

Defensible Space: Detering Crime and Building Community

The concentrated physical and social problems of poor neighborhoods have been on our public conscience for more than a century.¹ The burgeoning economies of the industrial North were creating great wealth a century ago, but they were also creating appalling slums as thousands of poor job seekers packed into the inadequate housing of our major cities. From the beginning, high rates of crime and juvenile delinquency were among the slums' most characteristic afflictions (DeForest and Veiller, 1903).

Through 1960, government programs directed toward the problems of slum areas focused predominantly on physical solutions—providing more and better housing in particular. But since then, this approach by itself has been recognized as myopic. New research made it clear that housing quality and overcrowding were not in themselves the critical underlying causes of crime and other social pathologies of poor neighborhoods.² Those who thought good housing alone would be enough to fix these problems were berated as “environmental determinists.” For a time, in important policy circles, strategies stressing physical change simply became unfashionable.

Today the pendulum seems to be swinging back to an increasing recognition that, in the right places, physical design does have a role to play in crime reduction. The design approaches capturing the interest of criminologists now, however, are quite different from the massive urban renewal schemes of the past. These design approaches are known collectively as *defensible space*. They rely on a bundle of relatively inexpensive techniques, such as appropriately placed fencing, that define spaces in a manner that discourages criminal activity for both individual buildings and whole neighborhoods.

The concept of defensible space is not yet well known. My purpose here is to introduce it to a broader audience of both local and national policymakers and to offer some ideas about its potential.

Defensible Space—Its Importance

Why is defensible space important? Crime persists as our Nation's dominant fear—if we listen to opinion polls—despite the massive recent growth in prison populations. Too many Americans are losing hope that the problem of crime in our streets will, or can, be addressed effectively. Anything that offers a chance of reducing it deserves attention. Defensible space techniques have had some impressive successes, dramatically reducing criminal activity in some projects and neighborhoods.

Even its advocates, however, do not claim that defensible space is a cure-all. It is most effective when used in conjunction with other programs (such as community policing and effective resident organization) if it is to have lasting effects on projects and neighborhoods. Any effective solution to America's crime problem as a whole will depend on a much broader assault on the structural flaws in our society that motivate high crime rates.

Nonetheless, the practical successes of defensible space initiatives, the fact that they can be implemented quickly and require very little public funding, and the surge of new research and experimentation they have generated³ make defensible space an approach well worth our consideration.

My own view is that we should be assessing these techniques broadly. Beyond their immediate impacts on crime reduction, they have the promise of making important contributions to longer term, multifaceted strategies aimed at halting the spread of decay in America's cities.

In the remainder of this essay, I outline the basic principles of defensible space; show how defensible space has worked in some public housing projects (now often the sites of lawlessness so blatant and devastating as to make the environments of late 19th-century slums seem benign); discuss the application of defensible space at the neighborhood level and its possible role as a catalyst for broader community improvement; and consider steps that might be taken to help realize the broader potential of defensible space, including research to better understand its limitations and linkages as well as programs to spread its application.

Defensible Space—Principles

The early development of the defensible space approach, and a surprising amount of the application so far, is attributable to one person: architect Oscar Newman. Although he acknowledges thematic debts to the writings of Jane Jacobs,⁴ Newman says that a strong personal motivator for these ideas was his exposure to the infamous Pruitt-Igoe public housing project in St. Louis (since demolished). The public spaces of the project were filthy and crime-ridden, but the apartment interiors, in sharp contrast, were well maintained. The problem seemed to have more to do with the characteristics of the public spaces than of the people who lived there. Since Newman's formulation of the basic approach to defensible space in the early 1970s (Newman, 1972),⁵ he has applied it in many locations and explored its applicability in considerable detail (Newman and Franck, 1980).⁶

Newman's fundamental assumption is that most criminals behave with some rationality, selecting for their crimes locations they believe will offer high rewards but very low risk of getting caught.⁷ To deter crime, then, spaces should convey to would-be intruders a strong sense that if they enter they are very likely to be observed, to be identified as intruders, and to have difficulty escaping.

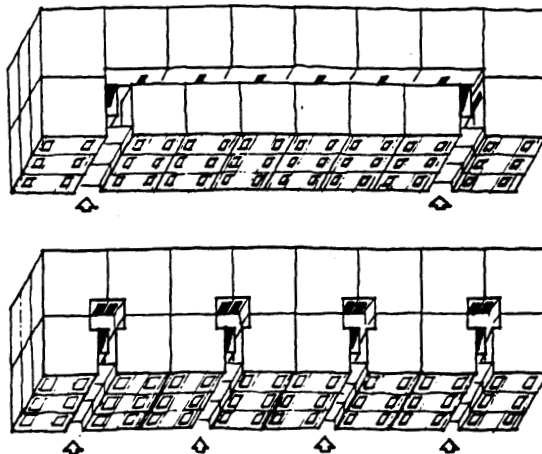
Outside spaces become more defensible if they are clearly demarcated (by fences, shrubbery, and so forth) for use by one household or a small number of households, and if they are easily observable by residents, neighbors, and passers-by. It is hard to tell who is, and who is not, an intruder if too many people are entitled to use an outdoor space and no one feels responsible for its legitimate use. Defensibility is also helped by good lighting around possible means of entrance; removal of visual barriers such as high, solid fences and shrubs that create hiding places; and windows with good views of the space in question.

