

# THE ELITE ARCADE: TAMING A CRIME GENERATOR REDUCING CRIME AND DISORDER IN AN ARCADE

DELTA POLICE DEPARTMENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA, 1997

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- THE PROBLEM:** The Delta Police Department in British Columbia, Canada, received a substantial increase in calls for service at a local commercial shopping mall. These problems were generated by large numbers of youths hanging out at the Elite Video arcade. Other tenants in the mall, especially those in close proximity to the arcade, started to move out. Local residents became enraged about crime spilling into their neighbourhood. Conventional police approaches proved ineffective and unsustainable.
- ANALYSIS:** Constable Mike Sheard set out to help the community, the mall, and the police department solve this worsening problem. He interviewed residents, analyzed statistics, and attended public meetings and discovered recent design changes made to the interior of the arcade greatly contributed to the increase in calls. The design made it impossible for management to supervise patrons and control the premise. The arcade had evolved into a crime-generator.
- RESPONSE:** Constable Sheard suggested redesigning the arcade using CPTED, but this was unacceptable to the owner. Constable Sheard contacted university students studying CPTED and they conducted a crime study confirming his findings. This was presented to the Municipal Council and design changes were made to the arcade. At Constable Sheard's prompting, Council adopted new by-laws for future arcades.
- ASSESSMENT:** In 1997, Constable Sheard assessed arcade crime throughout the city. Problems at the Elite Video arcade, the mall, and the neighbourhood have dropped significantly and remained low. Other new arcades have been developed using the new by-laws and not one has become a crime generator. From 1996-1997 Constable Sheard presented these by-laws in municipalities across Canada. They have become a model for arcade design throughout the country.
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## INTRODUCTION

The local teen "hang out" is not a new phenomenon. Video arcades are an entertainment style of choice for youths in the 1990s. There are distinct differences between

types of arcades when it comes to crime. Are all arcades crime generators? Some become centres for drugs and crime—crime generators—while others remain relatively problem free.

This article presents the findings from a seven-year POP project that began with a single crime generator arcade in a commercial strip mall. The end result was a reduction in the calls for service, crime problems, and the development of by-laws for developing future arcades.

## New Strategies

Since these by-laws were adopted by City Council, new arcades built in the City of Delta are not a burden on the police department or to adjacent neighbourhoods as experienced seven years ago. The by-laws that were generated as a result of this POP project have been implemented in a number of jurisdictions across Canada with similar successful results. More importantly an innovative new problem-solving process had been developed and tested. The Delta Police have re-invented the partnership profile in their community and created a generic strategy that has been copied in several cities across the country as a result (see Quarterly Calls For Service Data in appendix).

## SCANNING

In 1988 the Sunshine Village shopping centre, a commercial strip mall, was built in Delta, British Columbia, just south of Vancouver. It experienced few problems and was considered a model commercial mall. An arcade located in the mall, the Elite Video Arcade, suddenly began to attract crime and impact the surrounding businesses and community. Police received increasing calls for vandalism, litter, graffiti, thefts, and other criminal behaviour. Prior to this, the area had been an area of relatively low crime.

Initially the problem was identified by commercial storeowners complaining to mall management and the police. As the problem grew, the surrounding residential community began to be impacted and soon residents signed a petition for city council and police to do something. The mall was fairly new and had all the outward appearances of a modern, well kept suburban shopping centre. Police felt that it was surprising such problems had evolved at this early stage in its life span (see Quarterly Calls for Service Data in appendix).

As complaints around the mall increased, crime reports also began to escalate. Calls for police service to this mall indicated a 47% increase between 1988 and 1989. In 1990 calls increased another 14%. Clearly something had to be done.

## Conventional Police Approaches

Two initiatives in particular were tried; *Operation Blackjack* - a surveillance operation and *Zero Tolerance*, a standard saturation patrol effort. Both of these traditional strategies were largely unsuccessful and unsustainable. It was decided that a longer-term approach was needed.

Constable Sheard, who had recently been trained in crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), was assigned to tackle the problem.

## ANALYSIS

Constable Sheard began by analyzing crime statistics and police reports, conducting on-site interviews, and attending meetings with mall, arcade and community groups. He began uncovering the history of crime at the arcade.

