

CITY OF LAKE FOREST

Neighborhood Improvement Task Force

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design General Neighborhood Survey

Area 2 – East *(revised)*

Overview

The City of Lake Forest Neighborhood Improvement Task Force (NITF) was formed to address quality of life concerns voiced by residents, businesses, and other members of the community. Trabuco Consulting was retained to assist the NITF with identifying opportunities to implement Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies to mitigate these concerns. CPTED has been successfully used by public safety organizations, city planners, schools, businesses, and other property owners, to discourage undesired behavior and revitalize communities.

Issue

Since 2021, the NITF has initiated many strategies to address concerns raised by the community in Area 2, which is in the southwest region of the city. Area 2 is comprised of neighborhoods on both the west and east side of El Toro Road, between Muirlands Blvd. and the I-5 Freeway. Community surveys and outreach efforts have identified loitering, homelessness, theft, illegal vending, parking, and community maintenance as issues of concern for residents and businesses of the area. The NITF strategically focused its initial efforts west of El Toro Road and is now ready to expand improvement efforts east of El Toro Road. Trabuco Consulting was asked to assist with surveying the area for this purpose.

Observations

Since January 2024, Trabuco Consulting has conducted a series of site visits to the neighborhoods within Area 2 East, bordered by the I-5 Freeway, El Toro Road, Muirlands Blvd., and Los Alisos Blvd. This area consists of retail shopping centers, single family homes, mobile homes, public parks/library, and an elementary school. This is one of the oldest areas of the community, which had been developed under County of Orange standards prior to the City's incorporation in 1991. Many of the retail centers have undergone significant renovations over the years, while the residential areas have remained largely unchanged. In general, Area 2 East is very active, and people can be seen driving, walking, and moving about the neighborhoods and retail centers throughout the day.

El Toro / Rockfield Area

The area of El Toro Road and Rockfield serves as the most prominent gateway to the City from the I-5 Freeway and communities such as Laguna Hills and Laguna Woods. In general, the area is relatively clean with some signs of graffiti, trash, and general wear one might expect to see in mature communities. Major roadway

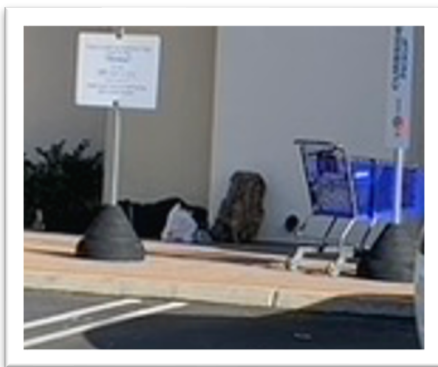


construction associated with the freeway causes vehicle congestion in the area and drivers often use Rockfield Blvd. to avoid the area. This likely causes more vehicle traffic on Rockfield Blvd. which borders the residential neighborhoods. The City owned monuments on the corners have been closed for an extended period due to misuse issues. While improvements to this area are continuing, focused discussion related to the incorporation of CPTED strategies is strongly encouraged.

Retail Centers – El Toro East

The primary retail centers within Area 2 span El Toro Road from the I-5 Freeway to Muirlands Blvd. Major retail stores such as Ralphs, Staples, PetSmart, CVS, Sprouts, Ross Dress for Less, a Goodwill Thrift store, Home Depot, Smart & Final, Guitar Center, Harbor Freight, and various restaurants can be found in these centers and generate significant customer activity.

During recent site visits to retail centers on the east side of El Toro Road, people were observed loitering and sleeping near business entrances and other public areas. This has been an issue of concern raised by residents and business owners in recent community surveys. Many of the businesses in these retail centers back-up to El Toro Road. The vegetation between the building and the sidewalks on El Toro Rd. create attractive locations for loitering. People have been observed sleeping, using drugs, and drinking in these areas. Miscellaneous bike parts, blankets and alcohol bottles have also been observed in these areas. These observations are consistent with undesired activity reported by members of the community throughout the area and can cause residents, customers, workers, and others to feel unsafe.



El Toro Plaza (El Toro/Muirlands)

El Toro Plaza has a steady flow of people visiting the businesses throughout the day. One concern is people buying single cans of beer at the market and consuming them in the parking area or nearby. This activity was confirmed by the on-site security guard, who reported customers regularly drink beer in the parking lot next to the business despite his best efforts to prevent this behavior. Fresh graffiti was observed near the trash enclosure next to Angelo’s Burgers and on the mailbox stand for the center. Again, graffiti and on-site alcohol consumption may cause people to feel unsafe in the area.



El Toro Park

A walk-thru of El Toro Park was performed as part of this review. The park separates the neighborhood from Los Alisos Blvd. which is the City’s border with Mission Viejo. Overall, the park appeared clean and well-maintained. There were a couple incidents of fresh graffiti near the north end of the park in the cul-de-sac of Larkwood. Vegetation, rolling landscape, and the tennis courts create visibility concerns for several area, which might encourage undesired activity. Graffiti can lead people to feel unsafe in their environment.



