Urban Design Guidelines for Large-Format Retail

May 2006

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Large-Format Retail is a term applied to large floor plate, one-storey retail outlets, usually operated as part of a chain, that locate on individual sites or that cluster on a large site, sometimes adjacent to each other. Large-format stores, commonly referred to as "big-box" stores, serve a region-wide market and typically locate at highly visible locations at major intersections or adjacent to highways.

Purpose and Application

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide urban design guidance at the planning application stage in order to assess, promote and achieve appropriate development of large format retail stores. Specific site context and conditions will also be reviewed in conjunction with these guidelines.

These guidelines are to be applied throughout the City for all large format retail development. When large-format retail projects are located in areas identified as Mainstreets, the guidelines for Mainstreets also apply. Where a Community Design Plan or relevant planning study exits, these guidelines will augment those documents. In addition, these guidelines will be used to help inform the formulation of new Community Design Plans.

Objectives

- To achieve interesting, high-quality architectural design for large-format retail buildings;
- To enhance landscaping, public open space, and environmental performance of such developments;
- To create comfortable and attractive pedestrian environments;
- To enhance the streetscape along public streets and contribute to a high quality public space;
- To protect and enhance the character and quality of the districts and neighbourhoods where large-format retail developments are located; and
- To promote development patterns that allow for future intensification.

Official Plan and Zoning By-Law Direction

The Official Plan identifies compatibility as a key design objective for the built environment over the next 20 years. As per sections 2.5.1 and 4.11, achieving compatibility of large-format retail development will involve not only considerations of built form, but also of operational characteristics and development context.

Annex 1 of the Official Plan identifies the protected rights-of-way sufficient to provide enough area for the streetscape elements and meet the needs of pedestrians and cyclists.

Annex 3 of the Official Plan contains a number of design considerations that provide suggestions for how to meet the Design Objectives and Principles in section 2.5.1 of the Official Plan. All other policies of the Official Plan, applicable regulations, Private Approach By-law, Signs By-law and Zoning By-laws must be met.

Context and Challenges

Large format retail developments are a product of the automotive age and have multiplied significantly over the past 15 or more years. While they have been financially successful, many opportunities to improve their physical design and function exist, including enhancing the architectural design of box-style buildings; enhancing the pedestrian environment both within development sites and along public streets; increasing the amounts of landscaping in order to mitigate environmental and visual impact of parking areas; designing in a manner that contributes to the public realm, the character of the street and surrounding neighbourhoods; and designing with consideration for the future adaptability and intensification of the site.

Other Available Guidelines

- Urban Design Guidelines for Development along Traditional Mainstreets (2006);
- Urban Design Guidelines for Development along Arterial Mainstreets (2006);
- Urban Design Guidelines for Drive-Through Facilities (2006);
- Urban Design Guidelines for Gas Stations (2006);
- Infill Housing Design Guidelines-Low-Medium Density (2005);
- Urban Design Guidelines for Outdoor Patios (2006) and
- Regional Road Corridor Design Guidelines (2000)

Urban Design Guidelines

The urban design guidelines for large format retail development are organized into the following six sections:

1. Streetscape and Built Form
2. Pedestrians and Cyclists
3. Vehicles and Parking
4. Landscape and Environment
5. Signs
6. Servicing and Utilities

1. Streetscape and Built Form

Guideline 1: Set new buildings back between 3.0 and 6.0 metres from the front property line, and from the side property line for corner sites, in order to define the street edge and provide space for pedestrian activities and landscaping.

Figure 1:
This commercial building is set back from the street and provides a generous pedestrian and landscaped area.

Guideline 2: Provide significant architectural or landscape features at the corner on corner sites where the building is set back further than 6.0 metres, to emphasize the public streets and enhance the streetscape.

Guideline 3: Orient the long side of each building to be parallel to the public street (Figure 2).

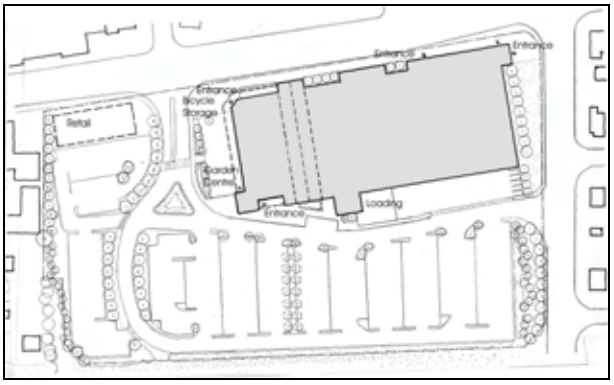

Figure 2:
This building is located on a corner and occupies more than 50% of the lot frontage.

