

The Turner-Fenton Campus

By: Cst. Tom McKay

Executive Summary

In January 1992, the Peel Regional Police Crime Prevention Services were asked to assist a local high school principal with a “trespass” problem at the Turner Fenton campus. Police responded by conducting a thorough Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) analysis and review of the 2,000 student school. As a result of that review Police realized that the trespass problem was merely symptomatic of a greater crime problem which could be significantly acted upon by a CPTED redesign. With this understanding Police created a 64 page document entitled “A Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Study of the Turner Fenton Secondary School”. That document proposed a comprehensive and successful redesign of the exterior layout of the school which, for the price of a single classroom renovation, all but eliminated the trespass problem while reducing the year of year police occurrences between 85-95% for the past five years.

Scanning

In January 1992, Cst. Tom McKay of Peel Regional Police Crime Prevention Services began a major problem-solving initiative in response to a letter received from Mr. Drew Leverette local high school principal Drew Leverette.

The letter, which principally identified a “trespass” problem, read in part:

“I am requesting in writing, assistance from your bureau to our school. Turner-Fenton Secondary School is a campus high school fast approaching 2,000 students, operating out of two buildings joined by a common parking lot. We have many ways of access onto our property and into our buildings. The size of our population is such, that staff can not know every student. This allows the problem of intruders to escalate. I would like some professional advice on how we can make this location more secure. I am assuming that your department gives local industry advice on parking lot flow and access, building access, employee security etc. We would like to explore some of these concepts with your department to see which are applicable to a school setting.”

Further details about the problem were gathered by Cst. McKay who requested a statistical overview from the divisional crime analyst and arranged for an on-site, preliminary meeting with Mr. Leverette.

Analysis

The meeting with Mr. Leverette revealed the true extent of the trespass problem. On any given day, the school received between 20 - 25 trespassers, some travelling a distance of up to 25 kilometers to be with friends and acquaintances.

While on school property, the trespassers would gather, loiter and frequently engage in criminal activity, including brandishing a handgun during the playing of a basketball game.

This combined with the students' own incidents of congestion, loitering and vandalism, and an ineffective response by school officials (limited to occasional challenges) resulted in the school developing an unsafe reputation.

Cst. McKay undertook a much more thorough analysis, using a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) approach to comprehensively assemble crime stats, collect floor and site plans, make regular observations during different times and periods and conduct frequent user interviews with students, administrators, gym, teaching and maintenance staff. He then organized the information into a matrix style assessment which detailed the major crime environment problems.

This assessment added to the original list of problems presented by stakeholders and revealed a number of design and use deficiencies not mentioned by interviewees, among them:

- a parking lot which physically and psychologically divided the campus into two halves, particularly while cars were parked,
- a parking lot entrance characterized by an irregular border and multiple access points and escape routes,
- an open and undifferentiated classroom and gymnasium area; and
- a lack of effective or well placed signage.

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Other significant problems identified by the assessment included a lack of walkways to safely move people between school buildings, and the complete lack of bus loading facilities to effectively address the parking lot loitering and congestion problems.

Response

This project considered a range of CPTED-style response alternatives, emphasizing the proper design and effective use of the built environment. The main objective was to develop an effective and efficient school environment.

Fundamental to achieving this was the re-orientation of the school's parking lot from an east-west bias to a north-south bias. This simple, yet important step, was critical to permanently braking the wedge effect created by parked cars.

It further established an easy-to-develop grid pattern which:

- provided for the anticipated increase in pedestrian traffic between the soon-to-be amalgamated schools;
- regularly introduced natural surveillance opportunities into the parking lot and between school buildings;
- better defined the parking lot entrance and facilitated the development of a clearly marked transitional zones between semi-public and private space;
- reduced parking lot entry points from 3 to 2 while limiting escape routes by 50%;
- provided for the development of safe, raised concrete walkways and bus loading areas complete with feeder sidewalks; and
- established a fire route by eliminating the parking from in front of the J. A. Turner building.

