

# Urban Design Guidelines for Development along Traditional Mainstreets

May 2006

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**Mainstreets** are defined in the Official Plan as "streets that offer some of the most significant opportunities in the city for intensification through more compact forms of development, a lively mix of uses and a pedestrian-friendly environment." Traditional Mainstreets, in contrast to Arterial Mainstreets, are defined as those Mainstreets developed primarily before 1945. They generally present a tightly knit urban fabric, with buildings that are often small-scale, with narrow frontages and set close to and addressing the street. This results in a strong pedestrian orientation and transit-friendly environment. Land uses are often mixed, with commercial uses at the street level and residential uses on the upper levels. These streets normally have a four-lane cross-section, on-street parking and adjacent development with limited on-site parking.

## 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 along Traditional Mainstreets. 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 streets identified as a Traditional Mainstreet within the Official Plan. Where a Community Design Plan or relevant planning study exists, these guidelines will augment those documents. They will also be used to help inform the preparation of new Community Design Plans.

## Objectives

- To promote development that will enhance and reinforce the recognized or planned scale and character of the streets;
- To promote development that is compatible with, and complements, its surroundings;
- To achieve high-quality built form and strengthen building continuity along Traditional Mainstreets;
- To foster compact, pedestrian-oriented development linked to street level amenities; and
- To accommodate a broad range of uses including retail, services, commercial uses, offices, residential and institutional uses where one can live, shop and access amenities.

### **Official Plan and By-Law Direction**

For Traditional Mainstreets, the Official Plan supports compatible development that respects the character of the street and adjacent areas, so that a more compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented development pattern, with building heights between four and six storeys, can be achieved or reinforced (Official Plan Amendment No. 28, section 3.6.3).

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, the Private Approach By-Law, Signs By-law and Zoning By-laws must be met.

In addition, respect the municipal and provincial policies specifically related to additions and infill associated with heritage buildings and areas: City of Ottawa Official Plan Section 4.6.1.2, 4.6.1.7 and 4.6.1.8 and the Provincial Policy Statement 2.6 Cultural Heritage.

### **Context and Challenges**

Traditional Mainstreets are found primarily within the older parts of the city, often pre-dating requirements to provide individual on-site parking. They serve as the main shopping street for the immediately adjoining community and, by virtue of unique specialty stores, often attract customers from beyond the local area. Vacant lots, aging retail strip malls, single storey developments, automobile sales lots, parking lots, and gas stations along these Traditional Mainstreets provide significant potential for intensification and redevelopment.

To remain competitive with outlying commercial shopping areas, Traditional Mainstreets must continue to respond to market trends. At the same time, to retain their role as an integral part of their surrounding community, new development must be of a type and scale that is compatible in form and considers the context of the street. These guidelines seek to sustain and enhance the spatial and design qualities of the streetscape and foster a pedestrian-oriented environment on Traditional Mainstreets.

### **Other Available Guidelines**

- Urban Design Guidelines for Large-Format Retail (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 developments along Traditional Mainstreets are organized into the following seven sections:

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

### 1. Streetscape

Guideline 1: Align streetwall buildings with the existing built form or with the average setback of the adjacent buildings in order to create a visually continuous streetscape (Figure 1).



Figure 1:  
Similar building setbacks  
create a strong street edge.

Guideline 2: Provide or restore a minimum 2.0 metre wide concrete sidewalk and locate to match approved streetscape design plans for the area. Where there is no approved streetscape plan, match the existing context. Provide a boulevard, for street furniture, trees and utilities, next to the sidewalk where possible. Provide an area adjacent to storefronts for canopies, outdoor patios or special merchant displays (the frontage zone). Create wider sidewalks for locations with high pedestrian volumes such as along traditional mainstreets in core urban areas (Figure 2).

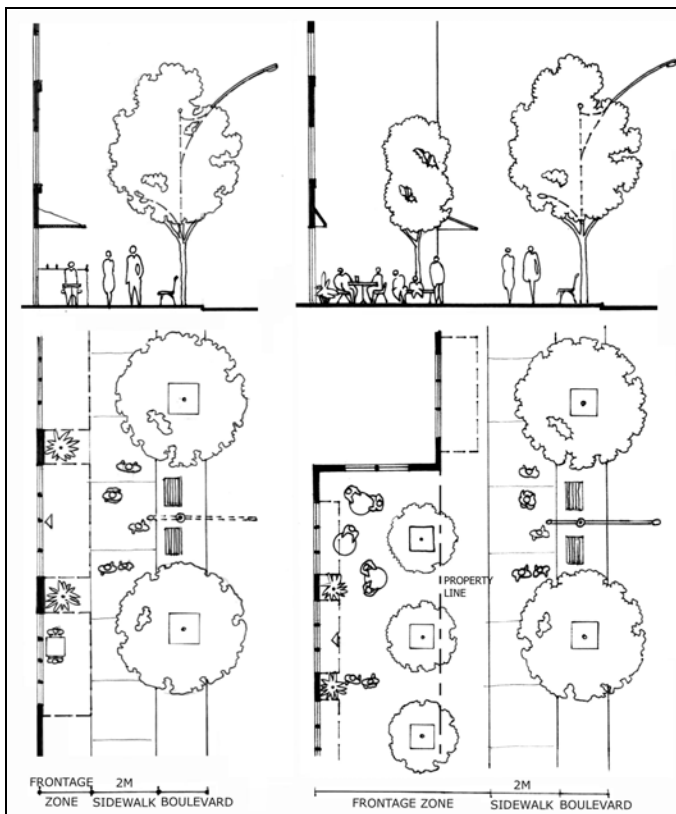


Figure 2:  
Streetscape section and plan  
showing the boulevard,  
sidewalk and area for retail  
amenity (frontage zone).

- Guideline 3: Use periodic breaks in the street wall or minor variations in building setback and alignment to add interest to the streetscape and to provide space for activities adjacent to the sidewalk (Figures 2 & 3 ).



Figure 3:  
*Small variations in building alignment add interest to the street.*

- Guideline 4: Locate streetscape elements in the boulevard clear of the unobstructed 2.0 metre sidewalk, including trees, paving, benches, newspaper boxes, bicycle parking and parking meters.
- Guideline 5: Cluster or group streetscape elements and utilities wherever possible to minimize clutter. Coordinate tree and street light locations with above and below-grade utilities.
- Guideline 6: Create attractive public and semi-public outdoor amenity spaces such as green spaces with trees, pocket parks, courtyards, outdoor cafés, seating and decorative pools or fountains (Figure 4).



Figure 4:  
*Outdoor cafés provide amenity space to the mainstreet and open the corner to more light and air.*

Guideline 7: Plant clusters of trees on the flanking residential streets, where they meet the mainstreet, for additional greenspace (Figure 5).



*Figure 5:  
New trees planted on the right, where the residential street meets the mainstreet, add green and help buffer the neighbourhood.*

## 2. Built Form

Guideline 8: Design quality buildings, rich in architectural detail, to respect the rhythm and patterns of the existing, or planned, buildings on the street, through the alignment of elements such as windows, front doors, cornice lines, fascias etc. (Figure 6).



*Figure 6:  
Infill development respects its context.*

Guideline 9: Design street sections with a ratio of *building height* to *road corridor width* of between 1:1 and 1:3. A ratio of 1:1 is appropriate for urban core areas, while a ratio of 1:2 to 1:3 is ideal for other traditional mainstreets (Figures 7 and 8).

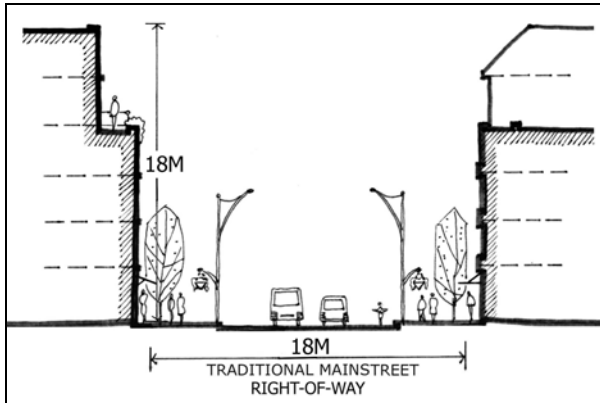


Figure 7:  
A ratio of 1:1 (in this example 18m represents 1) for building height to right-of-way width produces a comfortable sense of enclosure.

