

CHAPTER
TWO

Mini-neighborhoods in Five Oaks, Dayton, Ohio

The Five Oaks community in Dayton, Ohio, is a one-half-square mile residential area located a mile north of the downtown. It contains 2,000 households, or about 5,000 people, inhabiting one- and two-family homes and some small apartment buildings.

Like most American cities, Dayton experienced rapid suburban expansion following World War II. The exodus of the middle-class population from the city was accompanied by the relocation of shopping facilities, manufacturing, and office buildings. The replacement population was initially composed of working-class homeowner families, but over time these were replaced again by lower income renters who were mostly African American.

The problems experienced by Five Oaks are typical of older urban communities located near the downtown core: heavy through traffic; rising crime; the visual presence of drug dealers and prostitutes; single-family homes being converted to multifamily use; the continuing replacement of white, middle- and working-class property owners with low-income, minority renters; and general disinvestment. The U.S. census showed that in the 10 years between 1980 and 1990, the community went from a population of mostly white homeowners to 50-percent African American and 60-percent renter.

During the year before the Defensible Space modifications were undertaken, violent crimes increased by 77 percent; robberies by 76 percent; vandalism by 38 percent; and overall crime by 16 percent. Not only was

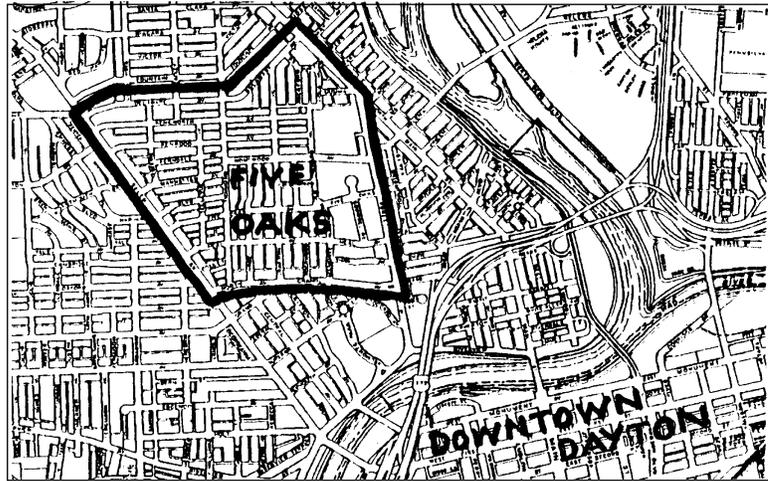


Figure II-1:
Map locating Five Oaks and downtown Dayton. Note the expressway that connects downtown to the suburbs and the exit ramp at the foot of the Five Oaks community.

crime increasing at a maddening pace, but drug dealers, pimps, and prostitutes had brazenly taken over the streets. Gun shots could be heard at all times of the day and night; blaring boomboxes meant to attract drug purchasers disturbed everyone's sleep; and speeding cars, the byproduct of these illicit activities, threatened people in their own streets. Children were virtually kept locked up in their homes. A 13-member police strike force hit the neighborhood round the clock every few months, but the results were only temporary.



Figure II-2:
Typical street in Five Oaks.

The Dayton Area Board of Realtors reported that sales values had dropped by 11 percent in that 1 year, while regional values rose 6 percent. Every second house in Five Oaks was up for sale.

Downtown Dayton still retains some of its finer old office and shopping buildings. Neighborhoods beautifully constructed in the 1920s border this downtown. Five Oaks is one of

these, and it serves as a gateway between the downtown and the suburban residential communities to the north. It is encountered on a daily basis by those coming to the downtown area to work and shop. Five Oaks is a community symptomatic of the city's problems and aspirations. For this reason many in the city government felt that what happens to Five Oaks will happen to the rest of Dayton. If Five Oaks fell, there would be a domino effect on the surrounding communities.

But Five Oaks' location between the downtown and the suburbs also turned its interior streets into a network of cut-through traffic as commuters used them to avoid the larger, traffic-laden arterials at the periphery of the community. Of Five Oaks' total traffic volume, 35 percent was found to be cutting through the neighborhood. The general effect was to burden its streets so heavily as to make them unsuitable for normal, quiet residential use—a use common to cul-de-sac streets in the suburbs where, ironically, most of the cut-through traffic was headed.

Five Oaks was also experiencing social problems: The dynamics of population change in the community had led to increased tensions between the older, permanent homeowners and the new, transient renters who were seen as a threat to the stability of the neighborhood. The lack of shared values and aspirations among neighbors increased feelings of isolation and the perception of being on their own. Even the most innocent of activities, such as children playing in the street, or one neighbor asking the other for more careful garbage disposal, was perceived as intolerance and incivility.

Ironically, because of its location and socioeconomic makeup and the perception that it was still safe, Five Oaks was perceived as an ideal community for drug dealing directed at middle-income outsiders. To the immediate west of Five Oaks is a community that also had drug dealers working its streets, but that community had become predominantly African American, 30 percent vacant, and severely deteriorated. It was perceived as too dangerous a place to buy drugs and solicit prostitutes by white, middle-class buyers. So the activity moved to Five Oaks. One wonders if the drug purchasers thought that the residents of Five Oaks would protect them or call the police if a drug deal went sour or a pimp got too greedy.

The noisy and blatantly evident traffic of drug dealers, prostitutes, and their clients was disturbing to the community out of all proportion to the number of vehicles, or threat, they represented. The police, however, did suspect that the frequency of burglaries and auto thefts in the community stemmed directly from drug-related activities.

Unable to sell their homes for a price that would pay off their outstanding mortgages, many homeowners had moved away and rented them—often in subdivided form and at times illegally and in a substandard fashion. The result of these inexpensive and inadequate conversions was the rapid, and visually evident, deterioration of the housing stock. This led to a reluctance on the part of neighboring homeowners to keep up their own properties. The community had entered a spiral of decline that appeared irreversible. Houses were selling for one-half to one-quarter of their replacement cost. The only buyers were slumlords.



Figure II-3:
Deteriorated two-story walkup in Five Oaks being rented to drug dealers.

Community and municipal efforts to acquire and refurbish deteriorated housing had barely any impact. Five times as many houses were being lost as were being refurbished. Slumlords, who found that drug dealers were undemanding tenants, rented to them and let their properties decline still further—pulling the condition of adjacent housing down with them. An immediate change to the infra-

structure was necessary, one that would visibly alter the entire pattern of use and would make itself evident at the scale of the whole community. The problem with the city's program of refurbishing single homes scattered throughout Five Oaks was that it did not produce any visual evidence of rehabilitative change at the scale of the entire community.

Five Oaks contains a variety of different types of housing: Some streets have large, stately homes on them, constructed of brick and stone and situated on large lots; others have wood frame houses on small lots. Still other streets contain two-story, two-family houses that share a common wall, while others house two- and three-story apartment buildings. Some of the arterial streets have medium highrise apartment buildings on them.



Figure II-4:
Street in Five Oaks with various building types.

