An Integrated Approach to Neighbourhood Safety Through Planning

Lessons from Saskatoon

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Abstract

Community and citizen safety is a concern in many neighbourhoods. The challenge for urban planners remains how, and when, safety can be addressed in the planning process. Some urban centers have responded with an increase in enforcement. Other cities have taken a more proactive approach. These cities attempt to address neighbourhood safety through a strategy known as Safe Growth, using the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). The case-in-point examines the Local Area Planning process in the City of Saskatoon. Specific consideration is given to the unique approach to local area planning used in Saskatoon where officials encourage the inclusion of CPTED principles into the local area planning process. The City approaches local area planning in an inclusive and collaborative manner where citizens are encouraged to become involved. The result is a local area plan suited to meet the specific needs and demands of the neighbourhood in question, addressing the specific safety concerns of local area residents.

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Introduction

In the City of Saskatoon Safe Growth has been integrated into the planning process. Currently Safe Growth, based on the principles of CPTED, supports neighbourhood risk assessments, safety audits, and CPTED reviews in neighbourhoods that have been noted as ‘at risk’. The City of Saskatoon has enhanced the planning process and developed an integrated approach to address neighbourhood concerns and challenges with regards to neighbourhood safety. What is commonly viewed in many cities as an add-on, or afterthought to the planning process, neighbourhood safety has been placed ‘front and center’ in Saskatoon. The city takes a holistic approach to neighbourhood safety by working with community members, business owners, and other community stakeholders in the development of practical and effective solutions to neighbourhood safety concerns. Saskatoon has incorporated crime prevention, and in particular the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) into the Local Area Planning (LAP) process. Through the activities of a Neighbourhood Safety or LAP subcommittee city planners help the community critically evaluate the safety and perceptions of safety in their neighbourhood. What results are design, programming, management activity, and/or perception based recommendations intended to address the specific neighbourhood safety concerns. This process is accomplished by working with the community’s citizens and other groups who have a vested interest in the neighbourhood. The analysis and recommendations have, in the past, been compiled into an implementation plan for that area. This has been the case for six of the eight approved LAPs. To date, the most comprehensive of these was the Pleasant Hill Safety Audit Report. Currently, the neighbourhood safety activities are being included inside the LAP process. The Riversdale Neighbourhood LAP is the first report where neighbourhood safety was integrated inside the LAP process and final document as opposed to a separate report as a result of a LAP recommendation. The City Park LAP, which is due for release in the fall of 2009, also follows this integrated model.

The case-in-point examines the LAP development process, the inclusion of CPTED principles and the resulting neighbourhood safety recommendations. This is accomplished through the examination of the Riversdale LAP and associated process. The focus of the case-in-point remains the examination of the inclusive, community-based strategy used by Saskatoon planners in developing neighbourhood safety recommendations during the LAP process.

The case-in-point offers new direction for City of Winnipeg officials in the area of neighbourhood safety. Although CPTED is already considered in the Winnipeg context, a more inclusive approach could ensure the development of supporting documentation, encouraging implementation, and ensuring that a budget is established for the completion of safety recommendations.

“The police are public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interest of community welfare and existence.”

- Robert Peel -
Neighbourhood safety concerns are generally based on two interrelated factors. The first factor is the actual, or physical safety risks associated with a neighbourhood. These risks are generally based on the challenges and actual incidents of personal or property crime and associated violence. The second factor is the perception of safety or crime. Perceived safety concerns are based on the feeling of safety an individual has when entering a neighbourhood. The perception of safety can be influenced by actual safety concerns or a variety of other factors ranging from neighbourhood history, the existing physical infrastructure, people's personal experiences, to recent events that may have taken place in the neighbourhood. The challenge of addressing the actual and/or perceived concerns for neighbourhood safety requires a multifaceted approach where no two-neighbourhood solutions will be the same. As a result, regardless of the approach taken to address neighbourhood safety, whether it be CPTED or an alternative approach, solutions must emerge from the community, be inclusive, and developed to meet the unique demands of the specific neighbourhood in question. City of Saskatoon officials, both administrative and political, have embraced this mindset, tailoring safety-based solutions to the specific neighbourhood in question.

