



BUILDING SOCIALLY
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

CRIME AND PLANNING

DEREK J. PAULSEN



American Planning Association

Making Great Communities Happen



CRC Press

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*To my wife Stacey and my boys Brue and Griffith.
This book is proof that through hard work, perseverance,
and a belief in your own ability all things are possible.*

Acknowledgments

The genesis of this book dates back more than seven years to an original graduate class on planning and crime I taught in the Police Executive Leadership Program at Eastern Kentucky University. Over the years, this class evolved into undergraduate classes, presentations, training classes, and eventually the book you see before you. In the years since this original class, I have learned much and shared much with many people without whose assistance this book would never be possible. While I am the only author of this book, it is by no means a solo effort. Although a full list of all who have influenced this book will surely end with some being forgotten, I shall nonetheless attempt one.

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About the Author

Derek J. Paulsen, PhD is currently the first ever commissioner of planning, preservation and development for the City of Lexington, KY as well as a professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at Eastern Kentucky University. In his prior work as the director of the Center for Crime and the Built Environment (CABE) at Eastern Kentucky University, Paulsen worked with numerous police agencies on crime analysis and crime prevention issues. In addition to his work as commissioner, Dr. Paulsen is active in research on crime analysis, crime prevention, and urban planning issues. He is the lead author of two books on the spatial analysis of crime data as well as numerous articles dealing with crime mapping and crime prevention issues that have appeared in such journals as *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*, *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*, and *International Journal of Police Science and Management*. A frequent presenter on crime mapping and crime prevention topics at both academic and professional conferences, Dr. Paulsen has been an invited speaker at numerous international conferences including the NIJ MAPS Conference, NIJ Conference, United Kingdom Crime Mapping Conference, and the American Planning Association Conference.

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Few in the fields of urban planning or urban design would argue with the fact that crime is a serious and important community issue. In addition, few would dispute that the form and layout of the built environment has a large and significant influence on crime by creating opportunities for it and, by extension, shaping community crime patterns. However, when asked if they consider crime when making planning and design decisions, few planners or designers would answer in the affirmative. The potential implications of ignoring crime in the decision-making process are profound.

In 2008 alone more than 11 million crimes were reported in the United States, resulting in direct financial losses of between \$17 and \$26 billion, in addition to incalculable personal loss.¹ Crime has also been shown to be associated with decreased housing values, reduced rent prices, residential instability, homeowners' decisions to move, and general neighborhood decline.² As a result, the public consistently views crime as one of the top public issues facing the country. Since 1997 crime has consistently been ranked by more than 85 percent of survey respondents as either the "top issue" or "important but not the top issue," outscoring such issues as taxes on the middle class, jobs, the budget deficit, and global trade issues.³

Whether considered an economic or a social issue, crime is an important issue for communities, one that affects and is affected by the form, layout, and functioning of the built environment. This leads to the question: If crime is such an important community issue, why do planners and designers fail to consider it in their decision-making processes?

Why a Disconnect?

While the failure to consider crime in the planning process can be a result of benign neglect or lack of information, there are six specific and interrelated reasons for this disconnection. The first issue is the belief that the causes of crime are many and that planning and the built environment at best play only small and relatively insignificant roles in the mechanics of crime. Thus, it is felt that neglecting considerations of crime when making planning decisions will have little real impact on crime patterns or neighborhood decline. It is true that crime is associated with an array of different factors, ranging from structural factors such as residential mobility, economic inequality,

and neighborhood heterogeneity to social process factors such as behavioral modeling, differential association, and neutralization. Nevertheless, we know that a high proportion of crime occurs in particular places within a community, commonly referred to within policing as hot spots. Moreover, the characteristics of these hot spots, both in their general settings and specific attributes, greatly influence crime occurring in those places; that is, crime occurs disproportionately where there are opportunities for it to occur, and these opportunities are most heavily influenced by built environment factors. While some of the factors that make a location an attractive opportunity for crime are macrostructural in nature such as economic inequality, many more are associated with the form and layout of the built environment such as excessively permeable street networks. Thus, ignoring crime considerations in making decisions about the form and layout of the built environment can actually abet the development of particular crime patterns in both the short and long terms. In “designing in” opportunities for crime, we place an already undermanned and underfunded police force at a distinct disadvantage in reducing and preventing crime.

At this point, some readers are undoubtedly concerned that this book is preaching a form of environmental determinism, advocating that all planning and design decisions be made with the single-minded goal of crime prevention. The case is more complex than that, however: Good planning and design are only parts of a multipronged response to crime in communities. While good urban planning and design are essential to reducing opportunities for crime, a real and sustained impact on crime levels within a community can come only from the coordination of numerous groups, governmental and otherwise. However, as the form and layout of the built environment is difficult and expensive to alter after it is built, getting it as right as possible the first time is essential to crime prevention.