Other external changes made to improve the functioning of the school included:

- developing a sense of territoriality through a series of signs which effectively communicated campus rules,
- bolstered property rights and reinforced transitions from public to private space; and
- placing speed bumps strategically throughout the driveway areas.

Similar design and use enhancements were achieved in the interior of the school. Once again, the main objective was to develop of an effective and efficient learning environment.

This was most critically needed in the J. A. Turner building, where the trespass, congestion and noise problems common to the undifferentiated classroom and gymnasium corridors was effectively dealt with by construction of strategically placed partitions. The development of the partitions also:

- distinguished these areas from the school's more active hallways;
- facilitated the development of out-of-bounds hallways and territorial feelings; and,
- provided for the continued natural surveillance of problem corridors through the extensive use of safety glass.

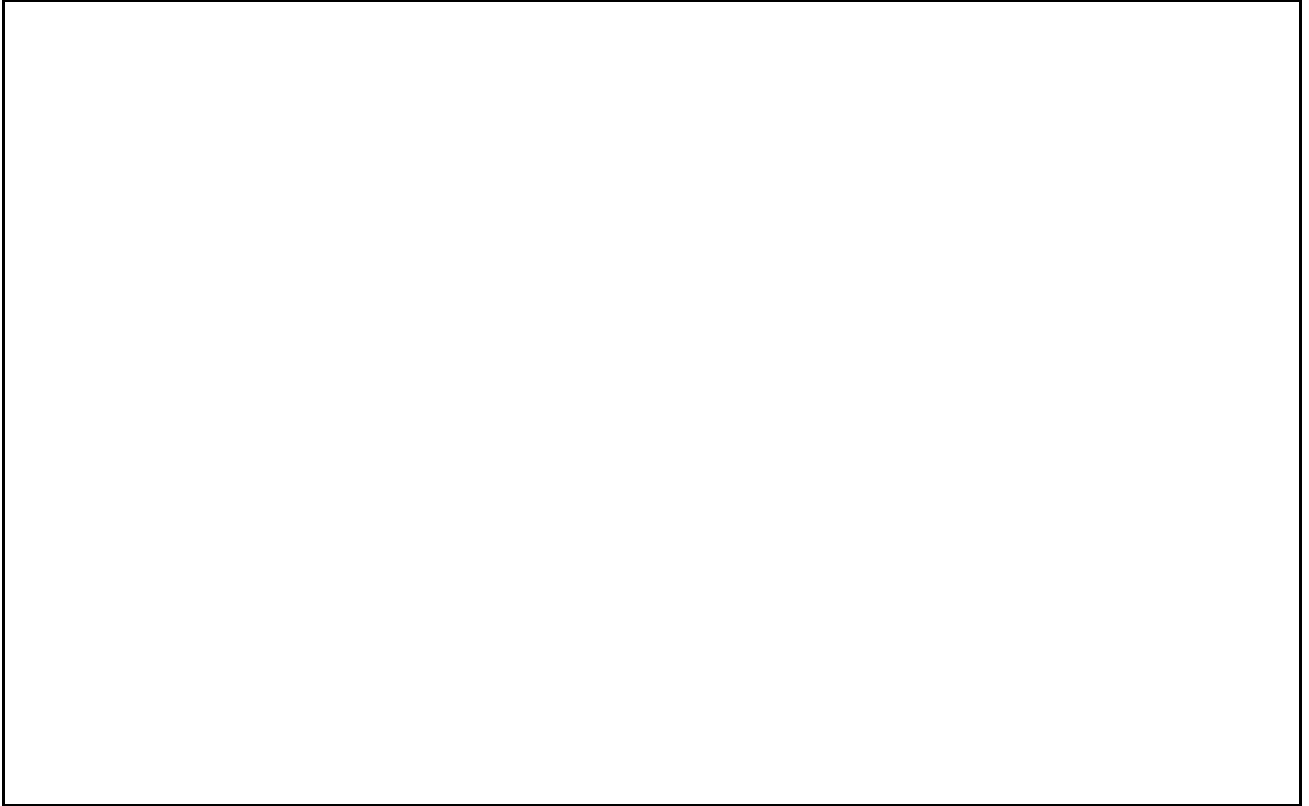
Details of the design plan and earlier assessment were presented in a 64 page CPTED study, complete with 18 illustrated appendices. This "stand alone" document carefully documented the school's crime and use problems, and explained and illustrated the CPTED assessment and design directives.

