



INSPIRED LEADERS SHAPING CITIES

Introduction

Clean and safe has long played a central role in place management, but public safety has taken on increasing importance amidst the protracted return to work, increases in homelessness, and efforts to square law-enforcement practices with demands for social justice.

For urban place management organizations (UPMOs), how a district's users perceive public safety defines the reality. Crimes of both violence and property have fallen substantially from their levels two decades ago in both the U.S. and Canada, according to both FBI and Bureau of Justice Statistics data in the U.S. and Statistics Canada.^{1,2} Despite this, perceptions of un-safety persist. Analysis by a pair of economists has validated this perception during the pandemic, suggesting that diminished downtown populations made it more likely for individuals to be victims of crime.³ The Pew Research Center has shown that sensationalized media coverage and other anecdotal evidence can strongly influence individual perceptions of crime.⁴ Disorderly and anti-social behaviors also become much more visible in empty spaces, and with fewer "eyes on the street" these behaviors become more likely. However, a Princeton study found that individuals are open to changing their opinion on crime when given information by an authoritative source,⁵ and UPMOs have served as a trusted source, particularly during the pandemic.⁶

Perception and reality also weave together around the issue of increased numbers of people experiencing homelessness. A March 2022 survey of all IDA members in the U.S. identified addressing homelessness as the number-one priority for our membership. The challenges remain, particularly as a distinction grows between

those who are unhoused and the "unhousable," people behaving extremely on the street and resisting services.

Finally, efforts to address public safety in downtowns and urban districts have grown thornier in the wake of debates about which crimes police should focus on and the tactics they use. The murder of George Floyd in 2020 produced significant pressure to rethink interactions between police and people of color, which had led to increased controversy about enforcing quality-of-life violations. Police staffing shortages have compounded these complex conversations. The ratio of full-time sworn officers per 1,000 U.S. residents fell by more than 10% between 1997 and 2016 according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics⁷, a trend that appears to have accelerated in recent years. A Police Executive Research Forum survey found that police departments on average had 1.5% fewer full-time, sworn officers in April 2021 than they had a year before. The Forum attributed the decrease to slower hiring and increased resignations and retirements.⁸

This report brief shows how UPMOs have responded to these challenges. IDA conducted interviews with dozens of members and in March 2022 held a roundtable with more than 30 participants to identify trends and approaches to public safety. Based on these discussions, this brief examines the varied approaches that UPMOs employ to promote public safety. It seeks to offer inspiration and solidarity for others who face similar challenges. One note: homelessness and (perceptions of) public safety are closely related, but this brief focuses on general public safety strategies. IDA will publish a Top Issues Council brief on Evolving Homeless Services later in 2022.

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Harnessing the Power of Data

UPMOs serve as public-private partnerships that bridge different sectors and bring together disparate stakeholders to address critical issues and help their districts thrive. As trusted sources, they can combine information and their relationships in the public and private sectors to pilot new initiatives quickly, designing them to improve their communities. This model also applies to public safety. Not law enforcement agencies, UPMOs are well positioned to make an impact by serving as a bridge between local government and business/property owners on multiple fronts.

Fostering a Sense Of Security in the District

Deploy High-Visibility Ambassador/Hospitality Teams

Deploying ambassador/clean and safe staff represents perhaps the most visible strategy UPMOs pursue to support public safety. These teams, typically on the street regularly in brightly-colored uniforms, welcome visitors and provide a sense of presence to show that the place is well-cared for. Ambassador teams also play a critical role in collecting data on the ground, whether they observe incidents or note where people tend to gather. Downtown Dallas, Inc., in Dallas, TX, has given its ambassador program an “in your face” approach—deploying ambassadors to high-traffic areas (e.g., parks, residential buildings) and entryways into downtown and having teams actively greet passers-by and pay regular visits to businesses. The group also increased use of its mobile fleet, putting ambassadors in small cars and on Segways and bikes. DDI also redesigned uniforms and updated branding to make the teams even more visible.