CPTED was initially introduced in the City of Saskatoon, through the City Planning Branch, in 1996. Since this time, the City's approach to crime prevention has included a strong community base as well as an ongoing interdepartmental group. Saskatoon's Safe Growth approach is focused on resident education, the development of tools and techniques to critically evaluate one's own neighbourhood for safety needs and concerns, and the subsequent implementation of safety based strategies to make a neighbourhood safer. The City's role in the process remains one of facilitation. Concerned citizens are encouraged to become involved in the process and in the creation of solutions intended to address their neighbourhoods safety concerns.

In Saskatoon, CPTED has emerged to the forefront of the LAP process. CPTED was historically considered following the LAP process and was often a result of recommendations made in the LAP. Growing community and government support for CPTED in Saskatoon has sparked enough interest to formalize the process, a move that would ensure safety is considered in all civic development. This interest has resulted in a proposal to council to amend the City of Saskatoon's Development Plan.

If the City of Winnipeg was to adopt a proactive approach to crime prevention, the model being implemented in Saskatoon should be considered as precedence. Similarities between Winnipeg and Saskatoon in terms of demographics and community composition could foster the possibility of replicating a similar approach in the City of Winnipeg.
An Inclusive Approach to Neighbourhood Safety: Facts of the case

The Local Area Planning Program in the City of Saskatoon began over 10 years ago. The intention for the City of Saskatoon to move toward a local area planning process was twofold. The first reason was to identify neighbourhoods with unique challenges or demands. The second was to collaboratively work with ‘neighbourhoods in need’, providing planning and subsequent financial assistance to alleviate the issues highlighted during the LAP process. Through working collaboratively with the community, planning staff are able to develop a strategy to ensure the long-term viability, rehabilitation, and success of the neighbourhood. The LAP process results in the development of a neighbourhood specific local area plan. Council is then able to use the LAP to determine how and where operating priorities should be set and capital funding should be allocated. Funding is then used to address the LAP recommendations in support of the identified neighbourhood improvements and develop solutions to issues identified in the LAP as a result of the LAP process (The City of Saskatoon 2008, and The City of Saskatoon, undated)

The Saskatoon LAP process has been subdivided into nine individual steps beginning with the initial neighbourhood identification and concluding with the completion, adoption, and implementation of the LAP. Outlined below is a brief summary of the process followed in the development of an LAP:

1. Neighbourhood Meeting:
The LAP process is initiated with a neighbourhood meeting where community member, business owners, developers, and community groups are invited. The purpose of the meeting is to develop a LAP working group/committee to head the project.

2. Forming a LAP Committee:
Once the LAP committee is formed, city staff works with the group to identify major issues present in the neighbourhood, developing strategies to alleviate the identified issues.

3. The Condition of the Community:
The LAP committee discusses the current demographics and physical composition of the community. This information is used to develop the remainder of the LAP.

4. Creating a Vision:
A common vision for the neighbourhood is determined.

5. Identifying Issues and Setting Goals:
Research is conducted and information is gathered to determine the neighbourhood’s primary challenges and the issues that are of importance to the greater community. This information is then used in the development of the LAP.

6. Writing the LAP:
City planners draft the LAP using information gathered from all meetings and from the research conducted. City Administration and the stakeholders review and provide comments on the draft LAP.

7. Adopting the LAP:
Once the first draft of the LAP is complete, the public is invited to provide input. If the LAP reflects the vision of the community the plan is presented to the Municipal Planning Commission and eventually adopted by Council.

8. Implementing the Strategies:
The LAP is then used to guide the neighbourhood towards the identified goals. As a general guideline, recommendations are adopted within a five to seven year time frame.

9. Monitoring, Evaluating and Updating the Plan:
The final step is to revisit the LAP and the progress within the neighbourhood to meet the identified goals.

Adapted from: (The City of Saskatoon, undated)

Generally, in most neighbourhoods, safety is identified as a part of the LAP process. Once safety has been identified by the community as an area of concern it is emphasized throughout the remainder of the process where consideration is given to the principles of CPTED. Methods used to evaluate the safety of a neighbourhood can range from community surveys, safety audits and risk assessments to observational research and community charettes.

