

Planning for Safer Communities



Summary and Checklists
for
Advisory Planning Commissions

Planning for Safer Communities

Summary and Checklists
for
Advisory Planning Commissions

Prepared by:

Terri Dame
Cowichan Women Against Violence Society

March 1998

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. THE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT	3
2.1. Places Where Safety is a Concern	3
3. FACTORS THAT AFFECT SAFETY AND SENSE OF SAFETY	4
3.1. Lighting	4
3.2. Isolation	4
3.3. Maintenance	4
3.4. Sightlines	5
3.5. Signage	5
3.6. Movement Predictors	5
3.7. Entrapment spots	5
3.8. General Design	5
4. ADDRESSING SAFETY THROUGH PLANNING AND DESIGN	6
5. ASSESSING DEVELOPMENTS	7
4.1. Process Considerations	7
4.2. Questions to Ask	8
6. DESIGN CHECKLIST	10
6.1. Overall Design	10
6.2. Isolation	10
6.3. Visibility	10
6.4. Lighting	10
6.5. Signage	11
6.6. Movement Predictors and Entrapment Sites	11
6.7. Maintenance	11
6.8. Management and Security	11

1. INTRODUCTION

The following is a summary for “*Planning for Safer Communities*” which has been produced by Cowichan Women Against Violence Society in partnership with the Cowichan Valley Regional District.

“*Planning for Safer Communities*” was developed in response to recommendations from a pilot women’s safety audit project in 1996. The pilot project conducted in the Cowichan Lake area examined women’s and children’s safety in their community environments. The final report of the pilot project recommended improvements to the local areas to support safety and accessibility. It also recommended that considerations for personal and public safety be incorporated into planning processes and policies of the C.V.R.D.

“*Planning for Safer Communities*” provides an overview of safety issues for women and children in their community environments, discusses the role of planning to support personal and public safety, and makes suggestions for objectives and policy considerations for Official Community Plans to incorporate personal and public safety into a community’s vision for the present and future.

Design considerations for various types of development are also contained in the guide. These are drawn from existing literature as well as input from safety audits that have been done in the district.

This summary has been prepared as a companion to the guide, as a quick reference to prompt questions about safety when considering development proposals and related planning questions. It is recognized that in any given situation, not all of the questions contained in the checklists will be pertinent. The purpose is to provide an array of considerations, and, where appropriate, to apply them to a given proposal.

“*Planning for Safer Communities*” was developed as part of the
Cowichan Valley Safer Futures / Safety Audit Project,
sponsored by Cowichan Women Against Violence Society
funded by

Status of Women Canada
Cowichan Valley Regional District
B.C. Ministry of Women’s Equality

2. THE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

There is a wealth of research which has explored how the design of physical environments affects both rate and type of crime and fear of crime in an area.

For example, research on public places where sexual assaults have occurred has found that a number of features are often present - the ability of an offender to predict time and path of a potential victim, the presence of an ambush site, an attack site which is often enclosed on three sides, poor visibility and an escape route for the offender.

2.1. Places Where Safety is a Concern

Perceptions about safety in particular places are related to both physical and social factors. Factors that are commonly identified in conjunction with women's fear of being in or using a place include poor lighting, isolation (i.e., no one around to respond in an emergency), places that present opportunities for entrapment, (such as alleys, laneways, behind buildings), obstructions to sightlines that detract from a person's ability to see what is ahead (sharp corners, walls), presence of derogatory graffiti.

In addition, familiarity with an area and the people, knowledge of crimes that have occurred a place or in similar places, time of day or year, presence of (or lack of) security and emergency services are all part of how a place may be perceived, and factor into decisions about use of those places.

Table 1 illustrates places and corresponding factors that may be associated with fear of being in and/or using them. It is followed by an explanation of how those factors affect safety and sense of safety in communities.