Facing a shortage of police staff, the Downtown Cleveland Alliance in Cleveland, OH, decided to “control what we can control” and piloted high-visibility hospitality ambassador teams that use bright carts to move in high-volume pedestrian areas. Beginning in late 2021, DCA implemented this approach primarily during WinterFest and the NBA All-Star weekend, with a focus on teams of two engaging pedestrians and businesses.

The goal was to let people know of DCA’s services and show a uniformed presence that can use radios to reach law enforcement quickly. DCA also launched an incentive program for ambassadors based on the number of their interactions with pedestrians. The ambassador program will be fully funded for summer 2022, and DCA will also work with hotels and the convention centers to support large events.

With similar goals, the Chicago Loop Alliance, in Chicago, IL, used pandemic-recovery funding from the City of Chicago to support a three-month program for ambassadors to patrol east - west streets from State Street to the two regional train stations and six subway stations, engaging commuters and visitors as they arrive on public transportation. The program has succeeded in raising visibility, although the level of engagement has fallen short of its original goals, a common challenge for these programs. Nevertheless, ambassador patrols and regular presence on streets deliver major benefits for the UPMO, as they give the organization a human face. Visibility increases awareness of the UPMO’s programs and lends credibility to their work in the public eye.



Photo credit: Downtown Cleveland Alliance. (2021). Cleveland, OH.

Increase Safety Personnel

In addition to hospitality staff, many UPMOs have added safety personnel. Nearly all are unarmed (or equipped with pepper spray at most). Observing and reporting, providing access to resources, and connecting with emergency personnel in urgent situations, these personnel have training in de-escalation techniques and put additional eyes on the street. Downtowns in Seattle, Baltimore, Nashville, Chicago, and Denver, among many others, have hired off-duty police officers or private security firms to provide additional patrols. The Nashville Downtown Partnership, in Nashville, TN, won a quarter-percent sales tax increase within the district to fund additional clean and safe, including the option of hiring off-duty police officers with the current plan for 10 FTE officers. The Partnership engaged a state and local lobbyist and worked alongside the Convention and Visitors' Corporation, Nashville Chamber of Commerce, Nashville Hospitality Association, and most importantly district merchants to pass the enabling legislation. The Partnership pushed for a clean and safe downtown to enhance the experience for residents, along with employees and visitors reemerging post pandemic and beyond.

The Rosslyn BID, in Arlington, VA coordinates directly with the Arlington County Police Department to contract an off-duty officer for a "walking officer program." Since 2019, this officer has conducted rounds three times a week from mid-April to late October, focusing on business and resident engagement as well as traffic and parking issues. The BID credits this strong partnership with deterring crime overall in its district, even as other parts of Arlington have seen some increases in crime.

In San Antonio, TX, the police department has deployed a dedicated bike patrol downtown over the past two decades. An acknowledged success in community policing, the patrol worked in two defined shifts that left a four-hour gap between 5pm and 9pm, a period

that saw an increase in misbehavior. In 2016 Centro San Antonio signed an agreement with the police department to fund extension of those shifts by two hours. The agreement builds in the flexibility to alternate when the extension falls, increasing police visibility. This has helped foil graffiti taggings and other quality-of-life offenses in the act, bolstering a sense of downtown security.

The Waterfront BIA, in downtown Toronto, ON, successfully advocated for additional police in its district after working with an arts and culture group, Harbourfront Centre, and the resident-led York Quay Neighbourhood Association. A few months after receiving the request for community officers, the police department assigned four additional officers. They will serve a minimum of four years in the district, a meaningful period for building strong relationships with residents and businesses. The Waterfront BIA has also been part of a coalition of six downtown Toronto BIAs who have provided public support for the mayor of [Toronto's #SafeTO initiative](#), and called for the province to [increase its commitment to safe streets](#).

