

Safe environments



Why are Safe Environments needed?

The 2021 Parks and Recreation Master Plan included findings from community input that community safety is the most frequently stated reason that parks and recreation facilities do not meet needs. Unsafe feelings may come from a perception of danger or risk of physical harm, sense of personal security, unease in situations, threats from disorder, and/or crime occurrences. Occurrences of Serious Crime Mapping points to areas of the city where there are trends of harm to public safety.

There are a variety of factors that cause people to feel unsafe in a public space. They include a space's reputation for criminal activities; poor park and recreation facility conditions and/or maintenance issues (such as litter); design that makes users uncomfortable or feel vulnerable (such as lack of lighting, traffic noise, or vehicles impacting pedestrian safety, or pollution); oppression from surveillance or discriminatory experiences; discomfort in space that may attract or harbor anti-social behavior (such as unsanctioned uses and disturbing noises); and negligent behavior that puts others' personal safety at risk.

New findings from this Equity Study include more in-depth understanding of what causes people to feel unsafe in Tempe's parks and recreation spaces. Overall, the [DEI Parks and Recreation Space Assessment](#) found that Tempe's spaces feel relatively safe and was the top-rated factor, while the Making Space Community Survey found that "safety" was the top reason that kept people from visiting parks. This result may be influenced by the Community Navigators that undertook this study having different levels of comfort than other park users or not experiencing dangerous situations at the time of their

visit to space. One-quarter of assessments indicated that 'lack of emergency or security devices in the park (i.e., cameras, signal buttons, call boxes, etc.) made them feel unsafe and 16 percent of assessments indicated that a lack of people in the park influenced their feelings of safety. Assessors had the option to write-in responses, common responses were off-leash dogs, poor lighting, vandalism, and open drug use; survey write-in responses indicated that the presence of armed police and the presence of unsheltered community members also contributed to feelings of safety. A thoughtful observation of varying perceptions and DEI implications noted that some people feel less comfortable or trusting with law enforcement presence and surveillance than others, and an abundance of security measures may give the impression that crime is frequent in the area.

The [2021 Parks and Recreation Master Plan public survey](#) along with other public input forums, and surveys for this Equity Study noted the most common detractor to sense of safety was the presence of unhoused people within parks and recreation spaces or encountered in accessing the space. Most commonly, the public comments reference a sense of disorder from unenforced code violations (i.e., unsanctioned encampments, trespass after park hours, dogs off leash, littering, motorized vehicles, unsanctioned uses, damage to property, and drug and alcohol use) or discomfort with community members who appear to have poor health or are experiencing mental distress. Parks and recreation providers are uniquely positioned to address the stigmatization of park users who may be experiencing homelessness. It is important that policies seek to educate and support community members rather than inadvertently perpetuating discrimination and

oppression. Strategies can focus on creating people-centered community wellness hubs to address public health threats and collectively pooling municipal resources to comprehensively treat a full spectrum of wellness needs. Strategies can also address unsafe activities or conflicts that discourage park use by everyone.

"Tempe is committed to addressing encampments citywide to assist unsheltered individuals and ensure that public spaces are safe and welcoming for all."

- Tempe Homeless Solutions

Activation of parks and recreation spaces to encourage high levels of use by a diverse mix of people as well as providing outreach of social services are increasingly effective approaches used for co-existence in urban parks. People must feel a space is safe before they use it, yet the presence of people in a space is an important indicator of safety. The more people in a space; particularly women, children, and the elderly, with an emphasis on diversity, the safer patrons feel. Efforts to bring people to park and recreation spaces and contribute to stewardship promote a sense of ownership and increase in park and recreation use. A welcoming environment can aid in overcoming sense of safety issues. Park and recreation space safety is accomplished through:

- A joint response between social services, police/enforcement and other partners;
- Park and recreation planning and design;
- Policy considerations;
- Community engagement;
- Program offerings and activation;
- Maintenance and improvements; and
- Public awareness and relationship building campaigns.