

Covington to beef up patrols

By Shelly Whitehead
Post staff reporter

It was 4:30 in the morning, and Covington police were facing a hostile crowd at the City Heights housing complex. The crowd milling around the 2500 block of White Court last week was large, loud and disorderly, a police report said. Amid the tension, a 3-year-old boy slept in a car filled with weapons and drugs.

A loaded 9mm lay on the floor below the toddler's head. Marijuana was sprinkled across the seat where he slept as his father roamed the crowd outside, officers said.

The father, Marvin Rice, 28, was one of two men arrested on drugs and weapons charges, police said. The crowd eventually dispersed, and the child was placed with an aunt.

But Covington Assistant Police Chief Lt. Col. David Finan Sr. said the situation isn't unusual in a neighborhood long known for drug sales and gunplay.

So in an effort to combat such violence - and potential violence - city leaders are using nearly \$200,000 in Community Development Block Grant money to pay for special overtime foot patrols in the housing projects.

Finan said the department has been gradually increasing the patrols as the crime-rich months of summer approach.

Most of the overtime hours will be spent at Jacob Price housing complex in Covington's Eastside neighborhood and City Heights in southwest Covington. Finan said there are far fewer disturbances at Latonia Terrace, so there will be fewer foot patrols there.

"We've been gradually increasing (patrols) to make sure we've got more officers where we need them," Finan said.

"We're doing it in four-hour blocks of time, with two officers working four-hour blocks of time each. And we're trying to do it at different times of day. It's foot patrols, where we're trying to be as visible as we can be."

Finan said the department hopes the funding will pay for overtime patrols at the housing complexes through next spring.

He said the department will monitor results through monthly reports showing arrests, drug and gun seizures, and other significant events resulting from the patrols.

Police Chief Tom Schonecker will evaluate the reports to determine the effectiveness of the initiative.

The expenditure of the funds - which come from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development - became an issue earlier this year when a citizens advisory committee recommended police get just \$99,000 because the patrols did not appear to be effective.

But the Covington City Commission disagreed, and in May gave police \$194,800 of the \$346,280 the city received in block grants to allow officers to beef up patrols in the city's low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.

Mayor Butch Callery said the police department had made changes in the way it spent the money, resulting in both increased foot patrols and more arrests.

City Commissioner Jerry Bamberger said Monday future funding will depend heavily on the recommendations of Schonecker and City Manager Jay Fossett.

"If the police chief thinks we can deter crime by putting additional patrols out there, we will do that," Bamberger said.

Post staff reporter Jeanne Houck contributed to this story.