Guideline 4: Use clear windows and doors to make the pedestrian level façade of walls facing the street highly transparent. Locate active uses at grade, such as restaurants, specialty in-store boutiques, food concessions and waiting areas (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Both the first and second floors of this building have clear windows.

Guideline 5: Locate interior uses such as seating areas, employee rooms, offices, waiting areas and lobbies, which have the potential for clear windows, along street-facing walls (Figure 4).

Figure 4:
The main façade of this commercial building faces a public street and has over 60% transparency.

Guideline 6: Landscape the area in front of a blank wall that faces public streets, and use projections, recesses, arcades, awnings, colour and texture to reduce the visual size of any unglazed walls (Figure 5).

Figure 5:
A corner tower, canopies, colour and material changes add interest to the corner façade of this building.

Guideline 7: Design the façade of buildings with multiple uses so that each use is defined separately through individual signage, individual entrances and individual canopies.

Guideline 8: Provide site furnishings, such as benches, bike racks and shelters, at building entrances and amenity areas (Figure 6).

Figure 6:
Site furnishings and landscaping enhance the entrance to this building.

Guideline 9: Orient the front façade to face the public street and locate front doors to be visible, and directly accessible, from the public street. (Figure 7).

Figure 7:
Both the front door and the front façade of this building face and enhance the streetscape.

Guideline 10: Base new development on an internal circulation pattern that allows logical movement throughout the site that will accommodate, and not preclude, intensification over time. Design the internal circulation pattern with direct connections to the surrounding streets (Figure 8).

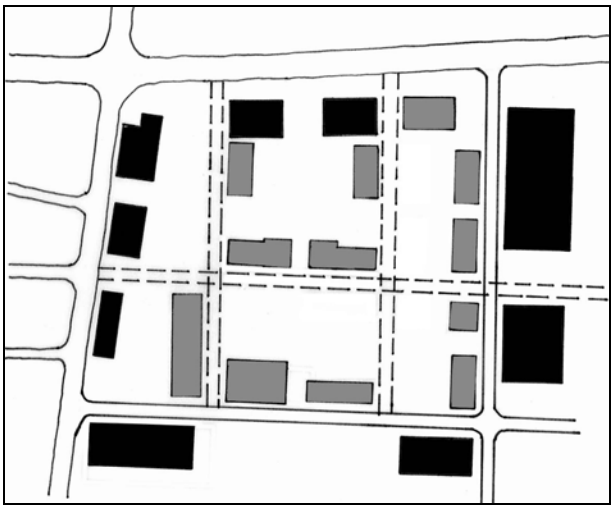

Figure 8:
Basing new development on a grid layout can easily accommodate redevelopment and future intensification.

2. Pedestrians and Cyclists

Guideline 11: Provide an unobstructed 2.0 metre wide sidewalk in the public right-of-way across private access driveways. Ensure little or no change in elevation (Figure 9).

Figure 9:
Minimal grade changes and conflict points with vehicles create a comfortable pedestrian environment.

Guideline 12: Provide direct, safe, continuous and clearly defined pedestrian access from public sidewalks, parking areas and transit stops to building entrances (Figure 10).

Guideline 13: Connect pedestrian walkways between adjacent properties in order to facilitate circulation between sites (Figure 10).

Figure 10:
A broad pedestrian walkway links the main entrances of buildings within a development site, adding to the pedestrian amenity.

Guideline 14: Provide unobstructed pedestrian walkways that are a minimum 2.0 metres wide along any façade with a customer entrance, along any façade adjacent to parking areas, and between the primary access and the public sidewalk. Provide additional width where doors swing out and car bumpers can potentially interfere with the walkway. Make all other on-site pedestrian walkways at least 1.5 metres wide (Figure 11).

Figure 11:
This walkway permits unobstructed pedestrian movement from the store entrance to the public street.

Guideline 15: Distinguish walkways from driving surfaces by using varied paving treatments and by raising walkways to curb level (Figures 12 and 13).

Figure 12:
Appropriately sized and clearly articulated pedestrian walkways.

Figure 13: Raised pedestrian walkways enhance safety for pedestrians crossing driveways.

Guideline 16: Provide weather protection at building entrances, close to transit stops, and in areas with pedestrian amenities (Figure 14).

Figure 14:
Glass awnings on this building protect pedestrians from the weather.

Guideline 17: Provide sheltered bicycle parking in visible locations near building entrances and pedestrian walkways. Ensure that these locations do not conflict with pedestrian circulation (Figure 15).

Figure 15:
Sheltered bicycle parking is incorporated into the building design.