The problem seemed to appear out of nowhere. It had erupted nine months after the arcade opened. He discovered that the problem had emerged after the owner changed the internal arcade layout.

Originally there were 25 video machines around the perimeter providing good sightlines throughout the arcade. Few problems were received at this time. The owner doubled the number of machines and changed the design of the arcade making it impossible for staff to monitor patrons, or criminals. A new wall concealed the cashier's view of the public (see Elite Arcade in appendix).

## CPTED Review

Constable Sheard then reviewed the interior layout of the arcade using CPTED principles. He found numerous problems including poor management, lack of proper natural surveillance, no control of interior spaces, and entrapment areas within the arcade. He reviewed the

research on what is known about arcades, specifically what makes a good arcade versus what features lead to crime problems. Constable Sheard discovered that the arcade became a crime generator for the whole mall.

At first there was an increase in problems in the arcade itself. But, as the owners ignored these problems and lost control, the conflicts between different groups of youths spilled into the parking lot area. Drug transactions and sales of stolen property began to occur within the premise. At this same time mall vacancy rates increased. Stores around the arcade closed and as a result the mall itself began to lose revenue. A security guard service became necessary.

### **Crime Supermarket**

Over a period of 3 months in 1990 security costs became a debilitating expense for the mall management. Within several weeks, the arcade seemed to have created a crime "market place" that soon spread to the surrounding community. Criminal activity took on a life of its own with younger kids not normally associated with crime being engaged in drug trafficking, stolen property and nuisance activities.

### **Community Involvement**

Constable Sheard interviewed local residents and mall patrons and discovered that the design changes to the arcade coincided with the increase in criminal activity. Police officers and neighbourhood youths agreed that the arcade had become an unsafe place.

### **Public Meetings**

This pointed to the conclusions that CPTED changes and management improvements would be a good first step. However before this could be attempted, additional measures were taken to develop public support for future prevention efforts. As a result Constable Sheard attended an open meeting at a local school where police met with 200 members of the community.

It was obvious that the public did support the police in these efforts. The next step was to attempt to implement the CPTED and management strategies.

### **RESPONSE**

Attempts were made to convince the arcade owner to correct the problems by removing the extra 20 video machines, the new wall, and return the lighting to original levels by replacing lights that had been removed. The owner refused on the grounds of additional cost. He argued that there was insufficient proof that these features were in any way responsible for the problems in the premise. In his words, "show me."

### **Architects and Urban Planners—Building Bridges**

Constable Sheard contacted the original architects of the mall and officials in the municipal planning department. Unhappy with the situation at the mall, they were motivated to see CPTED work. This arcade in particular presented planners with a unique opportunity to establish and study working guidelines to develop arcade land-use applications. They also came to realize they could more carefully monitor arcade owner's business license renewals in the future.

### **Crime Studies**

They decided to conduct a full study of arcade crime and Constable Sheard set up a partnership with students studying CPTED under Professor Patricia Brantingham, a specialist in environmental criminology at Simon Fraser University. The university study compared the Elite Arcade with two other arcades in the municipality and six video arcades in neighbouring cities. The municipal Planning Department agreed to cooperate with police in working with the data generated by the survey to develop CPTED-based design guidelines.

The study found certain designs accompany low problem video arcades throughout the municipality. The findings also held true in neighbouring cities. The results were brought to city hall where the students made a public presentation to Council, which was broadcast by a local television company. The arcade owner was summoned to city hall to hear the study results. He then agreed to make changes to his arcade.

The CPTED and managerial changes included:

### **Internal**

1. Machines should be set up only around the periphery of the arcade to provide for good visibility.
2. A clear and open view must be available to exterior. No tinted or reflective film on windows.
3. Ample lighting levels must be provided inside the arcade. (2 Lux per I.E.S. Standards.)

### **External**

1. Require a parking-stall-to-patron ratio (2:20) to help limit the number of arcade users.
2. Provide ample lighting for access routes and parking areas throughout the mall. (1.5 Lux per I.E.S. Standards)
3. Elite Arcade - Taming Crime Generators, June 1997

### **Management**

1. Hours of operation restricted to those of surrounding businesses in the mall.
2. Where possible, have in-house or contracted security staff.
3. Management must take an active role in enforcing rules - rules must be posted.
4. Limit number of people in the arcade. (Patrons per Floor Space Ratio (FSR) as per National Fire Code)
5. Age restrictions must be enforced with clientele. (12 - 18 years of age only.)
6. Control access to washrooms. (locked door opens only with Managers security key.)