Residential Areas

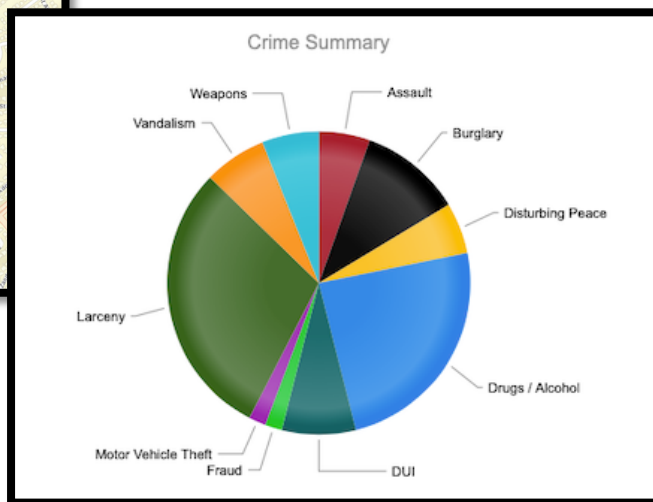
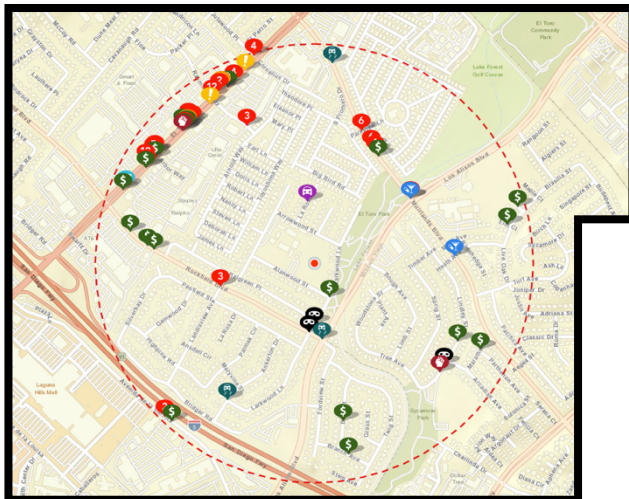
The single-family home neighborhoods in Area 2 East are located east of the retail centers and accessible from Rockfield Blvd. The homes in the area were generally in good condition with a few residences showing obvious signs of disrepair or in need of maintenance. A significant number of vehicles were parked on the streets at various hours. Vehicle traffic surrounding Gates Elementary School at dismissal time was backed-up throughout the neighborhood for at least thirty minutes. This back-up was caused by drivers waiting at the traffic signal to turn left onto Rockfield from Landisview. The cul-de-sac on Bridger Road adjacent to the El Toro Water District

appears to be a likely area of undesired activity and should be researched further. There are two mobile home communities within Area 2 East. Visually, these two communities appeared maintained, and did not appear to be exposed to the same type of traffic and parking issues commonly viewed in the single-family home areas.

General Crime Data – Area 2 East

A search of publicly available crime data, as reported by the Orange County Sheriff’s Department for the area bordered by the I-5 Freeway, El Toro Rd, Muirlands Blvd., Los Alisos Blvd. was obtained from www.crimemapping.com. For the period between September 3, 2023 to February 29, 2024 (180 days) 165 crime incidents were reported. Most of the reported incidents occurred along El Toro Rd, between Rockfield and Muirlands Blvd. Of these reported incidents, Larceny, Drugs/Alcohol, Vandalism, and Weapons violations were the most prevalent. *According to the Orange County Sheriff’s Department, approximately 65 bicycles were reported stolen city-wide in 2023 and approximately 23 of those occurred near El Toro Rd. and Rockfield Blvd. The actual number of stolen bicycles is likely higher as many of these crimes are often unreported to law enforcement.*

Although crime statistics provide additional information for consideration, it is important to understand that not every crime or undesired activity is reported to law enforcement or documented, so community outreach will be important to better understanding crime in the neighborhood.



Area Crime Data
September 1, 2023-February 28, 2024

Source: Crimemapping.com
(March 1, 2024)

Recommendations

The purpose of this neighborhood survey is to assist the NITF with prioritizing their approach to service efforts in Area 2 East. This survey is general in nature and intended to provide additional information for discussion purposes.

- The observations and crime data provided in this review suggest the NITF should consider a focused response to the quality-of-life issues occurring near the retail shopping along El Toro Road in Area 2 (East & West).
- Further research related to overall crime along El Toro Road is needed to better understand the contributing factors and actual impact on the community.
- The retail centers east of El Toro Road comprise nearly half of Area 2 East and generate a significant amount of the activity impacting the surrounding community. The NITF may find it beneficial to focus specific efforts to this area.
- NITF should consider outreach efforts to connect and engage retail property owners in crime prevention efforts.
- The gateway area (El Toro / Rockfield) has a significant impact on the surrounding communities and focused discussions regarding CPTED strategies for the area could be beneficial.
- Residents of the single-family home areas may have very different experiences than residents of the mobile home communities. Tailored survey and outreach efforts may be beneficial for these areas.
- *Stolen bicycles are often disassembled by thieves to sell parts or interchange parts with other stolen bicycles to avoid detection. Miscellaneous parts can be found discarded in public areas. Consider the implementation of a bicycle theft prevention campaign, including bicycle registration. Some communities have implemented ordinances to restrict the disassembly or maintenance of bicycles in public areas.*

Note: While CPTED has been used in many communities to reduce undesired behavior and address Quality of Life issues, there are many variables that influence human behavior and its impact on a community. Therefore, the recommendations listed in this report cannot prevent or anticipate all undesirable activity. The City of Lake Forest and members of the community are encouraged to use this information to further discussions and set priorities to address areas concerns.

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