



# Urban Design

**A Reference Guide to Creating  
Great Places and Great Spaces**

Planning, Transit and the Environment

Publication #2103

Summer 2007

**ottawa.ca**

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# What is Urban Design?

The City of Ottawa's Official Plan defines urban design as “the process of applying desired functional and aesthetic parameters to the design of the city and its parts.”

More specifically, urban design is about creating public friendly environments such as, charming streetscapes, bustling markets, distinct town centres, safe neighbourhoods, beautiful parks, trails, and public squares.



Source: Canadian Aerial Photo Corporation.

*This photo of downtown Ottawa illustrates how buildings can combine to create distinct areas, and how streets, sidewalks, parks, pathways, and bridges connect and define the boundaries of each area.*

Implementing good urban design is an ongoing and creative process that requires a common vision and cooperative efforts amongst many people and professions. Planners, developers, architects, landscape architects, engineers, artists, politicians, community groups, business owners, and residents all have a role and responsibility toward creating and maintaining highly functional and beautiful communities.

# The City's Design Objectives\*

The body of this guide is organized around the City's six design objectives. Under these objectives, 24 design themes are introduced using local photographs to illustrate how good urban design can be applied to various places and spaces throughout the city. The objectives and themes are not in order of importance and can only be applied through careful contextual consideration.



\* Derived from the more detailed design objectives contained in Section 2.5.1 of the City of Ottawa Official Plan. For accuracy, the Official Plan should be consulted.

## Design Objective 1:

# Create Unique Communities

Unique communities are created when their physical design reflects local values, history, culture, or the surrounding landscape. As communities evolve, it's important that new developments contribute toward distinct and unique community features.

### 1. Views and Vistas

Contribute to memorable and inspiring public views by lining up interesting view planes, creating neighbourhood focal points, and integrating symbols of community identity.



NATIONAL TREASURES



PLACES TO GATHER

### 2. Building Facades

Address and define public places and spaces with an interesting mix of facades that represent and enliven the character of the surrounding community.



SETTING THE MOOD



ADDRESSING THE STREET

### 3. Public Art

Add character and interest to a development by integrating some form of public art that reflects on the local history, culture, or unique aspects of the surrounding landscape.



ON THE WALL



OFF THE WALL

### 4. Themed Amenities

Define boundaries and unify special areas with themed public amenities such as benches, banners, light fixtures, planters, waste bins, and bike racks.



TRADITIONAL



MODERN

## Design Objective 2:

# Promote Quality Development

Throughout many areas of the city, quality has become a civic signature and a symbol of our national identity. To maintain this image, public and private developments should carefully consider the aesthetic and functional relationships that exist between public and private spaces.



**GRAND STATEMENTS**



**BOLD GESTURES**

### **5. Creative Architecture and Inspired Design**

Create inspired and compatible additions to the community that go beyond function to address creativity, aesthetics, and form.



**ACCENT LIGHTING**



**BOULEVARD TREATMENT**

### **6. Attention to Detail**

Decorate special places and spaces with unique details and quality materials that enliven the theme of the surrounding district or neighbourhood.



**SEASONAL PLANTERS**



**MULCHING CAN REDUCE MAINTENANCE**

### **7. Well Maintained**

Design spaces that are both beautiful and easily maintained.



**SCREENED UTILITIES**



**DECORATIVE FENCING**

### **8. Reduced Negative Impacts**

Locate blank walls, parking lots, garbage enclosures and utility equipment away from public view or screen with professional landscaping.

## Design Objective 3:

# Enhance Safety and Accessibility

Safe and attractive routes to popular destinations promote an active lifestyle where people feel comfortable and confident to walk, bike and use public transit. To improve safety and access throughout the city, new developments should provide direct connections to nearby destinations and consider site features that enhance the pedestrian environment.

### 9. Connected and Convenient

Link sidewalks to buildings and integrate pedestrian-oriented features such as shade trees, rest stops, barrier-free connections, bike racks, and shelter from the weather.



TRANSPARENT SHELTER



RELAXING COURTYARD

### 10. Natural Surveillance

Increase the real and perceived safety by orienting 'the eyes' of private development toward public places and spaces.



NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAYGROUND



VISIBLE PATHWAY

### 11. Strategic Lighting

Create a pleasant aesthetic and a safe environment for places that are intended for use after dark.



PEDESTRIAN LIGHTING



ACCENT LIGHTING

### 12. Way Finding

Preserve distinct views and integrate signage that makes it easy for people to understand where they are in relation to where they are going.



VIEW TO PEACE TOWER



PATHWAY SIGNAGE

## Design Objective 4:

# Respect Established Character

In distinct and established communities where character has been built up over many years, it's important that new and infill developments recognize and complement the unique qualities and positive characteristics that make the surrounding community special.



