

West End Neighborhood Task Force Minutes

Date / time 1/18/2022 7:00 PM Location Connections Church & Virtual		
Chair	Howard C Holz	Website
Vice Chair	Gordon Olson	Facebook Group
Secretary/Treasurer	Tina Volek	<u>West End Neighborhood Task Force</u>
		Email
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The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by Chair Howard C. Holz

AGENDA TOPICS

Minutes of 11/16/21: Tina Volek, Presenter.

The West End Neighborhood Task Force (WENTF) minutes previously had been distributed by e-mail. The minutes were accepted by consensus.

The December 2021 meeting was cancelled, so there are no minutes for approval from that session.

Police Report: Sgt. Ryan Kramer, Presenter.

Sgt. Kramer was unable to be present for the session. The monthly report was attached to the agenda for WENTF review.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED): Daniel Brooks, Billings Chamber of Commerce, and Joe Stout, Downtown Billings Alliance, Presenters.

Mr. Brooks said the Chamber's Smart Design. Smart Spaces. program works with businesses to look at their spaces for safety. Police assist from the law enforcement perspective. But the Smart Design. Smart Spaces. program helps to change the behavior of people downtown by making minor changes in the environment. For example, there is a video about building a piano into a staircase to alter the use of an elevator; it is fun, and helps people adapt. With City funding through the Downtown Billings Partnership, businesses have access to matching funds for safety improvements recommended in a security survey.

Colors have long played a role in business activities. Red and yellow on fast-food locations creates a reaction of hunger. Blue, as used by technology companies, creates a sense of security. “Eye level is buy level” for placing the most profitable items for sale.

CPTED began in 1971. It emphasizes natural surveillance, natural access control, territorial reinforcement, maintenance, and lighting.

For example, people sitting out on porches create a natural community surveillance mechanism, Mr. Stout said. Yet some stores are set up so people can’t see in or out of them because of merchandizing or location. So, natural surveillance uses glass in parking stairwells so people can see who is there before they go into the structures. A front desk in a facility like the new Billings Symphony offices downtown lets staff see who is walking in and out. Glass walls in the building also allow employees to see through it, and around the corner of the structure, so there are no surprises. Glass cubicles also allow staff to see what is going on in the building.

Landscaping is kept to three feet high under CPTED, when six feet had been the past rule, he added. Tree canopies are no lower than six feet, combining with the lower shrubs to give clearer vision.

All fast-food restaurants have windows in their back doors to allow people to look out before they let anyone in, or they exit the building. Employees often are concerned about going out to their cars when they leave work if there is no window or peephole to use before they go out, Mr. Brooks said. The other alternative is to install a camera where people can look out.

CPTED also calls for traffic calming measures such as adding parking lanes on Grand Avenue to slow traffic down, he said.

Natural access control passively shows people how to move through a space. It may be a path or rockwork. Celebrating entrances and setting up building fronts to draw the eye can help clients to know where to go, and provide protection, as exemplified by the Scheels store on the West End. Hotels can put up entrance overhangs for the same effect.

Building operators don’t want to diminish natural surveillance by things like allowing signs to go all the way to the ground so people can’t see behind them; they need to keep them higher. Wrought iron fences can be seen through and are hard to get by in areas that need to be closed off from public access. Even a symbolic fence, such as a chain running through pylons, and landscaping could set expectations for where people can walk. The Moss Mansion downtown uses landscaping to guide its visitors. Lighted sidewalks are safer and encourage people to use walking space effectively.

Mr. Brooks showed a treed area that created a space for inappropriate behavior near the Depot downtown. Light was not visible through the trees. They were trimmed, and river rock was laid down in areas to discourage people from sitting or lying down.

The CPTED program also encourages cyber locks so the code can be altered as needed, without the need for expensive rekeying. Business owners also can use auto locks and set times in which people can enter a facility.

Territorial reinforcement shows an area is owned, maintained, and looked after, Mr. Stout said. “Acting like you own it” shows the delineation between public, semi-public and private spaces. Employee-only spaces get rid of the idea that people don’t know what they can do in a space, like dumpster diving.

Murals, especially those done locally, show the property owner cares, and members of the public give buy-in. Public art doesn’t get tagged. The 6th Street underpass, formerly a site for graffiti artists, doesn’t get defaced any more, since a mural was put on it. Taggers think of themselves as artists. When there is no artwork, graffiti should be removed as quickly as possible. The Police Department has a 72-hour cleanup rule.

Behind the Depot, landscape gaps were created so people could see and dissuade use by loiterers.

Concrete bollards are being turned into artwork like pencils, Mr. Brooks said. Lighting also is looked at, with shields to reduce glare and focus on a site. Foot candles for fixtures and where to light are part of CPTED. For example, the Visible Vault behind the Yellowstone Art Museum was in a dark area and used for inappropriate behaviors. Improved lighting got rid of people who wanted to sleep or do inappropriate things there.

When asked, the Smart Design. Smart Spaces. program staff will visit to see what is going on at a particular site. Security sweeps are recommended, and suggestions will be made on what can be done to stop inappropriate behaviors. They try to keep the suggestions affordable, like horseshoes put in downtown areas around sidewalks to make them uncomfortable to sit or sleep and barberry bushes at Wells Fargo. There are resources, including some from NorthWestern Energy. The National Institute on Crime Prevention can help with the evaluation and recommend training for property owners.

They want to spread the information about the resources available through the Chamber and Downtown Billings Alliance. They would be glad to come and make presentations, as well as offering an on-line workshop course.

Other Items

Mr. Holz said there were not enough members for a quorum at that evening’s meeting, which is when the WENTF normally would appoint a nomination committee for officers for the coming year. An email would be sent to members before the next regular meeting, asking them to approve the nominating committee members. The group would then make officer recommendations for a vote at the March meeting.

Also, the Billings City Council is considering whether it should move its meetings to Tuesday evenings, instead of the traditional Monday nights. This would mean that neither Council members who usually came to the WENTF meetings would not be able to attend, nor would the City staff who make frequent presentations on topics of interest. Mr. Holz proposed holding a vote at the February meeting on changing the WENTF by-laws to allow the organization to determine annually on which night to meet in the third week of the month

The meeting was adjourned at 8:09 p.m. The next meeting will be held at 7 p.m. February 15 at the Connections Church, 5554 Grand Ave.