

A CPTED Case Study

By: Cst. Tom McKay

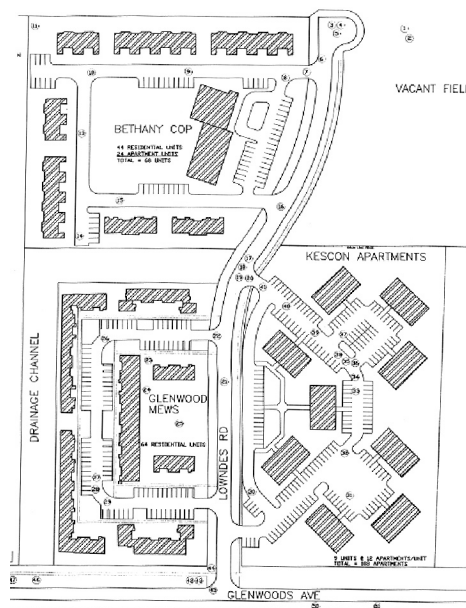
You are a clean-cut 25 year old, male planning student with camera in hand. As you walk through the first of three developments you are noticed. As you enter the play area, a parent approaches. “What are you doing?” “What is your name?” “Who is your supervisor?” You've just been checked out—big time.

In the next development, the reaction is stronger. As you walk through the playground a mother “flips out”. The commotion is loud enough to draw the attention of the woman's husband who's still inside the unit. When the husband approached you're asked for your name, supervisor and are, once again, thoroughly “checked out”. For the second time that morning you tell the residents of your planning assignment.

You travel to the last development across the road. This time its different. There are no kids playing. There is no activity. You don't feel noticed as you walk about. Then you observe a transaction and begin to feel threatened. The people involved in the transaction take exception to your taking photos. You seriously begin to think that you might be assaulted. This despite your age, gender and the day, time and hour.

You start to leave the development followed slowly by 4 youths in a car traveling a short distance behind. It is a long three minutes back to the intersection you first entered followed by some feelings of relief. The youths soon leave and you are struck by what has occurred.

The above story is true. It is representative of the successes and failures of the respective developments and their environments. It involves three distinct Keswick developments known as the Bethany Co-op, a mix of townhomes and apartments that are home to 188 people, 97 of which are under the age of 17; the Glenwood Mews, the first Region of York non-profit housing project consisting entirely of townhouses that are home to approximately 240 people, 150 of which are children; and the Kescon Apartments, an enclave style development of 9 low rise apartment buildings, 50% of which are vacant and home to 135 people.



The accompanying site plan helps to further illustrate the similarities and differences between the developments. The successful developments, the Bethany Co-op and Glenwood Mews, have a good street edge, few hidden pockets, a good visual identity and buildings that help define the perimeter and carve out areas private control with active, ground level units.

The Kescon Apartments on the other hand, were characterized by a poor connection to the street, lots of “left-over” space, a poor visual identity and anonymous, inactive buildings that poorly define the property.

A CPTED Case Study

The net results are three affordable, neighbouring developments with two significantly different levels of success, crime and feelings of ownership

The CPTED Factor

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, or CPTED as it is more commonly known, is a proactive crime fighting technique that believes that the proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime as well as an improvement in the quality of life. A CPTED analysis helps to provide an explanation for the varying reactions and results between the developments.

In the two most successful developments, the rear of the buildings are parallel to the properties' edge. This helps to:

- strengthen and reinforce the perimeter,
- maximize natural surveillance opportunities along the properties' edge, and
- help create a clearly marked transitional zone of strategically placed, semi-private, back-yard spaces.

These important CPTED factors provide for strong feelings of ownership and a strategic counter balance to, what would otherwise be, a significant trespass potential from the neighbouring plaza and drainage channel.

No such benefits exist however with respect to the enclave style of development. In that development, the backs of the buildings fail to significantly strengthen or reinforce the property's edge, maximize the perception of natural surveillance along its border or create private back yard spaces. The net result; a less intimidating, anonymous edge that is much more readily trespassed.

Another comparison between developments reveals a significant difference between the basic street patterns. In the two most successful developments, the street patterns result in 90 degree turns and maximum road lengths. This creates a number of CPTED style benefits that work against the offender.

These include:

- significant expanses of well-observed roadway,
- maximum distances between exits and, from the criminal's perspective, escape routes,
- natural traffic calming measures such as 90 degree turns that work to extend offender escape time, and
- the development of territorial feelings over the spaces and/or roadways directly in front of the units.

The same cannot be said of the enclave style of development. In that development, a would be offender needs only travel a short distance before the next turning opportunity. This is extremely important from the offender's perspective, because it, along with the use of 45 degree turns, limits the ability of residents to control or monitor an offender's movements.

Another significant difference between the developments is the availability of recreational facilities. In the two most successful developments, centrally located, well observed, recreational facilities give the development's common areas a specific sense of purpose that is capable of generating safe activity while promoting strong feelings of ownership.

The same is not true of the Kescon Apartments where a complete lack of recreational facilities results in limited feelings of ownership, numerous unassigned "leftover" spaces and a general loss of activity that collectively works to attract offenders.

Other significant differences between the developments include the presence or absence of shared parking facilities and attention to architectural detail. In the case of the Kescon Apartments, the existence of shared parking facilities limits the ability of residents to tell strangers from neighbours. This along with a "cookie cutter" approach to development dramatically limits the resident's ability to develop a feeling of ownership. The net result; an anonymous environment that significantly lacks identity and has been unflatteringly described as a "moonscape" or "Siberian barracks".

A CPTED Case Study

The opposite is true of the two successful developments. At the Bethany Co-op and Glenwood Mews, a minimum number of shared parking facilities enhances the ability of residents to identify strangers.

This along with a varied approach to brick, siding and roof colour helps to create a strong sense of identity which promotes strong feelings of ownership. The net result; two varied and successful developments where a number of fundamentally similar structures are effectively differentiated from one another.

Crime Rates

An analysis of Police calls for service supports the student's experience. Statistics show that Police attend the Kescon Apartments 3.8 and 4.7 times as often as they did the Glenwood Mews and Bethany Co-Op respectively.

Conclusion

CPTED theory holds that crime and loss are a by product of a design that is not working properly. In the case of our three developments, a significant relationship has developed between the overall calls for police service and the lack of CPTED features.

In order to address this problem, every effort must be made to incorporate good CPTED planning from the outset. This will require the cooperation of police, planners and the development industry.

Published in: Plan Canada Magazine, Sept. 1996 as "CPTED Case Study".