



CITY OF

PORTLAND, OREGON

OFFICE OF NEIGHBORHOOD INVOLVEMENT

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Organizing and supporting community partnerships to prevent crime and the fear of crime.

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To Humboldt Elementary School,
Portland Public School
Oregon Solutions

From: Crime Prevention Program, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design
(CPTED) Committee:

Celeste Carey
Mary Tompkins
Amanda McMillan, Portland Police Neighborhood Response Team Officer

RE: CPTED evaluation of the Humboldt Elementary School grounds, Humboldt School
Garden, vacant lot adjacent school yard

Location: 4915 N. Gantenbein Ave. Avenue

Date of Evaluation: November 3, 2008

CPTED is Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, and is based upon principles addressing territoriality, access control, surveillance, maintenance and activity support. Applying these principles to physical sites and situations create a safer and healthier environment.

The intent of this CPTED review was to assess the areas for community access to the Humboldt School grounds, and to determine if doing so would compromise the safety and security of the students and staff of the school, and residents in the area.

Marlys Mock, of Portland Public Schools and Kim Travis, of Oregon Solutions contacted Celeste Carey, Crime Prevention Coordinator, for advice on opening up the Humboldt Elementary School grounds to provide green space within the community.

Although there are open areas immediately adjacent to the elementary school, those lots are unimproved, and one is used by Jefferson High School for athletic activities.

The Humboldt neighborhood does not have much green space. Residents and especially area children have understandable and clear need for community accessible sites. Additionally, a new apartment complex, Humboldt Gardens (Housing Authority of Portland) was completed and opened in June 2008 just across the street from the school and proposed sites.

Overview of School Grounds (photos enclosed)

The school is located along a busy arterial (Alberta Street, on the north) and situated in the middle of the block, bounded on the east by Gantenbein Avenue and to the west by Commercial Avenue. Houses, a small vacant lot, a parking lot, portable building and Haight Avenue all converge along the south end of the school lot.

The school grounds are spacious, with grass on the west and north ends, and an asphalt play area containing basketball hoops and an expansive awning. There are trees along the north side of the schools. Where the grounds abut houses and Haight Ave., there is dense vegetation, some in need of trimming.

On the southwest side of the school yard, there are two portable buildings used daily for classes. Students (including the kindergarten students) walk unescorted on the grounds to and from the portables and the main building as part of their daily academic schedule. Doors, including those at the west end of the building, near Commercial Ave., are kept open for the students to access the classrooms and the restrooms. Gates along the fences are kept locked to provide safety for students and staff.

A chain link fence, approximately 12 feet high, surrounds the school yard, but there are three causeways that immediately abut the school yard (see photos and aerial image) that have dense bushes. These causeways are not easily seen from the street, school building or school yard. Natural surveillance and “all eyes on the property” are key CPTED principles. Although the fence does provide a barrier to contain and protect the students, these causeway areas are problematic in that they provide cover for any activity, especially problem or illegal ones.

There are three gates to in the fence allowing entry into the school yard: one on the Commercial Ave. side; one on Haight Ave. and one on the Gantenbein Ave. side. All gates to the fence are only open at 7:30 a.m. until 8:30 a.m. for the opening and then locked until 2:30 p.m. until 3:30 p.m.-at close of the school day. During classes, they are kept locked.

Gates may be unlocked during after-school activities until 8 p.m. One such activity is the GREAT program, supervised by the Portland Police Bureau.

Just north of the school building is the parking lot. Situated between the garden and the main building, the lot runs west from Gantenbein Ave., where it dead-ends; Haight Avenue right angles off the lot and runs into Alberta St. There are three houses on the block, and residents and their visitors park on the street and in the school parking lot.

Overall, the grounds are not situated for the level of visibility that would augment their safety and security. Being on a cul-de-sac and a one-way street, casual observation is limited. The dense vegetation, fences and position near parking lots and alleys limit the amount of foot traffic and visibility. The causeways and blind areas near the school building are problematic as they can conceal large groups of people easily.

Overview of lot and garden grounds

The garden site, located north of the school building, is bounded by Alberta St. (north), Gantenbein Ave (east) and the school driveway lot to the south (see Humboldt School aerial image).

Since the plot is elevated, the area is ideal for a garden, with excellent visibility all around and from the nearby Humboldt Gardens complex. Shrubbery and trees around the perimeter should be either trimmed down two feet (bushes) or limbed up five to six feet (trees).

The south lot (on Haight Ave.) is also ideal for community or school recreational use, with small improvements. Although the adjacent alley is overgrown with vegetation, the area has good visibility from the street, sidewalks, homes and portable. There are two floodlights on the lot, providing sufficient light now; however more would be needed for community activities.

The main concern of the area residents is the low level drug and prostitution activity in the parking lot. Despite being visible from the street and nearby houses, once the after-school programming finishes for the evening, the area becomes more inviting for illicit activities.

Improvements and moving positive activities to the area, with buy-in from the neighbors would increase community green space and displace the negative activities. Although wide (the lot is approximately forty feet wide) a heavy gauge chain would control and limit after-hours use. Additional lighting will support the street lights around the lot.

Crime Issues

The area has a high level of transient activity. While police records indicate a drop in overall criminal activity since 2007, area resident calls to crime prevention report street level drug dealing and prostitution issues, especially in the portable building parking lot on Haight Avenue (just south of the school building). A walking tour of the school, vacant lot and garden areas revealed debris and trash to support these claims: discarded condoms, alcohol containers and drug paraphernalia.

The school buildings are subject to frequent graffiti and other vandalism, such as broken windows. School staff also stated they remove needles and other drug paraphernalia from the play grounds each morning, before start of classes.

Broken glass, alcohol containers and fast food debris is found where Haight Ave. intersects with the school parking lot; two of the houses are frequent party sites for youth and young adults.

Although the residents call regarding street-level crime, there are no active or sustained neighborhood watch efforts in the area. Any community based use should do outreach

to the residents to get safety concerns and input, as well as engage them as part of the overall safety plan.

Recommendations:

School yard

- The fence is very effective in limiting access to students: fencing, along with current gate opening schedule, should remain intact.
- Trim all vegetation along fences.
- Install motion sensitive lighting in causeways, and trim vegetation.
- Suggest school staff check area before, during and after school day. Alert police for signs of “transient camping” in area.
- Install a heavy gauge chain at school parking lot entrance (and exit); lock during evening and weekends.

Garden site

- Trim vegetation along perimeter and at gate.
- Repair fence and gate. Lock gate during evening hours.
- Add low level solar lighting for night visibility.
- Add signage indicating use, hours and emergency information.

South lot and portable building

- Add motion sensitive lighting near portable for after-hours visibility. Lights would only be on when vehicles or people are on the lot after all programming has ended, indicating possible improper use/ illegal activities on the site.
- Consult with Portland Department of Transportation regarding city street right-of-way at Haight Avenue portable. If permitted, install a heavy gauge chain across the front of the lot to prevent after-hours use.
- Add additional lighting around perimeter of the lot, on secured timer for evening use.
- Clear alley vegetation. May need code enforcement visit to determine if adjacent yards have encroached on alley.
- Involve community to insure engagement and “ownership”. Enlist community group as co-sponsor to assist with maintenance and safety.
- Routine checking of city streetlights along perimeter for operability.

These CPTED recommendations were submitted by the Office of Neighborhood Involvement Crime Prevention Program CPTED Committee.

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Amanda McMillan, Officer- Portland Police Neighborhood Response Team

This report compiled and written by Celeste Carey