STITTVILLE



SPARKS STREET INFILL

### 13. Established Themes

Complement the surrounding scale, mass, and rhythm with compatible architecture and subtle details that are common to established developments.



LAURIER BRIDGE



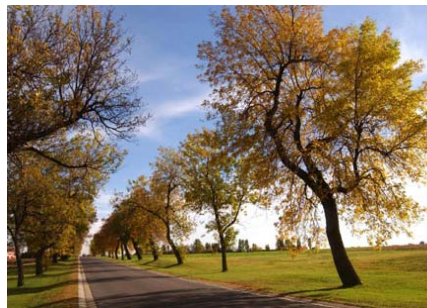
WATSON'S MILL

### 14. Community Landmarks

Develop around landmarks with sensitivity so as not to overpower or detract from these often cherished symbols of community.



GALETTA



CENTRAL EXPERIMENTAL FARM

### 15. Cultural Landscapes

Preserve our historical relationship with the land by respecting significant cultural landscapes.



RIDEAU FALLS



KANATA

### 16. Unique Landforms

Highlight unique landforms so that residents and visitors can identify and connect with the natural landscape.

## Design Objective 5:

# Incorporate Adaptability and Diversity

As time passes, economic conditions and demographics shift, resulting in new demands and needs for land use. To ensure that our communities can adapt to future conditions, development should incorporate a greater mix of housing types and building design should be adaptable to a diversity of future uses and users.

### 17. Mixed Uses

Contribute to vibrant and walkable communities by combining residential developments with commercial and civic uses.



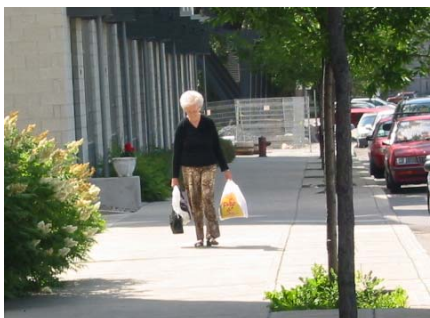
SPARKS STREET



BYWARD MARKET

### 18. Anticipate Change

Consider appropriate design responses to major trends such as our aging demographic, climate change, obesity rates, and local growth projections.



WALKABLE SHOPPING



ANDREW HAYDON PARK

### 19. Adaptive and Reusable

Accommodate a wide variety of future uses with flexible site layouts and construction techniques that allow buildings to be easily converted, salvaged, or reused.



ADAPTIVE USE AWARD



SALVAGED BUILDING MATERIALS

### 20. Innovation

Explore new and creative ways of approaching the many design challenges that exist throughout the city.



INFILL AWARD



GREEN ROOF



## Design Objective 6:

# Protect Natural Systems

In urban settings we often forget how dependent we are on natural systems. We rely on nature to renew our water and air, and use natural areas to reconnect with our senses. For the long-term health and sustainability of our city, all developments should integrate some aspects of environmental design.



TRANSIT- ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT



MID-RISE RESIDENTIAL



URBAN ESCAPES



ANDREW HAYDON PARK



RAIN BARREL/ SOLAR PANEL



LEED® CERTIFIED



TREE-LINED STREET



NATURALIZED STORMWATER POND

### 21. Compact Development

Reduce urban sprawl by locating compact or intensified development along major arteries and in proximity to nodes of development that are walkable or supported by public transit.

### 22. Resource Protection

Protect air and water quality by preserving parks, greenspaces, wetlands, watercourses and mature trees.

### 23. Green Buildings

Incorporate environmentally friendly design features such as green roofs, solar panels, drip irrigation, permeable site surfaces, optimized solar gain, and onsite gardens.

### 24. Green Infrastructure

Combine function with reduced environmental impacts by providing infrastructure such as dedicated bike lanes, street trees, naturalized stormwater management ponds, energy efficient streetlights, and community gardens.

# Development Review

For Official Plan, Zoning By-law Amendments, Plans of Subdivision and major Site Plan Control applications, community consultation is an integral part of the process. City staff, community organizations, and individual members of the public have several opportunities to provide comments and feedback relating to the details of these types of applications.

Community organizations can automatically receive notification of specific development applications or studies to be undertaken by registering with the City. To register you must fill out a two-page form that can be found on [ottawa.ca](http://ottawa.ca) by keyword searching 'Public Notification'. If you're not a member of a community organization and would like to review a development application or if you have general inquiries you must contact the planner on file whose name is located on the bottom of each public notification sign or advertisement.

**Notice  
Avis**

**Site Plan Control  
Proposal**

An application has been received to obtain Site Plan approval to construct a 2-storey light assembly & production building and to renovate and expand an existing warehouse building to accommodate sample/showroom addition.

