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EDMONTON (CANADA) POLICE SERVICE
CONSTABLE SUE OLSEN

***COMMUNITY PROBLEM SOLVING
INITIATIVE***

***COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:
CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH
ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN***

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This is a report submitted on a problem solving initiative, authored by Cst. Sue Olsen of The Edmonton Police Service. This paper is nominated by Superintendent Boris Yaremko, Officer in Charge of North Division Edmonton Police Service for consideration for the Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem-Solving Award

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INTRODUCTION

Efforts by the Edmonton Police Service over the past few years have set the pace for change. The notion of the "Us" vs "Them" dichotomy is slowly being eroded through the introduction of a concept known as community based policing. Community policing has broadened the scope of policing and raised the communities expectations of their police officers.

Community policing allows constables to play an advocacy role, having them act as agents in communities committed to improving the quality of life in their neighbourhoods. It is this role that fostered the involvement of this author in the Avenue Revitalization Project. The Avenue Revitalization Project (ARP) is a non profit volunteer organization of community and business people formed in November 1992 to co-ordinate revitalization efforts on the 118 Avenue business corridor and surrounding communities.

The ARP area includes five neighbourhoods, Alberta Avenue, Cromdale, Delton, Eastwood and Parkdale. The total population is 18,493 with an unemployment rate for those over 25 years at 13.9%. Of all economic families 35% are considered low income. The area is rich in ethnic diversity and is comprised of a large Aboriginal, Asian, Portuguese and Ukrainian population and to a lesser degree 29 other ethnic groups.

This paper will outline the problem solving initiative undertaken by ARP. It will identify the problem and discuss who was affected by the problem, problem analysis, the collaborative effort, the goal and strategies for problem resolution, and the final achievement.

1) THE PROBLEM

The design of a new shopping center that was being considered for an urban inner city area was identified as being problematic in July, 1993. The developers were CN Realty, a national group who was interested in a land exchange with Grant MacEwan Community College, on the condition they could obtain the appropriate re-zoning necessary to develop a strip mall (known as Cromdale Center). Grant MacEwan needed the land CN owned to expand the college. The law firm Bryan & Company, a well known prestigious corporate office in Edmonton and local architect Don Kassian of Kassian Kennedy Architects were hired by CN Realty to secure their position.

It was the belief of ARP that if the revitalization efforts were going to be successful then the first order of business should be to address actual crime rates and the fear of crime as the neighbourhood was considered a high crime area and not sustainable for small business. The use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design criteria (CPTED) were seen as an appropriate strategy and was supported by both the Avenue Revitalization advocates and the City of Edmonton Safer Cities Task Force.

The problem arose when the design of the Cromdale Center did not meet the criteria of CPTED planning. ARP believed the proposed site development fell short in three areas:

I The design was unsafe in that it failed to meet basic Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design criteria. It was a standard suburban formula placed in an urban inner city environment (See appendix I)

ii The uses outlined in the site specific development control (DCS) districting application did not complement the revitalization efforts. They were auto oriented as opposed to pedestrian oriented. (See appendix I)

Hi The planning and development report did not address the concerns of the community. (See appendix I)

The design created a problem not only for revitalization efforts but for existing businesses. There existed a strong likelihood that criminal or undesirable behaviour conducted in the shopping mall would detract from their economic success. As a result businesses would probably relocate from this high crime area; thus creating a question of economic viability and marketing concerns.

The community impact was clear, they were already dealing with a negative image created through the real and perceived crime rates. They were looking for a pedestrian oriented shopping center that would create legitimate activity thereby reducing the overall undesirable behaviour in the neighbourhood. They believed a poor design would negate any revitalization efforts and only serve to strengthen the notion that the area was not an acceptable place to live or do business. They were also concerned at the lack of attention given to the isolation of their community police station if the proposed design was accepted.

A vulnerability study of this proposed site raised some policing considerations. The design produced nooks and crannies that traditionally attract loiters, drunks and prostitutes. There were few clear sightlines, these would have been further reduced by the proposed introduction of soil landscaping and the planting of coniferous trees. Also at issue was the lighting, and window placement as well as ingress and egress routes. The construction of the center

would separate and isolate the existing community police station from the site. There were no plans to incorporate a pedestrian walkway which would create the perception that the police building was part of the complex.

II) PROBLEM ANALYSIS

In order to develop a strategy we needed to collect, evaluate and analyze demographics, existing land use, districting bylaws, crime analysis of the area, a crime prevention safety audit, Alberta Avenue/Eastwood Redevelopment Plan, Planning and Development's 118 Ave. Revitalization Plan, Mayor's Task Force on Safer Cities report, case studies of existing poorly designed shopping strips, and public meetings. Having collected this information we were able to evaluate and analyze what existed and determine what positive impact this data would have in support of our argument. Due to active participation in community development issues we had no difficulty in obtaining any of this data.