Under the co-responder, or co-delivery, model, a mental health, drug and alcohol and/or social service professional joins a crisis-intervention-trained police officer to respond to incidents involving people exhibiting problematic behaviors often associated with mental health problems or drug and alcohol addiction. Although municipalities generally establish these programs, Center City District in Philadelphia, PA, decided to take matters into its own hands and pay for this program within its boundaries. Realizing that this coordination wouldn't happen naturally, CCD raised funds, partially through its foundation, to launch the "Ambassadors of Hope" program. The program now has two teams comprising a Project Home outreach worker (Philadelphia's lead non-profit homeless housing

provider); a crisis-intervention-trained Philadelphia Police officer; and a Community Service Representative Homeless Outreach Team member from CCD. They are supported by mental health professionals from Penn Medicine and from the City's Department of Behavioral Health. The teams patrol Monday through Friday, 8:30am–3:30pm, visiting chronically homeless individuals, but also respond to emergency incidents. Social service and outreach workers initiate each discussion, and the teams have learned from their members' respective protocols. CCD dedicates a van to transport those who agree to accept services and shelter. Over the past four years, the teams have helped more than 525 unsheltered people come off Center City sidewalks, parks and concourses and connect with housing, services and/or treatment providers.⁹

Provide Direct Services for Downtown Users

Other initiatives that offer direct safety services to downtown patrons include clean and safe apps and safe walk efforts. As a part of a larger [downtown security action plan](#), the Downtown Denver Partnership, in Denver, CO, maintains a clean and safe app for maintenance and cleaning requests and the reporting of nonviolent illegal activity. These requests have provided the Partnership with the ability to identify hotspots and maintain a record of activity and responses by their private security team. This data has enabled the Partnership to have productive solution-oriented conversations with local authorities and property owners alike.

Several UPMOs (including Downtown Long Beach, Downtown STL, Inc., and Downtown Winnipeg BIZ) have safe-walk initiatives, under which a person can call to request an ambassador or police officer to accompany them, particularly after-hours. In San Francisco's



Photo credit: Center City District. (2019). Philadelphia, PA.

Tenderloin CBD, the Safe Passage program has grown from a neighborhood effort into an organized CBD program that focuses on helping children in the district walk to school safely. The program now offers the service for seniors, and neighboring CBDs, such as SOMA West, have requested city funding to create a similar program. The CBD rolled this into a [larger funding request](#) that would also provide funds for more safety ambassadors and staffed mobile toilets.

In short, these initiatives use resources to showcase the UPMO's presence in the district, strengthen a sense that the area is cared for, and show that the communities always have "eyes on the street."

Changing the Physical Environment to Encourage Positive Behaviors

In addition to eyes on the street, a UPMO can heavily influence the physical environment in small and inexpensive ways to encourage positive behaviors. The “broken windows theory”—an idea introduced by criminologists James Wilson and George Kelling that even “one unrepaired broken window is a signal that no one cares, and so breaking more windows costs nothing”¹⁰—serves as the loose inspiration for many clean and safe programs at UPMOs. These programs telegraph the message that a place is cared for and that negative behavior has consequences.

UPMOs can also influence the physical environment by employing crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). This approach combines techniques from multiple disciplines including architecture, urban planning, and place management, with the goal of deterring or displacing criminal activity. Many place management professionals likely have used CPTED techniques without knowing their formal name. The International CPTED Association groups the strategies into two types: first- and second-generation CPTED, each with four core principles.¹¹ While major infrastructure redevelopment and the design of new buildings can incorporate CPTED, and recent research by the Brookings Institute and Civil Rights Corp point to the research and opportunity that new federal funding can support for community safety-driven infrastructure¹², UPMOs can also choose among several low-cost interventions for rapid tests that simultaneously activate the district.

First-Generation CPTED includes strategies, first developed in the 1970s, that focus on the physical design of the built environment and public spaces.

- **Territoriality** uses the design of public and semi-public spaces to give businesses and residents a sense of ownership of those spaces. This includes the place branding and signage that almost every UPMO uses to identify its district, decorative signage and landscaping.
- **Natural surveillance** increases the public’s ability to “casually observe” spaces through measures such as landscaping changes and improved lighting that increases visibility to reduce opportunities for crime. Many UPMOs have undertaken such activities, including Corpus Christi Downtown Management District, in Corpus Christi, TX, which added decorative lights to trees in an unsafe area, improving visibility and creating an attraction.
- **Image** is connected to the ideas of broken-window theory, as described above, in presenting spaces that are well-cared for.
- **Access control** involves limiting access to certain areas to those who have legitimate reasons to be there. This concept is typically cited in reference to private properties but it can also be useful for disrupting illegal behavior patterns in public spaces. For example, in response to a hotspot of drug-dealing from idling cars in Minneapolis, MN, the Mpls DID converted an on-street parking lane to a protected bike lane with jersey barriers.