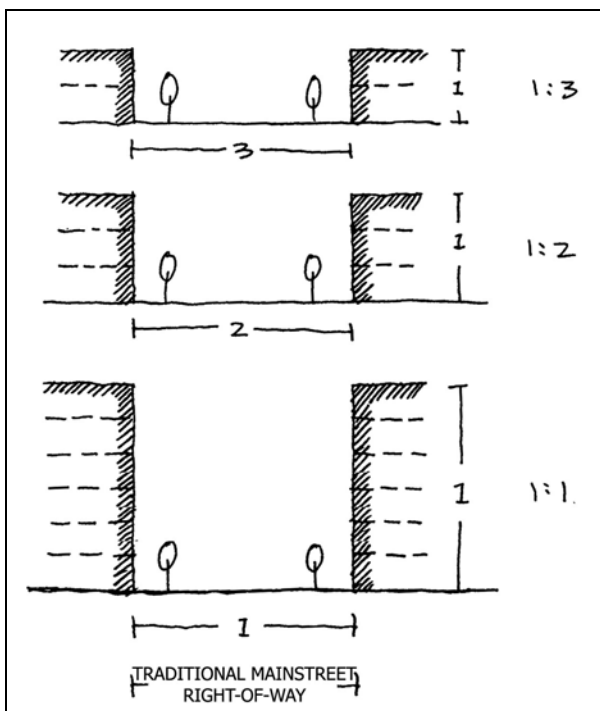


Figure 8:  
Street section ratios evolve from 1:3 to 1:1 as a street intensifies.

Guideline 10: Locate mixed-use development by concentrating height and mass at nodes and gateways (Figure 9).

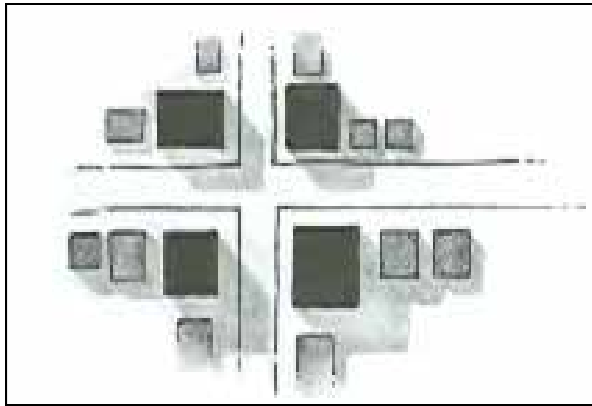


Figure 9:  
Major intersections are good locations  
for taller buildings.

Guideline 11: Ensure adequate sunlight for sidewalks by building within a 45-degree angular plane measured from the opposite sidewalk curb (Figure 10).

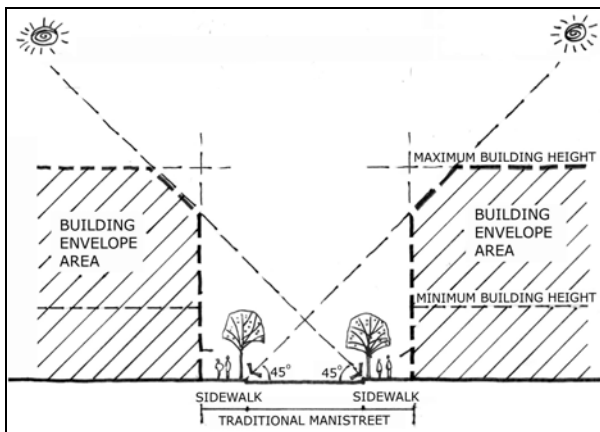


Figure 10:  
Building within sun angle envelopes  
helps ensure adequate light on  
mainstreet sidewalks.

Guideline 12: Set back the upper floors of taller buildings to help achieve a human scale and more light on the sidewalks (Figure 11).



*Figure 11:  
Buildings set back above 3-4 storeys  
preserve a human scale and allow  
more light to reach the sidewalk.*

Guideline 13: Ensure sufficient light and privacy for residential and institutional properties to the rear by ensuring that new development is compatible and sensitive with adjacent uses with regard to maximizing light and minimizing overlook.

Guideline 14: Use clear windows and doors, to make the pedestrian level façade of walls facing the street highly transparent, and locate active pedestrian-oriented uses at grade (Figure 12).



*Figure 12:  
A highly visible street level storefront  
animates the streetscape.*



Guideline 15: Highlight buildings on corner sites, where two public streets intersect, with special treatment such as a corner entrance. Continue the same level of architectural detailing around both sides of the building (Figure 13).



