

Communities By Design, a
nonprofit 501c(3) training and education
organization, in cooperation with the
City of Redwood City,
is pleased to present:

The Forum *at Redwood City*

A CONTINUING CONVERSATION ON CITY DESIGN



Can Good Design Reduce Crime and Fear of Crime?

2006-07 SEASON: FORUM #2
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2006
LITTLE FOX THEATER
2209 BROADWAY
REDWOOD CITY
6:00 P.M. - 7:45 P.M.

On November 1, 2006, the City of Redwood City and the nonprofit “Communities By Design” hosted its second presentation of the 2006-2007 Forum season. The presentation was given by urban designer and author, Al Zelinka, AICP, CMSM, Principal of RBF Consulting’s Urban Design Studio in Irvine, CA. Mr. Zelinka spoke about the links between urban design and public safety in his presentation entitled, “Can Good Design Reduce Crime and Fear of Crime?”

Mr. Zelinka is an active proponent for safety awareness and social cooperation for safety through urban design. In Phoenix, he was a key figure in a safe communities program that brought together law enforcement and neighborhood agencies with the City’s planning department in order to implement safer policies and design. During Mr. Zelinka’s work in Phoenix, he discovered that people didn’t frequent the downtown area because of their fear of a crime occurring. Yet studies found that downtown Phoenix was no more crime prone than it’s outlying suburbs.

Crime and Predictability

Mr. Zelinka pointed out that less than half of all crimes are actually reported. The most reliable way to discover actual crime incidences are through phone surveys that allow victims to give more accurate accounts of what occurred and where. Mr. Zelinka’s studies have found that crime is more likely to occur in areas of neglect and in neighborhoods with little variation of activity types. Perpetrators can easily read patterns of neglect and monotonous daily routines, making such neighborhoods easy targets.

By contrast, neighborhoods with a diversity of functions programmed into their design are more difficult for perpetrators to target. The perceived likeliness of being caught and

reported are major factors criminals consider when deciding to commit a crime in a given place. Reducing the existence of predictability for would be criminals through design is a way to make a location safer. Predictability can be decreased (and public safety can be increased) by having a mix of uses in a community, including retail with a variety of operational hours, and/or a mix of residences that have families, students, and retirees home at a broad (and unpredictable) range of hours throughout the day. Twenty-five percent of American parents say they would be less worried about leaving their kids at home alone if there was a neighbor close by who could help in case of emergency.

To reduce likelihood of crime, Mr. Zelinka recommends designing a building so that fifty to seventy-five percent of that building frontage has what he calls “eyes on the street.” This means transparent doors, windows and open porches cover the majority of a building frontage, whether residential or retail. Higher density can be beneficial because it means that there are more eyes on the street, and more people coming and going at any given time.

Crime and Fear

Fear of crime can be almost as damaging to a community as actual crime. Fear, Zelinka finds, is “triggered by conditions of disorder.” Such conditions include graffiti, homelessness, noise and a general air of decay and neglect. When this condition of fear exists, Mr. Zelinka asserts, a perfect habitat for crime is created

The places where we commonly feel safer, and where we *should* feel the safest, are ironically where the most crime occurs. Seventy percent of homicides happen in locations Zelinka dubs “our turf,” meaning our homes, parks, schools, streets/sidewalks. Most alarmingly, the largest portion of homicide happens in or just outside of our homes. The remaining thirty percent occurs where we might expect - in parking lots, bars and vehicles. Case studies from Irving, Texas showed no clear indication that crime occurred more often in dense areas, instead the trend was linked to areas where the population had lower education levels.

Environment and Behavior

Mr. Zelinka stressed that gathering data on crime and having a good understanding of the unique crime climate of your specific community is key to improving safety. Crime is staged at three different categories of “place,” and should be specifically addressed at each level. The most specific level is the crime *location*, meaning a specific address, the second level is crime *place*, such as a school or park, and the broadest level of crime occurrence is the larger *area*, for example, the neighborhood.

Mr. Zelinka recommends looking at the interrelationship between behavior and environment and analyzing how the environment determines, responds, ignores and accommodates that behavior. Mr. Zelinka believes we must go “back to the basics” and design for people at the human scale.

Connecting private and public realms, implementing mixed use developments, and designing for foot traffic are the first steps to making a friendlier link between people and their environment. The neighborhood block is the interface between social and physical realms, and the more personal interaction planners and designers can program into a neighborhood, the safer it will be. Improving the

“The objective is to maximize the presence of built environment attributes that optimize desirable behavior (productive activities) and minimize undesirable behavior (destructive activities).”

-Al Zelinka

visual appearance of a place increases pride of place and enhances time spent in the public realm.

Mr. Zelinka asserts that it is crucial to balance foot and vehicular traffic. Walkable communities encourage a self-policing atmosphere where people help report and prevent crime by becoming involved with the well being of their community. Americans are spending more and more time in the car, which means less time interacting with their families and communities. By designing grades not more than six percent and keeping blocks in the range of 250-500 feet, planners can encourage more people to walk. Mr. Zelinka noted that pedestrian activity increases a sense of community and therefore improves public safety.

SafeScape

Mr. Zelinka shared the following four human factor principles from his book *SafeScape* that people need in order to be safer:

Principle 1 - Information and Orientation: “To feel safe and enhance our safety, we need to know where we are, where we are going and what the rules are.”

Principle 2 - Interaction and Socialization: “To enhance overall public safety, the public realm must provide opportunities for people to interact comfortably and build community.”

Principle 3 - Ownership and Stewardship: “Private property and public space that is well maintained and allows individual expression, contributes to a positive image and a feeling of safety and a sense of community.”

Principle 4 - Seeing and Being Seen: “To feel safe we need to know that others are aware of our presence. Likewise it is important that we are aware of the people and activities going on around us.”

Mr. Zelinka’s additional three Principles are implementation tools for human factors in design and planning:

Principle 5 - Land use and Design: “Land use mixes that are compatible, combined with human-centered design, create environments that are safer for more people.”

Principle 6 - Activity and Programming: “We feel safer in the public realm- and are safer when there is activity around us and that activity is orderly.”

Principle 7 - Management and Maintenance: “Spaces that are maintained for their intended purpose and condition reinforce a feeling of safety and encourage people to use those spaces for productive reasons.”

Mr. Zelinka closed by advising the audience that solutions and crime prevention through design need to be based on what is known to be true locally and what is relevant to the immediate community.