TABLE 1 - PLACES WHERE SAFETY IS A CONCERN

PLACES	CONTRIBUTING FACTORS
Home:	Isolation, being alone, inadequate security Knowledge of crime and violence in an area
Work: At work. Going to and leaving work in the morning and at night.	Isolation (Especially at night when few staff are on duty) Inadequate security
Public places: Parks, trails, pathways Parking lots Highways and secondary roads Streets & lanes Side streets and alleyways Commercial areas Areas used as hangouts Bus stops, stations Public and other communal buildings (entrances, hallways, stairways, elevators, laundry rooms and washrooms)	Isolation (Being alone) Inadequate security Poor lighting Poor visibility due to various factors including bushes, trees, high fences, sharp corners Entrapment and hiding spots Lack of signage Inadequate access to emergency services (e.g., telephones) Derogatory graffiti People in the area perceived as threatening Dogs and Wildlife

3. FACTORS THAT AFFECT SAFETY AND SENSE OF SAFETY

The following are characteristics of environments that are commonly identified in conjunction with concerns about being in or using places in communities.

1. LIGHTING

Lighting is essential both in day and at night, to see and be seen, particularly for pedestrians. Many areas may be lit for motorists, but not for people walking through them. Lighting can also be uneven or obstructed by landscaping or structures. Problem places include parking lots, parks / recreational areas, building entrances and exits, back of buildings, communal areas of buildings, pedestrian pathways.

Safety concerns include:

- not being able to see an adequate distance or into potential hiding areas. when lighting is uneven or inconsistent it can create isolated spots, shadows (for example, when lighting is obscured by vegetation or other similar barriers).
- entrances and exits, indoor communal areas are often inadequately lit, or existing lighting is not maintained promptly.
- improper lighting that causes glare can also impede visibility.

2. ISOLATION

Being in a place where there is no one around that would hear a call for help, or little prospect of getting to help on foot. Isolated areas include places that are not used intensively, and/or are vacant, for example, after dark or during certain times of the day such as parks, parking lots, paths, buildings, highways and rural roads.

Factors that cause and contribute to isolation include:

- absence of people around the area - residents and particular user groups.
- inadequate access to emergency services, for example, public telephones and signage which provides direction and information.
- vacant buildings as well as spaces that are adequately lit, or without security.
- lack of surveillance due to building design or placement.

3. MAINTENANCE

Maintenance of facilities such as sidewalks is essential for safety; maintenance of buildings and grounds also contributes to a sense of ownership of space. If a place is littered with garbage or graffiti (especially racist and other derogatory messages) it presents a message that it is not safe for some people to be.

4. SIGHTLINES

People need to be able to see far enough ahead to anticipate potential problems/danger. Areas where sightlines may be a problem are pathways, trails, hallways, stairways, building entrances and exits. Problems can include:

- recessed entrances and exits
- visual barriers such as high, solid fences, landscaping - vegetative cover and bushes
- sharp curves or steep grades in roads or driveways
- sharp corners in halls and stairways; room dividers

5. SIGNAGE

Signage is necessary for people to know where they are and where they are going. It can also provide essential information about accessing emergency services or public facilities, and can lend messages about an area's ownership, intended use, and hazards. Directional and other information is needed for people who may not be familiar with an area and for people who do not speak English, have a disability or are visually impaired. It is important that signage be well-placed, well lit but free of glare.

6. MOVEMENT PREDICTORS

Movement predictors are paths or routes where a potential attacker can predict a person's movement, and which offer no alternative for a person to escape. Problematic places include paths, trails, tunnels, hallways, public washrooms. Safety concerns may also be compounded by poor lighting, lack of adequate emergency outlets or security features, knowledge of the area and of alternative routes.

7. ENTRAPMENT SPOTS

Entrapment spots are offered by small, confined, often isolated areas, that present opportunities for hiding and surprise to a victim, and an enclosed area in which an assault may be committed. Examples include spaces in and around buildings, such as alcoves, recessed entrances and exits, storage buildings, isolated rooms, washrooms, elevators, vacant buildings, car lots. Problems may be exacerbated where there is poor lighting and obstacles to visibility, inadequate access to emergency services or no alternative route through an area.

8. GENERAL DESIGN

General design and layout of an area needs to be clear for people to know where they are and what direction they need to go to reach their destination. An unclear layout can create confusion as to direction; problems can also be compounded by lack of adequate signage, isolation, poor lighting, etc.