3. Vehicles and Parking

Guideline 18: Link access drives and parking lots of adjacent properties in order to allow for the circulation of vehicles between sites.

Guideline 19: Share vehicular access to parking areas between adjacent properties in order to reduce the extent of interruption along the sidewalk and the streetscape.

Guideline 20: Locating surface parking spaces at the side or rear of buildings.

Guideline 21: Provide only the minimum number of parking spaces required by the Zoning By-law.

Guideline 22: Design the site circulation to minimize the conflict between pedestrians and vehicles. This can be achieved by orienting car parking spaces to minimize the number of traffic aisles that pedestrians must cross (Figure 16).

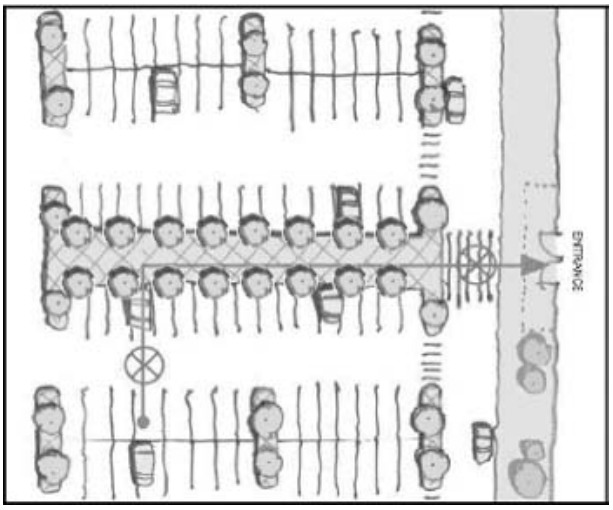

Figure 16:
Parking modules oriented toward building entrances minimize the number of conflict points

Guideline 23: Provide a consistent width of landscaped and pedestrian area across the site frontage (Figure 17).

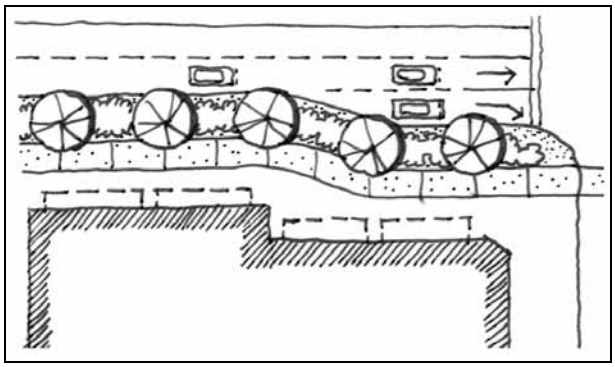

Figure 17:
The sidewalk and landscape area, in the figure on the left, are a consistent width.

4. Landscape and Environment

Guideline 24: Plant street trees between 7.0 and 10.0 metres apart along public streets and along the length of internal pedestrian walkways. Plant trees in permeable surface areas, with approximately 10.0 square metre of soil area per tree (Figure 18).

Figure 18:
Trees are planted along the length of this public frontage.

Guideline 25: Select trees, shrubs and other vegetation considering their tolerance to urban conditions, such as road salt and heat. Give preference to native species of the region that are of equal suitability.

Guideline 26: Provide a minimum 3.0 metre wide landscaped area along the edge of a site where parking areas, drive lanes or stacking lanes are adjacent to a public street. Use trees, shrubs and low walls to screen cars from view while allowing eye level visibility into the site (Figure 19).

Figure 19:
Landscaped low walls help screen the parked cars while allowing visibility to the area.

Guideline 27: Divide large parking areas into smaller and well-defined sections using soft and hard landscaping in order minimize the amount of paved areas (Figures 20a and 20b).

Figure 20a

Figures 20b:
Planting defines the pedestrian walkway and breaks up the large parking space.

Guideline 28: Plant trees in landscaped islands in parking areas, with at least two trees together and at least 10.0 square metres of soil area per tree (Figures 21a and 21b).

Figure 21a

Figures 21 b:
Landscaped parking islands reduce the amount of paved area on site.

Guideline 29: Provide a minimum 3.0 metre wide landscaped area, which may include a solid wall or fence in addition to planting, at the edges of sites that are adjacent to residential or institutional properties (Figure 22).

Figure 22:
Landscaped buffers provide an appropriate transition between large format retail sites and residential areas.

Guideline 30: Provide a minimum 2.5 metre wide landscape area along the site's side and rear yards in order to provide screening and enhance site environmental benefits.

Guideline 31: Landscape any area between the building and the sidewalk with foundation planting, trees, street furniture, and walkways to public sidewalks (Figure 23).