*Figure 13:  
Architectural detail enhances the streetscape on the public sides of a corner building.*

Guideline 16: Provide pedestrian weather protection such as colonnades, individual canopies, awnings and balconies (Figure 14).



*Figure 14:  
Individual canopies provide weather protection and animate the streetscape.*

Guideline 17: Locate residential units above vehicular traffic in a mixed-use building and provide shared entrances to residential units, clearly accessible from the street. (For these units, consider triple glazed windows and bedrooms located away from the mainstreet for noise and ventilation concerns).

### 3. Pedestrians and Cyclists

Guideline 18: Locate front doors to face the mainstreet and be directly accessible from the public sidewalk.

Guideline 19: Design pedestrian walkways of materials such as concrete or unit pavers that are easily maintained for safety.

Guideline 20: Provide sheltered bicycle parking in visible locations near building entrances and pedestrian walkways. Ensure that these locations minimize conflict with pedestrians (Figure 15).



*Figure 15:  
Sheltered bicycle parking located by the  
front door.*

Guideline 21: Create inviting, well-lit pedestrian walkways to link rear parking areas to the public sidewalk/street (Figure 16).



*Figure 16:  
Pedestrian walkways link the mainstreet  
to parking behind and provide room for  
tree planting.*

#### 4. Vehicles and Parking

- Guideline 22: Locate surface parking in the rear yard with vehicular access off side streets and laneways.
- Guideline 23: Share vehicular access to parking areas between adjacent properties in order to reduce the extent of interruption along the sidewalk and the streetscape. (Figure 17).

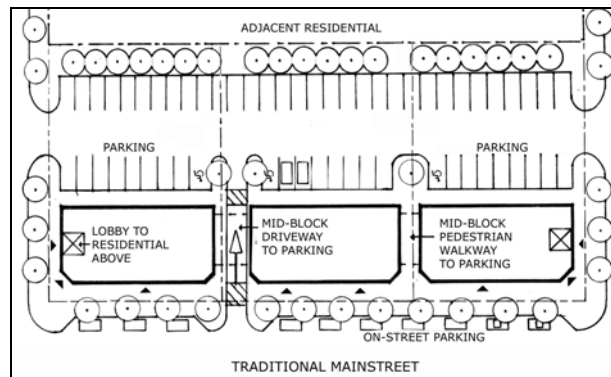


Figure 17:  
Rear parking lots provide continuous streetscapes for pedestrians in front and more parking on the mainstreet.

- Guideline 24: Preserve the rear, existing vehicular public laneway system wherever possible. Re-activate laneways where they have become dormant.
- Guideline 25: Where properties are landlocked in the middle of the block and no other alternative exists, vehicular driveways can be provided off the mainstreet.
- Guideline 26: Provide only the minimum number of required car parking spaces. Consider parking on the mainstreet.
- Guideline 27: Provide a minimum 3.0 metre wide landscape 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 18).



Figure 18:  
Low walls and planting visually screen parking from the public sidewalk.

## 5. Landscape and Environment

- Guideline 28: Select trees, shrubs and other vegetation considering their tolerance to urban conditions such as road salt or heat. Give preference to native species of the region that are of equal suitability.
- Guideline 29: Protect and feature heritage, specimen and mature trees on site by minimizing grade changes.
- Guideline 30: Plant street trees between 6.0 and 8.0 metres apart along public streets and internal pedestrian walkways. Plant trees in permeable surfaces with approximately 10.0 square metres of soil area per tree.
- Guideline 31: Provide a minimum 3.0 metre wide landscape area, which may include a solid wall or fence in addition to planting, at the edges of sites adjacent to residential or institutional properties.
- Guideline 32: Use green building technologies such as green roofs, drip irrigation, and other Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) approaches.

## 6. Signs

- Guideline 33: Design buildings to include defined spaces to accommodate signs that respect building scale, architectural features, signage uniformity and established streetscape design objectives (Figure 19).



*Figure 19:  
Compact signs fit in with the  
design of the building.*

- Guideline 34: Design sign illumination to be task oriented and avoid glare/light spillover toward adjacent land uses.
- Guideline 35: Eliminate visual clutter.
- Guideline 36: Place temporary signs where they are clear of pedestrian travel.

