

BEYOND AND BELOW THE NEW URBANISM: CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND RESPONSIVE SPATIAL RECONSTRUCTION

ARCHON FUNG*

Abstract: This article examines a strategy called responsive participatory redesign (RPR): in it, ordinary citizens attempt to proactively correct defects in existing spatial arrangements that contribute to problems such as neighborhood crime. This approach offers important advantages over more top-down strategies of community-friendly design such as those of the "New Urbanism" such as its capacity to manage unintended consequences, draw direct citizen engagement, and economize on the resources available for public problem solving. Recent developments under the rubric of Chicago's Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) have unintentionally created some of the building blocks of RPR, and several early experiences illustrate the modest contributions to the quality of neighborhood life that this public policy approach can yield.

To solve problems, instead of evading them, takes creativity and the solutions are not necessarily obvious until after the fact. To keep a society's older work from deteriorating also requires constant creativity. Older ways of organizing the work and carrying it on don't serve any longer when the scale of the work expands or becomes more complex.¹

I. PARTICIPATION AND URBAN RECONFIGURATION

Old and new traditions in planning and urban design recognize the critical effect of spatial contours upon the vitality of local communities. Quite unintentionally, recent developments in the city of Chicago have created institutional feedback loops in which residents can respond to neighborhood problems by reconstructing local geographies in ways that mitigate harms and enhance the possibilities for rich social life. These policies, intended in the first instance to en-

* Ass't Prof. Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Gov't, Harvard U.; Ph.D., 1999, Mass. Inst. Tech.; B.S. Physics, 1990, Mass. Inst. Tech.; B.S. Philosophy, 1990, Mass. Inst. Tech.

¹ Leticia Kent, *Jane Jacobs: Against Urban Renewal, for Urban Life*, N.Y. TIMES, May 25, 1969 (Magazine), at 35 (quoting Jane Jacobs).

hance public safety through community policing, have created a structure for hundreds of simultaneous efforts in neighborhood-level participatory planning. If it were self-conscious, this strategy might be called responsive participatory redesign (RPR): in it, ordinary citizens attempt to pro-actively correct defects in existing spatial arrangements. This Article examines the building blocks of RPR as found in Chicago and argues that this approach offers important advantages over top-down strategies of community-friendly designs such as the New Urbanism.²

Four important organizing principles emerge from considering developments at the intersection of community policing and spatial reconfiguration: (1) citizen participation; (2) critical feedback loops connecting the quality of community action and the conduciveness of physical space; (3) retrospective and incremental strategies of spatial improvement; and (4) the construction of enabling participatory political and administrative institutions.

In RPR, the principle of participation means that citizens ought to have a voice in shaping the public spaces that they use. In Chicago, residents have played crucial roles (sometimes with planners and other officials or professionals, sometimes without them) in recognizing problematic space, developing solutions, and eventually implementing reconfigurations. This bottom-up dynamic brings the local knowledge, ingenuity, and legitimacy of citizen-activists to bear on the problem of urban design. By contrast, New Urbanists often privilege the knowledge and capacity of planners and architects to design spaces that serve the best interests of citizens and thereby advance community formation. In doing so, New Urbanists inject the goal of establishing vibrant community into professional priorities, but forego potential contributions from the beneficiaries of these designs.

A second organizing principle of RPR identifies a constructive feedback loop connecting the quality of community action with the physical context that structures the community. When citizens organize to alter their common spatial circumstances, they can construct environments that are in turn more conducive to community building and social organizing. Prescriptively, this observation suggests that a feedback loop might be self-consciously intensified through public policies and institutional arrangements that, for example, encourage citizens to consider the consequences of the public spaces they in-

² See generally PETER KATZ, *THE NEW URBANISM: TOWARD AN ARCHITECTURE OF COMMUNITY* (1994).

habit, and empower them to positively transform those spaces. Conceptually, this descriptive and normative principle reverses the causal emphasis of New Urbanist perspectives. There, the chain of cause and effect runs from space to citizenship; physical facts conduce or obstruct vibrant community and public life. RPR is more intensively democratic than The New Urbanism in that it imagines active citizens cooperatively transforming urban spaces to make them more congenial.

The third operational principle of RPR emphasizes responsive and incremental action. In the examples below, citizens begin to act when they recognize and respond to defects in their circumstances. They seek to repair these problems in a pragmatic, wait-and-see fashion. This kind of action is necessarily piecemeal because it addresses only those situations that are most urgent and problematic. The citizens' solutions directly affect only small portions of the totality of neighborhood form. This approach economizes the limited resources available in most urban neighborhoods by concentrating efforts on the most serious local concerns. More importantly, responsive incrementalism respects the complexity of the dynamics connecting private behavior, community formation, and physicality. It attempts to manage the plethora of unintended consequences that inevitably accompanies deliberate efforts to alter these dynamics by limiting citizen ambition to step-wise changes in which concrete effects can be monitored and incorporated into subsequent efforts. The New Urbanism, by contrast, often aims at a more totalizing transformation of space, ambitiously imposing its principles and physical picture by erasing that which preceded it. While they are by no means mutually exclusive, the former presents a more practicable and focused approach to spatial reconstruction.