After the changes were implemented, Constable Sheard worked with city planners to begin drafting new municipal by-laws for video arcades in future development, which were adopted by Council in 1992.

### **ASSESSMENT**

Upon implementation of the changes, crime and police calls for service were reduced initially by about 150% in 1991 and a further 5% in 1992. The mall began to recover commercial viability over the next few months. As of 1997 it is once again thriving (see CALLS FOR SERVICE in appendix).

### **Positive Displacement**

Some displacement effects were anticipated and did occur as expected. There was some increased activity around local parks, which was easily handled through conventional community policing responses like recruiting more volunteers in to the citizen patrol combined with heavier use of the enforceable Park's bylaw.

Displacement of some kids was anticipated to the local Boy's & Girls Club centre. There was adult supervision of the youth at this location and activities were provided for youth. This displacement did occur as predicted and the increased usage raised the community profile of the Boy's and Girls Club. This was so successful that by 1997 there was community-wide financial support for a new building and expansion of their services.

### **Public Confidence**

Additional public confidence in the initiatives was recently demonstrated in September of 1991 when over 2,000 people signed a petition to City Council asking to have the video arcade hours extended. They wanted the arcade to operate during the same hours as the other mall stores to accommodate parents dropping off their kids at the arcade while they went shopping.

### **Reluctant Beneficiary**

Another measure of success was that the arcade owner was able to use the CPTED study to justify a local advertising campaign promoting

his arcade. It used the phrase "If you could escape for an afternoon to a place that was clean, safe, and exciting, would you? Well you can?" This was a far cry from "show me".

## Crime

Perhaps most convincing was a review of crime statistics. Although the calls for service were reduced by about 150% immediately from 1990 to 1991, the actual crime statistics only show an initial decrease of one percent (from 105 to 103). However, the period from 1991 to 1992 showed a marked improvement with a 24% reduction in reported crimes (from 103 to 98), which has remained fairly consistent for the past 6 years.

## Bylaws

The planning by-laws provided the sustainability, which was not part of the initial police response to this problem. These by-laws are now enacted prior to development of new arcades. They can be monitored and enforced by municipal bylaw officers on a long-term basis.

The by-law proposal as initially drafted in 1991 included various options for planning development controls. The proposal was followed up with revisions and from 1992 to 1994 the CPTED design recommendations were developed into a final arcade design by-law.

Constable Sheard continued to monitor the situation at the mall and the implementation of the new by-law. In 1995 two new video arcades were built using the by-laws. Crime and police calls for service for these new arcades were examined. They showed that the area was not adversely affected by developing the two new arcades. For example, one arcade was located in a large regional shopping mall nearby.

For the period from January 1996 to June 1997 there was only one call attributed to this location. The mail reports no problems and surrounding businesses were not adversely affected. The other arcade was located in a nearby strip mall and recorded no calls whatsoever from January 1996 to June 1997.

By 1997 it was clear that the Elite Video Arcade project had provided the catalyst for developing

a sustainable way to tame video arcades that become crime generators. The video arcade by-laws have since become a working model for other communities. In the past two years, municipalities requested copies of the Delta video arcade by-laws across North America. In response Constable Sheard has presented this POP project and the arcade by-law in over a dozen cities. They have become a model for reducing video arcade crime-generators across Canada.

## AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

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## NOTES

1. A single police officer completed this initiative acting largely outside traditional policing. Initially projects such as the Elite Video Arcade project were confined to a few officers doing CPTED projects. After the video arcade project the Delta Police department began to change. The police department became a strong supporter of police involvement in community planning, development and neighbourhood problem-solving.
2. In terms of cost, this project cost the department the commitment of Constable Sheard's time, which was scattered throughout the past seven years. Initially it involved a two-week CPTED training course. It also involved about three weeks of working on the project. In recent years it has been limited to ten to fifteen hours per year to monitor the situation and present findings to other municipalities.
3. Constable Sheard was originally trained through a CPTED course for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1989. He was among the first CPTED officers trained at the time. He first developed

his practical problem-solving skills during the period of this arcade initiative.