4. ADDRESSING SAFETY THROUGH PLANNING AND DESIGN

Incorporating considerations for personal safety into planning and design of communities is an important component of crime prevention. Research suggests that safety and security in public places can be enhanced by design and management of the physical environment that seeks to minimize or eliminate opportunities for crime and concurrently, increases people's sense of safety. The following are general principles for planning and design of the community environment to support safety.

1. Provide for awareness and clarity of surroundings.

- General design and layout of an area or building should provide for ease of navigation, clarity of surroundings and visibility. An area or building should "make sense" and be easy to get around in, contain adequate directional information, emergency outlets (e.g., public telephones). Considerations should include aspects such as clear sightlines and well-lit pedestrian pathways.

2. Provide for adequate visibility and opportunities for casual surveillance

- Provide adequate lighting (level, intensity, angle).
- Reduce or eliminate obstructions to sightlines, movement predictors (for example, solid hedges in landscaping or high solid fences adjacent pedestrian pathways)
- Locate and place buildings, including entrances, windows that overlook pedestrian walkways.

3. Reduce isolation

- Encourage a mix of land uses (e.g., residential and commercial).
- Encourage visibility in placement and design of buildings, landscaping.

4. Provide access to emergency outlets and services

- Public telephones, informational and directional signage to tell people how and where to access help.

5. Provide for accessibility

- Promote safe and accessible public transportation.
- Consider accessibility needs of people with disabilities with respect to building design and location of services.

6. Include Management Policies and Practices to support safety

- Managers of places should be aware of women's safety issues and concerns, and be encouraged to provide services to promote safety of staff and the public. parks staff, to building and shopping centre managers, to personnel managers of government offices and businesses.

5. ASSESSING DEVELOPMENTS

The following checklist suggests some steps and questions to ask about proposed developments, Official Community Plan development and reviews, by-laws and zoning regulations. It is followed by a Safety Checklist which outlines design and management factors that may be relevant to development proposals.

5.1. Process Considerations

1. Introduce and ask questions about safety issues and concerns at the beginning of a process.
2. Provide information to applicants on safety and security issues, and design and management solutions.
3. Include a process for referral and suggest community contacts to provide input. (In the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the Women's Safety Advisory Committee has been established with a mandate to review development proposals for safety.)
4. Suggest a women's safety audit of the local area.

5.2. Questions to Ask:

1. Context of the area / development:

- a) Are there any existing safety issues that need to be addressed? Has a safety audit been done to determine existing and potential problems?
- Is the area known for vandalism, thefts, assaults?
 - Is it perceived to be unsafe for / by women, children, youth, seniors, people with disabilities?
 - Is the area isolated, dark, poorly maintained?
 - Is it known for traffic or pedestrian issues?
 - How might the proposed development affect or improve the area in terms of safety?
- b) Who are the present and proposed users?
Are there any potential conflicts for example, between neighbouring land uses?

Examples might include:

- A vacant lot next to a proposed housing complex, a school next to a farm, mall, video arcade, a liquor store next to a bus stop, industrial complex next to a park.

2. How do/will women and children use this area both day and night and what might their safety concerns be? Day? Night?

Examples might include:

- A neighbourhood park that will be used by women and children whose safety concerns might be around using washrooms, or need for emergency outlets, possible alcohol/drug use in the park.
- A proposed neighbourhood in a rural area where children and youth would need to walk to school and recreation?

Have all needs/views have been considered/solicited?

- Has the developer contacted people who may be the most vulnerable and/or who are not able to come out to public meetings? Have parents, women, seniors, people with disabilities. been specifically asked for their views?

3. Does the development consider design elements which support safety?

***See the Design Safety Checklist.**

- Does layout and design of the proposed development (interior and exterior) maximize opportunities for casual surveillance, minimize potential entrapment areas, hiding spots?
- Will there be adequate lighting, signage, accessible pedestrian routes, transit, security, emergency services and outlets? (How has this been determined?)
- What provisions are there for accessibility?
- Again, has consultation been done to determine the concerns of people who are the most vulnerable, and does design incorporate those needs?