Figure 23:
Foundation planting enhances the relationship between the building and the street.

Guideline 32: Define pedestrian walkways within parking areas with continuous planting areas consisting of trees and shrubs (Figure 24).

Figure 24:
Landscaping along internal pedestrian walkways defines a safe, pedestrian realm.

Guideline 33: Protect and feature heritage, specimen and mature trees on site by minimizing grade changes and preserving permeable surfaces.

Guideline 34: Use sodded areas and shrub beds within parking areas to collect, store and filter stormwater in order to improve groundwater recharge (Figure 25).

Figure 25:
Planting islands with depressed curbs allow stormwater to run from paved areas into the islands.

Guideline 35: Plant trees, shrubs, ground cover etc. on any unbuilt portions of the site that are not required to meet minimum parking requirements. This includes any areas reserved for future phases of development.

Guideline 36: Use green building technologies such as green roofs, drip irrigation, and other Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) approaches.

5. Signs

Guideline 37: Design buildings to include defined spaces to accommodate signs that respect building scale, architectural features, signage uniformity and established streetscape design objectives (Figure 26).

Figure 26:
An example of using fascia signs that are in proportion with the building façade

Guideline38: Locate and design ground-mounted and wall-mounted signs to complement the character and scale of the area and promote an active, pedestrian friendly environment (Figure 27).

Figure 27:
This ground-mounted sign is in scale with the pedestrian environment.

Guideline 39: Integrate landscape features with ground-mounted signs.

Guideline 40: Allow for retailer brand identification where there are multiple buildings and uses on a site, but avoid individual corporate image, colour, and signage back-lit signs from dominating the site.

Guideline 41: Divide sign space equally between retailers for ground signs of multiple tenant projects to avoid corporate dominance

Guideline 42: Design sign illumination to be task-oriented and avoid glare/light spillover toward adjacent land uses.

Guideline 43: Eliminate visual clutter.

Guideline 44: Restrict temporary and portable signs. Prohibit billboards, revolving signs and roof signs on private property. (Refer to Temporary Signs on Private Property By-law and Permanent Signs on Private Property By-law).

6. Servicing and Utilities

Guideline 45: Share service and utility areas between different users within a single building or between different buildings, to maximize space efficiencies.

Guideline 46: Enclose all utility equipment within buildings or screen it from both the public street and private properties to the rear and ensure that noise is attenuated. This includes utility boxes, garbage and recycling container storage, loading docks and ramps and air conditioner compressors (Figures 28 and 29).

Figure 28: This building is designed with an internal service area that matches the building materials.

Figure 29: The materials and design of the service building match the main building.

Guideline 47: Design garbage enclosures that are external to the building with the same materials as the building and ensure that the wall height is sufficient to completely conceal garbage dumpsters.

Guideline 48: Provide lighting that is appropriate to the ground floor use and focuses on pedestrian areas.

Guideline 49: Use efficient white light sources on site to reduce energy costs and to create a natural colour balance for safety and security.

Guideline 50: Design lighting so that there is no light spilling, glare or light cast over adjacent uses.

Guideline 51: Design secondary doors, such as emergency exit doors, to blend in with the building façade.

Guideline 52: Plan the site to include areas for temporary snow storage without conflicting with site circulation, landscaping and utility boxes.

Glossary

Façade: the principal face of a building (also referred to as the front wall)

Foundation planting: planting that extends along a building wall and hides the foundation

Glazing: clear or lightly tinted glass windows

Pedestrian walkway: sidewalk on private property

Property line: the legal boundary of a property

Setback: the required distance from a road, property line, or another structure, within which no building can be located

Sidewalk: unobstructed concrete or paved area for pedestrian travel in the public right-of-way

Stacking lane: an on-site queuing lane for motorized vehicles, which is separated from other vehicular traffic and pedestrian circulation by barriers, markings or signs

Figure Credits

Figure 1: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 2: N/A, City of Ottawa

Figure 3: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 4: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 5: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 6: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 7: Hull, Quebec. City of Ottawa

Figure 8: N/A, City of Ottawa

Figure 9: City of Ottawa

Figure 10: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 11: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 12: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 13: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 14: Toronto, Ontario. Taylor Harriri Pontarini Architects

Figure 15: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 16: N/A, Adapted from IBI Group

Figure 17: N/A, City of Ottawa

Figure 18: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 19: Markham, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 20a: Easton, Ohio. www.eastontowncentre.com

Figure 20b: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 21a: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 21b: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 22: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 23: Calgary, Alberta. City of Ottawa

Figure 24: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 25: US Environmental Protection Agency

Figure 26: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 27: Kingston, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 28: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa

Figure 29: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa