

Urban Design Guidelines for Neighbourhoods and Streets

Mainstreets (Wider than 30m)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

1.0 Site Organization

- 1.1 Building Placement.....08
- 1.2 Pedestrians and cyclists11
- 1.3 Vehicles and Parking12
- 1.4 Utility and Services14

2.0 Built Form

- 2.1 Height and Massing.....16
- 2.2 Animation and Articulation.....18

3.0 Pedestrian Realm

- 3.1 Streetscape Element.....21
- 3.2 Signage and Lighting.....24
- 3.3 Landscaping.....25

Image Credit

Glossary: See the urban design guideline page on Ottawa.ca for definition of terminologies (search “urban design guidelines glossary”).

Published 2026





INTRODUCTION

This section outlines:

- The objectives of this guideline document
- The applicable Official Plan and By-law directions
- Key issues related to different context
- Responsibilities related to sustainable design
- When and how the guidelines are to be used

INTRODUCTION

Definitions

Mainstreet Corridor (or Mainstreet) is a land use designation of the Official Plan. The designation applies to bands of land along specified streets (shown on Schedule B Series) whose planned function combines a medium to high density of development, a greater degree of mixed uses and a higher level of street transit service.

For the purposes of these Urban Design Guidelines, the Mainstreet Corridors are broken up into two types: those narrower than 30 metres, and those wider than 30 metres to reflect the historic Traditional and Arterial Mainstreet Designations under the former City of Ottawa Official Plan.

Use and Application

These guidelines are to be used during the preparation and review of development proposals along Mainstreet Corridors wider than 30 metres shown on the Schedule B Series.

These are general guidelines. They are a tool kit and not intended to be used as a checklist for evaluating a proposal and not all of the guidelines are applicable to every site. The context of each development proposal will inform the application of, and the emphasis on, the particular guidelines that are relevant.

Where specific policies are provided in an area-specific policy document, such as a Secondary Plan or a Community Design Plan (CDP), the area-specific policies will take precedent. Guidelines in this document may augment such area-specific policies. The guidelines will also be a resource for the preparation of CDPs.

Objectives

The objectives of these guidelines are to highlight ways to:

- foster compatible development that will contribute to the recognized or planned character of the streets
- promote a comfortable pedestrian environment and create attractive streetscapes
- achieve high-quality built form and establish a strong street edge along Mainstreet Corridors greater than 30 metres
- facilitate a gradual transition to more intensive forms of development on Mainstreet Corridors greater than 30 metres
- accommodate a broad range of uses including retail, services, commercial, office, institutional and higher density residential
- enhance connections that link development sites to public transit, roads and pedestrian walkways

Official Plan and By-Law Direction

The Mainstreets, along with the Hubs, are expected to see significant growth and to accommodate the majority of the services, amenities, and employment. Mainstreets are the centre of the 15 minute neighbourhoods and support the economic vitality of the community. Mainstreet Corridors provide safe and convenient pedestrian and cycling facilities and are conveniently accessible by transit. The Official Plan permits a mix of uses throughout the building in the Mainstreet designation. The Zoning By-law may require active commercial, or service uses on the ground floor, which include those that support cultural development in order to maintain, extend, or create a continuous stretch of active frontages along a Mainstreet.

Mainstreet Corridors greater than 30 metres exist in Inner Urban, Outer Urban, and Suburban Transects. Along these Corridors, the Official Plan supports compatible development and a gradual transformation to a more compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented pattern of development within a mid-to-high rise-built form. The Plan calls for development to respect the character of the street and the heritage context, and requires sensitive integration with the surrounding low-rise neighbourhoods. The Official Plan stipulates that built form transition should occur within the Corridors.

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, including heritage conservation district plans and guidelines.

Context and Issues

Development along Mainstreet Corridors greater than 30 metres in width are traditionally low in profile, set back from the street, and separated from other buildings by large areas of asphalt. This type of development has created large gaps in the urban fabric and has generally produced unpleasant walking environments and incomplete streetscapes. Mainstreet Corridors greater than 30m are prime locations that present significant opportunities to: intensify and enhance development in a manner that creates attractive pedestrian environments; contribute to vibrant new neighbourhoods; and create transit-friendly places. The challenge is to facilitate the evolution of these Mainstreet Corridors over time to a more balanced vehicular and pedestrian environment with the streetscape defined and supported by buildings and landscape.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Design

One of the objectives of the Official Plan is to build a city that is energy conscious, mitigates emissions and is more resilient to the impacts of climate change. All development should consider opportunities to reduce resource consumption during construction, and provide buildings that conserve energy, reduce peak demand and provide resilience to power disruptions throughout their life cycle. All buildings should consider using efficient mechanical and electrical systems as well as incorporating renewable energy generation features. The design of buildings should prevent thermal bridging and providing appropriate wall thickness and window to wall ratios to insulate the building.

Building resiliency to flooding and future climate risks is an objective of the Official Plan. Proponents are encouraged to design stormwater infrastructure to be durable, adaptive and resilient to future climate events. Low-impact development or nature-based solutions should be considered where possible.

The City of Ottawa encourages proponents of any development to explore and apply best sustainable practices for the full life cycle of the site and buildings. The City encourages the use of sustainable design standards, such as the Canadian Green Building Council (CaGBC) Zero Carbon Building Standards, rating system and the International WELL Building Institute WELL Building Standard in the planning, design, construction and operation stages of a development.

Development along Mainstreet Corridors wider than 30 metres carries the responsibility to achieve this objective. The design guidelines included in this document support sustainable design by promoting a more compact, inclusive, transit-supportive, pedestrian-friendly, and attractive urban environment, in addition to a building of higher energy efficiency and greater climate resilience.



1.0 SITE ORGANIZATION

The Mainstreet Corridors greater than 30m are mostly developed after the Second World War in a pattern that is dependent on private automobile transportation. They provide necessary services to the surrounding neighbourhoods and sometimes the broader community. Some Corridors have frequent transit services. The Official Plan supports the transformation of these Mainstreets into a denser and pedestrian-friendly environment that supports business and other socio-economic and cultural activities. The Official Plan requires development along the wide Mainstreet Corridors to respond to context, to frame, activate, and be well connected to adjacent streets, parks, and open spaces. The site organization should strive to achieve these overarching objectives. The guidelines in this section highlight the following key considerations:

- Building placement
- Pedestrians and Cyclists
- Vehicles and Parking
- Utilities and Services

1

SITE ORGANIZATION

Building Placement

1.1 Building Placement

- 1 Locate new buildings along the public street edge (Diagram 1).
- 2 Set new buildings 0 to 3.0 metres back from the front property line, and 0 to 3.0 metres back 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).

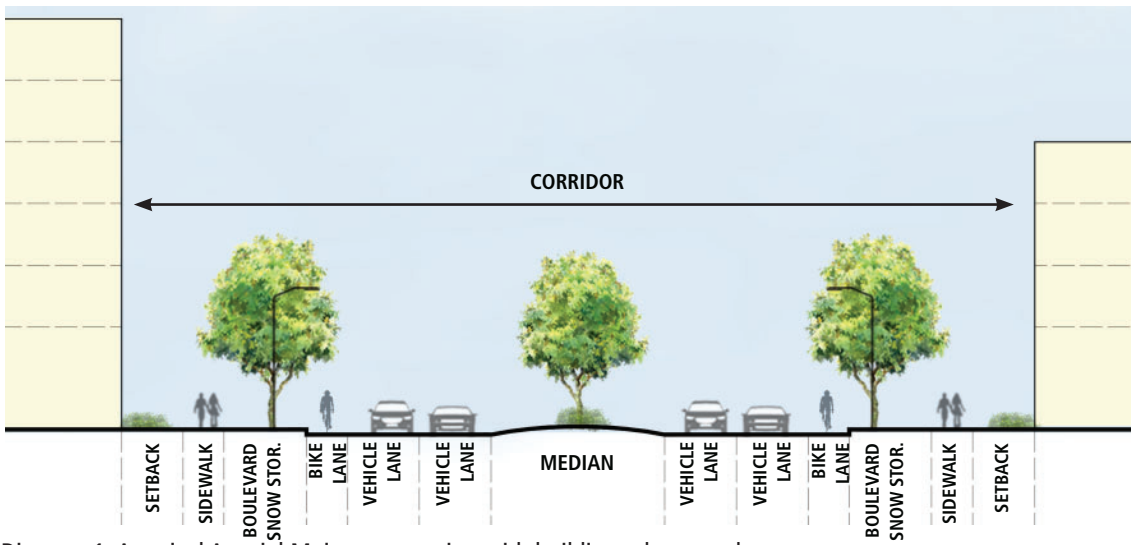


Diagram 1: A typical Arterial Mainstreet section with buildings close to the street.



Figure 1: Increased setbacks provide room for wider sidewalks.

- 3 Design new development to be sensitive to the general physical character of adjacent neighbourhoods. Protect the positive elements of the existing fabric including streetwall position, heritage elements, existing trees, pedestrian routes, public facilities and pedestrian amenities (Figure 2).
- 4 Ensure that buildings occupy the majority of the lot frontage. If the site is on a corner, situate the building at the lot line with the entrance at the corner (Figure 3).



Figure 2: New development that is sensitive to the neighbourhood contributes to a vibrant streetscape..



Figure 3: Corner entrances anchor the intersection.

1 SITE ORGANIZATION

- 5 Create intensified, mixed-use development, incorporating public amenities such as bus stops and transit shelters, at nodes and gateways by concentrating height and mass at these locations (Diagram 2).