4. What are requirements or considerations for management to support safety of staff and the public?

- For example, will store owners, building managers be made aware of women's safety issues (and how) and will there be programs/policies to support safety of staff, residents, patrons?

5. What is the potential impact on community services?

- Does the development provide for or augment existing community services?
- Will there be adequate access to public transportation?
- Does the proposed development target a specific group, for example seniors? If so, will there be adequate access to services for people who may be mobility impaired, require medical attention?
- What might the impacts be for recreation opportunities, school grounds safety, traffic safety for children? Have school parent groups been contacted for their views?

6. DESIGN CHECKLIST



*The following questions have been drawn and adapted from **Safety Audit Checklists** regarding design of places related to personal safety.*

1. OVERALL DESIGN

- ⇒ Is it easy for someone who is not familiar with the area to find their way around?
- ⇒ Is it easy for someone who is not familiar with the area to find their way around?
- ⇒ Is there adequate signage and other information that tells people where they are and how to find services, who to call in an emergency?
- ⇒ Is information provided visible and legible to someone in a wheelchair, someone who is visually impaired?

Is the area/building accessible?

- ⇒ Is the area served by public transportation? If so, does transit meet the needs of users? If not, what other assistance is available?
- ⇒ Are buildings, sidewalks, streets and crossing areas well-placed and accessible, particularly for people with disabilities? How has this been determined?

2. ISOLATION

- ⇒ Is / will the area, building (or parts of the building) be subject to isolation? If so, are there practices in place to enhance personal safety and security of people who must use the area during those times?
- ⇒ Do the surrounding land uses encourage people to be there?
- ⇒ How far away are the nearest emergency services?
- ⇒ Is the area patrolled by security, police, neighbourhood watch?
- ⇒ Would someone hear a call for help?

3. VISIBILITY

- ⇒ Does layout of the site and building(s) provide for maximum visibility of the street and parking areas, paths and walkways?
- ⇒ Does the building interior contain sharp corners, isolated areas?
- ⇒ Are there any structures, landscaping, vegetation, corners, ditches, vehicles, signs that would impede visibility?

4. LIGHTING

- ⇒ Is the lighting adequate? How has this been determined?
- ⇒ Is the lighting bright enough (without being too bright or causing glare), is it evenly spaced and unobscured by landscaping or fences?
- ⇒ How well does lighting illuminate parking lots, pedestrian walkways, sidewalks, directional signs and maps? Is lighting adequate for someone to see another person 20 metres away?

5. SIGNAGE

- ⇒ What signage is planned? What signage is needed to serve all users? Does it provide necessary information?
- ⇒ Does signage direct people with disabilities to accessible entrances?
- ⇒ Is it located properly? (e.g., so that it is visible to someone in a wheelchair?)
- ⇒ Is the lettering large enough to read, easy to understand? Visual symbols?
- ⇒ Are transportation points clearly indicated? (Taxi stands, bus stops, paratransit?)

6. MOVEMENT PREDICTORS AND ENTRAPMENT SITES

- ⇒ Are there small, confined areas, such as alcoves, solid staircases, between garbage bins, alleys, lanes, parking spots where someone could hide or be hidden from view?
- ⇒ How easy would it be to predict someone's movements along a route?
- ⇒ Is there more than one main route/ exit through well-traveled areas, into buildings?

7. MAINTENANCE

- ⇒ How will the area/building be maintained?
- ⇒ Who will be responsible for removing graffiti, repairing vandalism? Will this be done promptly?
- ⇒ Will there be information posted to tell people how to report problems?

8. MANAGEMENT AND SECURITY

- ⇒ How is the area or building monitored? (police, security staff, etc.)
- ⇒ Are security staff and building managers aware of personal safety concerns for women and children?
- ⇒ Where buildings are used by businesses and services, are there safety measures and programs in place?
- ⇒ How far away is the nearest emergency service? (alarm, personnel, emergency telephone)
- ⇒ Are there areas that should be locked, fenced or barricaded?