



## Landscape Ontario Podcast

### Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

**Host:** Karina Sinclair

**Guests:** Constable Matt Hunt, Ottawa Police Service

### Transcription

#### INTRO:

Karina: Did you know that, as landscape professionals, you can help design out crime?

Welcome back to another episode of the Landscape Ontario podcast, where we talk to innovators and thought leaders in the landscape and horticulture profession. I'm your host, Karina Sinclair. Today we're going to explore an intriguing concept called Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, or CPTED for short.

Imagine a world where the very design of our neighbourhoods and public spaces serves as a shield against crime. This is the essence of CPTED, a concept that underscores the pivotal role landscape professionals, together with law enforcement, have in shaping secure and resilient environments.

The CPTED movement was introduced back in the 1960s, and the general idea is to create urban designs that draw people into public spaces to be the "eyes on the street." The hope is that when more people get out and engage in their neighbourhoods in a positive way, it fosters a sense of community pride and informally suppresses crime.

There are four initial principles to this concept. Territorial control, natural surveillance, image and milieu, and access control. All of these principles can be addressed at least in part by thoughtful landscaping designs

In today's episode, I'm honored to be joined by Constable Matthew Hunt, the CPTED coordinator for the Ottawa Police Service. He has 24 years of experience on the force with stints in various units, including patrol, traffic enforcement, schools and community policing. For the

past seven years, Constable Hunt has led one of the few standalone CPTED units in Canada and has developed a keen eye for how thoughtful landscaping choices can foster safer neighbourhoods and alleviate the fear of crime.

Together, we'll unravel the intricate relationship between landscape design and crime prevention, exploring the principles of CPTED and uncovering practical strategies for landscape and horticulture professionals, like you, to become true guardians of our communities.

## **Music transition**

### **INTERVIEW:**

Karina: Thanks so much for joining us on the podcast here, Constable. And I'm so glad that you were able to take some time from your busy day to join us on the podcast.

Cst. Hunt: No problem.

Karina: Let's dive right in. Is it really possible to design out crime, and if so, what kinds of crime?

Cst. Hunt: You can't design out crime completely. There's really no way to do that. But it is possible to do a few things to try to alleviate some of the crime that might be happening. For instance, break and enters to residences. If you have a good landscape plan in that you have open sightlines, good pride of ownership for your property and you maintain what I call "a three-foot six-foot rule" where you make sure that bushes and shrubs and stuff don't exceed three feet in height and you trim up trees.

So a good landscape plan and obviously good maintenance of property in regards to a well-kept space generally breeds positive activity on the property. So there are a few things that, you know, landscapers can do to alleviate some of the crimes. And like I said, it's break and enters, it's theft into vehicles or theft of vehicles, which is a very popular crime right now. And it's just keeping the sightlines open with good landscaping practices.

Karina: Tell me more about your role as the CPTED co-ordinator for the Ottawa Police Service. What does that involve?

Cst. Hunt: So the Ottawa Police is one of the only standalone CPTED units in Canada. There are a few other agencies that have them. Everyone's using CPTED but we have our own unit and that's comprised of myself and a sergeant who's in charge of crime prevention.

Now, what I do in my role, there's a few different things. I teach two courses to other members of the service and also some partnering agencies. The first one is home inspections. So your home gets broken into and at the end of the report, you're asked whether you would like a home inspection where an officer, a civilian within the service, comes to your house and looks at safety and security with your personal home, things like lighting, you know, sightlines, doors and window locks. We touch on the garage, if that's applicable. Locking valuables, safes in your house, alarm systems, video surveillance. Some people are moving that way towards video or doorbell cameras in their personal homes. So we'll discuss a bunch of different options and we provide a detailed report on our findings with regards to your personal residence. So I teach a course that teaches officers and civilians how to do that.

And as well, I teach another course that's CPTED level one. So that's where you go out and do a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design audit of a specific location. So it might be a religious institution, it might be a park, a school, a retail store, a condo building, any of these spaces. And we'll go and again provide recommendations as to how to keep the space safer.

It's usually in a reactive mode. Occasionally people call for a proactive look at their residence, but usually usually in response to something negative that's happened, whether it be a break in or a mischief, some damage to property or theft, that sort of thing. So I teach those two courses and obviously do those two things: home inspections and CPTED audits.