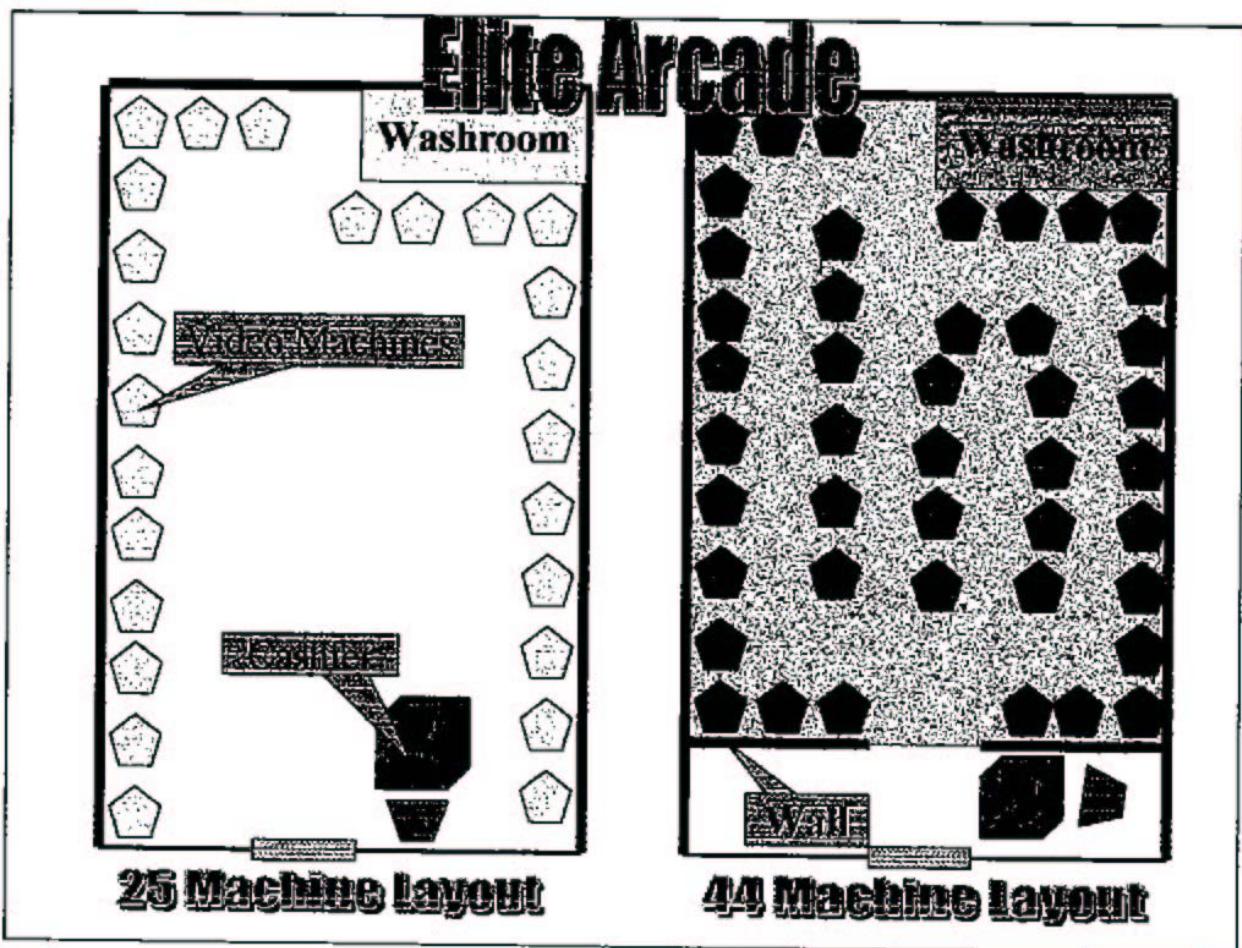
4. In 1989 there were few incentives given to officers who engaged in problem solving. Over the years this has changed. The Provincial Solicitor General eventually recognized Constable Sheard as the crime prevention police practitioner of the year. He has since won Provincial awards and has taught CPTED internationally.
5. At the time of the project there were no guidelines in terms of problem-solving beyond traditional crime prevention models. Since 1992, problem-oriented policing has emerged as a one-week course at the provincial police academy. POP ultimately provided a framework for a problem-solving initiative that helped the 150-member Delta Police Department and the municipality resolve on-going problems at video arcades.
6. This project also helped to demonstrate the importance of CPTED as a component of problem oriented

policing. It resulted in Constable Sheard being appointed by Police Chief Jim Cessord to coordinate and help deliver POP training to the entire police department in 1996. The department was then administratively reorganized and geographically decentralized into small areas of zone-ownership. Since 1996 individual officers have been assigned responsibility for specific locations for on-going problem-oriented policing projects.