A fourth consideration emphasizes the contribution of appropriate political institutions. Though the three principles of participation, feedback, and incremental response are ubiquitous in urban spatial transformation, RPR suggests that they can be deliberately harnessed and reinforced through the appropriate political institutions. In particular, enhancing the opportunities for local and direct citizen participation, and then rendering the agencies that construct urban space—departments of housing, parks, streets, sanitation, safety, education, and the like—more responsive to these citizens would promote such institutional reform.

The next section describes how Chicago's community policing reforms unintentionally created empowered local democratic spaces for incremental urban reconstruction. The third and fourth sections

offer three micro-cases of spatial reconstruction community policing reforms to illustrate how these dynamics have functioned in practice, and to draw some lessons from these experiences. This Article concludes by reflecting upon the limitations of RPR's emerging approach and its potential contributions to other strategies of urban governance.

II. COMMUNITY POLICING AS DEMOCRATIC CATALYST

Drawn in the broadest terms, local democracy is a form of governance in which people in some small area, such as a neighborhood, come together, discuss common problems, devise solutions, and implement changes. During the 1990s, the Chicago Police Department (CPD) and its occasional civilian partner in community policing, the Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety (CANS), created a limited local democracy in the context of community policing.³ In 1993, the CPD "rolled-out" its community policing program, known as the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS), in five of the city's twenty-four police districts. In 1994, the CPD began to expand the program to cover the entire city. One basic plank of CAPS was to divide the city into 279 "beats," each of which would be served by roughly the same patrol officers and sergeants for one-year terms.⁴ This administrative change was designed to enable officers to act in a more proactive way: to know their beats, to recognize particular local concerns, and to devise creative solutions to specific problems of crime and disorder. Parallel to this state-side reform, CANS contracted with the city to organize civilian community policing groups in each of the beats to work with sworn officers on problems of safety and order. From the outset, CAPS was conceived as a public-public partnership between reorganized police officers and organized communities.

By fleshing out the details on the community side of the equation, it appears that CAPS utilizes three means to catalyze a local democratic process by reconstituting relationships both between citizens and the state and among citizens themselves: (1) it brings individuals together around common concerns; (2) it focuses the attention of these groups onto problems of safety and disorder; and (3) it specifies a distinctive communicative process of problem solving

³ See generally WESLEY G. SKOGAN & SUSAN M. HARTNETT, *COMMUNITY POLICING, CHICAGO STYLE* (1997).

⁴ See *id.* at 38-69.

which specifies how members are to interact with one another and with the state.

First, aggregating private and often alienated citizens into deliberative and effective groups is a substantial problem. One fundamental difficulty is that participation is costly to the individual. It takes time to find out where meetings are held and then to attend. In the case of community policing, there is often the additional cost of possible retaliation from criminals in the community. Furthermore, the connection between participation and public purpose often seems tenuous; meetings often seem pointless, endless, and futile. Famously, there is also the free-rider problem: whatever public good—in terms of decision or action—that comes from a meeting would likely have happened in the absence of any single person's contribution.

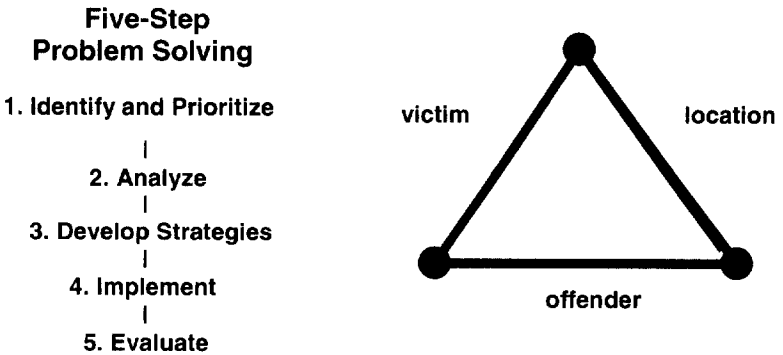
CAPS and CANS have dealt with this nexus of problems rather directly. In 1994, they hired fifty organizers to knock on doors, post posters, contact community leaders, and call and facilitate meetings. Their goal was to translate widespread concern about neighborhood safety into individual participation by lowering (or themselves paying for) informational and transactional costs. That, combined with the potential benefit that participation might increase public safety, was aimed at garnering citizen participation. Because common prerequisites of collective action—income, education, trust, confidence, and social capital—were quite absent from many of these areas, it was remarkable that the efforts of CAPS and CANS yielded substantial participation. Between 1995 and 1999, the typical neighborhood beat meeting was attended by about seventeen residents.⁵ Though this participation rate is not overwhelming, neither is it negligible. These meetings typically occur monthly in each of the city's 279 beats.

The second element of CAPS is important and straightforward. The community and police officers constitute themselves to address problems of public safety. They do this because organizers choose a single, urgent, and deeply felt issue and invite anyone who is concerned about that issue to take part in the common effort. Concerns that begin with safety often implicate a broad array of facially unrelated considerations—in particular configurations of physical space.

