



Women and Community Safety Fact Sheet #4

Traditional responsibilities of local governments, such as safe water, traffic control and street design for vehicular and pedestrian safety, acquiring land for parks, and providing recreation programs, are all justified on the grounds of ensuring the well-being of community residents.

Supporting community safety for women is also a fundamental aspect of providing for community well-being. It is a matter of understanding and acknowledging that the personal safety of women and other marginalized groups is an essential part of community living, and that local government, along with the rest of the community, has an important role to play.

However, the fit between the work of local women's organizations and the work of local government has not always been obvious. Further, the willingness of local government to acknowledge safety as a priority may be weighed down by the concern that they are being asked to assume more and more responsibility from senior levels of government. While a legitimate question, perhaps more accurate a picture is that local governments can recognize the role that they already play in terms of social development and crime prevention, and address their traditional roles with an understanding of how they affect personal safety and quality of life of those who are the most vulnerable to violence.

It is important to firstly acknowledge, and then integrate community safety as a priority into the mechanisms that guide how decisions are made. The direct steps that local government takes, the processes through which decisions are made, and the allocation of staff time, reflect the **priorities and standards** set out by Council through the **Official Community Plan**, and other by-laws.

Planning can influence economic development, housing development and design, parks and recreation program provision, public transportation, the design and maintenance of public facilities, as well as the management of programs that local government is responsible for. Planning can ensure ongoing attention and consideration of women's safety; it can enhance the ability of citizens to gain better access to decision-making systems and to have their concerns heard; and, can work to ensure involvement of all sectors of the community in the work for change.

The OCP can recognize and address many aspects of women's personal security, and play an important role in supporting, both directly and indirectly, all of the elements that contribute to the social well-being of communities. Official Community Plans are reviewed periodically, and the OCP Review Process provides an opportunity for women's voices to be inserted into the local government arena.

Community Planning Mechanisms for Safety

Plan Policies

Policies are the vehicle by which Councils and Boards, in their Official Community Plans, express their intent as to how the community should develop in the future, based on existing conditions and community objectives.

They are included in the OCP and other sub-plans that may deal with specific issues (such as recreational priorities, environmental health) or parts of the community (such as neighbourhoods).

Policies can address goals and objectives for community safety through:

- Establishing criteria and guidelines to ensure that the type and location of developments promote individual and community safety, and accessibility, to all segments of the population.
- Encouraging partnerships with other levels of government, private companies and community groups in the provision of facilities and amenities that can foster affordable housing, parks, recreational facilities, affordable day care and other social services.
- Directing priorities for the provision of services and facilities, to ensure that all areas and all user groups are served in an equitable manner.
- Providing for public input from specific user groups to ensure adequate representation in decision-making processes.
- Prohibiting exclusion of certain types of land-uses in other by-laws to reduce barriers to provision of essential and other social services such as shelters and transition houses.

Town planning affects the way people live their lives and can help determine people's quality of life, health and well-being. It plays a key role in determining where people can live, work, shop and spend their leisure time.

Planning can help either to create or to remove barriers to access in relation to jobs, shopping housing, community, education and leisure facilities."

Royal Town Planning Institute, Advice Note No. 12, "Planning for Women," January, 1995

Policy in Action

Integrating personal and public safety considerations into the OCP and day-to-day responsibilities of local government requires an understanding of the issues, as well as background information, data and public input.

The basic questions that need to be addressed are:

How do women and other vulnerable groups use and need to use their communities?

What are the barriers that they face and how can these be addressed through physical design and social development?

Adopting a Women's Safety Lens

Applying a "women's safety lens" to community development questions helps decision-makers to understand how decisions may affect not only women, but also other marginalized groups in the community. For example, the following questions can form part of a checklist for assessing new development:

- What is the context of the development (i.e., area in which it is proposed) and what is there (or not there) that will have an impact on crime and women's safety?
- How do, and how will, women and children use this area - day and night?
- What are their personal safety concerns?
- What elements of the proposal will support or detract from personal safety?
- How will the development affect the need for community (social) services?
- Are there plans for management and security?

For more information, check out "Women and Community Safety: a resource book on planning for safer communities" available from the Women and Community Safety Project, or online at www.saferfutures.org.