



Security and Crime Prevention

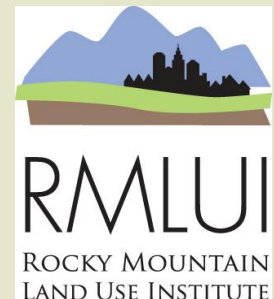
Joe Holmes & James van Hemert

The Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute

Sustainable Community Development Code

Research Monologue Series:

People's Relationship to the Environment



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About the Research Monologue Series

The Sustainable Community Development Code, an initiative of the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute, represents the next generation of local government development codes. Environmental, social, and economic sustainability are the central guiding principles of the code. Supporting research for the code is represented by a series of research monologues commissioned, presented and discussed at a symposium held at the University of Denver in September of 2007. RMLUI and the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law extend its gratitude to the authors of the papers who have provided their talents and work pro bono in the service of the mission of RMLUI and the stewardship of the creation.

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About the Authors

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Security and Crime Prevention

Beginning in the 1960's and 1970's, planners began to take notice of the connection between the built environment and security and crime prevention. Before this time, suburban development advocates preached that empty streets were safer than crowded ones, isolated communities were safer than integrated ones, and the car represented progress over the pedestrian. With her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs challenged these fundamental assumptions and argued that crime flourishes where people do not meaningfully interact with their neighbors and community. Adopting the opposite approach, Jacobs argued that in order for streets to be safe there must be a clear demarcation of private and public space, a diversity of use, and a high level of pedestrian use of the sidewalks.¹ These ideas are largely reflected in contemporary urban thought and are essential to building truly safe communities. In addition, security involves neighborhood policing, well-maintained and inviting public and private areas, and providing places where people feel comfortable socializing with others.

Among the many other benefits mixed-used development brings, security and crime prevention are valuable advantages to be had by having a diversity of land uses. Mixed-use development encourages activity in a given area at all hours of the day rather than during only business hours or in the evening in residential neighborhoods. While single use development, requiring a limited range of uses, has dominated new construction, people are beginning to recognize the social and practical advantages of mixed-use living. In Golden, Colorado, for example, the Gateway Station mixed-use project has revitalized the downtown area, bringing people onto the streets at all hours of the day.² Similarly, much of the increased activity and corresponding drops in crime rates in the Downtown Denver area have been spurred by mixed-use housing options.³ For mixed-use development to work there must be a distinct separation of the commercial entrances from the residential access and a clear identity for each use.⁴ Putting people in downtown areas at night is an effective strategy to minimize crime; mixed-use developments provide a perfect opportunity to do just that – enhance people's quality of life while also adding the social benefit of increased security and crime reduction.⁵



Mixing uses provides watchfulness day and night. Shaded outdoor seating attracts people as well.

http://www.lgc.org/freepub/PDF/Land_Use/focus/plan_safe_neighborhoods.pdf

Natural surveillance can also be created in public and private areas by creating or extending a “sphere of influence.” This is done by utilizing physical designs such as pavement treatments, landscaping, and signage, which allows users of an area to develop a sense of proprietorship over the area. For example, well-designed parks and public places increase community safety. While formal surveillance of public spaces will always remain a necessity, such places should be built in a manner that encourages natural surveillance by other citizens. This natural surveillance stems from people frequently using the public place and, as a result, feeling a sense of ownership and responsibility for the place.⁶ Additionally, public places should be open so that security forces have easy access to the spaces by various means of transportation.⁷ All too often fear of “undesirables” causes parks and sidewalks to be remodeled without seating, shade, vendors, or other amenities that serve to encourage positive public activity and that discourage crime and disruption.⁸ Despite being relatively new to Downtown Denver, Commons Park has already proven to be an exemplary public space. The park is accessible by foot, bicycle, bus, and car, and is linked to neighboring communities by bridges, tunnels, and paths. Commons Park also has an ample supply of seating and shade which makes it a desirable place to spend a lazy afternoon. The City is currently encouraging the building of cafes across from the park’s main promenade. Conveniently located next to Downtown Denver and the Platte River, Commons Park has quickly become a preferred destination for visitors and locals alike because of its safe, welcoming environment.⁹

Similarly, in neighborhoods and more private areas, design strategies can be used to promote natural surveillance. For example, windows should be located in positions where they overlook sidewalks, streets, and parking lots; this simple strategy can keep the neighborhood’s “eyes on the street.”¹⁰ Lighting is also critical; successful lighting design must be respectful of neighboring properties, avoid glare and intrusion, and must contribute to the security and visual quality of the neighborhood as a whole.¹¹ It is also important that potential problem areas such as parking garages and lots, ATMs, bus stops, schools, children’s play areas, and parks are illuminated in uniform luminous white lights to ensure that a human face is recognizable at a reasonable

distance. Wire cages or industrial strength shatter-resistant lenses should be placed over lights to deter vandalism.¹² Open landscaping can also promote natural surveillance. These strategies ensure that potential intruders are easily observable; this fact alone works to deter criminal behavior. Furthermore, lighting, landscaping, signage, and design can clearly guide people to and from the proper entrances and exits of public places. Controlling the natural access of a place directs the flow of people while decreasing the opportunity for crime.¹³

Additionally, public areas should be clearly distinguished from private areas. Design features can be utilized to define boundaries between public and private property. For instance, fencing, building setbacks, and open landscaping help demarcate public spaces from private ones. Natural access control is another method which can be used to control how people get to their destination; to distinguish public routes from private ones, streets, sidewalks, pathways, and buildings can be designed to direct traffic in the proper direction.