Single-family homes, row houses, and duplexes are most defensible, by definition, because building entrances and outside spaces are used and controlled by only one household; that is, they are "private." To capitalize on the inherent advantages of these housing types, designers should:

- Avoid setting the front of the building too far back from the street, to keep the building observable to neighbors.
- Provide fences or other barriers to demarcate and prevent easy access to and through back yards.

Figure 1

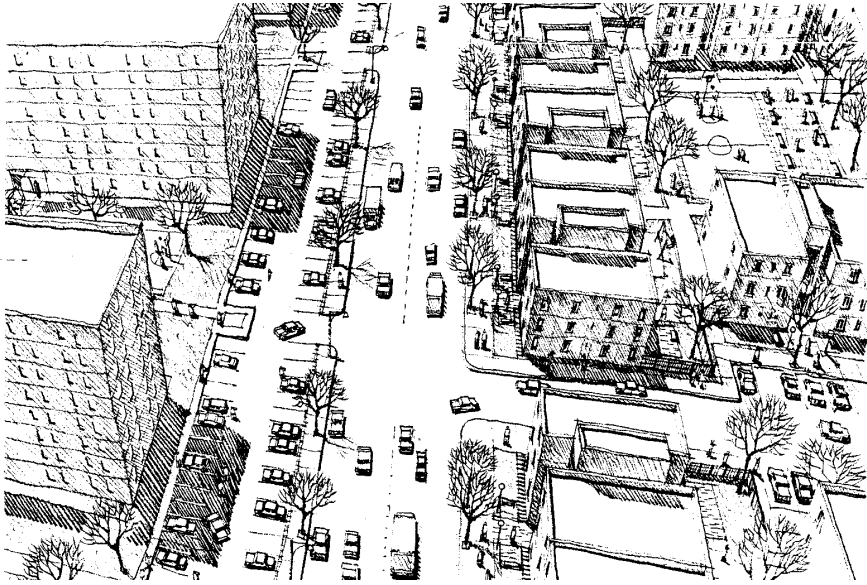
A 48-unit building (top) with common stairs and long corridors that are tempting to intruders, and the same building (bottom) made safer by allowing access to only 12 units per entrance.



Source: Oscar Newman, *Design Guidelines for Creating Defensible Space*. Reprinted by permission.

Figure 2

Newman's sketch of alternative ways to develop a four-block area. The project on the left is turned in on itself, away from the public street.



Source: Oscar Newman, *Community of Interest*. Reprinted by permission.

- Provide good outside lighting around entrances and avoid visual barriers that create hiding places easily accessible from public streets.

Two- to four-story apartment buildings are more of a challenge because entrances, interior circulation areas, and some outside spaces must be used by more than one household; that is, they are “public.” A priority for designers of public apartment buildings is to minimize the number of apartments served by each entrance. In the 48-unit building at the top of figure 1, the common stairs and corridors are accessible to 48 families, and the long corridors are tempting to intruders—offering escape routes and a fairly low probability that anyone will report them if they are observed. The building at the bottom of figure 1 has the same number of apartments, but there are only 12 units per entrance (4 per landing) and escape is not as easy. Also important in these cases is that outside spaces be divided up and allocated to individual families insofar as possible. Where this cannot be done, it may be possible to define areas for use by a limited number of families—for example, by providing a clearly marked play area for children immediately adjacent to (and observable from the windows of) a small number of apartments.

Highrise apartments with large outside open spaces are hardest to make defensible. Elevator economics encourages one central interior public space serving a great many units. Moreover, a highrise project typically has a large outside “no-man’s land”—a public space where intruders can mingle without notice and find easy avenues of escape. Clearly, highrise projects can be made more defensible,

but the means (guards and reception desks) are usually unaffordable even for moderate-income families, let alone the poor.

Newman's sketch of three alternative ways to develop a four-block area (figure 2) illustrates these points. The first alternative consists of single-family row houses. A high percentage of the land area in each block is private, thus defensible. The second consists of walkup apartments. The inner portions of the blocks are at least semiprivate, with limited points of access and observable spaces. Spaces are not divided up and assigned to individual households, so the risks for an intruder in these spaces are clearly less serious than in the back yard of a single-family house. The third alternative is a set of highrise apartment blocks. All of the exterior space is public, and the elements of natural household-based control are lacking altogether.

The limited evidence available suggests that design can influence crime rates. In New York City Housing Authority projects in 1969, for example, felony rates (crimes per 1,000 families) affecting low-income, female-headed households averaged 90 in buildings with 12 to 30 stories, 78 in buildings with 6 to 7 stories, and only 41 in walkups with 3 to 4 stories. Crimes occurring in interior public spaces accounted for 37 percent of the total in highrise structures, but only 5 percent in the walkups.

