



Lancaster  
Community  
Safety  
Coalition

## **North Central Elm Street Neighborhood Safety Audit**

### **Project Area**

On September 27, 2006 representatives of the Elm Street Advisory Council teamed with members of our staff of certified crime prevention specialists to walk the project area and observe nighttime conditions. Subsequent visits by Lancaster Community Safety Coalition staff were conducted during the month of October to observe day and nighttime conditions of the remainder of the Elm Street Area.

The boundary of the Elm Street Area generally follows North Christian, Ross, Lemon, and North Prince Streets. The most prevalent land uses are residential town homes, restaurants, office space, retail businesses, churches, institutions (i.e. YMCA & Stahr Armory) and parking lots/structures.

The James Street Improvement District is an active contributor to crime prevention in the northwest quadrant of the city. CPTED concepts have been used to increase territorial concern and quality of life for residents. The JSID Bike Patrol provides added natural surveillance of public areas.

The Elm Street Facade Improvement Program has improved the aesthetics of the neighborhood and has a positive impact on crime prevention. Improved exterior residential lighting has increased pedestrian safety. The sense of ownership and collaboration among participating property owners has fostered positive territoriality, which is a key CPTED principle. Similar efforts are needed to transform the neighborhood, both physically and socially to form functional neighborhood watch groups.

The high turnover of residents in rental properties creates challenges for active and sustained neighborhood cohesion. The prevalence of graffiti and vandalism demonstrates a need for increased crime prevention measures as well as improved property maintenance. The Elm Street Advisory Council expressed a high level of concern regarding criminal activity, which threatens the quality of life.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

Based upon our site visits and input from the Elm Street Advisory Council, the most pressing crime prevention issues are:

- ✓ Lighting
- ✓ Graffiti
- ✓ Landscaping
- ✓ Entrapment Spots
- ✓ Escape Routes
- ✓ Sidewalks
- ✓ Address Signs
- ✓ Property Maintenance
- ✓ Criminal Activities of Special Concern

The above issues are presented below text by topic together with general objectives and specific recommendations in *italics*.

## **Lighting**

### Objective:

Provide adequate exterior lighting of buildings and areas used by pedestrians. According to the Illumination Engineering Society of North America, the standard minimum lighting level for identifying objects on a walkway is 0.5 foot-candles. Parking lots should have 7 to 10 foot-candles throughout. Doorways should be provided with 5 foot-candles. Perimeters of buildings should have 1 to 2 foot-candles.

Adequate lighting discourages criminal activity because it increases the likelihood of being seen. Additionally, favorable light conditions increase the perceived safety which increases the amount of pedestrian traffic and natural surveillance. The use of porch lights is also effective in the illumination of sidewalks in areas where heavy tree canopies block streetlights.

### Observations & Recommendations:

The vast majority of the sidewalks and alleys in the project area does not have adequate lighting. This is particularly true in areas where mature street trees create a barrier between the streetlights and the sidewalks. Additionally, several streetlights are either inoperable or are near the end of their lifecycle and need to be replaced. This is evident by flickering or the emission of very low light levels. There is also a high percentage of residences that either lacked exterior porch lights or had lights that were not on.

*The following approaches would improve lighting conditions:*

1. *Deploy a residential "lights on" approach, encouraging those with lights to keep them on throughout the night. Incentives such as low energy bulbs could be incorporated into this program.*
2. *Encourage the installation of porch lights through public awareness and grants.*
3. *Pursue the installation of pedestrian scale lighting to illuminate sidewalks and parking spaces.*

4. *Conduct an inventory of the status of streetlights to identify malfunctioning lights and enlist PPL in the maintenance of lights.*
5. *Conduct a systematic inspection of both residential and streetlights to ensure proper maintenance throughout the year. The inspection could take place every quarter of each year or at otherwise agreed-upon intervals.*

## **Graffiti**

### Objective:

Maintain a graffiti-free environment. Graffiti is an indicator of gang activity because it represents “turf”. Similarly, spray painting or other markings that are not gang-related, known as “tagging”, represent signs that properties are not monitored or maintained. The three “R’s” rule should always be followed: Report, Record, and Remove. Police should be involved in the recording of graffiti.

