

KITCHENER PUBLIC LIBRARY

An Interior C.P.T.E.D. CASE STUDY

Scanning

It had come to this. Police officers were again being asked to do permanent foot patrols through the main branch of the Kitchener Public Library. If this weren't drastic enough, library officials wanted to build a police phone-in facility inside the main branch, in the faint hope that police officers would spend more time in this facility than their own major police division located just next door.

The incident that resulted in these demands occurred in the summer of 1995 when the library's third floor stacks were used by an offender to approach a 15 year-old girl then masturbate and ejaculate in front of her. This was the most outrageous of the reported incidents that included 5 other indecent acts, 5 thefts, 1 break-in and 17 miscellaneous calls for service.

Recognizing the redundancy of the traditional response and the role the layout of the library's stacks had played in facilitating these incidents, Cst. Barry Zehr, of Waterloo Regional Police, contacted Cst. Tom McKay of Peel Regional Police Crime Prevention Services for expert Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) advice.

Analysis

The third floor book shelves were layed out parallel to the floor's main corridor. This effectively limited natural surveillance of the book stacks to two cross aisles and the first row of books. It further limited the natural surveillance potential of all corridor based activities. This included a very busy elevator, stairway and staffed information desk.

Adding to this problem was an open second floor ceiling which created a void along the right side of the stacks and the blinker-like use of study carrels located along the rear.

An additional problem resulted from a permanently propped open and unalarmed exit door at the rear of the stacks. This provided offenders with a low-risk point of entry and superior escape opportunities.

Response

The primary goal of the response plan was to provide for and exploit a number of lost opportunities for natural surveillance and access control. This was best accomplished by:

turning the library stacks perpendicular to the public corridor and circulation desk,

installing a large mirror on the blank corridor wall opposite the circulation desk and

newly arranged stacks,

rearranging the study carrels from an unbroken, continuous row of units located at the end of the book stacks to a series of strategically placed, independent units that maximized natural surveillance of the aisles in the newly arranged stacks, and

designating the secondary, rear stairwell as a fire route so that the door could be signed as a fire exit in the closed position, and retrofitted with an alarm.

The first two recommendations were required to facilitate natural surveillance opportunities for staff and persons using the busy corridor that connects the old section of the library to the new.

The last recommendation was required to limit escape routes and increase the conspicuousness of anyone entering or leaving this area by "forcing" them to walk past a staffed area or sound a door alarm.

In addition to these measures, computerized catalogue terminals were placed near the cross aisles to generate activity and provide for natural surveillance.

As the response was quickly recognized as being necessary and apparent to all parties, the only real debate centered around how best to move 300,000 books. Complicating this matter was the coincident decision to upgrade the area's lighting. This would require the temporary partitioning of sections of the stacks which in turn would require the storage of a large number of books.

Described as a "master stroke of co-ordination", the stacks were realigned at an estimated cost of between \$5,000 to \$10,000 using part-time staff over a four month period. The realignment occurred with only localized disruption to the third floor area of the library.

Assessment

The response achieved its primary objective through the development of an easily monitored area which not only took full advantage of the many previously unexploited casual opportunities for natural surveillance but limited unsupervised access both into and out of the stacks.

In addition, staff noted a number of improvements including:

wider aisles that resulted in improved mobility for people using strollers, scooters, wheelchairs, or staff carts,

improved lighting, signage and book display, particularly on the bottom shelves, and

a modest gain in shelf space.

Statistically, Police occurrences to the library as a whole, dropped 39.5% from a high of 29 in 1995, the year of CPTED audit, to 19 occurrences in 1997, the first full year after the CPTED retrofit. While impressive for a downtown library, the statistical drop understates the improvements to the problem area.

In this regard, there were no new sex offences to the problem area, or the remainder of the library, during 1997. In addition, staff noted that there "hadn't been any incidents" of any description to this area, "for a good, long while".

Anecdotally, staff reported comments such as the library was "easier to read", "felt more secure when working at the back" and "looked like a whole different place". It also resulted in comments that indicated a "greater sense of space" and a "more open" and "dynamic" feel.

Perhaps the best comments came from Margaret Walshe, the Chief Executive Officer of the library. Ms. Walshe stated that the results were "well worth the investment of time and staff". Further, the lessons learned from this experience are now being applied to the design of new branches and representatives from neighbouring library boards have visited the library and were very impressed with the redesign.