The second reason for the crime/planning disconnect is the overall lack of education and training concerning crime, its underlying causes, and its prevention. While classes on these subjects are part and parcel of criminal justice programs across the country, they are virtually nonexistent within the curriculum of urban planning programs. Of the ninety-three urban planning programs that are members of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, only one offers any class that specifically deals with crime and the built environment.⁴ While other planning classes may address crime and crime prevention in the context of planning, the lack of focus on the subject does indicate a general disregard of this important subject. This lack of formal education concerning crime and the built environment is further reinforced by the lack of publications and presentations geared toward planners by the American Planning Association (APA) and other planning organizations that practicing planners rely on. APA's Planners Press has only thirteen books that touch on the subject of crime and—prior to this one—only one that

deals explicitly with the topic of crime and crime prevention in a planning context. This compares to seventy-three books that discuss sprawl, sixty-nine concerning sustainability, and sixty-three that discuss smart growth, on all of which crime has significant impacts. Furthermore, at the 2009 and 2010 APA conferences, only 3 out of almost 400 total presentations dealt at all with crime, one of which was conducted by the author. This lack of formal education means that not only do planners fail to consider crime in planning and design decisions, but they also have an improper or incomplete understanding of crime when they *do* consider it. This manifests itself as improper understandings of crime prevention tactics, such as natural surveillance or “eyes on the street,” as well as the creation of zoning regulations and other planning policies that foster opportunities for crime rather than deter them. Those who think they understand a topic are far more dangerous than those who admit they know nothing about it and seek advice from those who do.

Closely associated with this lack of formal education and training on crime and planning issues is the lack of tools and practical guidance on these issues. While planning topics such as transit-oriented design, smart growth, sprawl, form-based codes, and others all have ample tools and guides for their proper use and incorporation within planning, the same cannot be said for crime. Criminology topics such as Crime Prevention Through, Environmental Design (CPTED), Defensible Space, and other programs that provide guidance on crime and the built environment have been around for nearly forty years, yet few have been included in planning tools or guides. These initiatives and others, such as the development of an Urban Crime Simulator by the National Institute of Justice, all come from outside the field of planning rather than from within. This lack of tools and practical guidance is important because their development helps to legitimize and popularize best practices surrounding these topics and promotes their use within the field. More than formal education, the development of tools and practical guides about crime and planning would help to ensure that ideas are adopted within the field and that good ideas are transmitted. Without this, planners and designers are forced to fly blind on these topics or do nothing at all.

The fourth reason for the crime/planning disconnect is that many planners and designers actually think they are already considering crime and its consequences within their planning process. Anecdotally, I have heard from many planners over the years who say that they do take crime into consideration and that they have programs, albeit small and informal ones, already in place. Unfortunately, the research doesn't bear out these assertions. In his excellent review of existing crime prevention programs associated with the built environment, Olasky reports on the general lack of programs aimed at preventing crime through planning or the built environment.⁵ For every Mesa, Arizona, and its CPTED-based certification program, hundreds of locations do little but claim much. Moreover, many programs, such as

the Florida Safe Neighborhoods Act, are launched with much fanfare and promise, only to be virtually nonexistent in a few years due to lack of funding, direction, and misuse.⁶ Of those programs that still exist and focus on built environment issues, most are usually completely housed within police agencies, and any cooperation with planning departments is tenuous at best. In order to properly move forward with incorporating crime prevention into planning and design decisions, planners need to be honest about their efforts and start working with other agencies to create real programs.

A fifth reason for the crime/planning disconnect is the misconception that the goal of crime prevention is mutually exclusive from all other planning goals. A colleague of mine in California was involved in a meeting with several planning staff members about crime research and its implications for a complete streets project that was being undertaken. A complete streets program typically seeks to ensure that streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users within a community. In addition to improving bike and pedestrian safety, the local complete streets proposal was also attempting to improve street connectivity. During the course of the meeting, he was told that while his research as it related to crime was informational, it was not as important as the goal of improving connectivity, and that his ideas would likely derail the project. Basically, he was asked to shelve his research and comments in favor of the connectivity plan because connectivity was about “saving lives” and crime prevention was only about reducing property crime. The underlying message was that preventing property crime was not only an unworthy goal, but also that it was in direct conflict with “real” planning goals. In addition to highlighting a lack of understanding of crime and its interplay with planning issues, these comments perfectly illustrated the belief that crime prevention is incommensurate with or not central to the pursuit of reasonable and legitimate planning goals. This belief is not only patently wrong, it is also potentially dangerous. Not only is crime prevention compatible with planning goals, but failure to consider it will actually reduce the likelihood of achieving many of the goals planners cherish.