Residential neighborhoods appear more or less vulnerable to crime depending on their location, their internal layout, the mix of housing types within them, and the actions and attitudes of their residents. The technique most prominently discussed to make such large spaces more defensible is that of changing street patterns. Blocking off some streets and alleys and installing fencing makes it harder to drive into the area or to make a quick getaway.

At the neighborhood level, resident attitudes and behaviors also seem to affect the defensibility of space. Physical change may be less effective in deterring crime when residents are fearful and apathetic than when they are hopeful, determined, and organized.⁸

Applications in Public Housing

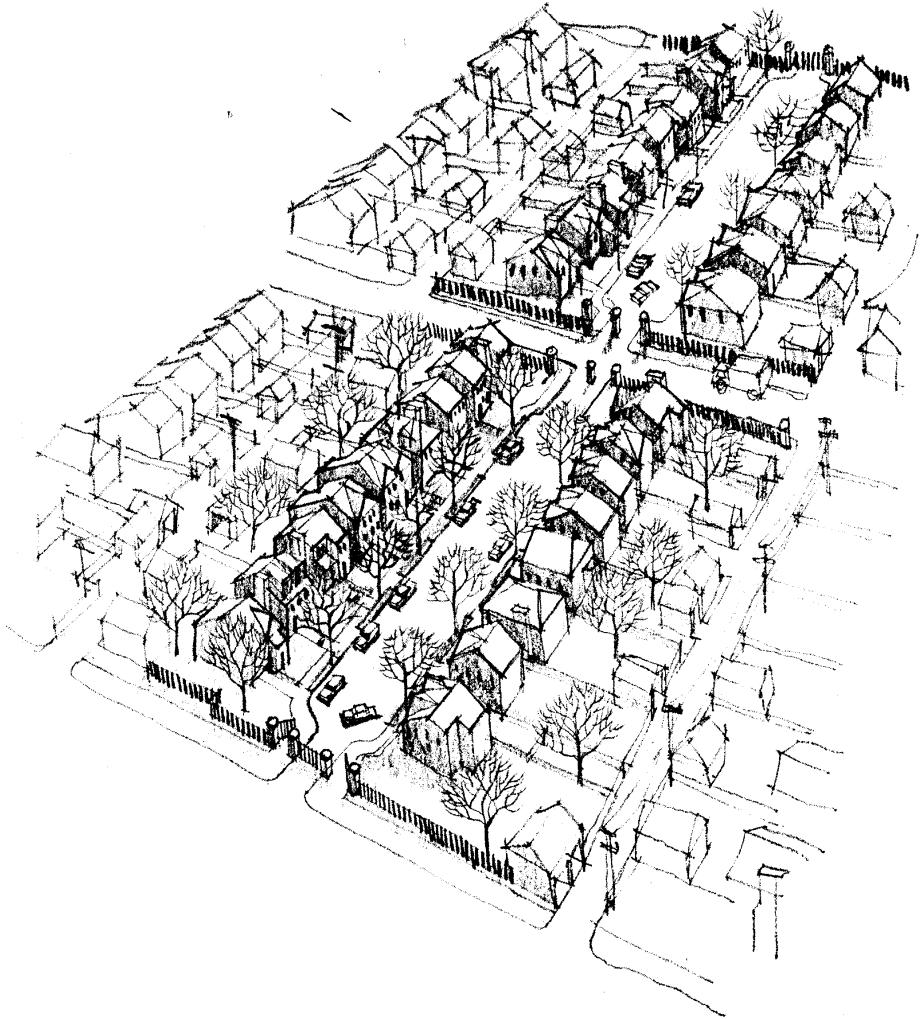
Most Americans' image of public housing is of a large concentration of run-down highrise buildings in a major city—crime-ridden and inhabited by the poorest of the poor. The principles of defensible space help to explain why crime rates in such projects are both so high and so hard to bring under control.

There are, indeed, many such projects, but this single image of public housing is something of a media distortion. In 1989 one- and two-story structures (many were scattered-site, single-family units) accounted for almost one-third of the 1.4 million public housing units nationwide. Buildings with three to six stories accounted for almost another quarter (Casey, 1989).

Defensible space techniques have had considerable success in several smaller scale developments, and they have made at least some dent in the crime problems of certain highrise developments. I believe this approach can be highly cost-effective and should be applied much more widely. But in moving forward it is

Figure 3

Aerial view of a typical set of private closed streets in St. Louis, Missouri. Street closures by residents have reduced crime and stabilized communities.



important to learn from cases where defensible space approaches have been misapplied. The danger is not only that they may fail to cut crime in the projects themselves, but that they may shift it to a nearby location.

The Experiment at Clason Point Gardens

Clason Point is a development on the border of the South Bronx in New York City, composed almost entirely of three- to six-unit blocks of two-story row houses. When these buildings were constructed, all of the space around them was

left public, giving tenants no sense of personal responsibility for any area outside their own units. The project was plagued with problems, and crime was high on the list. In one of the earliest attempts to apply the defensible space concept in public housing, Oscar Newman redesigned the grounds of the Clason Point project. Newman's plan focused on four simple measures:

- Handsome 6-foot iron fences were installed to enclose the areas immediately behind each row-house block. Provision of fencing, shrubs, or other materials to further subdivide these spaces into individual back yards was left to the tenants.
- Paths and low curbs were used to delineate individual front yards for each unit in the formerly public space in front of each block, similar to the treatment in figure 3.
- The amorphous building facades were resurfaced in varying colors and textures, so that each unit became visually distinct from the one next door.
- Ample street lighting, along with seating and other appropriate “street furniture,” was provided along the paths and in other spaces that remained public. These changes, completed in 1972, converted 80 percent of the previously public grounds into spaces clearly demarcated for private use and control.

The results were all that the designer had hoped. Within a year, almost all of the residents had planted grass seed (provided by the housing authority) in their new front and back yards. Many had also added fencing and shrubbery to define their own spaces more clearly and had begun to sweep the public paths in front of their units regularly. With so much less land to take care of, the grounds maintenance crew's workload declined substantially, and half the crew was transferred to another project. Crime decreased as well. The overall crime rate dropped by more than 50 percent, from 83 to 38 incidents per 1,000 residents per year, and the burglary rate declined by more than 25 percent. The percentage of tenants feeling that they had a right to question strangers on the project grounds jumped from 27 to 50 percent.

The New Wave of Interest

Despite the success of Clason Point Gardens, the next 20 years saw comparatively few defensible space improvements in public housing. Newman and others applied similar techniques effectively in other projects, but for a number of reasons (fiscal stringency being prominent among them), the approach never caught on.

In the 1990s, however, many of the older big-city projects have become environments of such sheer terror that local housing authorities are willing to try almost any technique, including defensible space, to alleviate the nightmare. New phenomena from the preceding decade—the crack cocaine epidemic, the widened availability of inexpensive guns, the rise of youth gangs—have aggravated the problem of crime in public housing beyond imagination. The stories are now well known: residents who have become prisoners in their own apartments, cringing behind darkened windows and hoping to avoid the next spray of random gunfire; maintenance crews that are withdrawn because of harassment by gang members who have assumed de facto control of project access.

The redevelopment of the Outhwaite Homes project in Cleveland, Ohio, where Congressman Louis Stokes grew up, now underway, also uses the principles of defensible space. It entails:

- Adding terraces and stoops outside the apartments to make it easier for tenants to sit outdoors, where they can both see and be seen.
- Delineating areas within the development with iron fencing and by providing paved pathways, gates, and landscaping to make interior courtyard areas more attractive, thereby eliminating visual barriers that have made it hard for tenants and police to see what is happening.
- Establishing proprietary spaces farther away from the buildings, including plots for gardening.
- Converting many existing single-occupant units to multibedroom family apartments to encourage additional working families to move in (Litt, 1994).

Renaissance Homes, also in Cleveland, is eliminating long interior hallways on the ground floor by adding hall space to abutting apartments and is providing outside entrances for each apartment.

Potomac Gardens, in Washington, D.C., tried a less ambitious approach. Managers simply installed 8-foot perimeter fences around the buildings in conjunction with a focused initiative to evict known drug dealers. The number of drug-related arrests in the complex plunged from 150 in 1991 (the year before the defensible space improvements) to only 7 in 1992 (Kovaleski, 1994). But in the case of Potomac Gardens, the results may be less impressive than they seem. Crime rates in the nearby Hopkins Project increased markedly after the fences went in at Potomac Gardens. A good case has been made that much of the drug trade from Potomac Gardens simply moved over to Hopkins.

Another danger is that the criminal element may not leave. A perimeter fence around a project could actually make matters worse for residents when drug dealers and gangs control the internal turf, because the fence only consolidates that control. As Oscar Newman has always emphasized, fences should break up and allocate spaces internally, not wall off a development from its surrounding environment. The latter can sometimes help, but only in the right circumstances.

We must recognize that defensible space applications are not all winners. Success is likely only when techniques are mixed to fit the circumstances of the project at hand.

Street Patterns and “Broken Windows”

Thus far I have talked mostly about single owners (public housing authorities or private parties), who are able to make definitive decisions about physical improvements and security measures. How do defensible space techniques work in a residential neighborhood where there are many owners, where power to change the physical environment is more diffuse, and where outcomes may have a less uniform impact on the physical space and on the reactions of criminals?

Two conclusions stand out from the research available on this topic. First, the physical characteristics and appearance of a neighborhood do matter when those who would break the law select the location for their crimes. Second, neighborhood characteristics signal how strongly residents are likely to respond when they identify criminal activity in their midst.