Using a simple and easy-to-read format, the document provided Mr. Leverette with all the tools he needed to address a Board of Superintendents and convince them of the merits of the plan. The study further served as a working document that the Design and Construction section used to develop a formal site plan and prepare a construction schedule.

With only slight amendments to the plan, reflecting minor landscaping and building code adjustments, construction began in August of 1992. The School Board funded construction costs of \$50,000 (Cdn) and signage costs of \$7,000 (Cdn.) which were equal to the cost of renovating a single classroom. As the plan quickly became a reality, additional use enhancements were now actively considered including the development of a parking permit system and the designation of a visitor's parking area.

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Evaluation



The CPTED response was an unqualified success. In the five calendar years following construction, police occurrences at the 2,000 student high school campus began a steady drop beginning in the second year culminating in a 47% drop five years later.

Equally impressive was anecdotal evidence which frequently spoke to the plan's effectiveness and the accomplishment of its goals. A prime example came from Mr. Leverette who told a group of visiting school officials that the parking lot had been transformed from a "no man's land" into "part of the campus" and the word is out "you don't trespass at Turner Fenton".

Another impressive comment came from a long-serving teacher who told Mr. Leverette "this is the first time in 17 years that I feel like I'm at a new school".

Other comments relayed directly to Cst. McKay came from a graduate student and a summer school principal who respectively claimed that "grades had improved" at the school and that "traffic flow was much better".

Some of the best testimonials came during tours of the school. When a visiting, 45 year old male, school official parked his vehicle outside the visitor's parking area, a 16 yr. old, female student approached him and said "You're a visitor to this school (he didn't have a parking permit). You will have to park in the visitor parking area and report to the main office".

Another time, a news cameraman from a local t.v. station attended the campus to film the arrival of an American Planning Association mobile bus tour. While conducting an interview with Cst. McKay inside the school, the cameraman briefly left his private vehicle in a fire route. Upon his return, the cameraman found a tow truck in the process of removing the illegally parked car.

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These comments and incidents are typical of a properly designed, self-policing environment which has developed strong feelings of ownership. It is fully anticipated that the campus will continue to “work” well into the future and that the feelings of ownership engendered by the design will continue to be exhibited as and when required.

An indication of the plan's long term effectiveness has already been tested with the departure of Mr. Leverette in the fall of 1993. Notwithstanding his departure, the school attained its lowest level of Police occurrences in the following year.

Other significant signs of success include considerable international interest, and a lack of problems and reported displacement after implementation. With many examples of international interest, the most notable examples include:

- a presentation to the American Society for Industrial Security (ASIS) 1994 Profit Centre II seminar in Edmonton, Alberta, culminating in the receipt of a special acknowledgement award;
- a cover story in the April 1996 edition of Security Management magazine;
- an article in the June 1996 edition of Parking Security Report;
- a joint visit, as part of a mobile bus tour, of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) and European Schools of Planning (AESOP) on July 26, 1996, and
- receipt of the Herman Goldstein, Excellence in Problem Solving Award (Individual Category) from the Washington based Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) on November 3, 1996.

A final and very special acknowledgement was received by prominent American Criminologist and CPTED advocate Timothy Crowe who described the project as “one of the best” that he had seen.