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Design Out Crime City of Los Angeles

The City of Los Angeles has undertaken a creative new initiative called "Design Out Crime," injecting into City government the techniques of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). While the concepts of CPTED are well accepted, the City of Los Angeles is one of the first major cities in the nation to institutionalize them comprehensively. As members of the Greater Los Angeles community, we encourage you to read this information and adopt these measures in your own area.

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Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

The Design Out Crime program introduces ways to deter crime by changing the design of buildings and public spaces. It involves simple, preventive steps that developers, architects, and individuals can take to reduce crime in their homes, businesses, and neighborhoods. For example:

- Housing units can be designed so as to allow neighbors to "self-patrol" their environments.
- Lighting and landscaping may be enhanced in parking lots to improve visibility.
- Fences around housing developments can be designed in ways that avoid creating hiding places for criminals.
- Signs can be removed from storefront windows to allow clear views in and out of the store.
- Vines or planted coverings may be placed on walls to deter graffiti.

Los Angeles City Councilmember Laura Chick in 1995 created an inter-agency "Design Out Crime" task force, led by representatives of the City Planning Department and Police Department, but including eight City agencies. The task force developed a set of "Design Out Crime" guidelines, adopted officially by the City Council, for distribution to developers, architects, urban planners and others involved in the design of building projects. The guidelines are also used by City agencies, such as the Housing Department, as criteria in evaluating projects worthy of City funding.

The Police Department's Crime Prevention Unit also consults with private developers to incorporate CPTED techniques into projects. The Police Department also now participates in the City's Permit Processing Network, an inter-agency task force that reviews complex development projects.

The City's Information Technology Agency in 1997 completed a landmark video on this subject, probably the first comprehensive video produced anywhere explaining CPTED principles. A 15-minute version of this Design Out Crime videotape is targeted at community and neighborhood watch groups interested in applying these techniques in their homes and small businesses. A

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second, 30-minute version of this videotape, hosted by actress Joanna Cassidy, demonstrates more detailed techniques for use in new development projects by architects, developers, real estate professionals, and urban planners.

How it Works

In these tight fiscal times, cities must look beyond traditional policing methods and examine **all** possible ways to enhance public safety. Cities need to find creative, cost-effective ways to stop crime on the front-end and reduce the need to solve our crime problems only by adding more police officers.

Until the Design Out Crime initiative began, few City staff members and private developers gave much thought to the public safety implications of development projects. The problems are apparent around Los Angeles and most major cities; decaying public housing projects, abandoned public spaces, unsafe convenience stores, and even burglarized single-family homes. Cities may ameliorate all of these conditions through careful attention to CPTED principles.

By making all City agencies, not just police departments, accountable for fighting crime, the Design Out Crime initiative also addresses the fractured nature of public safety efforts in major cities. By bringing together departments to work cooperatively on the guidelines and their implementation, it has induced a shift in the City's organizational culture. City staff members who review development projects -- in the Planning Department, Redevelopment Agency, Recreation and Parks, Housing Department, and other key agencies -- have now received training in CPTED techniques so that they can use them to improve projects.

Finally, Design Out Crime makes "community policing" more than a mere buzzword. Through the dissemination of the video and the application of simple, inexpensive techniques, the initiative gives community residents and small business owners concrete steps they can take to reduce crime.

Benefits of the Program

The Design Out Crime initiative will benefit every Los Angeles resident. Residents in new affordable housing projects will be living in complexes that will stay safe over the long haul. Public parks and other public spaces will become vibrant centers of activity rather than forbidding "no man's lands". Single-family homes will become more impervious to burglary and other crimes. Small businesses, such as convenience stores, will become safer for patrons and employees alike.

When the Design Out Crime techniques become prevalent throughout the City, police patrols will be enhanced in a manner that will benefit even those citizens who do not use the new projects. Police officers will be able to patrol projects incorporating CPTED principles much more quickly, allowing them to move on to the next police call.

Secondary benefits will accrue to those City employees who are trained in design strategies and tactics and can apply them in a practical sense to proposed development projects. Besides learning crime-prevention design techniques, these front-line employees are empowered to apply the CPTED principles using their own insights and creativity to improve the safety of the development project.

Achievements of the Program

The Design Out Crime program has already changed City government's organizational culture in reviewing development projects. Multiple agencies now work cooperatively to assure that new development projects and public spaces are designed to maximize their safety. Because the City Council has given its official stamp of approval to a set of CPTED principles, the City's leadership has effectively institutionalized this way of thinking into City government.

Design Out Crime has stirred new awareness of CPTED principles among the general public through the extensive press coverage it has received. It has also reached a wide (and receptive) audience of design and planning professionals. City staff has partnered with professional organizations of urban planners,

architects, housing officials, apartment owners, real estate management companies, and private security firms to urge their membership to incorporate these techniques in their own work. Design professionals are now routinely proposing projects that incorporate these concepts into the plan.

Because the Design Out Crime initiative has only been fully underway for about 18 months and represents a preventative approach to crime, its crime reductions may be difficult to quantify. Many projects currently being processed through the City's development approval process have incorporated the Design Out Crime techniques. However, since the program remains in an early phase, many of the projects reviewed under this initiative have not been completed. Future crime statistics in the area of these projects could prove useful indicators of the relative success of these efforts.

Easy to Replicate

The Design Out Crime program offers techniques that are not building- or territory-specific, so the program can be easily replicated to fit nearly any neighborhood or city. While the videotape uses Los Angeles-area examples, the principles it illustrates can apply to any City, which is why the City has already received numerous requests for the video from around the nation.

CPTED applies three key concepts, all of which are interrelated, and all of which are easy to replicate anywhere:

- Natural surveillance: The placement of physical features, activities, and people in a way that maximizes visibility
- Natural access control: Restricting or encouraging people to come into a space through the placement of entrances, exits, fencing, landscaping, and lighting.
- Territorial reinforcement: The use of physical attributes to define ownership and separate public and private space.

For example, Design Out Crime recommends the planting of prickly vegetation below certain external windows. In this situation, the designer could choose flowering bougainvilleas, desert-style cactus plants, or any vegetation native to the particular region.

The biggest obstacle to Design Out Crime may be an initial misconception by some critics that CPTED techniques involve the creation of fortress-like architecture: cloistered gated communities, buildings with forbidding facades, or defensive architecture. In reality, all of these principles may be implemented in a way that remains aesthetically pleasing and will enhance the visual character of the entire city. Indeed, Design Out Crime seeks to discourage fortress-like architecture and generate designs that invite the kind of positive activity that deters crime.

Funding Sources

The Design Out Crime program has accomplished wonders on a shoestring budget. The Los Angeles City Council allocated \$25,000 for the program -- \$10,000 (40%) for training of staff, \$10,000 (40%) for the production of the video, and \$5,000 (20%) for the production of the written guidelines. For less than half the cost of one police officer for one year, the City has developed ground-breaking crime prevention work of enduring value. These City of Los Angeles General Funds are the only monies allocated to the program thus far.

The Innovations Grant would finance the duplication and distribution of the Design Out Crime videotape to a much wider audience around Southern California and to other interested cities around the nation. It would also allow for more extensive printing and distribution of the written guidelines for use by all Neighborhood Watch groups in the City and by the membership of all major professional organizations. The City also hopes to create a Design Out Crime Web site, and the Innovations Grant would help finance the necessary labor costs for its launch.