## 7. Servicing and Utilities

- Guideline 37: Share service and utility areas between different users within a single building or among different buildings.
- Guideline 38: Enclose all utility equipment within buildings or screen them from both the traditional mainstreet and private properties to the rear. These include utility boxes, garbage and recycling container storage, loading docks, ramps, air conditioner compressors, utility meters and transformers.
- Guideline 39: Supplement street lighting where necessary with lighting affixed to the buildings in order to accentuate and animate buildings and spaces.
- Guideline 40: Design lighting so that there is no glare or light spilling onto surrounding uses.
- Guideline 41: Provide lighting that is appropriate to the street character and mainstreet ground floor use, with a focus on pedestrian areas.

## Glossary

**Amenity:** something that contributes to an area's needs, whether social, environmental or cultural

**Articulation:** architectural detail that gives a building interest and added richness

**Boulevard:** area between the curb and the sidewalk for: street trees, newspaper boxes, parking meters, light poles, bike rings etc. so that sidewalks are kept free and clear for pedestrians

**Built form:** buildings and structures

**Clear pedestrian travel route:** unobstructed 2.0 metre wide sidewalk

**Compatible / Compatibility:** when the density, form, bulk, height, setbacks, and/or materials of buildings are able to co-exist with their surroundings.

**Curb cut:** a break in the curb for car access from the street onto a lot

**Driveway:** a private way across land used for vehicular access from a public street - includes a private right-of-way

**Glazing:** clear or lightly tinted glass windows

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

**Fascia:** a plain horizontal band along the facade, often where the building's sign is placed (Refer Figure 6)

**Frontage Zone:** the area in the right-of-way between the building and the sidewalk; can include planting, outdoor patios etc.

**Gateway:** a main point of entrance into a district or a neighbourhood and a good location for intensification.

**Hard landscape:** landscape features other than plant materials (e.g. decorative pavers, planter boxes, walks, fences, retaining walls, etc.)

**Intensification:** higher, bigger and more compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented development

**Lane:** a narrow street at the back of buildings, generally used for service and parking

**Light pollution:** light created from excessive illumination, by unshielded or misaligned light fixtures, and by inefficient lamp sources, with health implications to humans and wildlife

**Mews:** small pedestrian passageway to link parking to public sidewalks, parks to sidewalks etc.

**Nodes:** important locations in a city to highlight, feature or intensify, occurring at key intersections and neighbourhood gateways

**Overlook:** the design of a private amenity space of one unit has the potential, if incorrectly placed, to 'overlook' the private amenity space of another

**Parking lot:** a lot or other place used for the temporary parking of four or more passenger vehicles

**Pedestrian scale:** a size of a building or space that a pedestrian perceives as not dominating or overpowering

**Pedestrian travel route:** the unobstructed portion of the sidewalk

**Pedestrian walkway:** sidewalk on private property

**Permeable surface:** a surface formed of material that allows infiltration of water to the sub-base

**Property line:** the legal boundary of a property

**Public realm:** the streets, lanes, parks and open spaces that are free and available to anyone to use

**Right-of-way:** a public or private area that allows for passage of people or goods, including, but not limited to, freeways, streets, bicycle paths, alleys, trails and pedestrian walkways

**Scale:** the size of a building or an architectural feature in relation to its surroundings and to the size of a person

**Screening:** vegetation, landforms, or structures that serve to reduce the impact of development on nearby properties

**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

**Soft landscape:** planting such as trees, shrub, vines, perennials and annuals

**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

**Streetscape:** the overall character and appearance of a street formed by buildings and landscape features that frame the public street. Includes building façades, street trees, plants, lighting, street furniture, paving, etc.

**Street frontage:** the front of the property facing the street

**Street Section:** a street cross-section which includes the horizontal line of the street plus the vertical edges of the buildings, on either side, that face it

**Streetwall:** street edge, along which a line of buildings can occur and defines the limits of the right-of-way.

**Urban design:** the analysis and design of the city's physical form

**Urban form:** the pattern of development in an urban area

**Figure Credits**

- Figure 3: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa
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- Figure 5: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa
- Figure 6: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa
- Figure 11: Toronto, Ontario.
- Figure 12: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa
- Figure 13: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa
- Figure 14, Kingston, Ontario.
- Figure 15: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa
- Figure 16: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa
- Figure 18: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa
- Figure 19: Ottawa, Ontario. City of Ottawa