Physical Location

In Atlanta, Georgia, and Richmond, Virginia,⁹ neighborhoods that are harder to drive through (narrow streets, one-way streets, few straight thoroughfares) have significantly less crime than those that are more permeable. In St. Louis, Missouri, private streets have much lower levels of criminal activity than adjacent blocks with similar housing types (Newman, 1980). The safer streets were actually deeded to residents' associations, which closed off one end to prohibit through traffic and installed decorative entry portals at the other end. In Washington, D.C., the percentage of lots zoned for commercial use in a neighborhood is significantly related to the risk of robbery (Harrell and Gouvis, 1994). In a 50-block area in Baltimore, Maryland, physical deterioration of streetfronts is linked to higher crime rates (controlling for social class and block layout) (Perkins et al., 1992). In Los Angeles, increasing crime rates followed building abandonment, conversions from owner to rental occupancy, and land-use changes (Schuerman and Kobrin, 1986).

Resident Response

James Q. Wilson and George Kelling developed the “broken windows” thesis to explain the signaling function of neighborhood characteristics (Wilson and Kelling, 1982).¹⁰ This thesis suggests that the following sequence of events can be expected in deteriorating neighborhoods. Evidence of decay (accumulated trash, broken windows, deteriorated building exteriors) remains in the neighborhood for a reasonably long period of time. People who live and work in the area feel more vulnerable and begin to withdraw. They become less willing to intervene to maintain public order (for example, to attempt to break up groups of rowdy teens loitering on street corners) or to address physical signs of deterioration. Sensing this, teens and other possible offenders become bolder and intensify their harassment and vandalism. Residents become yet more fearful and withdraw further from community involvement and upkeep. This atmosphere then attracts offenders from outside the area, who sense that it has become a more vulnerable and less risky site for crime (Taylor et al., 1985).¹¹

Defensible Space at the Neighborhood Scale

An important question regarding defensible space is whether the sequence of neglect described above can work in reverse. There is little doubt that visible evidence of decay can start the downward spiral captured by the “broken windows” hypothesis. On the other hand, can physical improvements to a neighborhood lessen residents' fear, increase their involvement, and, in turn, actually reduce crime? There is encouraging evidence that they can.

Figure 4

An entry portal to the mini-neighborhood created through street closures.



Source: Oscar Newman, *Improving the Viability of Two Dayton Communities: Five Oaks and Dunbar Manor*.
Reprinted by permission.

Figure 5

Decorative iron gates hung on brick piers used to block other entrances to the mini-neighborhood.



Source: Oscar Newman, *Improving the Viability of Two Dayton Communities: Five Oaks and Dunbar Manor*.
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The Five Oaks Story

The Five Oaks neighborhood of Dayton, Ohio, is probably the most impressive example of the creation of neighborhood defensible space (Newman, 1992). Five Oaks is a one-half-square-mile area accommodating some 2,000 households, located about a mile away from Dayton's central business district. Historically, its street pattern permitted considerable through traffic, and it has always been something of a gateway between the downtown and prosperous residential communities to the north.

In the 1960s Five Oaks was predominantly a community of white, middle-income homeowners. By 1990 more than one-half of its residents were minorities and more than one-half were renters. Property values had declined substantially, and crime had increased.¹² Many of the original homeowners who wanted to move were unable to find buyers at an acceptable price. So they converted their properties to rentals—and sometimes to illegal multifamily rentals.

Still the area, with its large, well-built homes, retained a sufficiently middle-class character to be regarded as relatively safe. Ironically, this perception made it an ideal location for drug dealers and prostitutes serving a higher income clientele who usually made their purchases from their cars.¹³ This vehicular trade came to dominate the street scene and created a threatening atmosphere for residents. Gunshots sounded in the afternoon; radio “boom-boxes” played and tires screeched throughout the night. Fearful residents withdrew into their homes, and the potential for further flight and accompanying physical deterioration increased.

In late 1991 Dayton's police department retained Oscar Newman to make recommendations for Five Oaks. After Newman had made an initial reconnaissance and discussed possible solutions, the city manager asked him to work with resident groups and representatives of a number of city departments on a plan for implementation.

The plan had four elements. The first and foremost was a series of steps to close streets to through traffic in a very special way. The planning team divided the area into 10 mini-neighborhoods, each with 3 to 6 streets and relatively similar housing characteristics. From a bordering arterial street, one opening was selected as the entry portal into each mini-neighborhood (figure 4); portals were to be identified by attractive brick pillars. All other entrances into the mini-neighborhoods were to be blocked off by iron gates hung on brick piers (figure 5). These gates could be unlocked to provide access to emergency and maintenance vehicles. Internal streets would become cul-de-sacs, but openings at the sides of the gates would permit free access to pedestrians.

The basic point, of course, as with all defensible space applications, was to increase the risk for criminals entering the area. They could still drive through the portals, but it would not be so easy to leave. If suspicious behavior was observed and the police were called, there was a good chance that a police unit would be there before the offender could depart.