The third constitutive element is the problem solving process by which these groups deliberate and act. CAPS deliberately establishes a

⁵ For beat meeting participation patterns, see Archon Fung, *Accountable Autonomy: Toward Empowered Deliberation in Chicago Schools and Policing*, 29 *POL. AND SOC'Y* Mar. 2001, at 86–93 and SROGAN & HARTNETT, *supra* note 3, at 113–20.

communicative relationship among members of the public which is based on developing a collective capacity to solve problems.⁶ Elements of problem solving processes have been part of Chicago community policing since its outset and continue to evolve. One important step in the development of problem solving processes was its formalization into a CAPS "curriculum" which is taught to joint teams of police-civilian trainers, who then teach it to members of community policing groups. A review of the formal program and the trainers' pedagogical method provides some evidence that communicative problem solving accurately characterizes these groups. The curriculum has three central elements: (1) a set of criteria which a concern must meet in order to qualify as a community policing "problem," (2) a five-step problem solving process, and (3) the crime triangle:⁷



In order to qualify as a "problem" to be addressed by a community policing group, a concern must be: (1) a repeated pattern of behavior rather than a single incident; (2) of concern to the community as a whole; and (3) large enough that many people in the group can work on it effectively. The crime triangle provides a straightforward

⁶ Many difficulties are elided in the following discussion of publics under CAPS. The first major omission is that certain interests/views are excluded from the beginning—the interests and views of drug dealers, gangsters, and prostitutes, but also sometimes interests of liquor store owners, landlords, and the homeless. The second major omission, albeit less important, is the degree of conflict present in these publics. The purpose of this discussion is to tease out the problem solving mechanism through which this conflict is transformed into consensus.

This conception of the public (recognizing common problems and then acting collectively and reflectively to solve them) adds nothing fundamental to John Dewey's conception of the public. See generally JOHN DEWEY, *THE PUBLIC AND ITS PROBLEMS* (Ohio U. Press 1954) (1927).

⁷ These figures are reproduced, essentially unchanged, from CAPS training posters.

method of classifying aspects of a problem by asking the following three questions:

- Who is affected and how can they be protected?
- Who is causing the problem and how can their behavior be changed?
- Where is the problem occurring and why is it occurring in that place rather than another?

The five-step process specifies how members of the public are to think about the problem and how they should act on it; this formulates a public process of practical reasoning.

If this communicative and cognitive process is to succeed in any particular case, it must either be blessed with or, as is more often the case, construct for itself consensus and trust within the group because the implementation stage requires collective action and mutual aid. By limiting itself to only problems that are of general concern to many in the community and that require coordinated action from many in the group, the curriculum's definition of "problem" ensures that there will be a common incentive for members to cooperate. The step-wise problem solving method also provides a graduated, though steep, path to consensus, trust, and mutual reliance. For example, the first stage in the process is brainstorming and consensus building. Participants list problems of crime and disorder, together prioritize that list, and then select the most important problem as the one which they will collectively tackle. At the second and third stages, participants attempt to discover the sources of the identified problem and develop strategies to attack those sources. In the fourth stage, members divide the labor of executing strategies among themselves, and make mutual commitments to perform these tasks. At the fifth stage, they evaluate their performance as well as the strategy as a whole and then revise their approaches accordingly.

The communicative problem solving process of these community policing publics follows the five-step form depicted above. Trainers teach community members the "curriculum" by leading them through its steps, typically with one or two sessions dedicated to each step with "homework" (investigating property ownership, identities of usual suspects, history of action, etc.) between the meetings. After initial orientation and overview sessions, the next community problem solving meeting is dedicated to identifying and prioritizing actual problems. Then a meeting is held to analyze the causes of the most prominent problem, and so on.

Though many different kinds of measures emerge from these participatory problem solving deliberations, strategies frequently revolve around the reconfiguration of public space.⁸ These strategies attempt to reduce local problems such as narcotics trafficking, gang activity, and prostitution by altering the physical space in which they occur, for example, by increasing lighting, closing down particular kinds of businesses, maintaining a police or citizen presence, removing pay phones, or simply cleaning up graffiti and trash.⁹ To a surprising extent, enhancing public safety often requires improving the quality of public space in such ways.

Two other considerations motivate this focus on space. First, a pressing general question is whether community policing compared to more traditional policing methods makes any difference at all. In examining outcomes, evaluators have typically sought to document changes in the number of index crimes or to establish attitudinal changes in the police or citizenry.¹⁰ Shifting attention to changes in physical space illuminates an additional piece of undeniable evidence that community policing matters. Traditional policing strategies—street patrols, crime investigations, and emergency response—do not alter urban spaces in the ways that community policing action often does. The effect of changing space on reported crime or perceptions of safety remains to be seen, but it would be surprising if the reorganization of space described had no pertinent effects.

Moreover, the way space is constructed affords a focused point from which to compare various kinds of institutions in action. The configurations of the spaces we will examine were produced by individual action mediated by modernist institutions of public hierarchies (the Parks Commission and the Chicago Transportation Authority (CTA)) and real estate markets. Spaces created by these institutions became problematic for some citizens concerned with public safety, and thus were consequently reconstructed through an alternative institutional form that was more decentralized and participatory. These

⁸ For a general discussion of the various strategies and tactics that emerge from Chicago community policing, see generally Fung, *supra* note 5, and WESLEY SKOGAN ET AL., *ON THE BEAT* (1999).