Photo credit: MPLS Downtown Improvement District. (2017). Minneapolis, MN.

Second-Generation CPTED emerged in the late 1990s and incorporates then-emerging concepts about social use of space and community building.

- **Social cohesion** uses specific steps to promote positive social relations among residents—for example, creating an action group to discuss and tackle a difficult problem. In Minneapolis, MN, Mpls Downtown Improvement District organized a Tactical Urbanism Advisory Committee, most active between 2014 and 2019. It brought together disparate stakeholders to begin using CPTED and tactical urbanism techniques to address hotspots of concern for real and perceived safety, relying heavily on the UPMO’s ability to pilot and test strategies quickly. This introduced several placemaking experiments such as adding landscaping at key sites of concern, adding a flower market to activate public seating, commissioning artist-designed temporary bus shelters, and many more. Each change, reinforced by the others, helped encourage positive social activity and deter anti-social behavior.
- **Community culture** uses festivals and block parties to bring people together with the aim of creating a sense of unity, not solving a specific problem. Downtown Vancouver BIA, in Vancouver, BC, hosted an event in a “bad” part of the district. Afterwards, more than 90% of those surveyed said they felt safe during the event, which highlights the safety of crowded spaces. Such activations can reset perceptions throughout a district.



Photo credit: MPLS Downtown Improvement District. (2017). Minneapolis, MN.

- **Connectivity** builds physical and communication networks in the community, such as the public or semi-private text-message or radio-alert systems that many UPMOs have implemented. For instance, the Downtown Denver Partnership built a shared radio system so that the security personnel at downtown properties could alert each other to incidents in real-time. On a smaller scale, other UPMOs such as the Champaign Center Partnership in Champaign, IL, uses the Discord app and invites front-line food/beverage/hospitality workers including DJs to share experiences late at night, provide mutual aid, and share other neighborhood information and resources. Centro San Antonio has launched a pilot program using Ring security cameras at a specific business that have endured multiple incidences of vandalism. In the first few months of this pilot, no further incidents have occurred.
- **Threshold capacity** means allowing multiple land uses within a neighborhood, allowing people from all walks of life to use a space continuously. This means creating a live/ work/ play environment that doesn’t empty out at the end of the business day. Districts with strong residential populations came through the pandemic in better economic shape than office-dependent districts, and UPMOs continue to strive toward balancing living, working, and playing.

Serving as the Trusted Source of Information and Liaison to Build Lasting Relationships

Many UPMOs see the police department and other law enforcement as a valued partner, but the depth of that relationship varies greatly. Having a strong relationship at all levels, from police administration to street-level supervisors to the officers on foot patrol, creates lasting trust and understanding from typically over-stretched law enforcement departments. UPMOs can play an important role in addressing concerns on the street and with business and property owners.

Since its inception in 1991, Center City District in Philadelphia has co-located its Community Service Representatives (CSRs) with police officers in the downtown police substation. This co-location helps police really understand the role of the CSRs and serves as a great resource for both partners. The Downtown Cleveland Alliance has begun development of a similar plan.

A UPMO's ability to be specific about its law-enforcement needs also greatly reinforces the relationship with police. For example, when stakeholders wanted to see a stronger law-enforcement presence in downtown Dallas, DDI requested that police officers put their cruise lights on while patrolling downtown, making them more visible. The number of police didn't change, but that increased visibility of existing officers created a safer environment. Rather than generally requesting that the police "do something" about homeless encampments, DDI asked police to focus on vagrancy in a few specific parks. In addition, DDI helps to publicize plans for public safety. In summer 2021,

hoping to head off an expected rise in crime, DDI issued a press release highlighting the [Summer Operations Plan](#), a multipronged public-safety initiative conducted in partnership with the police department, transit police, and other government and community partners.