Furthermore, people with a sense of ownership are far more likely to challenge intruders or report them to the police. Moreover, the sense of owned space creates an environment where outsiders or intruders are more easily noticed.¹⁴ Additionally, if citizens feel a sense of ownership, they are more likely to maintain the area. Neglected and poorly maintained properties are breeding grounds for criminal activity. The “broken window” theory – the idea that one unrepaired broken window is a signal that no one cares and will consequentially lead to more broken windows – is an idea that has been floating around for decades.¹⁵ And while the empirical validity of the theory’s crime prevention is somewhat uncertain, the perceived safety that results from clean, well-maintained environments is incontrovertible. Some neighborhoods in Southwest Denver, including Westwood, Mar Lee, and Harvey Park, have already implemented “broken window” policies. Police and code enforcement officers in these areas are instructed to look for and break up crimes of disorder, including abandoned vehicles, property disrepair that violates zoning codes, graffiti, public drunkenness, and possible signs of criminal behavior (high traffic in and out of a home, loud parties late at night, etc.); in addition, neighbors are encouraged to help identify and report problems as quickly as possible.¹⁷

Security is more than one’s actual safety from violent crime or property damage – security fundamentally relates to whether or not a person *feels* safe walking down the street at night. Perception is a large part of security. As such, building upkeep and maintenance are essential components to a secure neighborhood.¹⁶ One way to achieve this feeling or perception of safety is to create safe routes to schools on which children can walk to school. When parents allow their children to walk to school, a high sense of safety is reflected in the given area.

.These efforts are not meant to replace traditional measures of law enforcement but are instead additional efforts that, when coupled with conventional policing strategies, should promote safe and secure public places and neighborhoods. Encouraging natural surveillance and constant maintenance, controlling access, and

mixing land uses are necessary components to a built environment that is both safe and secure. Citizens who feel a sense of proprietorship and responsibility for the community are more likely to report crimes and suspicious individuals. While traditional policing measures are still necessary, some simple changes to the built environment can make people feel safer in their homes and public places.

Potential sustainability measures:

- Average time it takes to report and/or repair community eyesores such as graffiti, broken windows, and vandalized or abandoned property
- Distance at which the average person can recognize a face in a public place at night—within 60 feet
- The variation and integration of various land uses
- Actual crime rates compared with community perceptions of safety

Land Use Code Strategies

Removing Obstacles

- Relax zoning laws that require uniform land uses in large swaths of land
- Allow and encourage community groups and individuals to maintain abandoned lots through expanding urban agriculture and recreation areas
- Ensure that codes do not prohibit the use of lots for gardens or other uses

Incentives

- Provide tax incentives to developers who build mixed-use developments in areas that are perceived by local residents to be unsafe
- Assure citizens that if disorderly behavior or property damage is reported that police and code enforcement officials will promptly deal with the reported incident

Regulations

- Lighting of public places must minimize glare and blind spots; potential problem areas should be illuminated in uniform luminous white lights to ensure that a human face is recognizable at a reasonable distance
- Lighting, landscaping, signage, design, and other “wayfinding” techniques should clearly guide people to and from proper entrances and exits of public places
- Public spaces and parks should have ample supplies of seating, shade, vendors, and other amenities that encourage positive public activity
- Serious zoning code violation must be addressed quickly as to avoid a “broken window” mentality in the community
- Zoning codes should require varied forms of housing and commercial uses to have windows and doors facing streets so that more “eyes are on the street”
- In the site plan design process, public areas should be clearly distinguished from private ones; entrances and exits should be clear to all citizens

- Include safe routes to school in code section --- see manual for school site planning in Douglas County

Strategic Success Factors

- Establish techniques and programs to share and expand hours of shared uses for potential nuisances uses such as dog exercise and skateboarding
- For urban gardens seek permanent title to land. Long term sustainability requires sufficient water.

Notes

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3. Alyson Geller, "Smart Growth: A Prescription for Livable Cities," *American Journal of Public Health* 93 (9): 1410.
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5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. The Institute for Urban Planning and Development of the Paris Ile-D-France Region, "Taking safety into account in urban development: challenges and methodology," http://www.iaurif.org/en/doc/studies/safety_2/safety-in-urban-development.pdf.
8. Project for Public Spaces, "Safety & Security in Public Space," http://www.pps.org/info/placemakingtools/issuepapers/safety_security.
9. Project for Public Spaces, http://www.pps.org/great_public_spaces/one?public_place_id=211&type_id=0.
10. Leanne Malcolm, "Eyes on the Street," <http://aic.gov.au/conferences/housing/malcolm.html>.
11. Scott Thompson, "Mixed-use buildings revive best practices of the past" *Puget Sound Business Journal* (March 29, 2002).
12. Alan Duer, "Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design – Security Lighting," <http://www.asisonline.org/certification/ppt/lighting-powerpoint.ppt#256>.
13. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Security, http://www.cptedsecurity.com/cpted_design_guidelines.htm.
14. *Ibid.*
15. James Wilson and George Kelling, "Broken Windows," *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 1982), p. 29-37.
16. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Security, http://www.cptedsecurity.com/cpted_design_guidelines.htm.
17. City News from Councilwoman Jeanne Faatz, "'Broken Windows' comes to Council District 2," <http://www.denvergov.com/Portals/72/documents/citynews.pdf>.