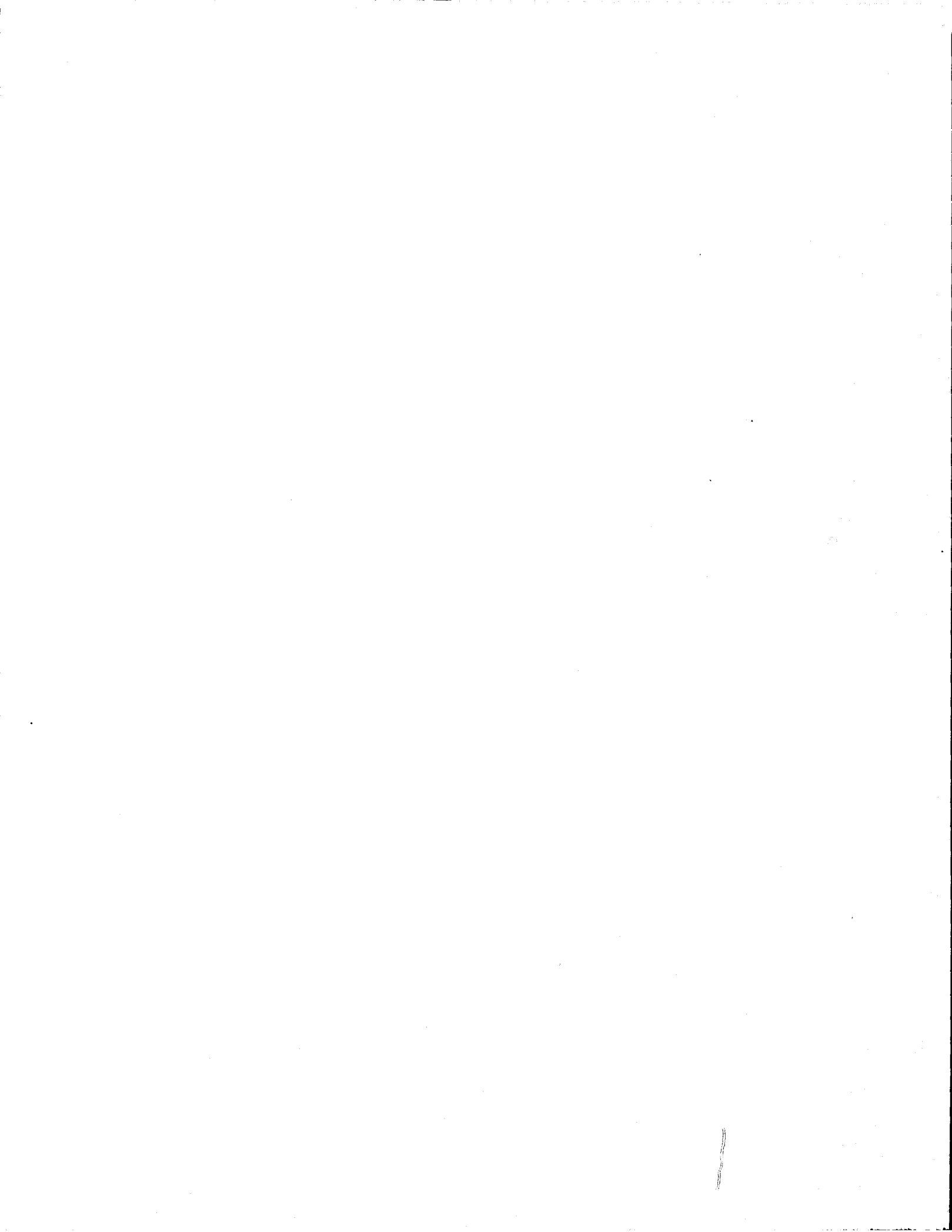
It should be established in advance what legal protection, if any, exists for members who become involved in any type of incident.

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Conclusions

Active and positive citizen participation is a critical and essential ingredient in successful community crime prevention efforts. But the desired participation may not occur naturally. Those responsible for initiating, planning, and implementing crime prevention programs must mobilize and utilize the human resources living within and served by the community.

There are many factors influencing citizen participation. This paper identifies four classes of factors: Organization tactics, coordination, community interests, and communication. Within these classes, 13 specific factors are described. Although the factors were identified while developing CPTED demonstration programs, it is likely that they are applicable while planning and implementing most community crime prevention programs.



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