And another thing that I look at which I really enjoy is the site plan review. So any new build throughout the city of Ottawa has a site plan attached to it and the engineers seek feedback from different agencies. So for me it's from a safety and security perspective. It's a new build happening in the city and I'll look at it through my lens and provide feedback to the site planner and to the engineers before the thing's actually built. Whatever it is, it might be a new school, it might be a condo, it might be a new park, and I can provide some feedback before it's actually built.

And then I can look later on, once it is built and see if any of my suggestions were taken into account. So that's kind of a really neat aspect to the job. Most of what I do is reactive after the fact and you have a building or a space and you have to find things to improve with it. But in this case, it's before a build is made. And you know, a lot of these engineers and site planners have a CPTED background as well. So they're looking at it from that lens even before construction, which is really nice.

Karina: That's really interesting to have that chance before shovels even dig into the ground to set up some ideas of what's going to keep this place safer, because it's a lot harder to go back in and retrofit some of these landscape elements or change hardscape or pathways or retaining walls or whatever it might be that prevent you from having that line of sight. And so to have a chance to get in there really early is key.

Cst. Hunt: Absolutely. Yeah. It's it's a very valuable part of of my job and it's a very enjoyable one as well because you you find out about the new spaces that are that are being built or the new properties that are being built all over the city, which is really interesting and you're able to provide some feedback, which I hope is valuable to them.

Karina: Now, what happens after a site audit? How do you know if your design suggestions are working to help reduce crime in those areas?

Cst. Hunt: So at the end of an audit, like I said before, I provide a detailed report to the owner or the property manager or whoever requested the audit. So what I'll do is I'll circle back and usually about six months, I'll give them some time to look at my recommendations, discuss — a lot of it is financial and I get that, but I expect and I say this when I go do an audit, I do expect them to to take my suggestions into account. I know that they won't necessarily be able to do everything that I hope, but I hope that they've at least managed to look at a few things and maybe make some of the improvements that were suggested.

So I'll circle back in six months, usually for a visit, an in-person visit, and I'll find out how things are going, what has been done. So if there were five recommendations, how many have we done? One, two, three? Anything is better than nothing, as far as I'm concerned. So hopefully they've done a few. And then, you know, we can talk about have things improved on site? How do your employees feel if it's a store? How is a park being used? Is it being used more for its

purpose? Have there been any issues? I can also look at police involvement. So whether police have been called there at all since my audit, so I can have some idea going in whether we've been called for service, not to say that things haven't gone on in the property and maybe have gone unreported, but at least I can look at what's been reported on our end.

And the goal for me is twofold. The goal is to make people feel safer and to make for a safer environment in their space and to alleviate calls for service so that police and other emergency personnel can concentrate on other areas of the city rather than this specific one that I'm doing the audit for. So that's kind of the purpose and hopefully things have improved.

If it hasn't or if new issues arise, then we simply revisit the audit and we revisit the site and do a secondary CPTED audit and hopefully more recommendations come from that and hopefully they're helpful.

Karina: One of the principles of CPTED is to create spaces that draw people together, to engage them within their community. And I think that's something you share with landscapers and landscape architects who create these public green spaces. From your experience, can you describe how you've seen this done well, where residents felt empowered to take back a space that maybe had had some criminal element in it before?

Cst. Hunt: So prior to my role as a CPTED coordinator for the Ottawa Police, I was a community police officer and in my area was a park called Dundonald Park in Ottawa. There were lots of issues, lots of crime, drug use, alcohol use, assaults, sexual assaults, you know, just a lot of disorder, a lot of social disorder within the park. And residents in the neighbourhood were fed up and also were scared about the issues of the park. So beautiful, beautiful park in Ottawa in a really nice location, just not being used very well.

So what we did is we set up a working group with some community members and the community association, some of the business improvement areas as well. And we met every couple of months and we were discussing ways as to how to take the park back in a way. How we could beautify the park, how we could bring people to the park.

And we came up with a lot of ideas as a group. We talked about things like community gardens, bringing people to look after a beautiful garden in the park and having the community kind of

take ownership of that garden. And obviously you're bringing desirable activity to the park to care for this garden in the warmer months, so that was a positive impact as well. They brought some tai chi and yoga classes to the park to get some of the community out using the space in a positive way.