The sixth and final issue revolves around the importance of crime in daily planning decisions. While many planners readily admit that crime is an important *societal* issue, few think that considering crime is an important or necessary component of the planning process and their daily duties as planners. In particular, the potential for crime is not viewed as a critical factor in making decisions about subdivisions, site plans, zoning changes, infill and redevelopment projects, mixed use proposals, or any other of the myriad of issues planners deal with on a normal basis. Planners already have a long list of environmental and social factors to consider when making these decisions and crime is simply not seen as being needed, desired or important to these decisions.

Unfortunately, there is much evidence from the field of criminology to show that crime is not only significantly influenced by planning decisions, but that ignoring it can have long-lasting negative impacts on a community. As will be discussed, crime patterns are influenced by a myriad built environment factors such as street layouts and connectivity patterns, the presence of cul-de-sacs or alleys, proximity of residential and commercial land uses, public transit routes and locations, and the design and location of public space, parks, and pedestrian trails, to name a few. Thus, seemingly mundane decisions such as whether to connect a street in a proposed neighborhood to an existing through street can have a significant impact on crime patterns and the long-term success or failure of a neighborhood. This is not to imply that the built environment alone will allow crime to flourish within a neighborhood, but rather to illustrate that ignoring factors such as these can create opportunities for crime that can lead to neighborhood decline.

Overall, these six interrelated issues illustrate not only the crime/planning disconnect, but also its causes and potential implications for planning and communities. Taken together, the dynamics behind these six issues lead not only to planners who are undereducated and indifferent about the nexus of planning and crime, but also to a field that undervalues the importance of crime in planning decisions, potentially leading to serious long-term issues within the communities planners serve. Mistakes made in the form and layout of the built environment are long lasting and not easily changed. These mistakes not only make communities more difficult to police by “designing in” opportunities for crime that place the police at a disadvantage, they also can increase the speed at which neighborhoods decline and can, in turn, heighten the need for expensive and often fraught with urban revitalization programs. While some view urban renewal as an opportunity for community revitalization and a chance to inject new energy into communities, it can also correctly be viewed as the failure of planning and the admission that a community is not sustainable.

Crime, Planning, and Sustainability

While the field of planning has traditionally made sustainability of communities one of its central tenets, that objective has become increasingly central in the past few years as public and professional interest in all things sustainable has grown. As popular awareness of the implications of peak oil and global warming has increased, “sustainability” has become a buzzword used in nearly every marketing campaign and government program to ensure public support. From mobile phones and potato-chip bags to beer and dry cleaning, products and services of every shape and size are providing sustainability scores and green reports to ensure the public they are good enough corporate

citizens to be worthy of their money. Yet, amid this rush to embrace sustainability, the definition and understanding of what it means to be sustainable has been lost.⁷ This is particularly true in the field of planning, where despite its pedigree the understanding of sustainability has stagnated.⁸ Since the Brundtland Commission first penned the definition of sustainable development in 1987, it has undergone little meaningful change. That definition states that a sustainable development is one “that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”⁹ As this definition relates to housing and development, criticism of its failure to encompass the deeper meanings of sustainable development and for focusing overly on environmental concerns at the expense of wider social issues such as education, health, and crime has increased.¹⁰ In particular, it is important to recognize that issues such as health and crime are not simply interesting footnotes in sustainability discussions, but necessary components in designing truly sustainable communities. Simply put, issues of health and crime need to be part of the foundation of sustainable community development.¹¹

A commonly quoted statistic in sustainability discussions is that buildings contribute up to half of all CO₂ emissions in England and somewhere in the range of 30 percent of all emissions in the United States.¹² Yet often lost in this data is the fact that more than 16 percent of the CO₂ waste is generated in the construction phase.¹³ Therefore, significant reductions in CO₂ emissions can be made by designing buildings and places to last longer—which means designing them correctly, with a comprehensive eye toward safety in the first place. As Symes and Pauwels note, the longer a building lasts, the longer the period of time over which the environmental impacts of building it can be spread.¹⁴ Thus, a development that needs to be torn down or renewed because of design or policy errors is not sustainable. The goal of planning and design is to create places that are livable and capable of being maintained for the long term, places that can sustain generations. While renewal is a natural stage in the life cycle of a neighborhood, the rate at which neighborhoods need to be renewed and the age at which demolition is desirable are crucial issues. Importantly, while arguments can be made as to the factors that contribute to neighborhood decline, there is near universal agreement that crime and fear of crime are not only major causes of decline, but also a key indicator of neighborhoods in need of renewal.¹⁵

This link between crime and neighborhood decline is strong and varied within the field of criminology. Research has found that increased crime rates lead to increases in the number of mortgage defaults and that increased crime has a larger impact on housing values than even public-school quality.¹⁶ Still other research has found a relationship not only to home values but also to rent prices, with increases in crime reducing both rent and housing values throughout Chicago community areas.¹⁷ These falling home values affect not only homeowners, but also local municipal governments by reducing