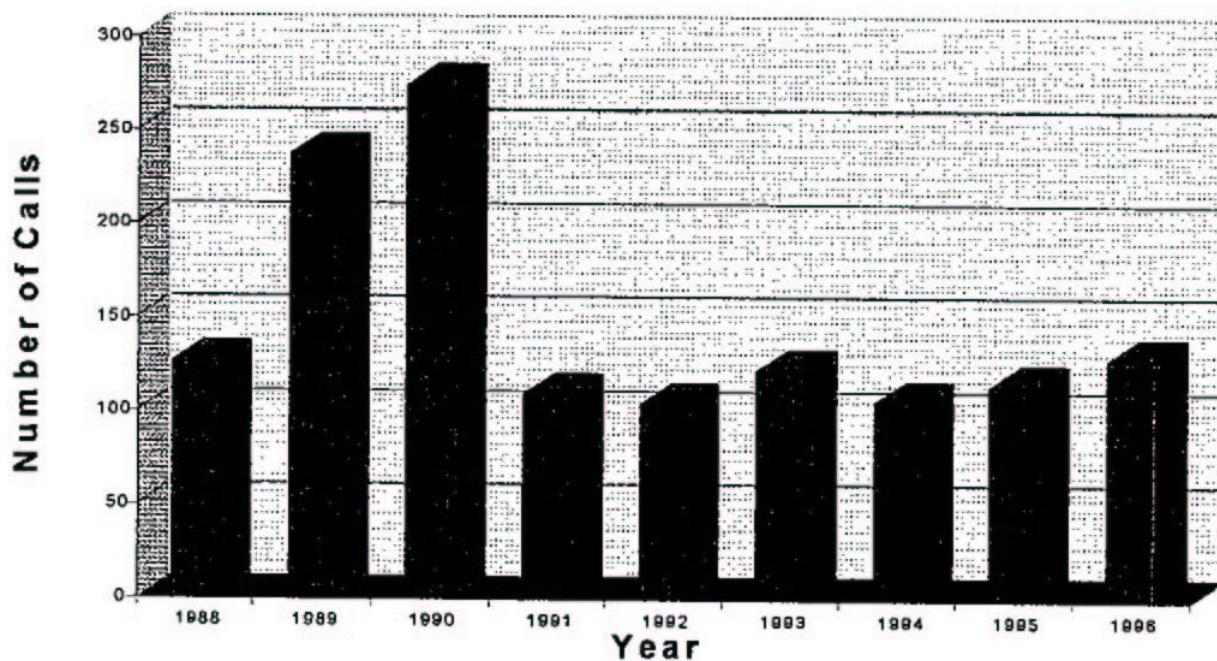
7. Today officers in this Department are assessed based on their abilities to accept responsibility for problems and work with the community to resolve them. In-service manuals have been developed and are maintained by the officers themselves about each area. These manuals include records of the status of the various POP projects ongoing in each area, those who have invested in ownership of the problem, and the results of each initiative. A library of completed and successful POP projects is also being maintained of successful POP projects, such as this Elite Video Arcade project.