The reason why we look at that is because if we're bringing all this positive activity to the park, my theory is that some of the negative activity will go away because the park is being so well used.

As well, we looked at things like extra police patrols just to hopefully take care of some of the criminal aspects that were in the park. We looked at activity generators, so we looked at redesigning areas of the park to better serve the people in the park so that we weren't having conflicting activities close together.

The other thing they did was just an absolute regular park cleanup. So we had extra garbage cans and recyclable boxes into the park and there was a regular community clean up. They also painted all the benches bright and really nice colours and with designs and stuff that were done by some of the local youth and also some of local community members. And so they took ownership of their park and they took the space back.

And there were a lot of positive things that came out of that. Now it's still a work in progress. There are still issues, no doubt. But I think some of the issues have been alleviated based on the good work of a community group that, you know, wanted to bring back the park in its original form. And you know, a lot of success came of it. And a lot of residents were very happy.

Karina: You mentioned activity generators. That's a term I've not heard before. Can you explore that a little bit more? Because it sounds like something landscape designers and greenspace designers could be thinking about in the early stages of their plans.

Cst. Hunt: Yeah, so there's positive activity generators and there's negative ones. And it's a very important tool in crime prevention that we try different uses in a park. For instance, you know, if you have a basketball court with teenagers and potentially some music and some older behaviour right beside a small play structure where little kids and their parents are, that's a conflicting activity.

So what we try to suggest is, they don't have to be miles apart, but try to separate different areas. So the splash pad and the little play structure for the smaller kids and then in another area of the park, maybe that's where you put in the basketball court or the skate park, different things like that for some of the older, so that they can both enjoy the park and the park's getting lots of use, but we're not conflicting activities.

As well, there are different negative activities or negative aspects, like a parking garage brings a lot of negativity. So what we look at is one parking garage decided they were going to have a car wash in the parking garage so people could pull in and have their car washed, so the residents could wash their car. So they're bringing some more positive generators to a spot where people try to break in.

They follow a car in or sneak in after a car's left, and now they have access to the garage and potentially access to the building so they can break into cars and such. But now we're bringing some positive activity to that area so that more people are using the space. And it would be a lot more noticeable if there was some negative activity in that space and it could be dealt with.

Karina: That's quite the push and pull of negative and positive. I guess there could be the tendency that if a negative element moves in, then people would be afraid to use that space. But it really is so important that the positive element keeps pushing back and doesn't allow those shadowy spaces to form for that undesirable activity.

But, you know, we know that people are not predictable all the time. They don't always behave the way we expect or use spaces for the intended purposes. Do you have any examples of how design elements in a public space created issues and how the city addressed it?

Cst. Hunt: So yes, we have a very recent one here in Ottawa that I dealt with and it was hockey pucks. So hockey is Canada's sport, as we know, and the idea was that they were going to bring in some very large hockey pucks that kind of look like benches, but they're in the shape of a hockey puck and they scattered them all over the Byward Market so that people could stop and have a coffee, take a rest, sit on them, enjoy the weather if it's nice.

And they were out front of different establishments. So the idea was you go into your establishment and you grab a coffee and a muffin and then you have a place to sit and eat your snack. And it's in line with the hockey theme. And over the winter, it looked really sharp. However, they weren't being used for the intended purpose, so unfortunately, they were being used for drug use, aggressive panhandling. People are sleeping on them, people are defecating on them.

And the businesses were really upset because their intended audience was not having a chance to even use that space. And actually people were scared to go into the businesses because to do so they had to pass this activity that was happening on the hockey pucks.

So rather than get rid of them altogether because, you know, they were a significant expense and they are actually very, very nice to look at, what we decided was to relocate them to a better area.

We have a lot of outdoor hockey rinks in Ottawa. Wasn't the best winter for it this winter, but we also have a lot of refrigerated rinks as well. So we relocated these pucks to those rinks as a spot where people could sit and put on their skates or sit and watch their kids skate or take a break from their own skating and keeping in line with the hockey theme and the Canada sport theme. It was just a natural fit.

So it's worked out really well in that the pucks are still being used, but they're being used more for their intended purposes. And I think people are really enjoying those sitting areas, but they're not having the same effect they did in the Byward Market where they're being used for undesirable purposes.

