

Parks and Plazas Safedesign™ Review & Recommendations

Background

When urban parks and plazas have been identified as needing substantial improvements or rebuilding, the importance of intentionally enhancing both real and perceived safety nearly always makes the list of top project goals. The same concerns also often surface when there are plans to build a completely new park or plaza. Whether the concerns involve attacks, drug use, homeless camping, panhandling, or just negative perceptions of safety, there is a need to address both real and perceived safety beginning at the site selection and program phase of the project.

Unfortunately, many projects leave “security” for the final phases of design and rely heavily on expensive patrol or technology solutions that often have little impact on perceptions or disorder issues like panhandling or homeless “camping” on benches or in alcoves.

This often results in public spaces that continue to be perceived as unsafe – and thus avoided by many users. Alternatively, communities are spending very large sums of scarce public resources to completely rebuild parks and plazas and then actively patrol and maintain them with high levels of staffing. For most places, this is not sustainable or scalable, and therefore has limited long-term impact.

The Safedesign™ Approach

In an era of limited public resources, we offer a more sustainable and affordable approach. Using innovative and proven approaches, we help our clients address real and perceived safety from site selection through program development, design development, and important design and operational details.

Our unique and innovative Safedesign™ approach will include evaluations of the project’s physical design features, land use patterns, proposed program/activities on various parts of the site, marketing and communications efforts, wayfinding systems, any retail mix, and other related attributes that can impact real and perceived safety. Our strategies include ways to maximize territoriality, natural surveillance, informal social interaction, appropriate access control, and strategic communications. In addition, we will help



obtain community feedback on the designs and safety approach, and will make presentations to key groups to help others understand the innovative strategies related to both perceptions and real safety initiatives.

Scope of Work – Typical Tasks

While each assignment is unique and we adjust our approach to address specific circumstances, our work typically occurs in three phases typical to a design project. The following tasks describe how our work often proceeds.

Phase I – early program and design development

- Initial review of market research or user surveys, nearby crime and disorder patterns, any perceptions research, property ownership or leasing patterns, and Schematic Plans and Program Descriptions.
- Conduct day and night site visits of site or site options, review of crime pin maps over last 2 years (if available), take photos and videos of existing conditions
- Attend team kickoff meeting to discuss program, phasing, leasing approach, anticipated electronic security improvements, anticipated parking operations (valet, free, paid)
- Research local, regional, and national grant opportunities that might assist with real and perceived safety for the project.
- Conduct meetings with private security and private development partners in the area
- Evaluate any proposed phasing plans and construction phasing where appropriate
- Evaluate likely customer/user travel paths for each phase
- Attend mid-point project team meeting to share concerns/ideas, get more detailed information
- Provide recommendations regarding various design features and programs, including but not limited to: site layout and land use patterns, program, bathroom locations, parking layout and locations, general landscaping and lighting concepts, general fencing and other access control features, and general signage and wayfinding concepts.
- Meet with staff to review draft recommendations
- Make presentation at a community meeting, including PowerPoint



Phase 2 – 60% design review, including:

- Review of updated site plan specifics, lighting analyses, preliminary building elevations and floor plans, program and operational adjustments, landscape proposals, territoriality features, public realm seating and restrooms, vending cart proposals, window and balcony placements, pavement materials, parking garage design, various pedestrian pathways, and similar features. Review any revised construction staging plans.
- Meet with project team to review and clarify changes, concerns, and preliminary suggestions.
- Meet with staff to review draft recommendations

- Provide written recommendations for further improvements, including any suggested adjustments to ambassadors and other interim programs.
- Make presentation at community meeting, including PowerPoint

Phase 3 – 90% design

- Review all aspects of updated project plans and construction staging. This will include details of lighting, landscaping, building exteriors, parking areas, pedestrian pathways, access control features, public art, parks and plazas, and similar features.
- Review any marketing strategies and materials for safety related messaging. Meet with PR/marketing consultants to discuss concerns and preliminary suggestions.
- Meet with project team to review and clarify changes and review concerns and preliminary suggestions.
- Meet with staff to review draft recommendations
- Provide written recommendations for further improvements/refinements
- Make presentation at formal public hearing where appropriate

Optional services

Depending on the particular project or assignment, we sometimes find a need for additional services, including the following:

- **Assessments of current perceptions** of the district and the project by key target markets. This would include carefully designed and executed surveys and focus groups to provide feedback on important features of the project and travel paths to/from the district. By creating a baseline and easily repeated assessment tools, you and your partners will be able to track progress and make adjustments to maximize perception improvements.
- **Special outreach to homeless service providers and advocates.** Homeless “camping” and panhandling are often big challenges in parks and plazas, and creating effective partnerships with service providers is an important way to resolve highly emotional issues and positional bargaining. Our experience creating such partnerships helps us to approach such situations strategically and achieve consensus more quickly about win-win solutions.
- **Training of key staff and stakeholders.** Because our approach often requires a shift in the way people think about safety, we often find that brief training sessions help improve the conversation in addition to the problem solving among diverse constituents. We offer two- and four-hour training sessions that are introductory in nature and suitable for all stakeholders from crime watch captains to skilled design professionals.
- **Ongoing advisory services.** As the project unfolds and evolves, we can provide objective and timely feedback and guidance about proposed changes, as-built conditions, strategic communications, and new safety issues and concerns.

Ready for sustainable and scalable solutions?

Contact us for a detailed proposal:

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