

Ridgeside

Crime Prevention Strategies

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This report is written as an update to an earlier 1995 study about crime prevention strategies in the Ridgeside community. The reader will notice a dramatic shift in perspective in this second report insofar that the first study viewed properties as a stranger and offered recommendations aligned with the concept and practices of a gated community whereas the second study views properties from a residential perspective without many of the external cues of a gated community. Overall, the goal remains the same—to develop a community self-defense to crime-related activity.

Before going into details and recommendations permit me to express words of appreciation to those sharing their time, insights, and concerns: First, to Mayor Brant Mason for sharing with me the sensitivities of the Ridgeside community and challenging me to think about possibilities beyond a gated community; Secondly, to Captain Jeff Francis and Sergeant Ponda Foster, Crime Analyst, of the Chattanooga Police Department for their assistance with crime statistics. One of the leading questions surrounding this study involves an understanding of criminal activity in and around the Ridgeside community. Their contributions offer disturbing pictures of life around us; Thirdly, to John VanWinkle, City Traffic Engineer, for his candid assessment of traffic control and issues related thereto: and last but not least, I would like to especially thank Commissioner Sonny Sanders for his time, patience, drive, and determination to create positive solution(s) on behalf of the Ridgeside community. Computers exchanged e-mails on a regular basis with considerable candor in our collaboration. The benefits are realized in the content of this report!

Location

Ridgeside is unique insofar that it stands as a small independent political jurisdiction within the heart of Chattanooga city limits. Primary borders are Shallowford Road and Tunnel Boulevard on the side of Missionary Ridge. It is entirely a residential single-family owner occupied community with pleasant surroundings and neighborhood recreational facilities. While Ridgeside enjoys many positive attributes there are several negative forces that merit attention and action.

Personal visits were made to the property site on several occasions. Some were pre-planned for consultation whereas other visits were random in order to observe traffic and behavior patterns.

The maps contained within this report illustrate the “island” character in relation to the City of Chattanooga.

Crime and the Surrounding Environment

A quick summary of the 1995 report enables discussion of details related to criminal activity in the area. Ridgeside is surrounded by areas having serious crime problems thereby inviting some crime simply due to location. Inherently there is high risk of vulnerability and victimization due to influences that are nearby. Tunnel Boulevard is known as a hotspot for serious drug related activity. Ridgeside is but a stones throw away from irrefutable hangouts and apartment dwellings.

These same words paint an accurate picture of conditions today. Drugs damage and destroy neighborhoods. Not only is there the drug deal gone bad that can turn violent on moment’s notice, there is also the need to financially support a drug habit which invites temptation via theft, burglary, robbery, and other mischief. Those who believe that illegal drug use constitutes victimless crime fail to see the tentacles that paralyze communities, emotionally and physically. The bottom line is if there are open drug markets on display and in operation there will be both violent and property crime in company. This should come as no surprise, but worthy of note, in terms of the challenges being confronted when thinking about crime prevention strategies.

Crime maps furnished by CPD personnel are both current and revealing! The map titled Ridgeside Surrounding Area covers activity from 9/01-10/06 of this year. In other words, the map covers activity primarily during the

month of September. Suffice it to say that the amount of burglary and larceny in the area is alarming and cause for concern. The other 2 maps look at crime-related activities over a broader spectrum of time—March 8/October 11/2007. The numbers that accompany the maps are telling of the influence and impact of drugs in the area.

What is well known and established in principle is that all drug-related activity is not reported or subject to the attention of the police. This is often referred to as the “shadow effect” of crime. What this means in effect is that there is more activity underway than reported or acted upon by the police.

Beyond the obvious drug issue at play there are a few salient items that merit special attention given their impact on quality of life. One item involves school suspension rates. Brainerd High School went from 310 suspensions in 2006 to 758 in 2007. It is not clear what is happening to account for this large increase but if a large number of teens are being suspended for long periods of time then quite simply we have teens roaming the streets looking for opportunities to exercise the five finger discount (theft) and convert private property into quick cash.

Related to the suspension topic is attendance policy or in this case truancy enforcement. According to T.C.A. 49-6-3006 the sole responsibility for the enforcement of compulsory attendance laws rests with the local board of education and its designated employees. Described to me in frustration is the lack of enforcement power on the part of police to address truancy in an effective manner. The language of the attendance law invites serious legal review so that the intent of compulsory education laws is satisfied.

Business is good in Juvenile Court! The question we now face is whether we have the necessary tools to work with this adolescent population testing our social, legal, and moral boundaries?

Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented in priority order. They work together and should not be separated.

Neighborhood Watch

At the outset, one guiding principle was stated and emphasized-- that Ridgeside does not wish to become a gated community. For any alternative

approach to be effective requires an active and involved Neighborhood Watch program. This is the most critical piece of the puzzle in building a self-defense to crime. It must be energetic and routine in exercise. It cannot be a committee in name only.