Other organizations hold regular briefings from the police department at stakeholder meetings, including at the board level or community events. Building these connections at multiple levels within the organization helps assure an organic partnership that extends beyond any one individual's tenure. For example, the Midtown Alliance in Atlanta, GA is now making much more detailed violent and property crime data available to all stakeholders in [monthly reports](#) in order to provide a more accurate picture of public safety in the district. This includes information breaking down the types and circumstances of incidents; how many are happening late at night; how many involved people that knew each other or altercations that escalated; the percentage of stolen vehicles that were illegally parked with key fobs in them or left running, citywide trends and other relevant details. This report has been a popular resource that has helped put issues of crime in context based on facts. It has also helped to inform district strategies and outreach to particular property owners as well as larger citywide policy efforts. Making this information widely available has also reduced the number of public safety inquiries that staff receive.

Case Study: Advocacy

Advocacy—and particularly building diverse coalitions—represents another key to UPMO success in promoting public safety. For example, the Downtown Berkeley Association (DBA) in Berkeley, CA, has worked to build a coalition to promote reinstatement of the pre-COVID bail schedule for felony and misdemeanor assaults. Early in the pandemic, when crowded jails helped spread the coronavirus, the state's court system imposed a statewide \$0 bail requirement. Unfortunately, this exacerbated an issue common to many downtowns—people with a record of behaving violently remained on the street. Workers and store owners felt unsafe and frequently experienced aggression at levels they'd never seen.

Despite the association's strong relationship with the municipality and mayor, meetings on the issue didn't produce change, so the DBA organized [an April 2021 letter](#) to the district attorney seeking change. Critically, a consortium of business and civic groups signed the letter, including the Oakland BID Alliance, Oakland Chamber of Commerce, Oakland African-American Chamber of Commerce, Oakland Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce, Oakland Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, Oakland Latino Chamber of Commerce, Visit Berkeley, the Berkeley Chamber, and the Berkeley Business Development Network. A coalition that crossed municipalities and

engaged diverse chambers of commerce gave this issue extra authority across two important urban centers. Having UPMOs and chambers of commerce take the lead also gave the municipality political cover to push forward on a politically sensitive issue. Seeing multiple logos at the top of a letter makes a strong impression on politicians and can yield significant results.

Advocacy takes time. The district attorney replied with a lengthy letter enumerating various initiatives her office had introduced, and she met with the coalition a few months later to discuss these initiatives and work with the presiding judge. Upon the advice of the District Attorney's office, the coalition then sent [another letter in January 2022](#), this time to the presiding judge of the Alameda County Court. Developed with support from the district attorney's office, the letter laid out narrowly targeted requests (which remain under review as of April 2022.) This work exemplifies how UPMOs can lead powerful coalitions and the impact strong partnerships can have. The letter resulted in a call with the Presiding Judge with all of the business associations, along with both mayors and senior staff of Berkeley and Oakland, to express their concerns about rising crime and the need to restore bail schedules. The coalition is waiting for a response soon from the Judge on a decision by the Court's Executive Committee.

Case Study: Expanding Partnerships

In Winnipeg, MB, a coalition established the nonprofit Downtown Community Safety Partnership (DCSP), to improve coordination and deployment of resources to support the downtown population. Founding and funding partners comprise Downtown Winnipeg BIZ, the provincial government, the City of Winnipeg, Winnipeg Police Service, Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service, and True North Sports + Entertainment. Pillars of the DCSP include a continuum of cohesive 24/7 support and non-emergency response to those in the community in need of support and assistance; partnerships and collaboration; and prevention and outreach focused on long-term solutions. The DCSP fields three distinct teams on the street:

The **CONNECT Team** provides street presence, frontline assistance and referral to downtown services and amenities. The team also offers courtesy walks for all members of the downtown community.