⁹ For some observers, graffiti is an expression of natural community or youth art. For others, it is a marker of gang territory (the vernacular term for painting graffiti is “tagging”) and thus uncontrolled space.

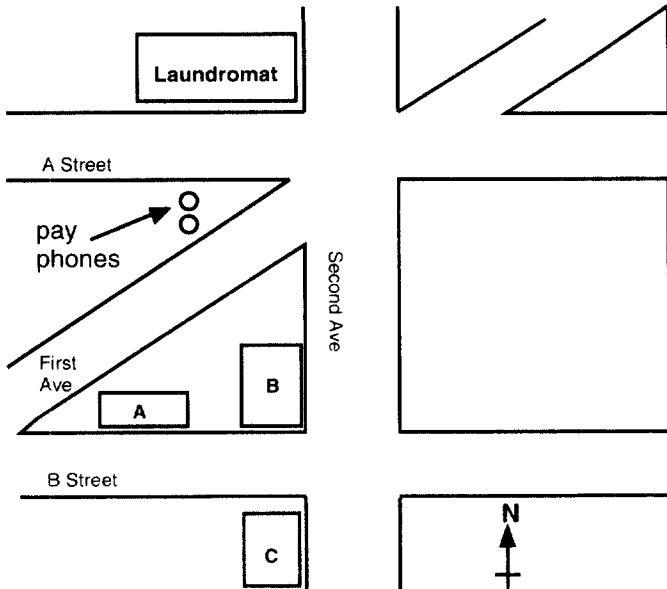
¹⁰ While useful, both of these measures have fundamental weaknesses. So, for example, many practitioners reason that a wildly successful community policing program will result in higher measured crime rates, because those who trust the police will be more likely to report crimes they know about or witness.

spaces could have been improved through the more traditional/modern forms of market and planning bureaucracy, but the fact is that they were not. The attentions of actors in public agencies and private markets were directed elsewhere. If not for action catalyzed by community policing, these spaces would have likely remained in unsatisfactory states for some time. That the spaces were reconstructed through the public-public partnership outlined above raises the possibility that other such spaces, increasingly common in many urban landscapes, might also be addressed through these alternative political structures.

III. THREE CASES

A. *Hot Spot in Rogers Park*

In 1992, before the formalization and spread of CAPS, residents in Rogers Park were already experimenting with community policing and problem solving methods. Residents in a beat there identified a host of problems on a street corner that included suspected crack dealing, prostitution, and noise late into the night. The disorder was concentrated around three rental properties near this corner. These properties and other salient geographic features are depicted on the map below:



After some reflection, residents determined that recent increases in undesirable street activity could be attributed to two main causes. First, the landlord of the laundromat on A Street had refused to renew the previous manager's lease and given management of the business to his son. The new manager took steps to discourage drug dealing on the premises, whereas the prior manager had allowed such activity. One significant measure was to remove pay phones in the laundromat.¹¹ These new policies pushed illicit activity that had been confined inside the building to the street outside, where suspected dealers relied on nearby public telephones.

Residents traced a second line of causation to three problem buildings—"A," "B," and "C"—on B Street and Second Avenue which had recently changed ownership. The new landlords did not screen tenants or keep up properties as well as the previous owners. As a result, undesirable tenants occupied the buildings and disturbed the peace through illegal activities. Others, who had previously frequented the laundromat, now haunted the bank of pay phones on the street and nearby dilapidated buildings.

Residents in the community policing group used a variety of strategies to target these various causes with uneven success. To address the problem of the street pay phones, they tried to convince their owner to cancel his contract with the telephone company. The owner agreed to do so, but the telephone company refused to cancel his contract. Eventually, some members of the community policing group met with the company and negotiated an arrangement that the phones would no longer receive incoming calls.

To target the problem properties, residents wrote letters to landlords to inform them of the problem and to offer to help. They organized walking groups to establish a "positive" community presence. They also set targets for use of nuisance abatement laws,¹² which allow a property to be taken from a landlord if police make two drug arrests on a single property within one year. They then worked with police to facilitate/initiate target arrests in specific units. Finally, they set up a task force to show community support in housing court when property was taken away from the landlord.

The residents coordinated these strategies with police, who agreed to establish a greater uniformed presence at this location.

¹¹ Pay phones are sometimes used by sellers of contraband narcotics to conduct business.

¹² CHICAGO, ILL., HOUSING CODE ch. 7-4, §§ 8-4-090, 13-12-145 (1996); ILL. COMP. STAT. 5/37-2 (2000).

They also informed the police of known trouble makers, and the police paid special attention to these persons (e.g. by finding arrest histories). Tactical police units targeted the area for arrest and surveillance, while narcotics officers were deployed to make undercover drug "buys" and to arrest perpetrators.

These efforts improved the space around the problem properties, and thus social conditions in the neighborhood. The nuisance abatement effort resulted in two arrests at the property marked "C" and at the same time brought the owner to housing court.¹³ The building was sold and renovated. Negotiations between the community policing group and the landlord of the property marked "B" resulted in improved management, intervention with problem tenants, and better tenant screening. In the "A" building, one tenant was evicted and another moved out. The efforts of this public-public partnership successfully abated many of the crime and disorder problems on the corner of B Street and Second Avenue.

