

Chapter 8: Crime

In 2002, more than 23 million crime victimizations occurred in the United States.⁷³ Some estimates place the cost of crime to victims at \$250 to \$500 million per year in the United States.⁷⁴ As of 1999, U.S. annual expenditures for police, courts, and corrections totaled \$146 billion.⁷⁵ Suffice to say crime exerts a serious quality of life impact on far too many Americans.

But what does crime and development have to do with one another? Actually, quite a bit. As will be shown in the review of research below, if development substantially increases the volume of traffic on a residential street then crime rates may rise. New neighborhoods can be designed in ways that greatly increase the number of eyes watching public spaces, which is an extremely effective way of deterring crime. And if increases in population are not matched by an equivalent increase in the number of police officers, then response times may slow considerably.

The perception of rampant crime has a significant effect upon quality of life. It may discourage people from taking an evening jog or stroll through their community or cause parents to keep their children indoors. Ironically, while there seems to be a widespread perception that crime has been increasing, it has actually declined over the past decade. In 1994, 25% of all households experienced crime. The percentage has dropped steadily since then with 15% of households victimized as of 2002.⁷⁶

In some respects crime has become a hinderance to the implementation of Smart Growth measures. A study conducted in Phoenix, Arizona found that the perception of crime was a significant barrier to infill development. Conversely, many gated communities are built in remote, rural areas to avoid densely-populated areas thought to be crime ridden. The perception that high-density and multifamily housing are synonymous with high crime areas can make it difficult to build at densities where bus service and other mass transportation facilities become economical.

The causes of crime are complex and far beyond the scope of this book. But poverty, lack of educational and employment opportunities certainly play a major role. Of course there are many

⁷³ *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 2002 Statistical Tables*, available for download at: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/cvus02.pdf>

⁷⁴ Social Factors Cause Crime, by Ed Rubenstein, in *Crime*, published by Greenhouse Press, Inc., San Diego, CA.

⁷⁵ Table 1.2, in *Sourcebook of criminal justice statistics Online* available for viewing at: <http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook/pdf/t12.pdf>

⁷⁶ Table 3.30 in *Sourcebook of criminal justice statistics Online* available for viewing at: <http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook/pdf/t330.pdf>

factors which reduce the rate of crime: police presence, probability of punishment, low unemployment rates, availability of affordable housing, access to good schools, and a host of other factors.

Growth management can play an important role in keeping crime rates low. Following is a brief, limited review of scientific research relevant to crime/growth-management relationships.

North Carolina University researchers looked at how street layout (accessibility) in Raleigh affected the rate of property crime (bicycle theft, auto theft, theft from autos, property theft, willful damage, and breaking-entering).⁷⁷ The researchers found that crime occurs more often in areas with easy road access, especially where commercial land uses dominate. Areas with cul-de-sacs, traffic calming, and other features inhibiting rapid vehicle movement tended to have a lower rate of crime. They also found that the risk of property crime increased as the number of homes on a street increased, which expands the opportunity to commit crime. The risk of property crime was lower on streets where most of the homes were owner-occupied.

The lower property crime rate on streets dominated by owner-occupied homes is likely due to several factors. It may be more likely that residents know their neighbors in areas where most homes are owner-occupied. This may foster a stronger sense of community which makes it more likely neighbors will look out for one another. In these communities strangers may stand out more distinctly and residents may be more likely to challenge and/or report suspicious activity. Also, property maintenance may be better in owner-occupied neighborhoods. Well-maintained properties sends a message that the owners care about their residences.

The link found in the Raleigh study between high housing density and elevated crime rates is not universal. Unfortunately, a common perception exists that high residential density equals a high rate of crime. This misperception motivates some local decision-makers to oppose multifamily housing and other higher density residential types. The relationship between housing density and crime was studied in the City of Irving, Texas, which is located adjacent to Dallas-Fort Worth.⁷⁸ The researchers found that high crime rates correlate better with socio-economic factors as opposed to housing density. Specifically, the researchers found:

“high crime rates tend to be associated with high poverty rate and unemployment rate, low education attainment, and large household size.”

The Irving study also showed that some crimes tend to be particularly high with specific land use types. For example, auto theft rates were highest in commercial areas, especially at malls and other

⁷⁷ Exploring accessibility versus opportunity crime factors, *Sociation Today*, Vol 1, No. 1, available for viewing online at: <http://www.ncsociology.org/sociationtoday/raleigh.htm>

⁷⁸ See *The Real Picture of Land-Use Density and Crime: A GIS Application* available online at: <http://gis.esri.com/library/userconf/proc00/professional/papers/PAP508/p508.htm>

shopping centers. An area dominated by high-income residences and warehouses also had a high auto-theft rate. The researchers theorized that the combination of expensive cars, warehouse pickup trucks and low population density accounted for the high auto theft rate. Burglary rates were high in residential areas dominated by professionals with high-end homes, where there are relatively few people around during the weekday. Again, overall crime rates are not likely to be significantly higher in high density or multifamily dwellings unless area residents are among the more socio-economically disadvantaged.

CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

In recent years Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) has arisen as a new approach to protecting homes, neighborhoods and businesses. CPTED consists of four complimentary strategies: Natural Surveillance, Natural Access Control, Territorial Reinforcement and Maintenance.

Natural surveillance consists of measures which make it harder for criminals to hide. In other words, to reach homes intruders must pass through areas where they are clearly visible to neighborhood residents. For example, walls are kept low or designed with openings so they provide poor hiding places. Through natural access control, visitors are discouraged from entering onto private areas through measures such as gateways, low walls, landscaping, sidewalks, and street design. Territorial reinforcement emphasizes where public and private spaces meet. The owners of private spaces are encouraged to exercise control over their area by challenging intruders. Good maintenance of a home or community spaces indicates that residents care and are more likely to notice and challenge intruders when compared to those who have allowed their surroundings to deteriorate.

CPTED does not eliminate crime within a neighborhood but it can dramatically reduce the likelihood of theft and other victimizations. One of the best guidance documents on CPTED is that developed by the Prince William County, Virginia police department⁷⁹. Following are measures presented in the portion of the Prince William document pertaining to neighborhoods consisting of single-family detached homes.

- Reliance upon measures such as video cameras may create an unnecessary sense of fear among neighborhood residents. Instead consider the following measures which are just as effective and do not instill a sense that one lives in a high-crime area;
- Avoid landscaping that might create blind spots or hiding places.
- Centrally locate open green spaces and recreational areas, so that they are visible from nearby homes and streets.
- Use pedestrian scale street lighting in high-pedestrian-traffic areas to help people recognize potential threats at night.

⁷⁹ *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design: A guide to safe environments in Prince William County, Virginia* can be viewed at: <http://www.pwcgov.org/docLibrary/PDF/002035.pdf>

- Limit access without completely disconnecting the subdivision from adjacent subdivisions.
- Design streets to discourage cut-through or high-speed traffic.
- Install paving treatments, plantings and architectural design features, such as columned gateways, to guide visitors to desired entrances and away from private areas.
- Install walkways in locations safe for pedestrians, and keep them unobscured.
- Design lots, streets and homes to encourage interaction between neighbors.
- Accentuate entrances with the subdivision name, different paving materials, changes in street elevation and architectural and landscape design.
- Clearly identify homes with street address numbers that are a minimum of three-inches high and reflective at night.
- Define property lines with post and pillar fencing, gates and plantings to direct pedestrian traffic to only desired points of access.
- Maintain all common areas to very high standards, including entrances, esplanades and rights of ways.
- Enforce deed restrictions and covenants in addition to all county codes.

Following are recommendations from the Prince William County CPTED document for multifamily (townhouses/apartment) communities:

- Design buildings so that the exterior doors are visible to the street or neighbors.
- Use good lighting at all doors that open to the outside.
- Install windows on all four facades of buildings to allow for good visibility.
- Assign parking spaces to residents. Locate the spaces next to the residents' unit but do NOT mark with the unit number. This makes unauthorized parking easier to identify and less likely to happen.
- Designate visitor parking.
- Make parking areas visible from windows and doors.
- Adequately illuminate parking areas and pedestrian walkways.
- Position recreation areas - pools, tennis courts, club houses and playgrounds, to be visible from many of the units' windows and doors.
- Screen or conceal dumpsters, but avoid creating blind spots and hiding places.
- Build elevators and stairwells in locations that are clearly visible from doors and windows.
- Centrally locate elevators and stairwells where many users may observe them.
- Allow shrubbery to be no more than three-feet high for clear visibility in vulnerable areas.
- Locate buildings so that the windows and doors of one unit are visible from another.
- Construct elevators and stairwells to be open and well-lighted, not enclosed behind solid walls.
- Centrally locate playgrounds where they are clearly visible from units, but not directly next to parking lots or streets.
- Keep balcony railings and patio enclosures less than 42-inches high and avoid using opaque materials.
- Define entrances to the site and each parking lot with landscaping, architectural design or symbolic gateways.
- Block off dead-end spaces with fences or gates.

- Discourage loitering by nonresidents and enforce occupancy provisions.
- Use devices that automatically lock upon closing on common building entrances.
- Provide good illumination in hallways.
- Allow no more than four apartments to share the same entrance (individual entrances are recommended).
- Limit access to the building to only one or two points.
- Define property lines with low landscaping or decorative fencing.
- Accentuate building entrances with architectural elements, lighting and landscaping.
- Clearly identify all buildings and residential units using street numbers that are a minimum of three-inches high and well-lighted at night.
- Where possible, locate individually locking mailboxes next to the appropriate units.
- Maintain all common areas to very high standards, including entrances, esplanades and rights of way.
- Prune trees and shrubs back from windows, doors and walkways.
- Use and maintain exterior lighting.
- Strictly enforce rules regarding junk vehicles and inappropriate outdoor storage. Disregard of these issues will make a site appear uncared for and less secure.

