

# Building and Site Design for Crime Prevention

## WHAT IS CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN (CPTED)?

CPTED (pronounced “sep-ted”) is an approach to planning and development based on the premise that the design of our environment affects our actions. For example, we may park closer to the lamp post in a parking area for better safety at night. Feeling safe influences where we choose to live, how we travel, and which places we choose to visit.

The quality of life in our neighborhoods, homes, public places, streets, and parks can be improved by decreasing the opportunities for crime to occur through the application of CPTED design principles. The City’s initiative for a Safe, Clean and Attractive Tacoma has been recently added as a component to the City’s Comprehensive Development Plan. The Comprehensive Plan Generalized Land Use Element, Safer By Design policy, explains how this strategy of development:

- helps to create healthy, safe communities through a well-planned project review;
- directly affects our behavior and decreases the opportunity for crime to occur;
- encourages positive social interaction within a safe and comfortable public environment;
- promotes maintenance of buildings, sidewalks, landscaping, and other areas to continue to be attractive and prevent dilapidated and vacated neighborhoods;
- implements strategies like fencing, police, and security personnel;
- and increases our freedom to use our facilities.



## HOW DOES CPTED WORK?

CPTED promotes design strategies in planned environments that encourage safe behavior and reduce the opportunities for crime to occur. There are three inter-related principles that guide basic CPTED strategies: natural access control, natural surveillance, and territoriality. These principles are encouraged to be considered throughout the design phase and construction of a project, however, are not required.

“The proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the fear of crime, and to an improvement in the quality of life.”

-Dr. C. Ray Jeffrey

*Criminologist from Florida State University who introduced Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design as a discipline in 1971*



**Note: This Tip Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations.**

**The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.**

**More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org) (253) 591-5030**

To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice).

TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.

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## CPTED BASIC PRINCIPLES

### Natural Surveillance

Natural surveillance increases visibility. This is the placement of physical features, activities and people in a way that maximizes visibility including limiting landscaping to the 3/7 rule (use plant materials that only grow to 3' in height and use tree types that can be limbed up to 7' and have thinner canopies to reduce shadows). A potential criminal is less likely to attempt a crime if he or she is at risk of being observed. At the same time, we are likely to feel safer when we can see and be seen.

### Natural Access Control

Natural access control guides people entering and leaving a space through the placement of entrances, exits, fences, directional signage landscaping and lighting. Access control can decrease opportunities for criminal activity by denying criminals access to potential targets and creating a perception of risk for would-be offenders.

### Territorial Reinforcement

This feature promotes a sense of ownership or interest in a place. The use of physical attributes that express ownership such as fences, landscaping, celebratory signage, textures, lighting, and pavement designs. Defined property lines and clear distinctions between private and public areas are examples of the application of territoriality. Territoriality can be seen in gateways into a development, a community or neighborhood.

### Activity Support

This element fosters community interaction. We encourage activities in public spaces that are intended for use by residents and other legitimate users discourage criminal acts.

### Maintenance

Maintenance of a sidewalk, building, parking area, landscaped area, etc. deters crime. A well maintained building or community creates a sense of ownership and tends to make someone feel like they will be observed by customers, pedestrians, neighbors or business owners because of obvious care about the area.

To get a complete CPTED assessment by the City of Tacoma, contact 311 or [make a request online](#).

**Disclaimer:** The recommendations listed here are made for the purpose of reducing the likelihood of criminal activity and providing for a safer environment. While no guarantee can be stated or implied, the concepts of CPTED have been proven internationally. The City of Tacoma recommends these measures as a public service, with the understanding that there is no way to predict or prevent all crime risks. Local building and fire/life safety codes must be considered when implementing CPTED strategies.



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