**APPENDIX**  
**Quarterly Calls For Service Data**

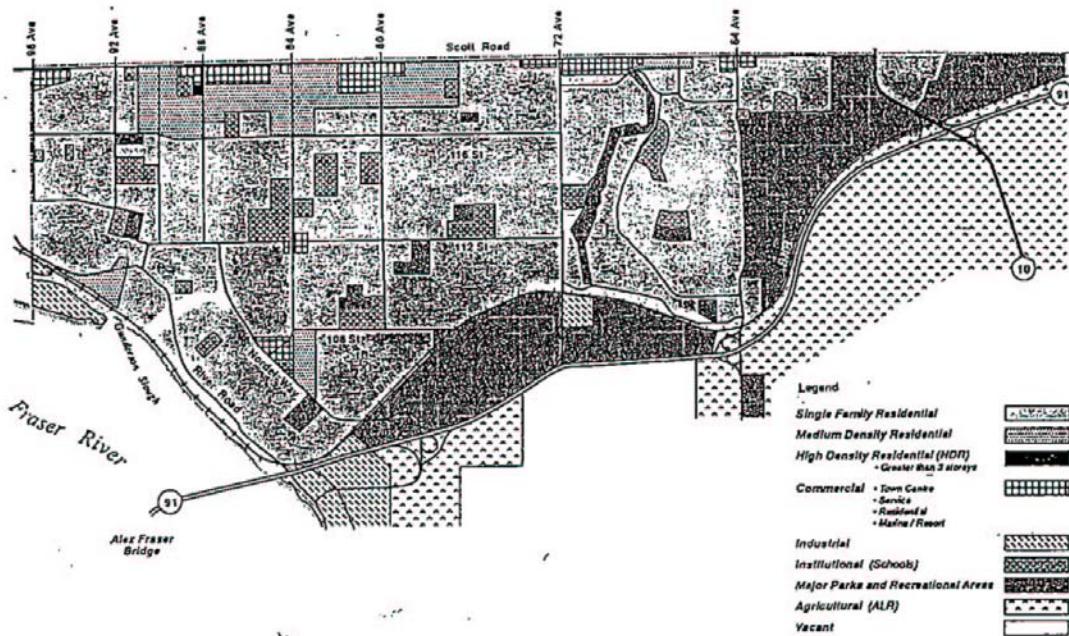
	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Year's Total</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>1988</b>	34	28	24	40	126	
<b>1989</b>	26	50	71	90	237	47%
<b>1990</b>	74	49	60	90	273	14%
<b>1991</b>	24	23	22	40	109	-151%
<b>1992</b>	27	20	21	36	104	-5%
<b>1993</b>	34	27	22	39	122	15%
<b>1994</b>	29	19	27	30	105	-16%
<b>1995</b>	29	23	26	36	114	8%
<b>1996</b>	36	22	28	42	128	11%



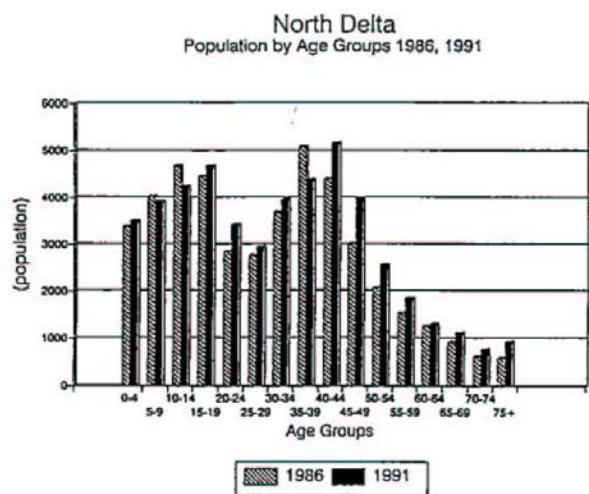
## **CALLS FOR SERVICE**



## **The 1997 Area Plan within the Official Community Plan**



## Demographics North Delta 1986, 1991



Age Group	1986		1991*	
	No. of People	% of Population	No. of People	% of Population
0-4	3,395	7.4	3,510	7.2
5-9	4,040	8.9	3,920	8.0
10-14	4,695	10.3	4,260	8.7
15-19	4,475	9.8	4,700	9.6
20-24	2,860	6.3	2,950	6.0
25-29	2,770	6.1	2,950	6.0
30-34	3,700	8.1	3,965	8.1
35-39	5,110	11.2	4,400	9.0
40-44	4,425	9.7	5,180	10.6
45-49	3,015	6.6	4,000	8.2
50-54	2,086	4.6	2,565	5.2
55-59	1,550	3.4	1,850	3.8
60-64	1,275	2.8	1,315	2.7
65-69	945	2.1	1,130	2.3
70-74	630	1.4	780	1.6
75 +	600	1.3	945	1.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>45,585</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>48,900</b>	<b>100</b>

**ELITE ARCADE**  
**SUNSHINE HILLS SHOPPING CENTER**

**CPTED STUDY PLAN**