B. Gangs at a Chicago Transit Authority Bus Stop

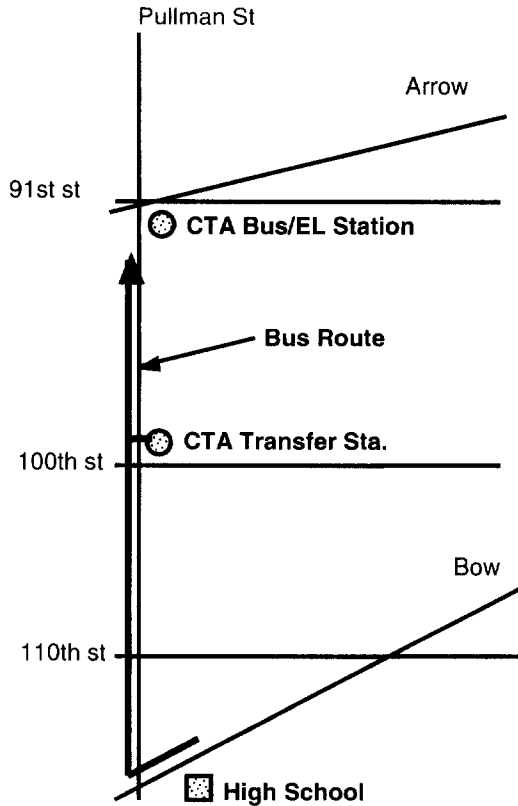
Marquette, the Chicago Police Department's tenth district, is located in the near southwest part of Chicago. The area is racially polarized, with the western end of the district being heavily Hispanic and the eastern side predominantly African-American.¹⁴ In the early 1990s, one of the hottest crime spots in the district was the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) bus transfer station¹⁵ on the corner of 100th and Pullman Streets (see map below). This corner is located in the Hispanic sector of the district and was a center of conflict between several gangs. This tension was exacerbated by the addition of an-

¹³ The nuisance abatement law is prosecuted in criminal court, whereas housing courts specialize in enforcement of housing code violations. Since it is difficult to comply with the volumes of housing codes, one tactic of community policing groups has been to encourage selective enforcement of code violations on owners of problematic buildings. CHICAGO, ILL., HOUSING CODE ch. 7-4, §§ 8-4-090, 13-12-145 (1996); 720 ILL. COMP. STAT. 5/37-2 (2000).

¹⁴ The details of this case, related above, were provided in a telephone interview with Chicago Police Department officers in the tenth district. See generally CHICAGO COMMUNITY POLICING EVALUATION CONSORTIUM, COMMUNITY POLICING IN CHICAGO, YEAR TWO: AN INTERIM REPORT, CHICAGO: ILLINOIS CRIMINAL JUSTICE INFORMATION AUTHORITY 41 (1995); Dominique Whelan, *Partnerships in Action*, in COMMUNITY POLICING PROJECT PAPERS (1995).

¹⁵ The locations on this map have been altered to preserve anonymity. The bus line which runs up Pullman Street breaks at the transfer station, so a northbound passenger rides one bus from Bow Street up to 100th Street, then waits at the transfer station for another bus to take the passenger the rest of the way to 91st Street.

other racial variable: African-American students attending a nearby high school to the south frequently waited for their buses at the transfer station. This combination made for a "boiling cauldron," as one police officer put it. Though tension was constant, it would flare up especially after days in which fights occurred at school. Drug dealing and violence were sufficiently severe that the tenth district police positioned one marked car and one wagon at the transfer station during all school hours.



Residents in the then newly formed community policing beat group (the transfer station is in this beat) were concerned about the excessive use of police resources at the trouble spot. Since a car was devoted to monitoring the bus transfer station, the rest of the beat received little patrol service. After police explained the severity of disorder at the transfer station, residents decided that the best way to free up limited police resources was to address the problematic activity there.

They wrote letters to petition help from directly interested parties: the alderman's office, the CTA, and the principal of the high school. Eventually, these authorities, the police, and the residents agreed to a concerted strategy. The principal staggered class times to reduce the density of students in the area. Most importantly, the CTA created a number of express buses to carry students directly from the high school to the main bus/elevated train (el) stop at the corner of Pullman and Arrow Streets, thereby bypassing the hot spot.

After these measures, officers reported that tensions at the original spot had abated to the point that their beat car no longer needed to maintain a permanent presence. One dynamic and ongoing result of this effort is that employees of the school contact the tenth district police station to inform them of fights in the school or other problems so that the police can be on the lookout for trouble at times when it is more likely to surface.

C. The Redesign of Gill Park

The residents in the Lake View community area of Chicago are generally white, middle class home owners.¹⁶ In the early prioritizing part of their problem solving process, residents decided that the most urgent public safety problem in their neighborhood was a group of young people who frequented the park and whom they suspected of dealing crack cocaine and prostitution. After some analysis, they determined that the problematic activity occurred mostly at night, in the back of the park, in an unfinished concrete structure which resembled a large sunken pit. The pit, partially hidden from the street by trees, evidently made a good hiding place.

