Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

In a Nutshell

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) refers to the physical surroundings that deter criminal activity and keep neighborhoods safer and more enjoyable to live. CPTED promotes security through visibility and social interaction through surveillance, access control, property maintenance, and territorial reinforcement. Law enforcement officers, architects, planners, landscape and interior designers, and residents should be included in the environmental design process to prevent crime and create positive communities.

The “How To”

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design provides strategies for communities, residents, businesses, schools, and local governments to follow to deter crime. Some techniques will alter the built environment to deter crime with the placement of walkways, parks, trees, and windows. This type of civic engagement will encourage neighbors to know neighbors, and should place “eyes on the street.” The visibility notion of “eyes on the street” comes from Jane Jacobs’s classic planning book, The Death and Life of Great American Cities. Three themes emerge:

- A clear separation between public and private
- Natural proprietors of the street can handle strangers to ensure the safety of all people. Those people cannot turn their backs on the street.
- Sidewalks must be busy with people.

Aspects of CPTED follow Oscar Newman’s Defensible Space. Defensible Space states “Subdivide large portions of public spaces and assign them to individuals and small groups to use and control as their own private spaces. If people take ownership of their territory and their neighborhoods, criminals are ineffective.” In a nutshell, criminals have less turf to vandalize when more property owners take ownership and use their property.

Along with “Eyes on the Street” and “Defensible Spaces,” CPTED addresses the following techniques: access control, property maintenance, surveillance, and territorial reinforcement.

Access Control

Access control should control the flow of the public to reduce opportunities for offending. Access control should separate between public and private space. Entry for private access should be limited to give fewer chances for delinquent behavior. Separation does not necessarily require 6-foot fences. This could be in the form of climbing, thorny plants, or a single, clearly identifiable point of entry. Design should restrict public access to rooftops and first and second story windows.

Surveillance

Individuals engaged in an activity become part of the surveillance system. Neighborhoods should carry the perception that people can be seen. Neighborhood design should encourage social interaction. Community gardens are perfect ways to increase outdoor activity while placing more people outside to watch over one's

community. Bicycle and pedestrian paths may also place more people on the street, increasing the neighborhood feel.

When developers and architects design communities, they should be encouraged by local ordinances to keep public spaces in visible range. Windows should overlook sidewalks, green spaces, and parking lots. Areas should be illuminated for visibility, as well.

Territorial Reinforcement

Territorial Reinforcement creates a sense of ownership in the neighborhood and on private property. Improving the landscape of a particular area can help. The OneSTL Native Landscaping tool may assist in improving properties. The tools for Urban and Community Forestry Management and Riparian Buffers may provide assistance for planning for vast public wilderness spaces.

Property Maintenance

Routine maintenance of neighborhoods and surrounding areas fosters a positive image, respect, responsibility, and the idea that the residents care about the community. The Broken Window Theory reinforces this notion that property maintenance deters crime. Residents and businesses should repair damages to their property such as windows, doors, mailboxes, and fences. They should pick up trash regularly. Keeping the lawn up to code helps, as well. OneSTL provides a Home Improvement Guide tool to help with residential property maintenance.

Planning & Zoning

It is recommended to orient buildings and individual residential entries to public sidewalks, visible courtyards, street-facing terraces, and open spaces at the front and sides of structures. Rationale for the City of Sacramento, California's multi-family residential design guidelines promotes "eyes on the street", a sense of security for pedestrians and increased security for residents. Also, the city encourages the orientiation of large windows, porches, balconies, and entryways on the street.

Community gardens are a good way to increase outdoor activity while placing more people outside to watch over one's community. The OneSTL Toolkit provides additional information about the zoning and ordinance requirements for community gardens.

Rental licensing programs require owners of rental units to undergo registration and inspection once a year. Ensuring that units are up to code should strengthen community properties.

Dollars & Cents

Residents may use home improvement loan programs to help repair homes, replace windows, and improve the neighborhood. Many programs provide up to $5,000 for repairs and upgrades. View the Home Improvement Loan Program OneSTL tool for more information.

To help prevent crime through better property maintenance, states and local governments may apply for community development block grants. States enrolled in the CDBG Program award grants to local governments that carry out community development. Click for more information on CDBG grants in Missouri and Illinois.

The City of St. Louis Community Development Administration (CDA) offers Neighborhood Transformation Grants to fund projects in Economic Justice Index priority areas and Qualified Census Tracts (QCTs) in the City of St. Louis. Projects can include housing production, home repair, and neighborhood beautification and capacity building.

Measuring Success

Qualitative data can be used to show whether a community or individual household feels safer from crime after CPTED measures have been implemented. Local businesses may gain more customers due to CPTED. Law enforcement and municipal leadership can also compare crime statistics on a yearly basis. Finally, communities and local government can also note usage of parks, community gardens, and public spaces.

Discover More

The American Planning Association has provided a policy guide on security. Under their guide on security, they introduce the book SafeScape: Creating Safer, More Livable Communities Through Planning and Design. The book presents principles for designing safer and more observant environments. It provides examples that contribute to lively, livable, and walkable places. Building community is a main aspect of lessons learned.

Universities and institutions can play a major role in crime prevention through environmental design, including by enrolling in Employer Assisted Housing programs, which reinvest in the stabilization of the neighborhoods surrounding employers.

The Seattle Police Department offers tips and identifies elements that may have the potential to attract crime. Their website shows an example of a gate that controls access but still allows visibility.

The National Institute of Crime Prevention offers CPD or Crime Prevention Through Education Design Professional Designation. This designation requires individuals to complete 64 hours of CPTED courses offered through NICP. Course topics include terror mitigation, site plan review, parks, public art, lighting, planning & zoning, and more.

CPTED workshops and training are available through the National Crime Prevention Council.