Demarcating mini-neighborhoods, however, was intended to benefit residents in more ways than one. As Newman puts it, “Smallness is essential to identity.”

Without the heavy traffic of the past, internal streets could be “taken back” and used for play by children and for other forms of interaction among neighbors. The scheme should encourage proprietary feelings by residents—recognition that they share a common destiny and the sense that neighborhood improvements might, at last, have a “payoff.”

The second element of the plan was a city-sponsored program to encourage resident homeownership by supporting modest rehabilitation and downpayments for first-time homebuyers. The third element focused on improved code enforcement procedures, including stronger, quicker, and more certain penalties for absentee owners whose buildings had code violations. The final element involved closer working relationships between the community and the police.

The recommendations regarding street closings and creation of mini-neighborhoods, which required a total of 35 gates and 26 alley closings, were implemented in the fall of 1992. The total cost of installation, \$693,000 including planning costs and insurance, was paid for from the proceeds of a city bond issue. The effect was dramatic and immediate. Between 1992 and 1993, nonviolent crime in Five Oaks fell by 24 percent and violent crime by 50 percent. Internal traffic declined by two-thirds and accidents by 40 percent. The average price of a single-family home in the area increased during the same period by 15 percent.

Other elements of the plan are currently being implemented. Once the gates went in, police strike forces raided “crack” houses and dens of prostitution operating in the area. Police officers are now working with code enforcement staff on focused applications of the city’s nuisance ordinances, which permit the seizure of properties being used for activities that have been determined to be public nuisances. Programs offering low-interest loans for building rehabilitation (for both landlords and owner-occupants) have been set up in cooperation with local banks.

The Five Oaks environment has clearly changed for the better. Most residents note reductions in traffic and noise, and more than one-third say that resident involvement has increased and that they know their neighbors better (Dayton Office of Management and Budget, 1994).

Perhaps most encouraging of all is that action in Five Oaks seems to be having a benign spillover effect: Crime rates are also declining in adjacent neighborhoods. Traders in drugs and prostitution may be confused about the exact borders of the street closings. They are clearly impressed by the forcefulness of the actions taken.

It is too early to be sure that Five Oaks has turned around for good, but the results certainly look promising so far.

Exploring the Potential

Five Oaks may be the most comprehensive application of defensible space approaches thus far, but changes to street patterns have also worked elsewhere. The year after the community of Miami Shores in southern Florida (Ycaza, 1992) finished installing a system of street barricades, burglaries were down by 23 percent, and robberies and car thefts had decreased as well. A drug-infested area of

Bridgeport, Connecticut, and a neighborhood in North Philadelphia have seen similar reductions in crime following street closings (Taylor et al., forthcoming).

What lessons can we draw from these experiences? What steps should we take? My own view is that, with correct application, the defensible space approach is a potentially powerful addition to our kit of tools for improving the living environment of lower income Americans. Further, I think we now know enough to promote its broader use and to learn by doing.

This approach has been criticized sharply by some who regard it as being linked to the increasing popularity of gated communities in distant suburbs—a symbol of exclusion and the growing sense of “fortress America.” Legitimate though these underlying concerns may be, they are not relevant, in my judgment, to the use of defensible space in the low- and moderate-income communities I am addressing here.

Five Oaks, for example, is a successfully integrated neighborhood in which more than 70 percent of the residents note racial diversity as a positive feature of their community. Neither the plan nor the reality of Five Oaks’ defensible space excluded anyone but criminals, and the community is *not* closed off. There are no barriers to pedestrians and no high, solid walls. If the plan continues to improve housing conditions and community stability, the many current vacancies in the area will help fill the city’s need for more affordable housing in a safe and decent living environment.

Although it seems wrong to me to apply the lowest possible cost criterion to housing improvements for poor residents, it is fortunate indeed that these techniques are inexpensive, given the generally constrained fiscal environment. Cheap wire-mesh fences create a “fortress” impression, connoting a community that considers itself under siege. Open ironwork fences with attractive landscaping signal a stable and pleasant place to live. The difference in cost between the two alternatives is modest in relation to the potential benefits.

The all-important lesson to be learned once again from designs for defensible space is how vital perceptions are—not only to criminals but also to residents. The way we feel about the place where we live governs our motivation to take care of it or to neglect it. In this sense, defensible space is no more than an expression of something that has always been a key principle of distinguished urban design: All urban spaces should be clearly articulated, providing strong visual clues as to their functions and ownership.

Potential for Urban Neighborhoods

When neighborhoods are the focus, we need to consider not only *how* defensible space techniques should be applied, but also *where* they should be applied. Since they have not yet been tried in a variety of urban settings, we have little experience to guide us on the second question. The right mix of techniques will probably help in most neighborhoods where crime is a threat, but the payoff will almost certainly be higher in some places than others.

The most devastated sections of our older cities—areas where a sense of community has all but vanished—are the least promising areas for reclamation in Oscar Newman’s opinion, and I agree with that judgment. Such areas will require strong medicine initially, with defensible space concepts offering useful guidelines during the rebuilding process.