CPTED Workshop
photo credit: City of Saskatoon, Planning Branch
An Inclusive Approach to Neighbourhood Safety: Riversdale Neighbourhood, LAP

The development of the Riversdale LAP in Saskatoon’s inner city was the first to formally incorporate neighbourhood safety activities inside the LAP process. Riversdale is considered one of Saskatoon’s oldest neighbourhoods and is faced with a range of challenges, including safety. Riversdale has the third highest crime incident rate in Saskatoon with 5.8% of the total crimes in the city occurring in the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood is considered to be entering the early stages of gentrification and is expected to continue to transition as developers purchase land on speculation. During the LAP process, neighbourhood safety was identified as the number one issue in the community. The LAP and subsequent CPTED process resulted in 6 over-riding goals to improve neighbourhood safety. Within each goal are several recommendations that emerged from the CPTED process. These goals and subsequent recommendations included:

1. To improve perceptions about safety in Riversdale:
   New to the LAP’s is a section about improving perceptions of the neighbourhood. It is also recommended in the LAP that there is a need for community clean-ups to improve the overall appearance and subsequent perception of the neighbourhood. This recommendation can be closely linked to the second goal of ensuring that community stakeholders work together.

2. To ensure that community stakeholders work together and integrate programs to improve safety

3. To ensure that community policing is supported and maintained in the neighbourhood:
   The Riversdale LAP Committee supports the community policing model (Community Liaison Officers and School and Cultural/Aboriginal Resource Officers). The LAP suggested extending the hours of the Little Chief Community Police Station.

4. To work toward the reduction of incidents of crime, gangs, drugs and sex trade activities in the neighbourhood:
   The LAP highlights the importance of the ‘Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act’, policy tools that can be used by officials to target buildings and land that are used for illegal activity. Additional need for safe needle deposits is also noted in the LAP. Several additional programs are highlighted throughout the LAP to encourage safer neighbourhoods. These include: a) The Crime Free Multi-Housing Strategy: A strategy to encourage landlords to pro-actively approach crime reduction, b) Saskatoon Crime Reduction Strategy: A strategy intended to reduce break and enter offences while targeting repeat offenders, c) Saskatoon Gang Strategy: A strategy focused on the prevention, intervention and suppression of gang activity, d) Saskatoon Communities for Children: A coalition to promote physical, mental, spiritual and emotional well-being of children. Finally, a need for a vacant lot registry is noted, where the registry would encourage
the redevelopment of vacant lots. The LAP also recommends: a) an additional safety audit to be conducted at Optimist Park, and b) The elimination of doorways and small spaces between buildings throughout the neighbourhood.

5. To ensure lighting issues are addressed in order to improve safety:
   Specific recommendation is made in the LAP to improve lighting at the Princess Alexandra School as well as at varying locations within the neighbourhood. Recommendation is also made to establish a program to encourage individuals to install front of porch lighting.

6. To reduce or eliminate graffiti vandalism:
   The LAP highlights the importance of graffiti vandalism reduction programs, including: The Graffiti Reduction Task Force, the Anti-Graffiti Unit (Police Services), and community action in removing graffiti vandalism. In addition, the LAP recommends the distribution of graffiti vandalism information brochures, and the enforcement of the Graffiti Bylaw once graffiti vandalism has been discovered.

Adapted from: The City of Saskatoon, 2008.

During the LAP process, several activities were conducted with community residents and stakeholders to build an understanding of the safety concerns in the neighbourhood. These activities included: 1. The development of a crime profile for the neighbourhood where crime statistics were compiled and analyzed, 2. Safety perception exercises where community stakeholders were asked to identify ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ places, 3. A CPTED Workshop in which citizens were educated about the principles of CPTED and worked in groups to design a ‘safe’ urban park that incorporated the CPTED principles to reinforce their learning, 4. Safety audits, conducted on identified areas of concern, resulting in area specific recommendations to improve safety, 5. A youth event, ‘What’s Good in the Hood’, held at a local neighbourhood out-reach center to further develop understanding of safety concerns from that age group, 6. A ‘Dark Spaces’ Inventory, and 7. An inventory of existing neighbourhood safety initiatives. This community-based neighbourhood safety process resulted in nineteen safety recommendations out of a total of fifty-nine LAP recommendations. (The City of Saskatoon, 2008)

To date there is no formal process in Saskatoon to measure the success of the CPTED program and subsequent CPTED recommendations for any given neighbourhood. However growing acceptance of CPTED within the community as well as other civic departments is indication that the principles are having success. Some quantitative feedback has been obtained through city-wide survey’s that include a section on safety, as well as several safety perception surveys, both of which indicate success. Positive qualitative feedback has been obtained from neighbourhood Community Associations with whom the city works closely.