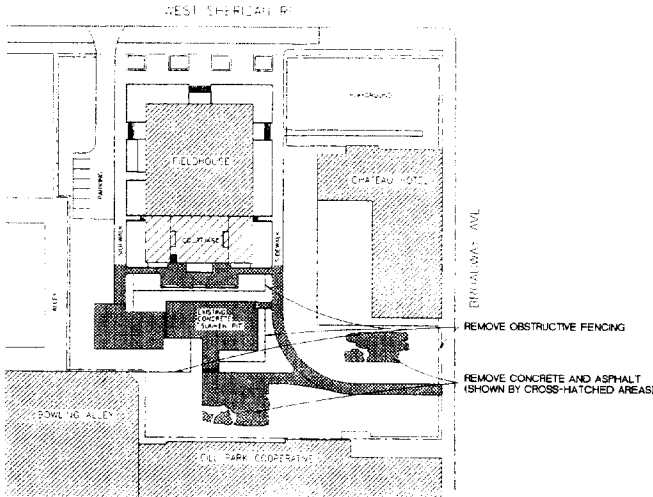
In the short term, residents and police worked together to mitigate unlawful activity. Police patrolled the area more frequently at peak times identified by residents, conducted foot patrols, and enforced loitering and curfew laws. Neighbors living next to the park organized themselves to watch for illicit activity and summon police response via a phone tree.

In the longer term, residents followed Jane Jacobs's wisdom that "eyes on the street" can prevent crime and nuisances in public places.¹⁷ They began with simple measures such as trimming tall trees to make the park's interior visible from the street. More ambitiously,

¹⁶ Interview with John McDermott, Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety, (Oct. 23, 1995).

¹⁷ See generally JANE JACOBS, *THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT AMERICAN CITIES* (1961).

residents sought physical improvements to make the park more useful, attractive, and inviting to legitimate users in the hope that they might drive out illegal ones. The group has taken steps which would be unavailable to most other community policing groups in the city. First, they contacted an architect through social connections to redesign the park. After conducting an aerial survey and consulting with the group, the architect developed plans that include a community garden, a multi-use athletic field, and plenty of night lights:



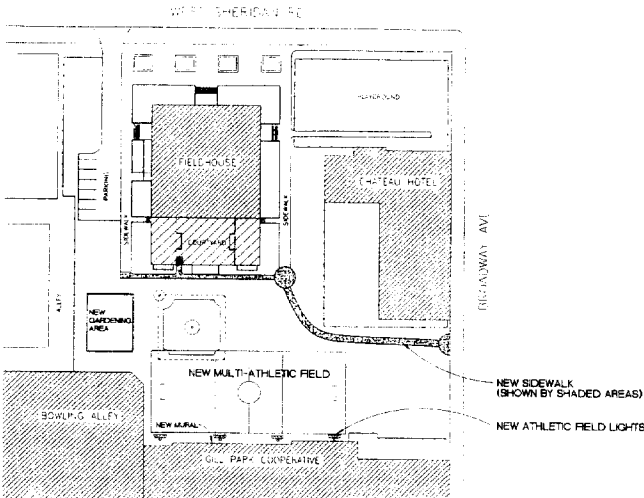
1 GILL PARK PROPOSAL - DEMOLITION

SCALE: 1" = 50'



0 25 50 100

DRAWING BY:
MICHAEL J. ECKHORN, ARCHITECT
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
OCTOBER 18, 1995



2 GILL PARK PROPOSAL - NEW WORK

SCALE: 1" = 50'



0 25 50 100

DRAWING BY:
MICHAEL J. ECKHORN, ARCHITECT
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
OCTOBER 18, 1995

Next, residents secured approval to make these modifications from the Parks Department. They also raised more than \$20,000 from the Chicago Cubs and local businesses to implement their new design. After construction was completed, unlawful activities and nuisances all but disappeared and the community use of the park increased.

IV. THE PROMISE OF PARTICIPATORY REDESIGN

It is, of course, unwise to develop general recommendations from three micro-cases and the institutions of community policing that made them possible. These experiences do, however, illustrate how the principles of participation, feedback, and incremental change can contribute to urban problem-solving and spatial reconfiguration. In all three cases, citizens and local officials were modestly successful in developing spatial strategies, implementing them, and thereby improving the levels of public safety. Many of the mechanisms that enabled them to be effective are typically unavailable in top-down approaches to redesign.

Some sources of these successes lie in the nature of participatory problem solving institutionalized by the city-wide community policing reforms. These safety-oriented neighborhood groups were able to gauge their own capacities and develop strategies suited to their limited resources. For example, groups in Rogers Park and Marquette were realistic and conservative in that they selected inexpensive strategies and limited, though important, goals. The Lakeview group was more ambitious and pursued a high-risk strategy toward park rehabilitation. These choices were backed by residents' confidence in the reach of their social networks. The residents were eventually rewarded. These groups also drew upon a rich base of local knowledge not only to identify problems but to ascertain the causes of these problems and to develop strategies to solve them. Problems too slight to be noticed by distant authorities, such as low-level narcotics trafficking on street-corners or in parks, or fights between students at a bus stop, often pose serious hazards and cause community decline when viewed from neighborhoods.¹⁸ Even if these problems had become priorities for public agencies, their solutions would likely have been less nimble for lack of access to the textured sense of local pri-

¹⁸ See generally GEORGE L. KELLING & CATHERINE M. COLES, *FIXING BROKEN WINDOWS: RESTORING ORDER AND REDUCING CRIME IN OUR COMMUNITIES* (1971); James Q. Wilson & George L. Kelling, *Making Neighborhoods Safe*, *ATLANTIC MONTHLY*, Feb. 2, 1989, at 46 (discussing the "broken windows" theory that minor problems lead to more serious ones).

orities and facts of life upon which these problem solving groups relied.