III) THE GOAL AND STRATEGIES OF THE PROBLEM SOLVING EFFORT

The goal of our group was to have the development control districting (DCS) bylaw application amended to consider safe design and business viability.

Our strategy to achieve this was:

i Completing a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design review of the site and proposed drawing, identifying the problems, potential problems and prevention strategy. (See appendix II)

iL Re-designing the proposed conceptual drawing to meet the needs of the community and

crime/safety concerns. (See appendix III)

iii Inviting community members and business owners to participate in public meetings.

iv. Re-writing the DCS Districting Bylaw adding and deleting sections that impacted safe design, uses and pedestrian orientation. (See appendix IV)

v. Preparing submissions for City Council and presenting these at a public hearing. (Includes appendix II, III & IV)

vi Meeting with City Councilors to explain our position.

vii Negotiating with CN Realty, Kassian Kennedy, and Bryan and Company.

IV) PROBLEM RESOLUTION

This project brought together a number of stakeholders with varying ideas on how this problem should be approached. Working with the writer from the Edmonton Police Service and the Avenue Revitalization Project was Mr. Richard McCabe, representing the ARP and Alberta Avenue Community League, other ARP members, Eastwood Community League, City of Edmonton Planning Department, Business Owners, and the Area Four Council which represents many community leagues and agencies. These groups provided the necessary support required to be representative of all community residents and businesses.

From the outset this coalition of community support spearheaded by ARP, wanted to move towards a mutual understanding of community concerns and a resolution with the developers. The group did not want this to be a typical community vs developer adversarial contest, we wanted to promote positive change within the planning process.

Mr. McCabe and I met on numerous occasions with the developers and their lawyers.

Our initial request was to re-orient the largest building on the site. (See appendix V-CRU I)

This was turned down and CN Realty did not offer any further suggestions. Our position was to present council our report and recommendations at a public hearing. We believed that since Council had approved the Safer Cities Task Force recommendation of implementing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design criteria they would at least refer the issue back to the planning administration for further review. This caused some consternation for CN Realty who was in the process of signing tenants to a lease and wanted the project to proceed as soon as possible. Bryan and Company had rallied with certain council members for support and they believed the project would go ahead without objection. (See Appendix VI)

Our group had come together to discuss our options. We spoke with the planning department and they agreed to review an alternative site plan we had designed as well as our CPTED report and re-written DCS. Planning representatives stated that what we were recommending was feasible, it would only be a matter of having CN agree to the changes. Knowing of course CN would not accept the re-orientation of the building and had offered no other options, we presented them with our re-design and DC5. This brought us to 11th hour negotiations. Three hours prior to the public hearing, CN Realty and Bryan & Associates agreed to have our proposed DC5 Bylaw, site design and CPTED criteria accepted.

This meant we had achieved our goal. Having the site designed in a safe manner; would increase

the viability and sustainability of business and provide for an urban design in an urban area. The shopping center would be more pedestrian oriented and include the community police station as part of the complex, and the planning department recognized the need to work with and seriously consider community recommendations.

V) POLICING RESPONSE

The previous model of policing did not allow police members to become so immersed in the communities they work in. It was believed by the police agency that they knew what was best for the community and the people who lived there. The police were re-active and had no mechanism to deal with issues that appeared to be somewhat controversial or political, nor were the average rank and file police members thought to possess the theoretical knowledge to become mentors for their community. In the past the EPS would have dismissed this issue by claiming not to be a stakeholder and not perceiving this as a police role.

Through the new community based policing model the role as a police officer advocate played an integral part in the resolution of this planning problem. The introduction of CPTED as a basis for the community development approach to crime prevention is an accepted strategy by pursued by the EPS.

CONCLUSION

It is this police members belief that community policing is defined by the needs of the community. It is the community interacting with the police and other agencies that identify and determine

strategies to resolve problems. This is demonstrated by involvement in this project. In the community this constable works, the pairing role is clear, there would be no sitting on the sidelines, the police would need to be a true advocate. This planning problem was identified by the community and the writer was to contribute as a partner from a community planning perspective and as a CPTED practitioner. It was refreshing to be part of a community team that affected change to a Bylaw. Although an agreement with CN Realty had been reached, we presented our report to City Council with acknowledgment of our support for the amended DCS based on the accepted recommendations. City Council accepted the changes based on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles, the re-written DC5 Bylaw and re-designed drawing. This was the first time CPTED planning had been put forward and accepted into bylaw by City Council.

The project is slated for construction by the fall of 1994. Once it is complete, the community and police will monitor the crime rates associated to the design in order to determine the success of the model. This effort has demonstrated the ability of the community and developers to operate from "a level playing field" and work towards a mutual understanding and respect.

NOTE: Since this project, the City of Edmonton, through the Safer Cities Initiatives has directed the Planning Department with the assistance of EPS to develop CPTED criteria as guidelines for development officers. The city has also sponsored a Planning Roundtable and invited public participation to discuss changes to the planning process.