Neighborhoods such as Five Oaks that are deteriorating but retain residents and other stakeholders who still have hope that traumatic decline can be prevented are the most promising candidates for the introduction of defensible space techniques. Many such neighborhoods lie at the edges of America’s cities. Some are among our Nation’s all-too-few integrated communities, while others are predominantly African-American or Hispanic. All differ from the core areas of intense criminal activity in that they house a higher percentage of traditional families and have higher rates of homeownership. In addition, because these neighborhoods are so near the core areas, their residents are often the most desperate to prevent the spread of crime.

Some might oppose the idea of spending public money to try to preserve neighborhoods such as these, arguing that funding should be devoted solely to core areas where the need is so much greater. That view misses an important point. Many neighborhoods that were clinging to the edge of stability a decade ago have since slid into chaos. If that trend continues, the magnitude of central-city problems and the cost of addressing them will grow to truly nightmarish proportions.

We should not devote vast public subsidies to keeping relatively stable neighborhoods afloat, but if we can fund modest public initiatives that leverage sizable reinvestment by the residents of those areas, we will have accomplished a great deal. That is the attraction of approaches such as defensible space: They are inexpensive, but they have the potential to have a substantial impact on the lives of residents.

As to *how* defensible space should be applied at the neighborhood level, I think the Five Oaks plan embodies several vital principles—principles we have been advocating strongly at HUD, particularly in our Empowerment Zone guidelines and our proposals for consolidating and simplifying the plans localities must submit as a basis for HUD funding.

Applying the first principle, residents of the area played a leading role in devising the strategy. Second, relevant city agencies participated in the planning process with neighborhood groups and were able to express their opinions on what would be workable while being exposed to the priorities and concerns of residents and other agencies. Third, the strategy was multifaceted, employing a variety of programmatic techniques.

Although all elements of the revitalization were probably essential, I would like to stress the importance of the contribution made by the defensible space approach. Many local programs over the past few decades have tried to preserve and upgrade marginal neighborhoods. In a number of them, the tools applied (for example, rehabilitating a fraction of the buildings in an area) were just not powerful enough to avert the forces of deterioration. What was missing was some sort of “big bang” that dramatically altered resident perceptions about the future of

their community: It should be something that could sharply and obviously reverse the “broken windows” sequence and motivate residents—collectively and individually—to reinvest, maintain, and take other actions to deal with the problems confronting them. It seems to me that defensible space applications, such as the gates and fences of Five Oaks, are just the sort of catalysts needed to make this happen. They are comparatively inexpensive and, if they have the desired effect of motivating private reinvestment, they may obviate the need for massive public funding for building rehabilitation.

Potential for Public Housing

Since I have been at HUD, we have not tried to hide the fact that many of our Nation’s public housing projects are in deep trouble. Rather, we have attempted to recognize and understand their problems and develop a forceful plan for addressing them. Our overall strategy calls for a major restructuring of current policies aimed at breaking down the role these projects are playing as highly concentrated “warehouses of the poor.” More immediately, the strategy calls for actions to alleviate the most severe threats to the daily lives of current residents, with drug and crime elimination as top priorities.

Our new Community Partnership Against Crime (COMPAC) initiative is the major focus of this effort. COMPAC will support a variety of activities, with particular emphasis on effective partnerships with local police departments, innovative police practices, and strong tenant involvement in all programs. Defensible space, including security fencing and other techniques, is very much a part of this mix.

We are engaged in an information campaign to make housing authority directors aware of the defensible space approach and how it can be applied in varying circumstances. We have even made it a requirement that housing authorities prepare a project-by-project assessment of security needs, including a defensible space analysis, as a precondition for receiving assistance under COMPAC.

This approach reflects conclusions I noted earlier. There can be no standard defensible space package for all public housing. The right mix of applications will depend on the physical and other characteristics of the project at hand, and the program must be based on a sensitive analysis of local needs and opportunities. For some public housing units, including those with the most serious internal crime and youth-gang problems, the time may not yet be right for defensible space applications. I think, however, that such applications can make a positive difference in most instances.

I am sure that a defensible space analysis is essential in all cases. There are many public housing developments where apartments and public spaces have been literally trashed by gang activity and the drug trade. It makes very little sense to spend substantial sums on physical repair and renovation in such housing if it is likely to be vandalized again within a few months. The problems related to criminal behavior must be fixed first, and they must be fixed permanently. I believe the defensible space approach will play an important role in these solutions.

As a final note, I would like to respond to the criticism that defensible space simply moves the problem around spatially. I would argue that shifting the problem spatially (in the sense of reducing the area where it is relatively easy to commit crimes) is itself a benefit. If all of a city's neighborhoods suffered under the "broken windows" thesis and were thus vulnerable, the police department's task would be virtually impossible. Using defensible space techniques, neighborhood by neighborhood, to raise the risk for criminals should lead to a decline in their activity.