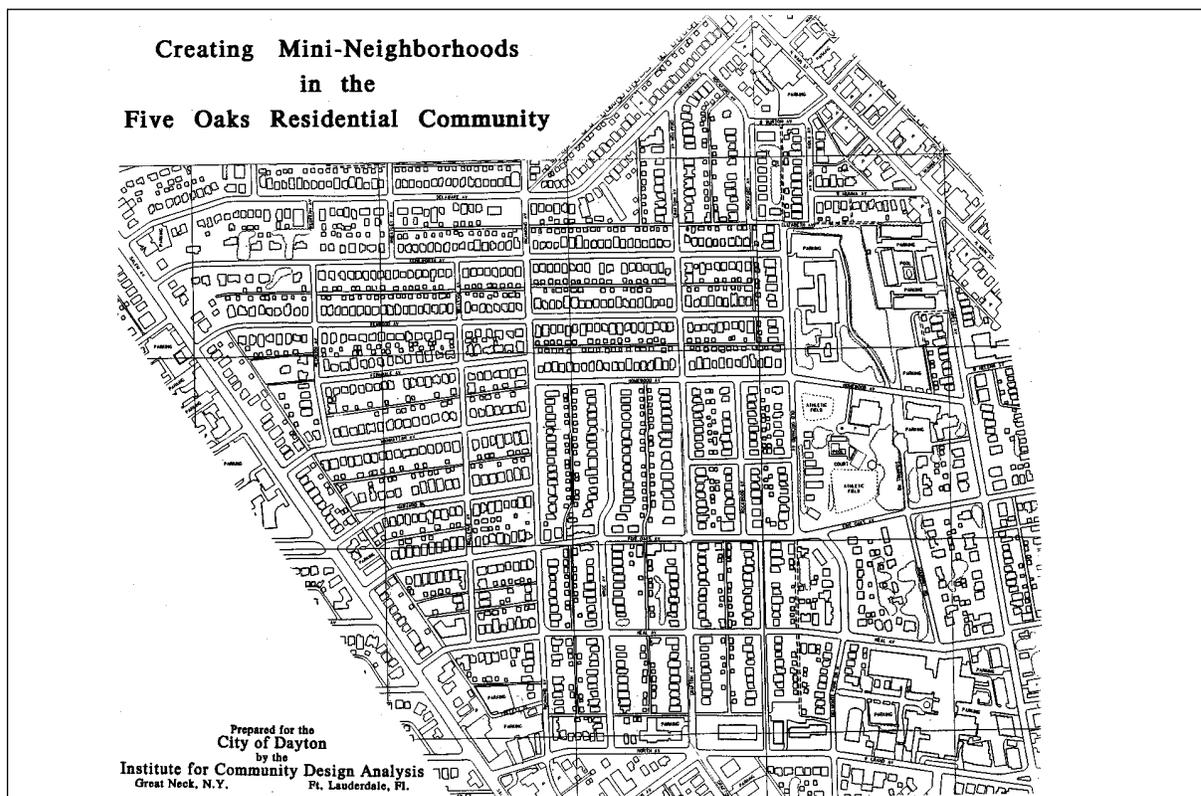
The community also houses some important institutions:

The Grandview hospital complex, located in the southeast quadrant of Five Oaks, serves the entire urban region; two large parochial schools on

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the east side of Five Oaks, Corpus Christi and Dayton Christian, serve the broader city as well as the immediate community.

The west and east borders of Five Oaks are defined by two major arterials that link northern suburban Dayton with downtown Dayton (Salem Avenue on the west and North Main on the east). The northern boundary of Five Oaks is a residential street called Delaware Avenue. Its southern boundary is a mixed residential and institutional street called Grand Avenue. A further mixed-use residential and commercial street defines a portion of the Five Oaks boundary to the east: Forest Avenue. Most of the traffic on the streets of Five Oaks was perceived as going through the neighborhood heading for suburban destinations to the north.



The 1990 census revealed that 3 of the 5 sectors that compose Five Oaks have 64-percent or more renters. The remaining 2 sectors have 43-percent and 49-percent renters.

Figure II-5:
*Map of Five Oaks showing
internal streets and arterial
boundaries.*

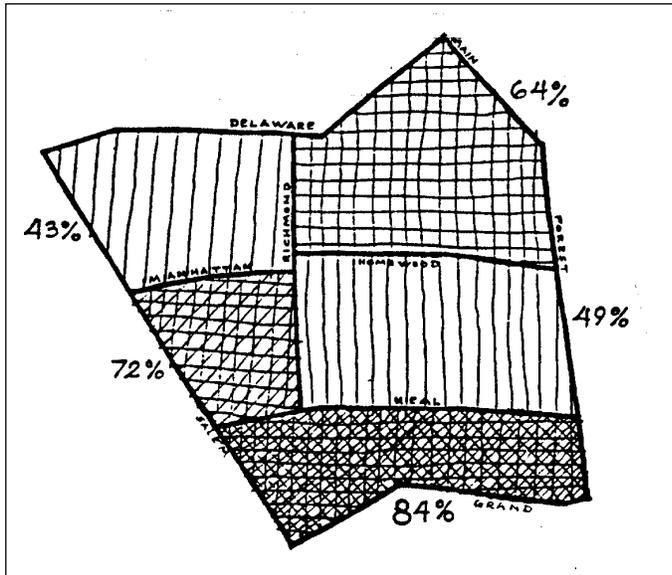


Figure II-6:
Map of Five Oaks showing percent of renters in different areas, 1990.

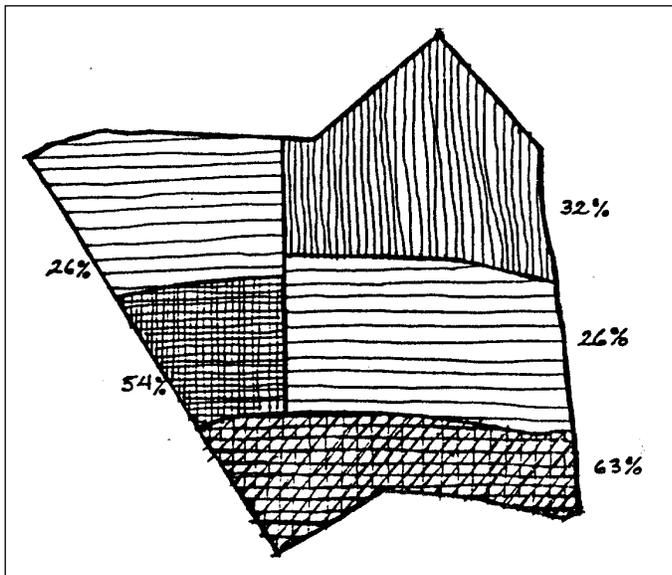


Figure II-7:
Map of Five Oaks showing percent of African-American renters in different areas, 1990.

Because most of the dwellings in Five Oaks consist of one- and two-family houses, the data reveal that many homeowners have moved away and are renting their units in either their original form or subdivided. This is partially because they were unable to sell their homes at reasonable prices.

Figure II-7 shows that most of the renters in Five Oaks are African American. Because African Americans earn about two-thirds the income of whites, it would appear that the rental market is at the lower end of the scale.

Figure II-8 shows that the three sectors of Five Oaks that have a high percentage of renters also have a high vacancy rate, ranging from 10 percent to 29 percent. Citywide, Dayton has a vacancy rate of only 6 percent.

Despite the evident change revealed by the census data, Five Oaks continued to be attractive to people working for institutions located in the downtown area: for example, city government, the universities, and hospitals. Its large, well-constructed houses could not be easily replicated today: Their materials are too costly, and the craftsmen who put them together are of a bygone era. At the low end, a wood frame and shingled, three-bedroom house on a small lot sold for between \$45,000 and \$55,000, depending on its condition. A larger, brick house with ornate architecture, quality woodwork and glass, on a larger lot, could be purchased for

\$75,000. Should one be interested in rental property, a two-family brick house with each unit having two bedrooms could be purchased for as little as \$58,000. The large, stately houses on large lots that had a replacement cost of more than \$500,000 could be purchased for just over \$100,000.

■ Initiating the process

Our institute first became involved in Five Oaks when the Dayton Police Department's superintendent of community relations, Major Jaruth Durham-Jefferson, made an inquiring telephone call. She was a forceful but charming African American who had heard of my work with street closures in St. Louis. "The Dayton community," she said, "was talking Defensible Space as a remedy to some of its crime and traffic problems, and there was some disagreement in people's minds about what it meant. Would I care to come for a visit so they could hear, from the horse's mouth, what it was all about? And while I was there, would I care to take a first-hand look at the communities in question?" I was not sure whether I was being asked or told. That telephone call led to a 3-day trip, night and day tours of many of Dayton's communities, meetings with key city officials and staff, and lectures to both the city staff and the community at large. In preparation, Major Durham-Jefferson had supplied me with the demographic and crime data I had requested and scheduled all the meetings.