The versatility and flexibility of the principles of CPTED is what makes them so beneficial. Saskatoon has been able to capitalize on CPTED and develop a process that specifically addresses unique neighbourhood safety concerns. The approach is easily transferable regardless of the neighbourhood in question, resulting in a set of recommendations, activities, and goals that are specific to a geographic area and the concerns of that area’s citizens.
Lessons Learned from Saskatoon

The City of Saskatoon has taken a holistic, community based approach to addressing the challenges of neighbourhood safety. The collaborative attitude the city uses relies heavily on the knowledge and expertise of area residents. The approach encourages community dialogue while allowing the planner to assume the role of facilitator. As facilitator the planner is able to help the community achieve the vision they have created for their neighbourhood. Through the use of creative engagement activities the planner is able to share their expert knowledge of the principles of CPTED, encouraging area residents to explore the opportunities associated with a more holistic and comprehensive approach to neighbourhood safety. The value of the approach can be seen in the community support the program has achieved, the reduction of criminal behaviour in neighbourhoods, the increase in feelings of safety in the neighbourhoods, and the physical implementation of safety recommendations that have emerged during the process.

Several lessons can be taken from the Saskatoon approach to Safe Growth and the inclusion of the principles of CPTED. It is evident that any approach to neighbourhood safety must be citizen or community based. In shifting the power from the planner to the citizen, citizens are more likely to take ownership, pride, and have greater buy-in to the associated projects. Subsequently, with greater community support the likelihood of success increases. The Saskatoon approach to neighbourhood safety builds community capacity, educates and helps to create common ground between planners and the community. Having the community involved from the beginning of the planning process further encourages support for additional planning within the community, strengthening the social cohesion within the neighbourhood.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design: Principles of Saskatoon

1. Natural Surveillance: Putting ‘eyes on the street’ and making a place unattractive for criminal activity.
2. Access Control: Controlling who enters and leaves a neighbourhood or public space.
3. Image: The appearance of a space helps create territoriality. A space that is well maintained and cared for will help deter criminal activity.
4. Territoriality: Creating a space that is used for legitimate uses. The users take ownership of the space, deterring criminal activity.
5. Conflicting User Groups: Minimization of conflicting uses/users of a public space.
6. Activity Support: Encourages the development and management of spaces that support legitimate activity, at various times of the day.
7. Crime Generators: Areas or uses that may generate crime. Careful consideration in the citing of these users or activities will help reduce the opportunity for crime to occur.
8. Land Use Mix: The concept that diversity in land uses is an important consideration. Separating land uses can result in unused space during the day.
9. Movement Predictors: Forcing pedestrian and cyclists along a particular predetermined path or route, without obvious escape routes or alternatives.
10. Displacement: Understanding how crime may move in time or space and what impact it may have: either positive or negative. Consideration must be given to where the criminal activity may move.
11. Cohesion: Supporting relationships and interactions between all users of a space, encouraging a sense of safety.
12. Connectivity: Refers to a spaces relationship with the surrounding community. Consideration should be given to ensure the space is not developed in isolation of the rest of the neighbourhood.
13. Capacity: Is the ability for a given space or neighbourhood to support it’s intended use.
14. Culture: Also referred to as placemaking. Refers to the use of space to bring people together for a common purpose.

Adapted From Personal Communication with Elisabeth Miller
Building Safer Neighbourhoods in Winnipeg: Application to a local setting

A neighbourhood safety strategy is needed in the city of Winnipeg. The success of the Saskatoon approach to Safe Growth and the principles of CPTED demonstrate the effectiveness of a community-based strategy and offers new direction in which the city of Winnipeg could proceed. The City of Saskatoon remains a model example of a safety strategy that has had success. This is illustrated by the recent proposal to amend the City of Saskatoon Development Plan to include Safe Growth and the CPTED principles in all development initiatives. Initially the focus will be on requiring civic projects, developments, and neighbourhoods to comply with the principles of CPTED and encouraging the private sector to follow by example, with the ultimate long term goal of reviewing all development. The approach has obtained ‘buy-in’ from a range of stakeholders as a result of the success previous safety initiatives have had. By developing a strategy that is community-based and included within the local area planning process, success is inevitable. The city of Winnipeg should take a proactive approach to addressing neighbourhood safety concerns, capitalizing upon the expertise of local area residents and their ability to initiate change.

About The Collaborator

Elisabeth Miller is a Senior Planner with the City of Saskatoon, Community Services Department, City Planning Branch. Elisabeth’s role is focused around building safer neighbourhoods and conducting CPTED reviews of civic structures, facilities, and developments.
References