Karina: And has anything replaced them? Like, how else could the Byward Market help invite people to come and buy that coffee and muffin and enjoy the sunshine while sitting outside a business? Have they been able to modify that space so that worked out better?

Cst. Hunt: No, not really. At this point, they do have some benches and some sitting areas, but unfortunately right now any time these spaces are available, they tend to be used undesirably. So we're really working at finding a way to keep the beautification of the Byward Market, but at the same time, things like this aren't being used as they were intended.



So this is the tricky part that they're having right now or that we're having with that space. But it's a work in progress at this point.

Karina: Now let's talk a little bit more about the landscaping element here. What are some easy wins for landscapers who want to help with the CPTED principles? What should they be thinking about when they design or maintain an outdoor space?

Cst. Hunt: Pride of ownership, like we talked about before, is a very key aspect to crime prevention. Well-maintained spaces generally don't breed as much negative activity. The "three-foot, six-foot rule" is an easy win, keeping shrubs down to three feet and or trimming up the trees to six feet to basically take away hiding places and bring about sightlines. It's all about the sightlines.

Transition zones are huge. So trying to differentiate between public space and private space — landscaping can do this very well with bushes that lead someone to the entryway, or the "celebrated entrance," as I call it, to a structure, rather than being able to cut across the grass. It really differentiates if you're on the other side of the hedge or the bush, that's private space now, that's semi-private and turning into private space. It's not public space anymore. So clear transition zones is key. Fencing also is good for that to sort of differentiate between the spaces.

Hostile plants. So what we look at there is that a lot of the break-ins that occur to people's residences tend to come through the back way because it's less visible. So if you have a fence in the back and people are climbing your fence and accessing your property, one of the ideas that we came up with is to plant some hostile plants, so some rose bushes or something that still look really nice, but they're not conducive for somebody jumping the fence and landing in them. So as long as they're well-maintained and they're on your property, you can plant what you like on your property. But it sort of would prevent or at least discourage people from unlawfully attending your property.

No tall shrubs. So in front of windows, we don't want windows blocked out. We don't want doors blocked out, we don't want cars hidden. We want the sightlines to be open because those are all points of access to people's residences or to condos. So that's, you know, very, very

important to keep foliage well-maintained during the summer months, especially when they can grow a little bit out of control at times. So keeping a good landscape plan, we call it.

The other thing is community gardens, bringing people to the spaces. So we want people to come take ownership of spaces. Murals are really good for this as well. Looking after or bringing a mural into an area which might be high graffiti.

As well, in the parks, I like lots of seating for parents to be able to watch their kids because that will discourage some of the negative activity. But sometimes these sitting areas or these picnic tables get moved into other areas of the parks that people can congregate. And that's when the drug use and the alcohol abuse and all that kind of stuff happens. So we may have to anchor or secure these things to trees or to the ground so that they don't move in their spaces.

Lighting is also very, very key that it's not blocked out from foliage, that it's working well with any video surveillance in the area, but it's all about clear sightlines and also the clear transition zone so that it's very, very clear to people what is public space and what is private.

Karina: That's a whole lot of great advice. And I think a lot of it makes sense. It might almost seem common sense, but I think some of those are forgotten. And I especially love the idea about the hostile plants being beautiful, but not a soft place to land.

Now, all that said, I mean, professional landscapers are capable of creating these gorgeous spaces, but not all parts of town can afford this. And it's even possible that by adding landscaping and beautification to disadvantaged areas can create gentrification and displacement of those long-term residents who want to do well in those spaces but end up getting pushed out because of increased property values and things. How can CPTED help balance these challenges of beautifying these neighbourhoods, reducing crime and helping people stay in those neighbourhoods that they can afford?

Cst. Hunt: The hope is that CPTED's going to help alleviate some of the calls for service with the police and also make people feel safer to use their space the way it was intended. So for me, it's a lot of community involvement. So we want to get the community involved. So I want to get them involved even in the CPTED audit. I want to hear their points of view as to what they're

living in because they're the ones living there, not me. And what their fears are and what the vulnerable areas are and we're going to concentrate on those areas.

I always say, "I need you to meet me halfway. I need you to report when you see suspicious activity or if a break in occurs or if your space was vandalized."

We want those reports and we want an accurate view of what's going on so that we can get extra police patrols there. As well, I want them involved in the community. So that's where the gardens, the activities, the various projects in the community, the youth involvement is key.