From the positive response to this initial visit by residents and staff came a request from the city manager for our institute to embark on a program that would produce schematic plans for the modification of two communities: Five Oaks, the racially mixed residential community near Dayton's downtown; and Dunbar Manor, a predominantly African-American public housing project. These two communities were typical of many in Dayton. The city manager hoped that by having city staff work closely with me, they could learn how it was done and could then

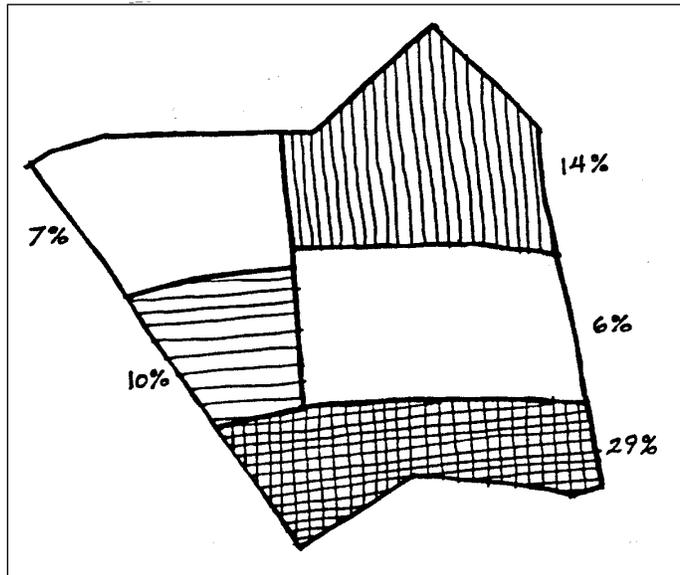


Figure II-8:
Map of Five Oaks showing percent of vacancies in different areas, 1990

apply the methodology elsewhere themselves. In this book I will only talk about the Five Oaks portion of our work in Dayton because the modifications to the Dunbar Manor public housing project have yet to be completed or evaluated.

The day-to-day running of the Five Oaks project was assigned to the city's director of urban development, Ray Reynolds. He asked the planning department and highway department to each assign a staff person to work with me full time while I was in Dayton. Police representatives attended all meetings with the community and city staff. The chief of police himself attended the large public presentations. The police also made crime data available as needed and were a continuing supportive presence.

■ **Initial presentations to city staff and the community**

The initial 3-day visit to Five Oaks was critical in determining whether the city and community would buy into the concept. The night of my arrival I insisted on a tour of the neighborhoods we would be visiting the next day. Major Durham-Jefferson looked a little concerned. "The only way to find out what we're dealing with," I told her, "is to see what is going down at night." During that night tour we witnessed a drug raid by police in the public housing project and saw drug dealing and prostitutes on many streets within Five Oaks. We drove in Major Durham-Jefferson's own car, rather than in a police car, so as not to create a disturbance. Not knowing our identity, drug dealers vied with each other to make a sale.

The next morning's meeting with city staff was scheduled early so as not to disrupt their working day. The city manager had assembled most department heads, including: fire, emergency response, garbage collection, snow removal, planning, community relations, and traffic. I particularly insisted on having all those people who were likely to be most opposed to the concept present. The chief of police was also present, but he was expected to be a proponent of the idea. At this initial meeting, it is essential also to have the mayor, the city manager, and a few city council members present. This informs the city department heads that the concept is being taken seriously, and

they look to elected officials for guidance about whether to be receptive to the idea and give their cooperation.

I have found that, from the start, a planner must take into account where all the opposition to his concepts is likely to come from and address them first. He must understand who all the players are, what their concerns are, and how to involve them in the process. Mini-neighborhoods only work if the community and the city staff really accept the idea.

At the initial meeting, the city staff, elected officials, and I sat around a table together. Using a slide projector, but sitting with them at the table rather than talking from a podium, I explained the Defensible Space concept by showing what I had done in other cities. I told them that they were free to interrupt at any time with any questions. I explained that the reason they were the very first in the city to see the concept was that I knew they were not going to like it. It was going to complicate how they collected garbage and how they removed snow, the fire and ambulance people were going to have to memorize new routes for getting to places quickly, and it was going to disrupt traffic flow, but it was also going to make a big difference to the life and viability of communities and to the city's tax base, because it would reduce crime, increase property values, and stabilize neighborhoods.

I then explained that the plan would only be prepared with their continual participation. That meant that representatives from every city department would be involved in every step of the process. If, at any time, we proposed something they thought was unworkable, I wanted them to say so. We would then try to find a way to modify what we were planning so as to accommodate them. We would not proceed with the plan until we felt we had arrived at something everyone could accept.

In planning mini-neighborhoods, it is very important to get to know all the players and what is bothering them. This is as true for the politics within city hall as it is for neighborhood rivalries. Sometimes what is being expressed as objective opposition to the idea has its origin in personal politics, but it is just as important to know that as to learn the internal pecking order and priorities at city hall. For instance, in Dayton, the current director of the planning department had just been demoted from assistant city manager by a new administration. He felt that he should

have been made the coordinator of this project rather than the city's director of urban development. Even though one of his staff was assigned to me full time, the planning director kept raising philosophical and operational objections to the evolving plans. I attempted to address them all, but soon realized that something more was wrong. I invited the city manager and the director of urban development out for a drink and learned that the planning director had hoped that he would become the new city manager. The Five Oaks plan was the new city manager's first showcase project, and the planning director was not going to do anything to help it along. Once I knew that, I tried to sidestep the planning director rather than engage in long public discussions with him.

Following that initial meeting, I toured Five Oaks in a minivan with community leaders and city staff. On tour, we frequently stopped to walk the streets and alleys, picking up residents along the way who had earlier been alerted. I explained the concept to them and sought their input, trying out ideas on them about which streets to close. I took slides as we walked and had them developed within the hour so that they could be incorporated into later presentations.

Following the neighborhood tour, we all had lunch together at an informal eating place. This was intended as an opportunity for everyone to relax. With neighborhood people coming into contact with so many city department heads, the discussion often went off on tangents—old wounds were opened. However, this is a source of useful information, and it gives city staff a sense of what is taking place on the streets of their neighborhoods.

That evening, I gave a formal presentation to a previously well-publicized town meeting. As many community people and city personnel as possible were invited. A few hundred people attended. I again showed slides about what I had accomplished in other cities, but this time I also included slides of the streets I had just walked through to show how similar the situations were. The presentation was followed by an open question period that lasted more than an hour. It is important that this community meeting be chaired by a city staff person and that city staff appear at the podium with me to help answer some questions. Otherwise, the appearance given is of an outsider telling the community how to do things.

In my presentations, I explain what the restructuring of streets to create mini-neighborhoods accomplishes: It alters the entire look and function of the community; it completely removes vehicular through-traffic (the only traffic remaining will be seeking destinations within each mini-neighborhood); and it completely changes the character of the streets (instead of being long, directional avenues laden with traffic, they become places where children can play safely and neighbors can interact). By limiting vehicular access, the streets are perceived as being under the control of the residents. Fewer cars make it easier to recognize neighbors—and strangers. I explain that access to the newly defined mini-neighborhoods, which will contain three to six streets, will be limited to only one entry off an arterial street. People will only be able to drive out the same way they came in. It is important to explain, again and again, that the gates will only restrict vehicular traffic: Pedestrians will be able to freely walk everywhere they did before.

Limiting access and egress to one opening for each mini-neighborhood means that criminals and their clients would have to think about coming into a mini-neighborhood to transact their business, as they would have to leave the same way they entered. There would no longer be a multitude of escape routes open to them down every city street. A call to the police by any resident would mean that criminals and their clients would be meeting the police on their way out. Such a street system will clearly be perceived by criminals, and particularly by their clients, as too risky in which to do business.

The subdivision of a community into mini-neighborhoods is intended to encourage the interaction of neighbors. Parents will watch their children playing in the now quiet streets and get to know each other. They will no longer feel locked up in their houses, facing the world alone. Tensions between renters and property owners, and the concern over incivilities, will likely also diminish as both parties living on the same closed street come to know each other through greater association and are able to develop standards of mutually acceptable behavior together.

Five Oaks demonstrated that once people came together within their own mini-neighborhood, they reached out to other neighborhoods and to the larger urban community. In other cities, mini-neighborhoods have not

only arrested decline; they have made people realize they could intervene to change things, and led them to become active in city politics. This is something we documented in our study of the closed streets of St. Louis (Newman, Grandin, Wayno, 1974) and witnessed not only in Dayton but in our mini-neighborhood projects in Florida. At the level of the neighborhood, reinvestment in one's own property no longer has to be undertaken as a risky, individual act but as an activity done in concert with one's neighbors.

The cost of creating mini-neighborhoods is low, about \$10,000 for each gate serving 30 to 40 households. Cities can use a variety of means for paying for the modifications: In St. Louis, the middle-income residents almost universally paid for it themselves; in Florida, some cities used CDBG funds to pay for the implementation costs, while others issued special district tax bonds to pay for the work and taxed the beneficiaries accordingly. Using the latter method, each household pays about \$60 extra in real-estate taxes per year over a 10-year period to cover the cost of the modifications. Still other cities split the costs between residents and CDBG or capital improvement funds.

Resident participation in paying for the gates is important for three reasons:

- It instills a sense of ownership, and enhancing proprietary feelings is what Defensible Space modifications are all about. Paying for one-half the cost of the modifications gives residents a possessive attitude toward the gates and the semiprivate streets they create.
- It gives the community more control over the future of the modifications. If, down the road, a new city administration decides, for whatever reason, that it no longer wants the gates, the community will have more leverage in preventing the city from removing them if it has paid for one-half the construction costs.
- A community's willingness to cover 50 percent of the cost makes a city more receptive to the idea and gives the project priority in the city's capital improvement budget. Cities are always looking for ways to stretch their limited funds and politicians want to take as much credit as they can in physically evident change.

It is very important to make clear to residents that most of their internal streets will be converted to cul-de-sacs and that in the first few months following the modifications residents, their outside friends, and service people will be inconvenienced. During this initiation period, many residents will want the gates removed, including some of those who voted to have them installed. But after 4 months and after residents and their friends have had a chance to learn to find their way around, people will not be able to believe the improvement in the quality of their lives produced by these changes and will insist that the gates remain.

At the conclusion of these initial meetings, I ask residents and city staff if the consensus is that we continue with the process to see if we can develop a plan or simply stop there. I specifically do not ask for approval of the concept, as this is premature: Most people will have heard of the Defensible Space and mini-neighborhood concepts only for the first time; they will need time to digest them. More importantly, people will need to see how the planning process evolves, whether their participation genuinely shapes the plan, and what the plan for their mini-neighborhood will actually look like. After these initial meetings, the overwhelming majority of Five Oaks residents voted to continue with the process.

■ **Community participation in designing the mini-neighborhoods**

It is critical to the success of the plan that as many people as possible participate in defining the boundaries of their mini-neighborhoods, that is, in deciding which streets should remain open, and where the gates should go. On my second trip to Dayton, I called the community together and showed them large plans of Five Oaks. These plans showed each house on each street

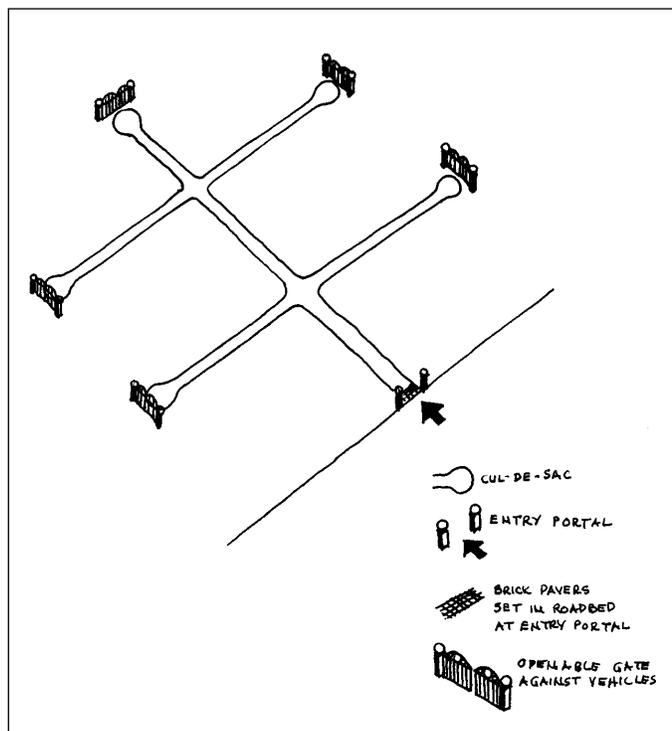


Figure II-9:
Greek cross plan for an ideal mini-neighborhood layout.

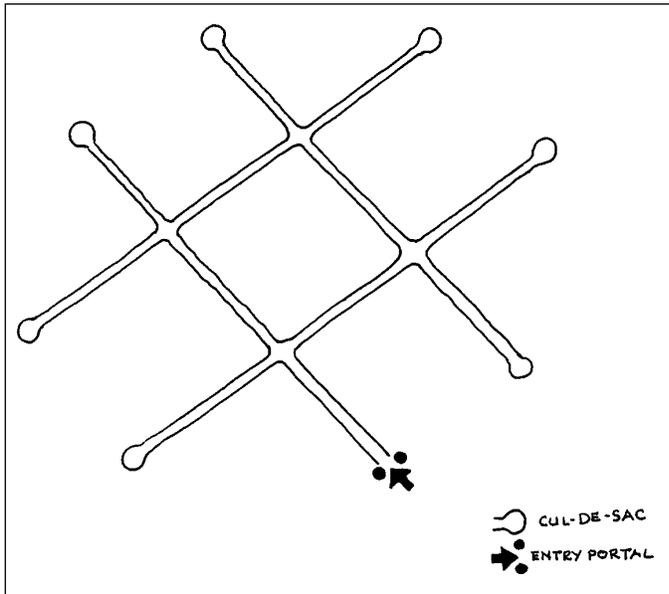


Figure II-10:
Overly large cul-de-sac layout.

and each shed in each alley. I explained to the residents that they were now going to define their own mini-neighborhoods and outlined the principles they should use in defining them:

- Smallness is essential to identity, so a mini-neighborhood should consist of a grouping of no more than three to six streets. The optimal configuration for a mini-neighborhood is a Greek cross, a vertical with two horizontals. Only one point of the cross will remain open, the other five will have gates across them.
- Cul-de-sac configurations should not be too large, for they take residents too far out of their way and produce too much of their own internal traffic. If a mini-neighborhood is made up of a vertical with six horizontals, for instance, residents will have to travel too long a distance to get to the end of their mini-neighborhood, and then they will have to travel all the way back to get out of it. In the process, they will encounter others doing the same thing. This will produce a great amount of internal traffic, and traffic is exactly what we are trying to avoid.
- A mini-neighborhood should consist of a grouping of streets sharing similar housing characteristics: building type (such as detached, semidetached, row houses, and walkups), building size, lot size, setbacks from the street, building materials, architectural style, and density.
- To facilitate access by emergency vehicles, access to the entry portals of each mini-neighborhood should be from existing arterial streets. As much as possible, these arterials should be on the border of the Five Oaks neighborhood to enable outsiders to find their way in easily.

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- Mini-neighborhoods and their access arterials should be designed to facilitate access but discourage through-traffic in the overall Five Oaks community.

I then asked people to come up to the map, gave them each a different colored felt pen, and said, “First make an X where you live and then show us what you think of as your mini-neighborhood.” Then I asked the rest of the audience: “How many of you who live nearby agree with their boundaries?” Some would say *yes*, others would say *no*. I would then ask the *no* persons to come up and take another colored pen, locate where they live, and draw in their view of their mini-neighborhood. This process inevitably elicits some friendly booing interspersed with applause. Then I ask if anybody else wants to change that boundary. And so it goes until we reach a consensus. Such meetings often run for a few hours. It is usually possible to get any differences resolved, but sometimes it becomes necessary to put in two mini-neighborhoods where you might have anticipated only one. A common mistake, in any case, is to make mini-neighborhoods too large. It is important to keep in mind that this process has two functions: to understand the neighborhoods that exist in people’s minds, and to bring people together to begin planning for their own future.

Once the mini-neighborhoods are defined, I ask people to volunteer to become mini-neighborhood captains. Their job is to make certain that every household in their mini-neighborhood is aware of what is being planned and participates in determining which street will remain open and where the gates will be placed. This will require putting fliers in everyone’s mailbox to announce meetings and city council hearings.

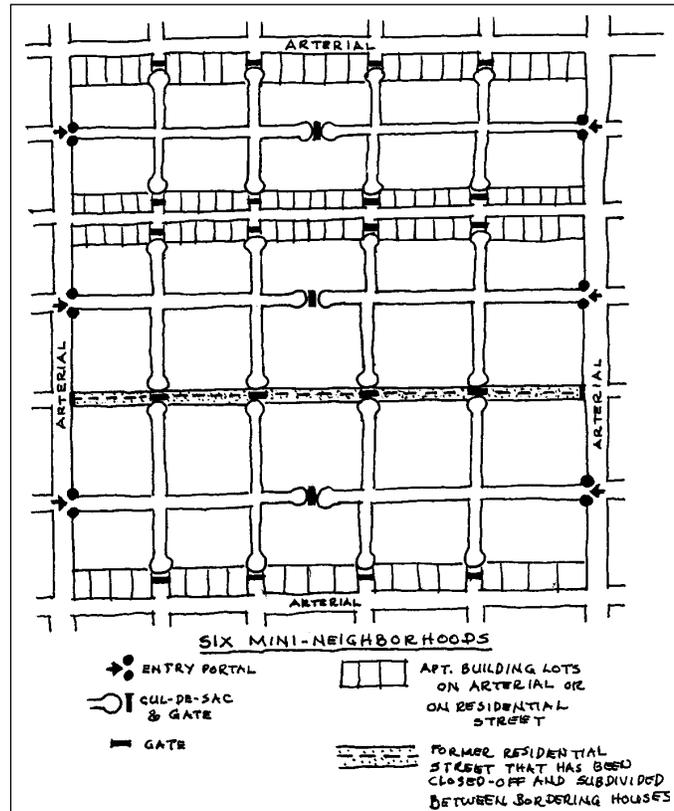


Figure II-11:
Schematic showing ideal way to access mini-neighborhoods from arterials.

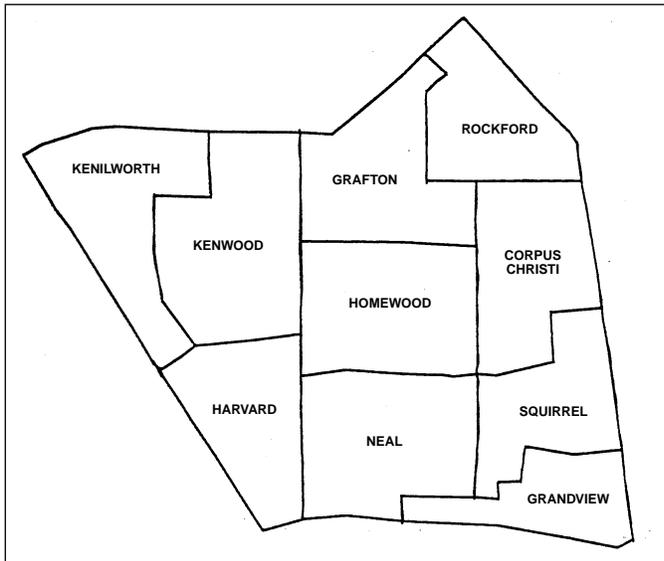


Figure II-12:
Mini-neighborhood boundaries of Five Oaks as defined by residents.

■ Traffic studies

As soon as the city of Dayton committed itself to the process, I asked the highway department to undertake origin-destination studies to determine how much traffic on the streets of Five Oaks was simply driving through the neighborhood. They found that 35 percent was. I then asked them to determine whether the existing arterials at the periphery of Five Oaks would be able to handle the 35-percent cut-through traffic that would be removed from the neighborhood streets. They found that they could.

■ Description of the Five Oaks mini-neighborhood plan

The final Five Oaks mini-neighborhood plan that evolved under my guidance was very much what the community sketched at its meetings. Minor modifications were made to accommodate traffic and emergency vehicle access but always with community approval.

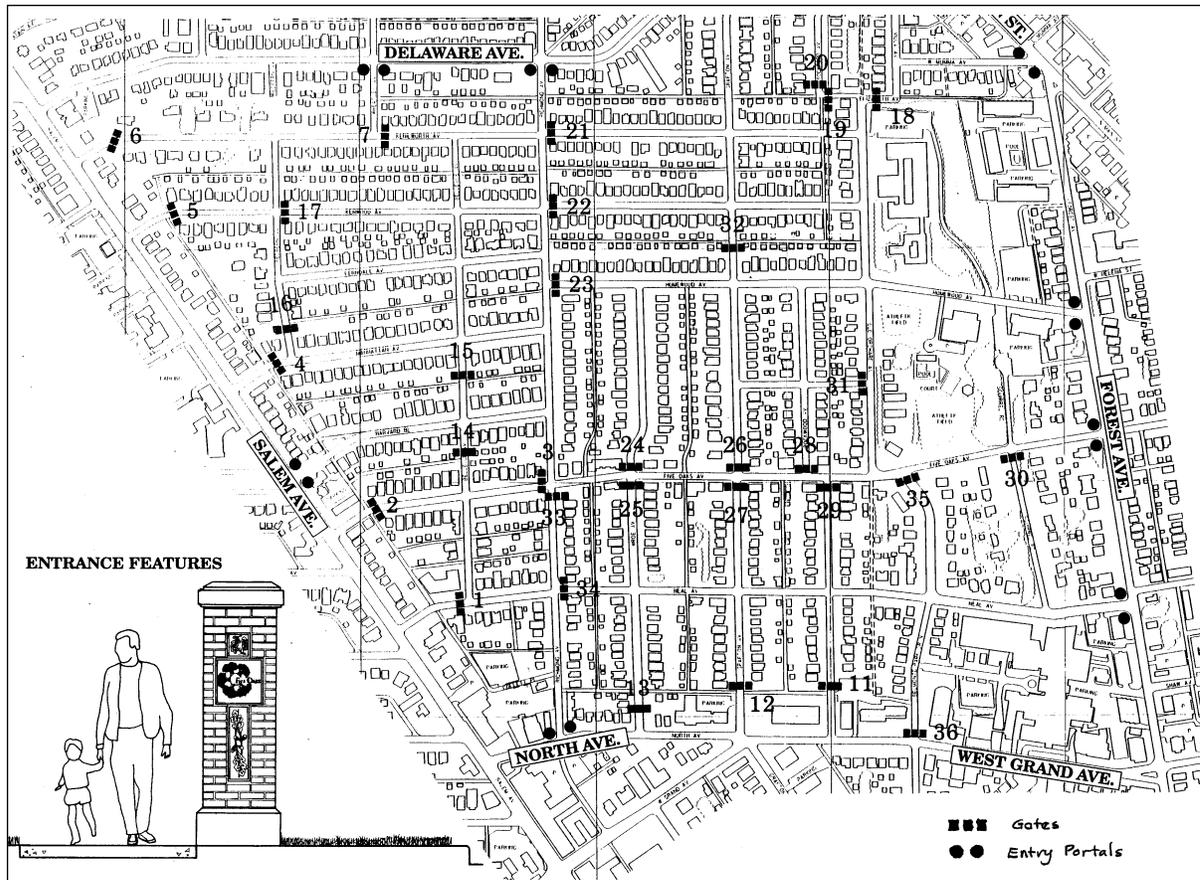
The one-half-square-mile Five Oaks community was divided into 10 mini-neighborhoods, each defined by the characteristics discussed earlier. Thirty-five streets and 25 alleys were closed. Two of the mini-neighborhoods, Corpus Christi and Grandview, housed the community's major schools and hospital complex. The remaining eight mini-neighborhoods were primarily residential in character—one included part of the hospital complex. Each mini-neighborhood was defined on the basis of a similarity in the size of the houses and lots, the materials of construction, and whether they contained single-family or multifamily buildings. Each mini-neighborhood contained between three and six streets.

The major arterials that defined the periphery of the Five Oaks community were retained intact and allowed east-west and north-south movement past the community. They were: Grand and Delaware going east-west; and Salem, Forest, and Main going north-south.

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Only one north-south arterial that was internal to the community was retained in my plan, Richmond. The community later decided that it would prefer to have Richmond interrupted so as to further discourage north-south through-traffic. This produced some congestion on one or two streets, and it is difficult to know whether that change was worthwhile.

The 10 mini-neighborhoods were given temporary names for identification purposes only. These were the names of the most prominent street within each: Kenilworth, Kenwood, Harvard, Grafton, Homewood, Neal, Rockford, and Squirrel. The other two neighborhoods are Corpus



Christi and Grandview, the school and hospital complex. The internal, two-way arterials that both define and give access to each of the mini-neighborhoods were: Five Oaks, Richmond, Old Orchard, Homewood, Neal, and Rockford.

Figure 11-13: Mini-neighborhood plan for Five Oaks showing location of gates and entries into mini-neighborhoods.



Figure II-14:
*Hammerhead turn at end
of street.*

A plan showing the workings of these access arterials and the cul-de-sac streets that serve each mini-neighborhood appears in figure II-13.

Because the existing streets in Five Oaks are too narrow, the cul-de-sac at the end of each street is not actually a cul-de-sac but is either a hammerhead turn, or makes use of the intersecting alleys to provide a turnaround at the end of each deadend street.

Only one entrance, or portal, is provided to each mini-neighborhood, and it is the only way out as well. A prominent symbol should be used to mark the entry and indicate that one is coming into a private world. We proposed the use of brick pillars that included the Five Oaks name and

the name of the mini-neighborhood. We also proposed that the pillars be positioned within the roadbed, intentionally constricting the entry. These pillars were to be placed to define the outer line of the curbside parking. We also recommended that a brick paving strip be introduced into the roadbed running between the two pillars. The top of the bricks would be level with the road surface, but the strip would produce a noise and a noticeable vibration as automobiles ran over it. This would bring to the drivers' further attention the fact that they were entering a different kind of street. The bricks are intentionally not raised above the surface of the road so they

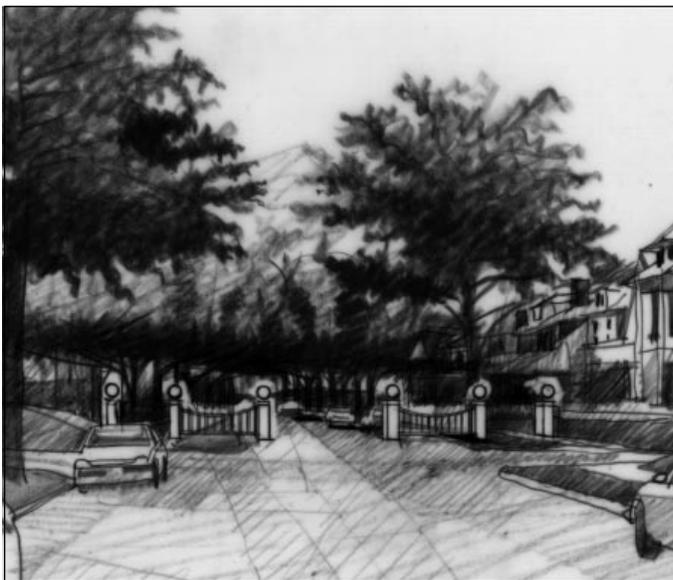


Figure II-15:
*Proposed portal markers for
mini-neighborhoods.*

will not interfere with snow removal equipment. A standard deadend street sign would also be added to explain that there was no other outlet.

The pillars actually installed by the city were positioned on the sidewalk on the far side of the road. They proved to be barely visible and did little to identify the entry portals. The decision to position them this way, rather than the way we proposed, was the result of the snow removal people saying that pillars located within the roadway would prove a hazard.



Figure II-16:
Actual position of portals as installed.

The gates installed by the city limiting access and egress to and from each mini-neighborhood come very close to the ones we designed. They are relatively prominent and serve to deter vehicular access while allowing pedestrians entry. In our design we had proposed two additional smaller gates above the sidewalks on either side of the road. These pedestrian gates were to remain open all the time. A fence would then continue the closure running from the pedestrian gate to some physical element on the adjoining property (fencing, shrubs, or a building).



Figure II-17:
Proposed gates defining mini-neighborhoods.

In case of emergencies, such as access for fire trucks and ambulances, these gates are able to be opened. Fire and emergency personnel should be given keys to them. To simplify access to all streets by moving vans, a few residents living near these gates should also be given keys to them.



Figure II-18:
Gates as actually installed.

In implementing our designs, the city decided to simplify my gate design, eliminating the pedestrian gate on either side of the road and the fence extension from the pedestrian gate onto the adjacent property. The city also eliminated the lights we proposed for the tops of the pillars. These were intended to illuminate the gates at night. The city used large reflectors instead, saving money by not having to provide lights,

replacement bulbs, or wiring from the nearest electric utility pole. The result is not too elegant and detracts from the stylishness of the gate.

The basic reason for the city changing the gate design was cost. Only 70 percent of the residents wanted the mini-neighborhood design implemented, and in order to placate the others, the city manager promised that a survey would be taken at the end of the first year. If the majority of residents wanted the gates removed, the city would remove them. This policy dictated that the gate design be simple to minimize costs both for implementation and removal. Although there is still another reason why the pedestrian gates were eliminated: The city wanted it made clear that the gates were intended to restrict automobile traffic only, and that pedestrians would continue to have unlimited access to every street. It should be remembered that children would still have to walk through various mini-neighborhoods to get to and from school.

In the street closures implemented in Florida, communities used attractive plantings set against walls rather than gates to close off streets. The lack of snow and the lack of street curbs and gutters allowed that to be done where it could not be done up north. These floral solutions must be careful not to interfere with existing drainage patterns, however. The repositioning of rainwater sewers and the provision of new gutters to accommodate a planted area at the end of a street can prove prohibitively costly. It can also deprive the fire department of the flexibility of an operable gate in the case of a serious emergency.

■ **The alley problem in Dayton**

The fact that many of the houses in Five Oaks are also served by alleys, and that these alleys are used for both parking and garbage collection complicated our plan appreciably. For maximum effectiveness in facilitating community control and in reducing crime, access to the alleys had to be limited to the residents of each mini-neighborhood and to the garbage collection vehicles.

In all cases, the alleys were too narrow to allow a garbage truck to turn around and go back the way it came. This would also be inefficient and costly. Garbage trucks had to have the ability to continue through to the alley in the next mini-neighborhood. In some instances, such as in the Grafton and Homewood mini-neighborhoods, a common alley served streets in two different mini-neighborhoods, making it impossible to make each mini-neighborhood truly separate.

Access to the alleys as well as to the streets was closed off by locked gates to which only the sanitation department had keys. Garbage trucks were to be the dominant users of the locked alley gates. Residents did not need to open the alley gates because they could turn their cars around in the alleys as they entered or left their parking garages.



Figure II-19:
Gates across the rear alleys. Parking garages are seen in background.

■ **Allied measures for stabilizing the community**

The physical modifications were intended to dramatically redefine the community and give residents greater control and use of their streets. But these physical modifications were only the first of three other measures implemented in the Five Oaks community. The first measure was critical to the success of the physical plan. The three other measures are listed below in order of their importance.

Coordinate police activities with target areas. Once the gates were installed, police, in a concerted effort, came in and flushed out the drug dealers, pimps, and prostitutes. They had done this before in Five Oaks, but the criminals had come back a week or 2 later. However, when the criminals were removed after the gates were installed, they did not return.

I believe that this police component is very important to the success of the entire program. Continual police liaison with the community and their participation in community planning meetings is also essential to giving the community the reassurance it needs. The effect of creating mini-neighborhoods in other communities where I have worked has been to personalize community/police relations. Creating mini-neighborhoods has produced a genuine appreciation of the police for the work they do and has resulted in a focused program by the police to eliminate the real problems threatening the community. Police officers come to be recognized and known by their first names. The police, in turn, now know many community residents by name. When a problem arises, they usually know exactly where to go to address it. A year after the modifications, police say it takes a much smaller expenditure of force on their part to keep Five Oaks free of crime.

One of the benefits of street closure and the creation of mini-neighborhoods is that it brings neighbors together in unified action to address their joint problems. It also focuses their attention on removing criminal activity from their communities. Rather than having one or two hesitant neighbors acting in isolation to bring criminal activity to the attention of the police, an entire street, or a mini-neighborhood, now acts in concert to alert the police and provide them with support in their anticrime efforts. A united community can more readily document criminal activity and photograph and identify criminals. Immediately after the street closings, police will be called upon by the community more frequently. These calls for service will diminish rapidly as the word about the street closures spreads to criminals and their clients. Police will find themselves working with a community that has a clearer sense of its own values and how they want the police to assist them. It should prove easier for the police to make arrests and to discourage further criminal activity within the community.

Improve code enforcement procedures. There were some truly disreputably maintained properties in Five Oaks that discouraged adjoining property owners from making their own improvements. Many properties had so many code violations, they could be shut down by the city for being beyond repair. Their owners were milking them for what they could and not reinvesting a penny. When these buildings could no longer attract even poor families, the landlords rented them out to drug dealers, who were pleased with the location and had little need for amenities.

The effect of neglected property is threefold: It results in neglect of adjacent property; it brings down sales prices in the surrounding area; and it attracts drug dealers who increase crime, traffic, and the perception that the community is out of control and going downhill. All of this causes the flight of even more homeowners, thus further deflating property values.

Although normal municipal code enforcement procedures do exist, they are most effective against those property owners who are already conscientious and concerned. They prove cumbersome to implement against slumlords who retain attorneys to endlessly delay the resolution of a complaint and see the small fines exacted by the city as part of their cost of doing business. Using the normal process, years can go by before any fines are exacted, and even then no improvements of any significance will have been made.

To counter these difficulties, the city of Fort Lauderdale developed an innovative code enforcement procedure that has not only proved to be quick and effective, it has brought in revenue that more than covers the cost of the program. It is called a *code team* and works as follows: Using the State powers given to police to enforce municipal ordinances—that means powers up to and including arrest—the police are able to issue warnings stating that code violations are arrestable offenses that can result in immediate court appearances.

The code team usually includes a building inspector and a police officer or a fire marshall. In this way, the necessary expertise can be presented before the court at the same time. Court appearances are usually scheduled within 30 days of a recorded violation. Of the 250 violations cited since the code team went into action in Fort Lauderdale, all 250 have

resulted in fines and corrections. The most notorious city slumlord has been arrested at his office, handcuffed, and brought before a magistrate. The city's fines and the improvements required of the slumlord are putting him out of business.

Another proven method for dealing with property occupied by drug dealers is property confiscation. Both municipal codes and Federal laws permit this action.

Encourage first-time homeownership. Much of the physical decline in Five Oaks is attributed to the exodus of resident homeowners. Absentee landlords simply do not maintain their properties. This is particularly true of two-family houses, where the side-by-side rental units are in the worst state of repair. Before the decline of Five Oaks, the most common form of tenure had the owner living in one unit and the renter in the other. This is no longer so.



Figure II-20:
Residents making improvements to their homes after the creation of the mini-neighborhoods.

The residents of Five Oaks felt that a city program that assists people in purchasing and living in the duplex units is critical to the rehabilitation of their neighborhood. The key to such a program is to couple assistance for the downpayment with funds needed to rehabilitate the unit. The actual cost of these duplex units is not high, and with a readily available loan, the amount of the down-

payment is no more than a few thousand dollars. Window and roof replacement are commonly needed repairs, as are furnace, plumbing, and electric improvements. This rehabilitation can lead to a cost of \$10,000 to \$20,000 per duplex. A subsidy for rehabilitation that is tied to a required residency of 5 to 10 years (with prorated benefits) would be most advantageous and cost effective in maintaining property values and the urban tax base. Such a program could also be directed at perspective purchasers of single-family houses.

Because many of the purchasers of these duplexes will likely be first-time homebuyers, a parallel education program that teaches them how to prioritize repairs and to manage and maintain rental property is essential. This would also help to ensure that the funds being invested in the program will be spent most effectively.

There are various Federal, State, and local programs directed at first-time homebuyers and at rehabilitation. Local banks have a Federal obligation to participate in local rehabilitation efforts. Dayton devised a three-point demonstration program to improve distressed properties. It provides funds to train existing landlords to be better managers; it educates and provides downpayment assistance to renters who are positioning themselves to become homeowners; and it provides interest rate buydowns and loans for home purchase, rehabilitation, and improvement. The city targeted the Five Oaks community with these programs immediately after the street closures went into effect.

■ Evaluation of the modifications

An evaluation by the city's office of management and budget revealed that within a year of creating the mini-neighborhoods, cut-through traffic was reduced by 67 percent, overall traffic volume by 36 percent, and traffic accidents by 40 percent. A survey of 191 residents conducted by the Social Science Research Center of the University of Dayton showed that 73 percent of residents thought that there was less traffic, but 13 percent saw no change; 62 percent said there was less noise, but 27 percent saw no change (Dayton OMB Evaluation, 1994).

The police department found that overall crime had been reduced by 26 percent and violent crime by 50 percent. Robbery, burglary, assault, and auto theft were found to be the lowest they had been in 5 years. By comparison, in Dayton overall, crime had increased by 1 percent. The university survey showed that 53 percent of residents thought there was less crime, but that 36 percent felt there was no change; 45 percent felt safer, and 43 percent thought it was as safe as it had been before.

Housing values were up 15 percent in Five Oaks in the first year, versus 4 percent in the region. People's investment in their homes and property



Figure II-21:
Renter and homeowner children playing together in a cul-de-sac street. The gates can be seen at rear.

had substantially increased. The owners of 75 rental buildings and 45 homeowners had applied for and received city improvement loans. Others had gone directly to banks or financed improvements themselves. With the neighborhood changing and housing values going up, people found that it now paid to make improvements: They were no longer acting alone and knew they would be getting their money back when they sold the property. A survey found that housing requiring both major and minor repairs dropped by 45 percent. For the first time in many years, houses in the neighborhood were attracting families with children. There was a 55-percent increase in housing sales during this same 1-year period.

The University of Dayton's survey found that 67 percent of residents thought their neighborhood was a better place to live, while 13 percent said it had remained about the same; 39 percent said they knew their neighbors better, while 53 percent said they knew as many as before; 24 percent said it was easier to recognize strangers; and 36 percent were more involved in the community (that is, through block clubs, civic activities, neighborhood watches). Most importantly, there was no difference in these perceptions between African Americans and whites, renters and homeowners. Drugs, theft from houses and cars, and harassment were all found to be less of a problem than a year earlier (University of Dayton, 1994).

The usual complaint about such programs, that they displace crime into the surrounding neighborhoods, also proved untrue. Crime in all the communities immediately surrounding Five Oaks decreased by an average of 1.2 percent. The police's explanation is that criminals and their clients knew that the residents of Five Oaks have taken control of their streets, but because they did not know the neighborhood's exact boundaries, they moved out of the surrounding communities as well. The positive effects

in traffic reduction also spilled over into bordering communities as all of Five Oaks has itself become an obstacle to cut-through traffic. Other communities in Dayton are now exploring a similar restructuring.

Whether this neighborhood stabilization effort served to deprive low-income residents of future housing opportunities in Five Oaks is best answered in this way: The neighborhood to the immediate west of Five Oaks is virtually identical in physical construction. Its decline preceded that of Five Oaks by a few years. Nothing was done to stop it. Driving through it now, one finds that every third house has either been boarded up or torn down. The community is perceived as being so unsafe that even white drug buyers will not go into the neighborhood. It is no longer a desirable place to live for renters or homeowners. Because of the high rates of abandonment and vacancy, there are fewer low-income renters per block now than in Five Oaks. So the policy of letting neighborhoods decline to create rental opportunities for low-income families proves to be a short-lived one. From the city's point of view, that neighborhood now contributes very little to its tax base, and its infrastructure of streets, water, power, and sewer lines goes wasted.

By comparison, Five Oaks is reducing its vacancies. Its African-American, low-income renters share their streets with middle-income whites. Their children play together. They benefit from low crime, good schools, and safe streets and play areas. The quality of municipal services Five Oaks receives, such as police, fire, snow removal, and garbage collection, is typical of that enjoyed by middle-income communities that contribute to the city's tax base. The mutual respect resulting from closer contact between the different racial and income groups has a positive effect on everyone. "The bottom line is this," says Ray Reynolds, the city's director of urban development, "if Five Oaks had not adopted its mini-neighborhood plan, it would have gone the way of its neighbor to the west."

Michael R. Turner, the mayor of Dayton, had the following to say after 2 years of observing the changes in Five Oaks:

The Five Oaks neighborhood has been the subject of articles in professional journals, the popular press from *Newsweek* to the *Economist*, television shows from *The Today Show* to *Dateline NBC*. We

have hosted visitors from a dozen cities and responded to literally hundreds of requests for information. This attention is a testament to the search in America for urban solutions that work.

The lesson we learned in Dayton is that when Defensible Space concepts are applied thoughtfully and with complete grassroots involvement, results can make neighborhoods more livable and increase the sense of community.

Dayton is typical of many mid-sized cities in America: It has lost many of its major employers; it lost 25 percent of its population since 1970 (declining from 243,000 in 1970 to 182,000 in 1990); it has an average income of \$22,000/year, compared with the average income in the county of \$32,000/year; its unemployment rate is usually a couple of points above the national (9.4 percent in 1993).

But Dayton is also a city of world-class innovation, from the Wright Brothers Flyer to the pop-top can. The Five Oaks Neighborhood Stabilization program is another such innovation.