### Observations & Recommendations:

Graffiti was most prevalent in areas with inadequate lighting and low levels of pedestrian activity which creates “natural surveillance” or more law-abiding “eyes on the street”. Graffiti is most problematic along North Market Street and West Ross Street. *The project area would benefit from all efforts to improve the perception that such areas are being monitored. Increased lighting levels would further this goal. Additionally property owners should be made aware of the importance to follow the three “R’s” procedure and promptly remove graffiti. The use of surveillance cameras would also improve the ability to apprehend the perpetrators and would serve as a deterrent.*

## **Landscaping**

### Objective:

Maintain landscaping in a manner that allows exterior lights to reach sidewalks, allows for clear sight lines, and eliminates entrapment points near pedestrian areas. Adjacent to pedestrian walkways and parking lots, landscaping should not exceed a height of three feet within 12 feet of horizontal distance. Tree branches should be trimmed to a minimum height of eight feet above walkways. Tree branches should not be allowed to grow in a manner that envelopes streetlights or otherwise blocks the light from walkways.

### Observations & Recommendations:

Landscaping maintenance is needed throughout the project area to conform to the above standards. *A comprehensive tree survey and trimming program could be initiated to raise the tree canopy above sidewalks. JSID has successfully used this approach in similar neighborhoods. The lighting survey (previously recommended) should identify tree trimming needed to address trees that have overtaken lighting fixtures. Landscaping that does not meet the above standard should be trimmed or removed adjacent to and above sidewalks throughout the project area.*

## **Entrapment Spots**

### Objective:

Eliminate areas where criminals can hide near sidewalks and parking lots.

### Observations & Recommendations:

The survey team identified a significant number of entrapment spots around dumpsters, foot alleys without gates, and entrances to basements. Dumpsters should be fenced with transparent or semi-transparent fencing and locked, whenever feasible. *Individual property owners should be notified of the hazards and informed of remedies such as gates and fences.*

## **Escape Routes**

### Objective:

Minimize the number of escape routes available to criminals.

### Observations & Recommendations:

The most prevalent problem with escape routes in the project area is foot alleys between buildings that are not gated. Such areas not only provide an escape route after a crime, but also are frequently used to gain access to the rear of buildings for the purpose of burglaries. *Education of property owners is needed.*

## **Sidewalks**

### Objective:

Maintain safe and aesthetically pleasing sidewalks that invite pedestrian traffic by individuals of all ages and physical conditions. Trip hazards and heaving sidewalks discourage natural surveillance by those with physical conditions as well as runners.

### Observations & Recommendations:

Unsafe sidewalk conditions were noted by the survey team. *The most significant problems should be addressed in a systematic manner with emphasis placed on one block at a time to improve the block-wide effectiveness of sidewalk improvements.*

## **Address Signs**

### Objective:

To allow prompt response by emergency responders, each property should have an address sign of sufficient size and in clear view from the street.

### Observations & Recommendations:

Properties without address signs were observed and noted during the assessment. *Property owners should be notified.*

## **Property Maintenance**

### Objective:

Properties should be well maintained to avoid fire and safety hazards and to strengthen the sense of ownership or territoriality of neighborhoods. Well maintained properties are a key component of strong communities in which neighbors watch out for one another. Poorly maintained properties inherently provide hiding spots and prevent natural surveillance from adjacent properties and streets. "Small" problems, such as one broken window, typically evolve into bigger problems if left unattended, which is the basic principle of the "broken windows" theory.

### Observations & Recommendations:

The most common maintenance issues include litter, overgrown/ unattended landscaping, and buildings in general disrepair. *The bulk of these issues represent code violations which should be addressed by the city through its systematic inspection program. The Elm Street Advisory Council and JSID should develop a strategy to address the remaining incidents of poor maintenance that do not constitute code violations.*

## **Criminal Activities of Special Concern**

### Objective:

Develop a successful, multi-faceted approach to the community's highest priority crimes.

### Observations & Recommendations:

Based upon the input received from the Elm Street Advisory Council and the Lancaster Bureau of Police, criminal activity of most concern includes suspected drug dealing, drug use, gang activity, vandalism, graffiti, theft from vehicles, burglaries, and robberies. *The JSID and Elm Street Advisory Council should continue and expand existing programs such as facade improvement, bike patrol, and education of residents on effective neighborhood block watch programs. Given the types of crimes that are of concern to the Elm Street Area, the installation and active monitoring of surveillance cameras would aid in the apprehension of criminals and serve as a deterrent to criminal acts.*