The likelihood of crime will be substantially reduced if the provisions presented above are incorporated into the design of multifamily projects. Following is an illustration of the effectiveness of CPTED.

Sarasota, Florida officials experimented with a *Prevention Through Environmental Design* (CPTED) program.⁸⁰ The pilot program focused on a neighborhood where 68% of the businesses had been victimized by crime. Between 1990 and 1996 CPTED measures were applied to the neighborhood and crime dropped by 40%. During this same period crime throughout Sarasota decreased by just 9%. Sarasota now requires that law enforcement officers and planners conduct an CPTED analysis as part of the process for reviewing each new development proposal.

INCREASING NEIGHBOR INTERACTION REDUCES CRIME

Measures which increase the interaction of residents and brings them out of their homes more often also reduces crime rates. For example, communities should be designed with neighborhood level congregating areas, such as a playground, a picnic area, or just a commons where people can walk their dogs, hold flea markets, and so forth. Community gardens are another example of a neighborhood amenity which could increase interaction, especially in high-density areas where yard space is too small for a garden.

The Trust for Public Lands (TPL), known more for preserving farms and forestlands, has become a major advocate of creating open space and recreation areas as an important crime prevention

⁸⁰ See *Design Techniques Reduce Crime Opportunity* available for viewing online at: <http://www.mrsc.org/subjects/planning/crimepre.aspx?r=1>

strategy. TPL's website (www.tpl.org) includes the following anecdotal evidence pointing to the importance of this approach:

"In Philadelphia, after police helped neighborhood volunteers clean up vacant lots and plant gardens, burglaries and thefts in the precinct dropped by 90%-from about 40 crimes each month before the cleanup to an average of only four per month. In the summertime, when Phoenix basketball courts and other recreation facilities are kept open until 2 A.M., police calls reporting juvenile crime drop by as much as 55%. But reports of crime go up again in the fall once gymnasiums go back to regular hours. Assistant Parks Director Dale Larsen says the activities-late-night swimming, volleyball, basketball, and dancing-are needed year round, but funding is not available. Compared to other crime-fighting measures, midnight recreation is a bargain. With 170,000 participants in Phoenix, the cost is 60 cents per youth."

FACILITIES PERCEIVED AS POSSIBLY INCREASING CRIME

Occasionally I'll receive a call from citizens concerned about how a proposed corrections facility, halfway house, or treatment center may affect crime rates in nearby areas. In the early 1990s I engaged the services of criminologists and other scientists to determine if these projects were likely to increase crime rates. What these experts seemed to consistently find was no clear cause for concern. For example, we had clients concerned about a juvenile reformatory proposed for construction about a quarter-mile from their neighborhood. It was similar to an existing reformatory. We spoke with people living near the existing facility to find out how it had affected their quality of life. Both new and long time residents said there had not been much affect at all. Several residents said they were aware of occasional escapes but the juveniles were desperate to get out of the area so they never stayed around long enough to cause a problem. We also engaged an expert on juvenile correction facilities who said the same thing about the existing facility and found the design of the proposed reformatory to be quite good.

If you feel that a proposed development project may result in an increase in crime, then I urge you to pursue the actions presented below. Should you find cause to believe that a crime increase is likely, then continue with the actions to identify steps for minimizing the effect.

1. Try to identify several existing facilities closely resembling the proposed project which are situated in areas resembling your neighborhood. Ideally the facilities should be identical in terms of population, function, layout, proximity to neighborhoods resembling yours, and other relevant factors.
2. Talk with the community affairs or crime prevention officer for each police district in which the similar facility is located. Ask if the neighborhoods adjoining the facility have a rate of crime higher than neighborhoods located elsewhere.
3. If the rate of crime is substantially higher, then talk with the crime prevention officer about what steps can be taken, such as the CPTED steps listed above, to ensure that the proposed facility does not cause a similar crime increase in your neighborhood.

4. If you need to continue the research then contact your state university, colleges, security agencies, and similar institutions to learn if a criminologist or urban planner is on the faculty who has expertise relevant to your concerns. If you find such a professional, then ask their opinion on the impact of the proposed facility upon crime rates in your community. If the professional feels the project may cause an increase in crime, then ask what safeguards they would call for if the project were proposed for a site near their home.

5. When you feel you have identified effective methods for minimizing crime ask for a list of areas where each method has been successfully (and unsuccessfully) applied. Talk with community leaders in each area to gain their perspective on the effectiveness of the crime prevention method. If you find a solution you like then seek the support of the local police or sheriff's department and planning agency for the measure. If necessary, go to the section of this book on *Strategy Options* for additional ways of winning implementation of the solution.