



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Hall and City Councilmembers

FROM: Jessica Simulcik Smith, City Clerk

DATE: February 27, 2018

RE: Documents received at 2/26/18 Council Meeting

CC: Debbie Tarry, City Manager
John Norris, Assistant City Manager

Attached hereto are documents received from the public at your February 26, 2018 City Council Meeting.

- 1) Crime and Public Safety information, submitted by Lance Young.

Crime & Public Safety

There are conflicting public attitudes about city trees and vegetation. On one hand, experiences in natural settings are believed to promote healing and renewal. Yet in urban settings the presence of vegetation is often implicated as a screen for criminal activity. This briefing summarizes the research findings on the relationship between urban vegetation and crimes, aggressive behavior, and safety. The science findings are not conclusive and may even seem inconsistent or conflicting, yet certain patterns and relationships appear across several studies.

Fast Facts

- There are, on average, about 3,800 crime victims per 100,000 population in the U.S. each year.¹
- Among minor crimes, there is less graffiti, vandalism, and littering in outdoor spaces with natural landscapes than in comparable plant-less spaces.⁴
- Public housing residents with nearby trees and natural landscapes reported 25% fewer acts of domestic aggression and violence.⁵
- Public housing buildings with greater amounts of vegetation had 52% fewer total crimes, 48% fewer property crimes, and 56% fewer violent crimes than buildings with low amounts of vegetation.²
- Studies of residential neighborhoods found that property crimes were less frequent when there were trees in the right-of-way, and more abundant vegetation around a house.^{6,7}
- In a study of community policing innovations, there was a 20% overall decrease in calls to police from the parts of town that received location-specific treatments. Cleaning up vacant lots was one of the most effective treatment strategies.¹²
- Vegetation can be managed to create a reassuring environment, reduce fear, and increase citizen surveillance and defensible space. Principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) suggest how to achieve safer places.

Contents:

> City Green & Crime > Crime Facts * Minor Crimes * Aggression and Violence * Serious Crimes * Community Policing * More Studies > Fear Factor * Views and Visibility * Manage for Crime Prevention > Being Mindful * Defensible Space and Territoriality * Surveillance * Community Cohesion * Mental Health > Conclusions > References

cite: Wolf, K.L. 2010. *Crime and Fear - A Literature Review*. In: *Green Cities: Good Health* (www.greenhealth.washington.edu). College of the Environment, University of Washington.

City Green & Crime



street trees can be pruned for greater visibility on neighborhood streets

- Social Strengths
- Local Economics
- Place Attachment & Meaning
- Crime & Public Safety
- Safe Streets
- Active Living
- Reduced Risk
- Stress, Wellness & Physiology
- Healing & Therapy
- Mental Health & Function
- Work & Learning
- Culture & Equity
- Life & Gender

The first section of this summary reports studies that tested the relationships of vegetation and crime in built environments. Crime behaviors can be influenced by social situations; the latter sections describe how nature affects the psychology of crime.

Just the Facts, Please

Crime is typically reported as both a quantity and the relative frequency of incidents. For example, law enforcement agencies reported 11.25 million crimes across the U.S. in 2007, of which 12.5% were violent crimes, and 87% were property crimes.¹ The number of crime victims averaged 3,730 for every 100,000 inhabitants. Nationally, crime rates have dropped since 1990, but the number of crimes remains high, and rates vary widely across states and cities.

Careful record keeping helps us to understand the relative public safety of areas by location and across time. But such reports do not address the causes and influences behind crime and violence. Law enforcement officials often have strong impressions on the negative influences of urban vegetation, seen to support criminal activity. Recent research has tested such claims more carefully. Below are examples.



large trees are uplimbed for greater visibility in a public park

Minor Crimes

Pilot studies have suggested a relationship between lack of vegetation and rates of "incivilities" or minor crimes.² A survey of 31 urban sites in a California community found that 90% of the incidents of vandalism or graffiti occurred in areas without plantings compared to 10% in landscaped areas.³ Within Chicago public housing units during a reporting period, 90 residents reported less graffiti, vandalism, and littering in outdoor spaces containing trees and grass than in comparable, more barren spaces. Rates of social disruption and incivilities, such as the presence of noisy individuals, loitering strangers, and illegal activity, were also lower in planted areas.⁴

Aggression and Violence

The presence of nearby nature may positively influence social interactions and lessen aggressive and violent behavior. Comparing similar buildings (within Chicago public housing), 145 women were asked to recall aggressive and violent behaviors within their household.⁵ Those who had trees and grass cover outside their apartments reported significantly less aggression against their partners than did those living in unlandscaped areas. Does this effect extend to acts of violence? The team found that rates of reported violence (mild and severe, during the year and across a lifetime) were significantly lower in the green areas than in the barren ones. Reductions in aggression and violence were 25% or more (Table 1). The scientists in this study noted that future research should examine the effects of natural settings on aggression by men and specific acts of violence (e.g., road rage and gang violence).



surveillance, by cameras and resider can be aided with tree pruning

Table 1: Aggression behaviors and nearby nature, green setting vs. barren setting

Reporting Period	Behavior	
	Overall Aggression	Violence
During the past year	27% less (.76/1.04)*	33% less (.49/.73)*
Over the lifetime	28% (.32/.44)	25% less (.24/.32)

* statistically significant

Serious Crimes

What about more serious crimes? Not relying on resident surveys, a science team collected two years of police data on property and violent crimes within public housing communities of Inner-city Chicago.² Residential buildings were architecturally similar, but the greener a building's surroundings, the fewer total crimes occurred. Comparing buildings with different levels of vegetation, those with high levels of vegetation recorded 52% fewer total crimes, 48% fewer property crimes, and 56% fewer violent