This local knowledge and access enabled residents and local officials in Rogers Park, Marquette, and Lakeview to navigate the complex confluences of spatial, organizational, and behavioral dynamics that both gave rise to the targeted problems and informed their solutions. The problems in Rogers Park were unintended consequences of seemingly unrelated factors—negligent landlords and the location of public phones—in a socio-economically depressed neighborhood. In Marquette, the bus transfer station problem in Marquette illustrates just how convoluted local tensions and issues can become. Recall that the route of a bus line, placement of a transfer station, the location and hours of operation of a high school, and the peculiar juxtaposition of two minority communities conspired to create a “hot-spot” of regular, violent altercations. It is difficult to imagine that a master designer, even one gifted with extraordinary insight and power, could have foreseen these confluences and prevented them.

By contrast, local problem solving groups, precisely because they were decentralized and attentive to local circumstances, were able to comprehend the full complexity of these intricate relationships and develop appropriately articulated responses. In Rogers Park, the solutions involved simultaneous police action and negotiations with local landlords, proprietors, and the telephone company. In Marquette, the solutions required altering and coordinating the bureaucratic mindsets of both a local school and the city’s bus system. Improving Lakeview involved the consent of the Parks Department, a simultaneous response by the police, and action from other city agencies, a private design firm, and a charitable foundation. In these instances, neighborhood problem-solving yielded agile solutions that were more logical and visible from the local perspective. From more distant perspectives, these problems might have seemed hopelessly complex, and the solutions designed to address them might have been much more clumsy.

Because these three problem-solving groups were composed of residents and local officials, they were also able to continuously monitor the progress of their strategies and develop new tactics to replace ineffective ones. When both problems and solution strategies are complex, they will often interact with circumstances to produce unintended consequences. However, problem solving groups can take note of these surprises and develop further dynamic strategies to cope with them. For instance, changing behavior at the laundromat in Rogers Park simply displaced problems and triggered subsequent

strategies. Similarly, additional concerns will probably arise in both Lakeview and Marquette. When they do, the citizens and local officials there are well positioned to respond to them.

Both design-centered approaches such as the New Urbanism and what I have termed RPR aim to change both physical form and behavior. The difference is that the former seeks to mold urban form based on general principles in the hope that such changes will enhance sociability, community, and public-spiritedness. The latter approach begins by taking the criticisms of modernist ambition to heart¹⁹ and recognizing the intricate relationships between form and behavior. It then seeks to negotiate these complexities by continuously making incremental adjustments to physical space—moving a bus station here, improving parts of a park there—and observing the actual impacts of these changes on behavior. Though this path of accretion is less swift, it may be more sure in the end.

Beyond abating some persistent patterns of crime and disorder, have these efforts advanced the more ambitious aim of fostering community and civic engagement? As with the New Urbanism, the concrete impacts of space upon civil society are difficult to disentangle.²⁰ Spatial improvements clear the way for residents and visitors to become more sociable in proximate public spaces. Residents are no longer harassed at the street corner or laundromat in Rogers Park; young people and adults can socialize and travel freely without fearing flashes of violence at the bus station in Marquette; and Gill Park in Lakeview has become an attribute for the neighborhood rather than an affliction. However, it is less clear whether most, or even many, residents of these neighborhoods have utilized these improvements to engage in more intensive forms of community. Though they offer optimistic anecdotes, the evidence is far from definitive.

From another perspective, however, these efforts have led to the development of social connections and public-spiritedness by exemplifying the kind of cooperative action and commitment that they seek to spark. The city-wide community policing initiative described above established institutional, rather than spatial, conditions for residents to coalesce around common concerns. Such projects were novel to many citizens who joined them. These experiences certainly

¹⁹ See generally JAMES C. SCOTT, *SEEING LIKE A STATE: HOW CERTAIN SCHEMES TO IMPROVE THE HUMAN CONDITION HAVE FAILED* (1998).

²⁰ See generally Emily TALEN, *Sense of Community and Neighborhood Form: An Assessment of the Social Doctrine of New Urbanism*, 36 *URB. STUDIES* 1361 (1999).

marked a substantial departure by local officials toward engagement with residents.

V. NO NEIGHBORHOOD IS AN ISLAND

The experiences of the three neighborhoods described above were marshaled with the very limited ambition of showing how a street-level, bottom-up strategy of urban redesign operates in practice. This strategy offers distinctive advantages—local information, micro-dynamics of incremental trial-and-error feedback, an economy of strategic targeting, and a capacity to coordinate complex individual and institutional behaviors from the most local perspective—compared to more top-down strategies. Despite these promising features, RPR is only one approach that must be supplemented by others in the difficult project of urban spatial and civic reconstruction. In conclusion, consider four limitations inherent in the approach that must be addressed by other policies: the spillover and displacement of problems from one neighborhood to another, inequalities between neighborhoods, limited scope of impact, and the political stability of community relationships with public institutions.