The **Community Outreach Advocacy Resource Team (COAR)** provides street presence and outreach and follow-up intervention and assistance. COAR works with partner agencies in housing, addictions treatment, education, mental health support, and other resources that aim to provide longer-term assistance for individuals and the full downtown community.

The **Mobile Assist and Connect Team 24/7** provides street presence and outreach services, including social needs assessments. It engages other agencies and resources, including the COAR team, as needed in response to individual needs. Trained in advanced first aid, team members assist with non-emergency medical situations.

Implementation of DCSP has allowed Downtown Winnipeg BIZ to expand its hospitality-focused Downtown Ambassador program and build a business and economic development program while still providing funding support to DCSP.

Harnessing the Power of Data

Knowledge is certainly power for UPMOs, and lack of reliable data represents a central problem in addressing public safety issues. UPMOs can both provide more accurate data and use more precise crime data to identify new patterns.

In some cases, UPMOs find a mismatch between official crime statistics and lived experience. In Hartford, CT, the Hartford BID urged members to report quality-of-life crimes to non-emergency police lines so that police officials could translate the “feeling” on the ground into usable data. Other UPMOs have reported that the decriminalization of many quality-of-life offenses has altered crime stats significantly—even though those offenses still occur and contribute to the perception of a dangerous downtown or district. The Downtown Partnership of Baltimore, in Baltimore, MD, invests heavily in GIS capabilities to study crime at an extremely granular level within its district as it aims to identify emerging crime hotspots and trends and do a better job of understanding how to deploy resources.

Even before the pandemic, police departments didn’t have enough personnel to be everywhere at every time. With better data in hand, UPMOs can advocate for more precise and efficient policing, focusing on hot spots or place-based policing. Managing public perceptions of increased crime due to higher reporting, of course, poses a challenge. Strategic communications play a critical role in keeping stakeholders and the public aware of the true safety of being in a downtown or urban district. Downtown Madison, Inc., in Madison, WI, has

launched a [three-year partnership with International Association of Chiefs of Police](#) (through the federal government’s Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program), working as part of a multi-disciplinary research team that includes the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, the City of Madison Community Development Division, the Madison Police Department, Public Health Madison Dane County, the Madison Mayor’s Office, and Capital Neighborhoods, Inc. Together, this team has focused on identifying hotspots and understanding the root causes of gun crimes and sexual assaults downtown. The partnership will test whether targeted focus leads to permanent reductions in these two categories of crime.

Conclusion

Even recognizing the highly localized character of crime and public safety challenges, UPMOs can draw on a model of district development that has proved successful on so many other issues. As stewards of place, UPMOs care for a space by putting eyes on the street, particularly through hospitality guides or ambassadors, as well as security personnel. UPMOs also play a key role in coalition building, serving as a bridge between the public and private sectors and police departments, and bringing in other stakeholders to address issues shaping public safety. Finally, UPMOs can collect, present, and employ data accurately to focus resources most efficiently. As challenges evolve, clean and safe remains fundamental to the work of urban place management.

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SPECIAL THANKS

Alliance for Downtown New York
 Association of Town and City Management
 Block By Block
 Braamfontein Improvement District
 Bronte BIA
 Campaignz, Ltd.
 Cape Town Central City Improvement District
 Center City District
 Central Houston, Inc.
 Centro San Antonio
 Champaign Center Partnership
 Chicago Loop Alliance
 Church Street Marketplace District
 City of Asheville, Urban Design & Place Strategies Division
 Corpus Christi Downtown Management District
 Delray Beach Downtown Development Authority
 Diamond City Partnership
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 Downtown Austin Alliance
 Downtown Berkeley Association
 Downtown Charlottetown, Inc.
 Downtown Cleveland Alliance
 Downtown Dallas, Inc.
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 Downtown Partnership of Baltimore, Inc
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 Hartford Business Improvement District
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 Rosslyn BID
 SOMA West Community Benefit District
 Strathcona BIA
 The Hollywood Partnership
 The Waterfront BIA
 Town of Queen Creek, AZ
 Waikiki Business Improvement District Association
 West Palm Beach DDA

ENDNOTES

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