If your community is considering a Defensible Space plan, pay attention to the lessons we learned:

1. A high level of citizen participation is critical.
2. Do more than close the streets; make it a comprehensive program: offer first-time homebuyers loans, target code enforcement efforts, and use police task forces to flush out the bad elements.
3. Accept some shortcomings. There are going to be a lot of benefits, but also some traffic inconveniences. It is not like you are starting from scratch on a fresh site: This is a retrofitting process, and some of the problems will not have 100-percent solutions.
4. Put some public policy in place: Decide on how the changes to the streets will be made and paid for; and decide when and for whom the gates will be opened (for snow plowing, fire and police emergencies, etc.).

■ **Limits to the application of the mini-neighborhood concept**

The creation of mini-neighborhoods will not survive a cookie-cutter approach: The concept does not lend itself to every situation. In communities where neighborhood people have tried the concept on their own, they have often failed. The experience of the highway department initiatives in Chicago and Los Angeles are not much better. There are certain conditions that must be in place and the action must involve the community in a particular way to be successful.

Need for a minimal percentage of homeowners. Existing homeownership is a critical ingredient to the success of mini-neighborhood creation. I have found that the presence of 40-percent resident homeowners may prove to be a minimum requirement. This is because in many communities, renters are normally given only 6-month to 1-year leases. This does not give them time to develop a commitment to their neighborhood, nor is there any incentive for them to maintain the house they live in or to care for its grounds. For us to also expect them to be concerned about the nature of the activity in the street would be really stretching it.

It might be possible for this 40-percent homeowner minimum to be reduced if there is a community tradition of renters occupying their units for periods of 5 years or more, and/or if there is a strong community identity among renters, coupled with strong social organizations. This does occur in some cities. In Baltimore, for instance, some renters have occupied neighborhoods for a few generations and have strong communal and religious organizations within them. Where this exists, the percent of homeowners could drop to as low as 20 percent, but a first-time homebuyer's program should still be made a very active parallel component of the mini-neighborhood effort.

Need for a predominance of single-family units. The percentage of single-family houses versus multifamily housing on each street is also an important factor. This is because in single-family houses, the front yard belongs to the family. By closing the street it makes it easy for that family to extend its realm of concern from its front yard into the street. Single-family houses include all three categories: fully detached houses, semidetached houses, and row houses (see the exposition of Defensible

Space principles in chapter I). Each of these three categories of single-family houses has separate entries facing the street directly off its front yard.

It is not that easy to create mini-neighborhoods in streets composed of multifamily buildings. The entries to these buildings serve many families and are often located at the side rather than facing the street. The grounds are usually public and not associated with particular families. Thus residents' adoption of the closed street as an extension of their dwellings is not second nature.

Need for quality schools. If a mini-neighborhood program is meant to attract working- and middle-class families with children, it is necessary to have good schools in the area. Dayton's public schools are not highly regarded. The Five Oaks community had three parochial schools operating within its boundaries, and 30 percent of the students in these schools came from the community. Residents felt that the presence of these schools was a necessary ingredient to the success of the mini-neighborhood effort. Communities in other cities may not have parochial schools, but a magnet school of good quality can serve the same purpose. In some gated communities in St. Louis, where neither magnet schools nor parochial schools were in existence, parents participated actively in the local public schools to improve performance. They helped purchase books and supplies, and ran special music, art, and sports programs.

It should be remembered that one of the appeals of inner-city mini-neighborhoods is the quality housing available at low cost in comparison with the suburbs. But the price for that is the need to supplement the cost of local schooling, either through the use of parochial schools or through active participation on the part of residents in making local schools better.

Need for mini-neighborhoods to reflect people's perceptions. It is critical that residents from every street participate in the planning process and define their own mini-neighborhoods. This can be a time-consuming process that many cities would prefer to avoid. In cities where the highway departments designed the street closures without community involvement, the results have often been pointless.

Working with local institutions. In creating mini-neighborhoods, it is important to work closely with the institutions in the area. The schools,

hospitals, and universities can be a real resource in many ways. They usually have a stronger commitment to the neighborhood than individual homeowners. They are also in a position to subsidize their staff to buy homes in the community.

I try to hold my community meetings in hospitals and schools and invite the principals of these institutions to attend so that they too can help shape the plan and make it theirs. In Dayton, the plan I prepared made it easy for the hospital staff, ambulances, and patients to come and go. But after I left, the community modified that portion of the plan and, by so doing, antagonized the hospital staff. The city then had to tear down these gates and revert to my original plan. The lesson again is: Everyone must participate in the planning process from beginning to end.

Race and the attitude toward mini-neighborhoods. Most of my work in creating mini-neighborhoods has been in racially and economically mixed communities, but I have also worked in all-African-American communities of varying income levels. Where the residents of these communities were working and middle class, they proved to be as strong advocates of mini-neighborhoods as whites of similar incomes in predominantly white communities. They understood very clearly that these mechanisms would enable them to keep the local gangs under control and the drug dealers and prostitutes out.

The most difficult communities I have found to work in are those that are about 70-percent African American that are undergoing rapid transition. In these situations, some African-American residents perceive the proposed gates as a device for either locking them in or locking them out. When I point out that some of the most expensive communities in their city and suburbs are gated, they scoff, saying: What has that to do with us? African Americans in this country do have a history of being excluded, so their position is understandable. However, by totally refusing to entertain such a solution, they are depriving themselves of a simple and effective means of making their communities safer and free of traffic.

A bit into the process, I discovered that African-American opposition in communities undergoing transition often came from people who did not actually live in the community but were hoping to buy into it given that

housing prices were falling. Because of this situation, they did not want a program that would interrupt the trend. They did not enjoy hearing me say: “We’re going to make this community more attractive to homeowners; and housing prices are going to jump by 20 to 30 percent.” In self-defense, one of the things I learned to do was ask people to identify themselves and give their address in the community before they spoke. That put their criticism in perspective. But in truth, one cannot stabilize a neighborhood for homeowners and increase property values on the one hand, without also making it more expensive for some people to buy into on the other.

When working in one neighborhood, one is open to criticism of favoritism from various other neighborhoods throughout a city. It is important for a city, therefore, to target African-American and Hispanic-American communities as well as predominantly white communities for Defensible Space modifications. In Dayton, I prepared plans for the modification of a public housing project as well as for Five Oaks. In this way it cannot be said that the city’s security programs are being directed only at middle-income families. In fact, I was told that Five Oaks was selected to be the first test of the mini-neighborhood concept in Dayton just because it was 50/50 African American and white. City officials feared that if it were a predominantly white community, their choice would have been severely criticized and implementing the modifications would have been made difficult.

Criticism from resident drug dealers and others. In some communities, drug dealers prove to be the wealthiest residents and often own the biggest houses. Needless to say, they feel very threatened by my proposals, but they will rarely get up and talk for themselves. Instead, they have well-spoken friends give long dissertations on the evil of gates and the removal of freedom of access and association, which is the “American way.” When I reply that my experience has shown that mini-neighborhoods actually serve to bring people out of hiding and encourage them to interact with each other, they boo me. When I ask what evidence they can point to that shows that people living on open streets interact more readily, or interact across the urban spectrum, they are silent. (So, for that matter, are my critics from academia.) Our study in St. Louis compared closed streets with open streets and found a significant difference in residents’ knowledge of their neighbors (Newman, Grandin, Wayno, 1974).

The police can be very useful in helping one learn about the relationship of community critics with drug dealers and slumlords. Let me hasten to say though that not everyone objecting to mini-neighborhoods on philosophical grounds is either a drug dealer or slumlord. Certainly, my critics from academia are not.

In some communities, including public housing projects, drug dealers are so omnipresent, they literally run the community and are strong contributors to the local economy. They provide young children with jobs as runners and subsidize the rents of seniors for the use of their apartments in which to hide their stash or to manufacture drugs. I have seen college-educated women at meetings speak of drug dealers as a financial boon to the community, oblivious to the fact that these same drug dealers have hooked resident teenagers on drugs and turned some of them into prostitutes.

In such communities, concerned residents will also stand up and say, “You don’t understand the situation here. Drug dealers run this place. These gates are just going to enable them to further assert their control.” That assessment may be correct: Mini-neighborhoods may not work there. Mini-neighborhoods only work where the people who do not want crime feel that they are the majority and that this mechanism will give them the control of their neighborhood they seek. But if they feel that the neighborhood is no longer theirs, they are right not to support the concept.