One difficulty is the possibility that actions beneficial to one neighborhood may be harmful to its neighbors. For example, the tenants who vacated the “problem buildings” in Rogers Park or the alleged drug dealers in Lakeview might simply have moved themselves to nearby, less organized neighborhoods and triggered further complaints there. But those who assume zero-sum displacement should recall that the original behaviors were facilitated by a confluence of factors that attracted problematic behavior to specific locations; a few relatively minor changes were sufficient to abate them. Although those who cause these problems may have moved on, they may not have found equally opportune sites for illicit activity. Beyond this, the inability of one neighborhood to join together against its own problems is hardly a reason for its neighbors to refrain from collective self-help.

Such spillover possibilities, however, do raise the very serious problem, ubiquitous in urban areas, that some neighborhoods are better able to organize than others due to their residents’ wealth, education, status, race, political advantage, or superior social capital. The Lakeview experience demonstrates one way in which socioeconomic inequalities in the city may significantly limit the capacities of different community policing groups. Lakeview residents are wealthier than those of the other two areas discussed; their problems are less

severe; and their collective resources are greater. Partially as a consequence of these advantages, a member of the group was able to call upon a network of friends, one of whom possessed architectural resources and expertise. These kinds of skills and resources are unavailable to social networks in most other Chicago communities. Furthermore, urban agencies such as the Parks Department may be more disposed to respond positively to requests from residents of wealthy neighborhoods.

Neighborhood inequality does not argue against RPR as such, but it does suggest that the public policies that make RPR possible ought also to pay attention to these inequalities and seek to address them. For example, the police or Parks Department might channel additional resources to poor neighborhoods through policies of administrative redistribution. To the extent that public bodies provide training and outreach services to equip residents to think creatively about neighborhood problems, and physical and social resources to solve them, those bodies ought to channel support to the most deprived areas; thereby mitigating differential capacities between neighborhoods. Such efforts cannot completely compensate for underlying socio-economic urban inequalities, but may suggest how public policies might reap the benefits of local civic action without exacerbating inequalities as devolutionary approaches often do.

A third objection, arising from the incremental nature of RPR, is that the approach accomplishes very little in the area of neighborhood revitalization. The achievements of the three groups described are relatively modest when considered against the troubles of the larger city. However, they should not be discounted because each group did reduce some of the most persistent problems in its particular area. Assessing the scale of these accomplishments against city-wide problems obscures the proper conceptualization of RPR as a principle to guide urban strategies and as a spatial component of them rather than as an exclusive alternative.²¹ I imagine RPR as a strategy that would complement conventional economic development, employment, housing, and social service efforts by making residential and commercial public spaces more secure, and, therefore, conducive to trade, work, and living. In the arena of spatial reconfiguration, one might even imagine RPR supplementing top-down New Urbanist planning. While the latter, if well conceived and executed, might yield

²¹ See Susan Fainstein, *New Directions in Planning Theory*, URB. AFF. REV., Mar. 2000, at 451 (discussing alleged alternative frames for considering urban problems and solutions).

dramatic improvements in an area, new and unforeseen problems would likely arise. RPR, as a continuous and incremental strategy, might then helpfully succeed the shock therapy of good design.

A final set of considerations addresses the political basis of RPR institutions. As emphasized above, RPR does not result from spontaneous civic organization and mutual aid. It is instead a consequence of deliberate, city-wide, and supra-neighborhood, public policies that convene and empower residents of neighborhoods to consider and address the problems that face them. These public policies both construct a framework for local deliberation and endow decisions made there with public resources. For example, the expertise and energy of police officers, portions of the school system, parks department, and transportation authority are necessary to give them force. Without this governmental framework, neither the neighborhood deliberation nor action of RPR would have occurred.

This dependent relationship between neighborhoods and officials in downtown offices creates the potential for conflict and political instability. When residents in neighborhoods make demands and launch criticisms of city government to prod agencies to action or hold them accountable, officials may respond by withdrawing the resources and cooperation necessary for RPR. Some have alleged that Chicago officials have acted in just that way when they withdrew funding from sometimes critical community organizations involved in community policing.²² The only antidote to this political instability lies in the larger polity itself. Like any public policy, RPR requires a constituency to flourish. Its natural constituency is composed of the neighborhood residents who depend on public resources to carry out their local improvement strategies. However, supporters of RPR would have to look beyond their immediate concerns and reach across neighborhood boundaries to support overarching policies upon which each independently depends, but which they can only secure together. This political interdependence mirrors the structure of solving complex urban problems. Local intelligence and action is necessary because broad centralized measures are too crude. Nonetheless, isolated local efforts are by themselves insufficient because they lack the force and often the wisdom required for effective action. As citizens whose cities are in dire need, our attention must be simultaneously and judiciously directed toward our immediate concerns as well

²² See Archon Fung, *Contract Expired: Is Chicago Poised to Take the Community Out of Community Policing?*, NEIGHBORHOOD WORKS, Mar.-Apr. 1997, at 8.

as toward the welfare of those who are more distant and thus less visible, but nevertheless inextricably tied to us.