**Proposition visant la  
réglementation du plan  
d'implantation**

Demande visant à obtenir l'approbation d'un plan d'implantation pour la construction d'un bâtiment de deux étages servant à la production et à l'assemblage léger et pour la rénovation et l'agrandissement d'un entrepôt afin d'y aménager une salle d'échantillons et d'exposition.

**92-110, avenue Bentley Avenue**

**Inquiries in English**  
☎ 613-580-2424, ext. 41700  
Bev.Streicher@ottawa.ca

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☎ 613-580-2424, poste 27500  
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Regardless of your specific interest in a development, it's essential that your input is based on sound planning principles and knowledge of any studies, plans, or policies that relate to the subject property. Once aware of the broad directions for your community, it will be easier to recognize appropriate design considerations relating to the fit, function, and form of each proposed development.

Visit [ottawa.ca](http://ottawa.ca) for more detailed information relating to development review and approval processes.

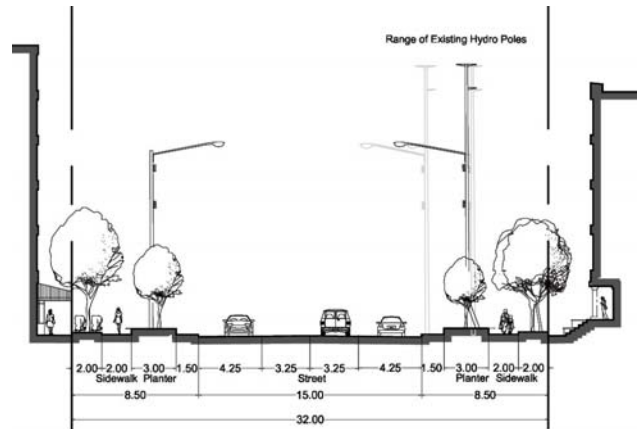
# Communicating Development

Most development applications must be accompanied by drawings that clearly communicate details of the proposed addition to the community. Depending upon the complexity, location, and type of development, typical drawings may include:

**1. Plan** drawings are composed from an aerial view and are best used to communicate site layouts, landscape plans, and functional relationships.



**2. Cross-section** drawings are like a slice across a specific section of a project. These types of drawings are very effective for showing proportions and elements within the streetscape.



**3. Elevation** drawings are 2-dimensional and show the exterior details of a building or structure. Elevations are best used to show façade details, building height, and scale.



ENTRY ELEVATION

**4. Perspective** drawings are 3-dimensional views and are best used to communicate a project in its surrounding context and to assess issues relating to mass and compatibility.



# Related Information

The following information is key to understanding and implementing good urban design throughout Ottawa. These, and many more related topics can be explored in detail by performing keyword searches on [ottawa.ca](http://ottawa.ca)

<b>Policies</b>
Official Plan Volume 1 Section 2.5.1 Compatibility and Community Design
Official Plan Volume 2A Secondary Plans
Comprehensive Zoning By-law (in progress)
Community Design Plans (14 completed to date)
Street Design Policy for Special Streets (in progress)
Right-of-Way Lighting Policy (in progress)
<b>Projects</b>
Downtown Ottawa Urban Design Strategy
Urban Design Guidelines (Traditional Mainstreets, Arterial Mainstreets, Large Format Retail, Gas Stations, Drive-Through Facilities, Low-Medium Density Infill Housing, Greenfield Neighbourhoods)
Land Use and Design Guidelines for Transit Oriented Development
Outdoor Patio Design Guidelines
Regional Road Corridor Design Guidelines
Guidelines for Transit Oriented Development
Environmental Noise Control Guidelines
<b>Programs</b>
Green Partnership Program
Public Art Program
<b>Promotion &amp; Education</b>
Annex 3 of Official Plan: Design Framework
Ottawa Urban Design Awards
Ottawa Architectural Conservation Awards
Accessibility by Design Awards
Urban Design: A Reference Guide to Creating Great Places and Great Spaces

## Get Involved

### 1. Send us your thoughts

The City is always looking for new and innovative ways to overcome barriers and advance the themes introduced in this guide. If you or your organization has ideas, questions, or suggestions please e-mail them to [urbandesign@ottawa.ca](mailto:urbandesign@ottawa.ca)

### 2. Community Associations/ Groups

Whether you're interested in public art, protecting the environment, or preserving heritage, one of the most effective ways to get involved is by volunteering your time and talents to an organized community group.

### 3. Public Consultations

Check [ottawa.ca](http://ottawa.ca) for a list of upcoming public consultations and plan to attend meetings that interest you.

### 4. Talk to your Councillor

Attend an upcoming ward meeting and get to know the issues and opportunities for improving design in your community.

### 5. Pre-consultation

If you are planning a development you should speak with a city planner first. They can help guide you through the process, provide information on what you will need to submit to the City, and answer questions.