Again let me emphasize that no one proposes defensible space, or any other single technique, as a cure-all. Multifaceted strategies are essential in every case. Nonetheless, the experience in hand strongly suggests that more aggressive applications of defensible space as a component of such strategies will help reduce crime in American cities.

Notes

1. This essay was first published in January 1995. The Department wishes to acknowledge the contributions of G. Thomas Kingsley, director, Center for Public Finance and Housing, The Urban Institute; and Oscar Newman, president, The Institute for Community Design Analysis, for making this essay possible.

Possibly the earliest official recognition of these problems at the Federal level was the initiation of a survey of slum conditions in several cities in 1892. See U.S. Bureau of Labor, *The Slums of Baltimore, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894).

2. Two influential works in this literature were Daniel Wilner, et al., *Housing Environment and Family Life* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962); and Leland Burns, *Housing: Symbol and Shelter* (Los Angeles: University of California, Graduate School of Business Administration, 1970).
3. One result is the establishment of a new professional organization, CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design). For a good summary of recent research in this field, see Ralph Taylor and Adele Harrell, "Physical Environment, Crime and Crime-Related Problems: Implications for Prevention and Community Viability," *NIJ Research in Brief* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice). Forthcoming.
4. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of the American City* (New York: Vintage, 1961). See also "Community on the City Streets," E.D. Baltzell, ed., *The Search for Community in Modern America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968): pp. 74-93.
5. Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space* (New York: Macmillan, 1972). See also *Design Guidelines for Creating Defensible Space* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, 1975).

6. See Oscar Newman and Karen Franck, *Factors Influencing Crime and Instability in Urban Housing Developments* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980). See also Newman and Franck, "The Effects of Building Size on Personal Crime and Fear of Crime," *Population and Environment*, No. 5 (1982): 203–220.
7. This assumption has since been the basis of formal research by others. For examples of this "rational offender" perspective, see R.V. Clarke, "Situational Crime Prevention: Its Theoretical Basis and Practical Scope," M. Tonry and N. Morris, eds., *Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), vol. 4, pp. 225–256; R.V. Clarke, ed., *Situational Crime Prevention* (Albany: Harrow and Heston, 1992); R.V. Clarke and D.B. Cornish, "Modeling Offenders' Decisions: A Framework for Research and Policy," M. Tonry and N. Morris, eds., *Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), vol. 6; and G. Rengert and J. Wasilchick, *Suburban Burglary* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1985). Rengert and Wasilchick's study showed that burglars "read" the environment around potential crime sites carefully before they act.
8. Ralph Taylor characterizes the recognition that territorial attitudes and behaviors of residents may affect the impact of physical design changes as "second generation" defensible space theory. This orientation has some applicability at the level of individual buildings as well, but its importance seems more pronounced at the neighborhood level. For discussions of its foundations, see Ralph B. Taylor, *Human Territorial Functioning* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Taylor, S.D. Gottfredson, and S.N. Brower, "The Defensibility of Defensible Space," T. Hirschi and M. Gottfredson, eds., *Understanding Crime* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980).
9. The Atlanta study was reported by S.W. Greenberg, J.R. Williams, and W.R. Rohe, "Safety in Urban Neighborhoods: A Comparison of Physical Characteristics and Informal Territorial Control in High and Low Crime Neighborhoods," *Population and Environment* 5 (1982): 141–165. The work done in Richmond was reported by G.F. White, "Neighborhood Permeability and Burglary Rates," *Justice Quarterly* 7 (1990): 57–68.
10. James Q. Wilson and George Kelling, "Broken Windows," *Atlantic Monthly* 211 (1982): 29–38. See also James Q. Wilson, *Thinking About Crime* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); and Wes Skogan, *Disorder and Decline: Crime and the Spiral of Decay in American Cities* (New York: Free Press, 1990).
11. Ralph B. Taylor, S.A. Shumaker, and S.D. Gottfredson, "Neighborhood-Level Links Between Physical Features and Local Sentiments: Deterioration, Fear of Crime, and Confidence," *Journal of Architectural Planning and Research* 2 (1985): 261–275. See also Taylor and Shumaker, "Local Crime as a Natural Hazard: Implications for Understanding the Relationship Between Disorder and Fear of Crime," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 18 (1990): 619–642.

12. The number of “part one” crimes in Five Oaks (homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft) increased from 383 in 1983 to 536 in 1991.
13. Similar changes have occurred in fringe neighborhoods bordering the urban core in other cities. For an example in New York, see Jeffrey Fagan, “Drug Selling and Licit Income in Distressed Neighborhoods: The Economic Lives of Street-Level Drug Users and Dealers,” Adele V. Harrell and George Peterson, eds., *Drugs, Crime, and Social Isolation: Barriers to Urban Opportunity* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1992).
14. Cindy Ycaza, “Crime Rate Drops In Shores,” *Miami Herald*, May 17, 1992. A notable increase in the number of narcotics arrests between 1990 and 1991 was due, according to police, to an increase in undercover “busts” over that period.

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