Translated into basic terms this means residents must be encouraged to become “nosy” neighbors. There is a pressing need to watch for suspicious activity and have plans in place for reporting to community representatives and the police. The demands on this organizational unit are multi-dimensional insofar that there is need for a day watch, an evening watch, weekends, holidays, etc. The criminal element oftentimes studies patterns of behavior before advancing to the stage of entry into a household. The point to be made is that drop-off and pick-up transportation times of children are predictable. Work hours and habits become known. There needs to be “eyes open in the neighborhood” during peak time periods of vulnerability.

Another dimension of Neighborhood Watch involves collaboration with other associations in the Brainerd area. It is imperative that there not be political alienation from surrounding neighborhoods falling within city limits. In fact, the converse is true. Ridgeside residents need to lend talent and support to nearby neighborhoods as they apply for available grant monies toward stabilization and economic development.

Street Closures

In the 1995 report there was advocacy of limiting access to the Ridgeside community with recommendation to close several streets in terms of entrance/exits. Today this item merits special attention and serious consideration for action if there is want to change the dynamics of traffic flow, especially on the part of non-residents usage.

A conversation with John VanWinkle, City Traffic Engineer, on 9/21/07 indicated general positive support of street closures with the exception of Seminole /Ridgeside entrance given the need to study the traffic pattern surrounding this particular artery before decision could be rendered.

The following recommendations are designed to limit thoroughfare appearance and discourage non-resident use:

- 1) Use Hillsdale as main entrance off Shallowford Road.
- 2) Block Windmere entrance on Shallowford
- 3) Use Windmere as main entrance off of Tunnel Blvd.
- 4) Block Lyncrest entrance on Tunnel Blvd.
- 5) Block one side of Cresenct Park semi-circle

- 6) Post alleys as Private Driveways to discourage use.
- 7) Ridgeside at Seminole is on hold awaiting further study. Ridgeside could be closed just past Seminole intersection immediately however this divides the population and limits access for some residents into other Ridgeside properties. A temporary step while under review involves speed bumps on Seminole that fall within Ridgeside jurisdiction. Conversations would then continue with traffic engineers to either support closure of Ridgeside Road at Shallowford or offer significant speed reduction support on Seminole from Donna Lane to Ridgeside

The manner and method used to close the street(s) represents unusual challenge in that the design should be aesthetic, environmentally friendly, and not give the appearance of a fence or gated community. Nevertheless it must be effective in discouraging vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

Signage

To the casual observer there is little or no distinction between Ridgeside and other Chattanooga neighborhoods. Signage denotes identity and conveys expectations. Confusion breeds hostility, invites mischief, and provides opportunity for excuse.

Given the need to soften appearance and image so as not to be viewed as a gated community there is want for the following signage:

- 1) Signs announcing Neighborhood Watch
- 2) Street signs appropriate for speed, parking, etc.
- 3) Signage at major entrances to property??? An R inside a circle?

Lighting

One of the obvious needs is lighting. Judgment is deferred to another committee examining this important issue. Wanted is a consistency and sufficiency of light, where needed. Possibilities with the lantern style yard poles merit exploration so that a general standard can be promoted.

Perimeter lighting along the back boundaries of properties should enjoy experimentation. This is especially applicable to Crescent Park and Ridgeside properties who share a common border with Pleasant Gardens Cemetery.

Complementary lighting around doorways should be encouraged so that a resident does not risk opening their door to shadows and darkness.

Law Enforcement/Patrol

There is a need for visible police presence. There is also a need for connectedness with the Chattanooga Police department so that criminal information can be shared. This item remains in limbo given a request to Chattanooga government officials to engage in conversation about contractual services for fire and police protection. A response should be forthcoming.

There are several models of policing subject to review:

- 1) Full-time police presence----this would be extremely costly and offer little in return.
- 2) Part-time police presence----this makes sense however there are rough edges to be recognized. Chattanooga Police Department leadership would have to agree that an employee could operate with full legal authority outside jurisdictional limits. Hamilton County Sheriff's Department could cover without waiver although they seldom patrol this area. Initially random daytime morning or afternoon hours would be preferred for direct patrol. East Ridge is currently operating in this mode,
- 3) Private Security---All avenues for (2) above should be exhausted before moving into this category. Private Security can work for gated communities however every attempt is being made to steer clear of this image.

Important to the model decided upon is a notable police presence, quick response, and collaboration with CPD in relation to known offenders and crimes in the area under investigation.

In summary, there is serious work to be done to build your community self-defense to crime. Some of the work can begin immediately. Other initiatives will take a while to realize. Critical to the crime prevention equation being advanced is that there is active participation on the part of all residents.

Some of the issues identified in this study are broad-based and subject to political winds. What is happening in the school system should concern us all. Policies related to truancy merit review and challenge, if necessary. Drug dealers should not find “safe havens”.

I trust the recommendations provided herein will start many private and public discussions about crime, public policy, and, most importantly, the priority of public safety when defining and measuring quality of life.

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