The mural program that we have here in Ottawa as well, just, you know, community clean up days which happen all over the city. They're very, very important because the community's taking ownership of their space and it's their space. And hopefully that will get some of the negative activity out of their area.

So it comes down for me to pride of ownership, community involvement, and the police and the community working together to try to keep the space as safe as possible and, you know, encouraging people to make reports and to call out this negative activity.

We're not suggesting they need to get involved in it, but if they could make a police report or alert their community police officer or myself as to what's going on so we have a good, accurate view of what's going on in their community, and then we can start to work at making sure that, people know that it's their community and that they're not going to stand for the behaviour in that space.

A lot of it is reactive, but some of it can be proactive as well. There's certain things we talked about earlier that we can do with the good landscape plan, with some traffic calming measures, some signage, some easy wins from a CPTED perspective that can hopefully make their space safer.

Karina: You just touched on a few more things that demonstrate that this is a really big topic. There's a whole lot to know about it. Do you have any resources or books that could help landscape designers learn more about CPTED principles?

Cst. Hunt: So when I started in this position, I didn't really get a lot of time with my predecessor. So what was suggested is that I do some reading. So there's four books that I have on my desk that I found very, very valuable and effective for me.

The first one is called 21st Century Security and CPTED. It's by Randall Atlas. The second one was Crime Prevention through Environmental Design, the second edition by Timothy Crowe. Both very valuable books, both a lot of information, good reads.

The third one was The Complete Guide to Physical Security, Dr. Paul Baker and the fourth one was the Death and Life of Great American Cities by Jane Jacobs.

So I have all four of these books. I've read all four of them. They were very, very helpful in learning as I go as to, you know, different ideas from a CPTED lens, different suggestions that you can make with spaces and just the founding principles. And it was very good for teaching these courses as well, because a lot of the material from my slides I was able to obtain from all of these four books.

Karina: What a great set of resources. That last one by Jane Jacobs, she's actually the one that might have coined those early phrases of environmental design. And the fact that you're teaching these courses, I think that's a great reminder for Landscape Ontario members that when they see this kind of workshop come up in the offerings to jump on the chance to learn more about it, because that's how I got to know about you, was that you delivered a workshop to the Ottawa chapter back in November 2023.

Thank you for sharing all of your thoughts today. Certainly lots to consider and think about and to explore more how landscapes have a role in creating safer welcoming spaces. So thanks again for joining us today, Constable Hunt.

Cst. Hunt: No problem. Have a nice day.

Karina: You too.

## **Music transition**

## **EXTRO:**

Karina: So there you have it. Yet ANOTHER way in which landscapers can make the world a better place. I think my favourite takeaway from my conversation with Constable Hunt was hearing about the communities that took back their green spaces by caring for gardens and planning activities that got more people outside. I think about all the good work being done by landscapers across the country to beautify forgotten or neglected neighbourhood spaces. If this is something you're interested in, there are lots of opportunities to make a difference. Check in with your local Landscape Ontario chapter, or the Green Cities Foundation, or Communities in Bloom to see where you can lend a hand.

And for your reference, we have a full transcription and relevant links to today's interview, including Constable Hunt's book recommendations, on this episode's web page at [landscapeontario.com/podcast](https://landscapeontario.com/podcast).

I'm so glad you tuned in today here on the Landscape Ontario podcast. I talk to all kinds of innovative and knowledgeable landscape professionals. So if you have a story idea or want to recommend a guest, let me know. And don't forget to subscribe to catch new episodes for inspiration every month.

## **Resources relevant to this episode**

[Design safe surroundings - Crime Prevention Ottawa](#)

[CPTED Canada](#)

[The International CPTED Association \(ICA\) - North America](#)

[Green Cities Foundation](#)

[Communities in Bloom](#)

## **CPTED Books recommended by Cst. Matt Hunt**

[21st Century Security And Cpted: Designing For Critical Infrastructure Protection And Crime Prevention by Randall I. Atlas](#)

[Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design by Timothy Crowe](#)

[The Complete Guide To Physical Security by Paul R. Baker, Daniel J. Benny](#)

[The Death And Life Of Great American Cities: 50th Anniversary Edition by Jane Jacobs](#)