

New task for city police: Patrols in public housing: <span ...

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Times photo by Frank Haras

Wind fans flames; 5 buildings burn

A firefighter rushes into action as flames, spread by high winds, engulf five residential buildings Tuesday morning at Lowe and Archer avenues. Two police officers who saw the fire entered one of the homes before firefighters

arrived and rescued two women and a child, who apparently were unaware of the blaze, authorities said. Two firefighters were treated at Mercy Hospital. Three of the buildings were vacant.

New task for city police: Patrols in public housing

By Philip Wattley
and Jerry Crimmins

CHICAGO POLICE will take over security at all public housing projects in the city starting in January, Police Supt. Richard Brzezczek announced Tuesday, but an aide later admitted that the department does not yet have enough officers to accomplish the task.

In the morning, Brzezczek said that 100 to 150 officers or perhaps even more would be assigned to the new "Public Housing Crime Unit," completely replacing private security guards paid by the Chicago Housing Authority.

The announcement marked the second expansion of the police department's jurisdiction in a month. Three weeks ago, the department took over the jobs of the Chicago Transit Authority security unit

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after that unit was abolished at the urging of Mayor Byrne.

BUT TUESDAY afternoon, Kathryn Kajari, spokeswoman for Brzezczek, said in reply to questions:

"He doesn't have 150 officers to put on CHA security. He wouldn't do it unless he got the officers. They're not there right now." Kajari said she assumed Brzezczek had assurances from the mayor that new officers would be hired.

A spokesman for the CHA, Tina Vicini, said the replacement of private guards by the police "is going to be done without

any cost to the taxpayers."

She said the CHA's current \$4.4 million allocation for private guards would be used to pay the police department for this new function.

ASKED ABOUT this, Kajari said that the \$4.4 million probably would not go directly to the police department. The CHA would most likely send the money to the city, where the police department's budget originates.

The city budget office would then decide how much of the money would be allocated to the police department for CHA security, Kajari said. The amount could be more than \$4.4 million, or less, she said.

In recent years, two private firms, Interstate Services and Wells Fargo Guard Services, have provided guards at CHA

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Police to handle security for CHA

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projects at a cost of \$7.83 an hour per guard.

Chuck Wessel, president of Interstate, said he was not informed by the CHA that Interstate was losing its contract, but that he heard it on the radio. Interstate supplies 106 guards, who work in the South Side projects, Wessel said.

Mike Neuzil, manager of Wells Fargo, when told of Brzeczek's announcement, said, "I hadn't even heard that." He refused to discuss it. According to Wessel and the CHA, Wells Fargo supplies 80 guards, who work in the West Side projects.

BRZECZEK SAID that the police takeover of CHA security was jointly decided by Mrs. Byrne, CHA officials, and police officials based on the success of a special, beefed-up police unit that was put into operation at the Cabrini-Green housing project.

Cabrini-Green got special attention when Mrs. Byrne moved there last spring. Brzeczek said the police crack-down on gang violence there "brought policing of public housing into national prominence."

Brzeczek said the 100 to 150 officers in the new CHA security unit would include the approximately 60 officers now regularly assigned to the special police unit at the Cabrini-Green housing complex, where there are no private security guards.

AN ANALYSIS of the numbers involved in taking over all CHA security shows that the police department would have to make herculean efforts to equal its success at Cabrini-Green.

Lt. Dominic Rizzi, who has been in charge of the Cabrini-Green unit, said that on any given day he has 75 to 90 men working under him. He said his unit has made 2,600 arrests of all types since March plus picking up 2,900 curfew violators.

He contended the beefed-up unit has almost eliminated gang warfare at Cabrini-Green and has eliminated the formerly common sniper fire there. The project has been transformed from "a desolated area" into "a normal community, where people are going to church, playing baseball," said Rizzi, who Tuesday was named commander of the new Public Housing Crime Unit.

BUT CABRINI-GREEN, according to CHA figures, has only one-tenth of the population of all the Chicago housing projects or one-eighth, if the senior citizens projects are not counted.

The police department has been able to put 75 to 90 men daily into Cabrini-Green only by hiring officers to work on days off. Rizzi said half and more of the officers working under him each day are officers from around the city working on their weekends.

Likewise, in the new Chicago Transit Authority detail, where 46 policemen are assigned to jobs formerly handled by CTA security, 12 of the officers are working their days off, said Kajari. She said that the CTA security jobs were "slowly but surely" being farmed out to a private security firm, Triad Associates, owned by two former Chicago policemen.