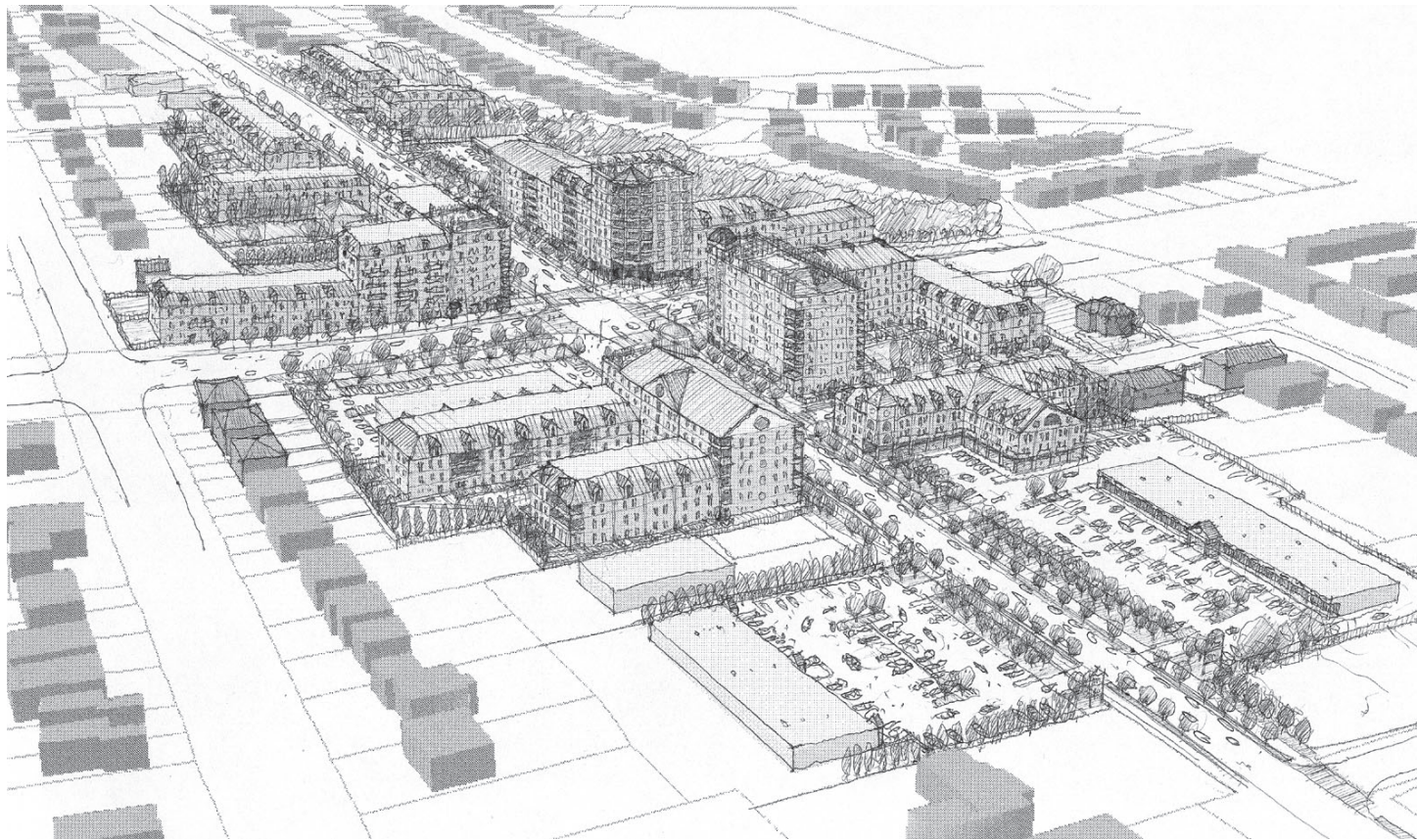


Diagram 2: Gateways into a neighborhood are prime locations for intensification

1.4 Pedestrians and Cyclists

- 1 Connect pedestrian walkways between adjacent properties in order to facilitate circulation between sites (Figure 4).
- 2 Provide direct, safe, continuous and clearly defined pedestrian access from public sidewalks to building entrances.
- 3 Provide a 2.0 metre wide unobstructed concrete walkway along any façade adjacent to parking areas, and between the primary entrance and the public sidewalk. Provide additional width where doors swing out and care bumpers can potentially interfere with the walkway. Make all other on-site pedestrian walkways at least 1.5 metres wide (Figure 5).



Figure 4: Walkways enhance pedestrian circulation between sites.



Figure 5: This concrete walkway connects the entrances of multiple commercial units and the public sidewalk.

1

SITE ORGANIZATION

Vehicles and Parking

1.4 Vehicles and Parking

- 1 Share vehicular access to parking areas between adjacent properties in order to reduce the extent of interruption along the sidewalk and the streetscape. (Diagram 3).
- 2 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 (Diagram 4).
- 3 Link access drives and parking lots of adjacent properties in order to allow for the circulation of vehicles between sites.
- 4 Locate surface parking spaces at the side or rear of buildings. Provide only the minimum number of parking spaces required by the Zoning By-law.

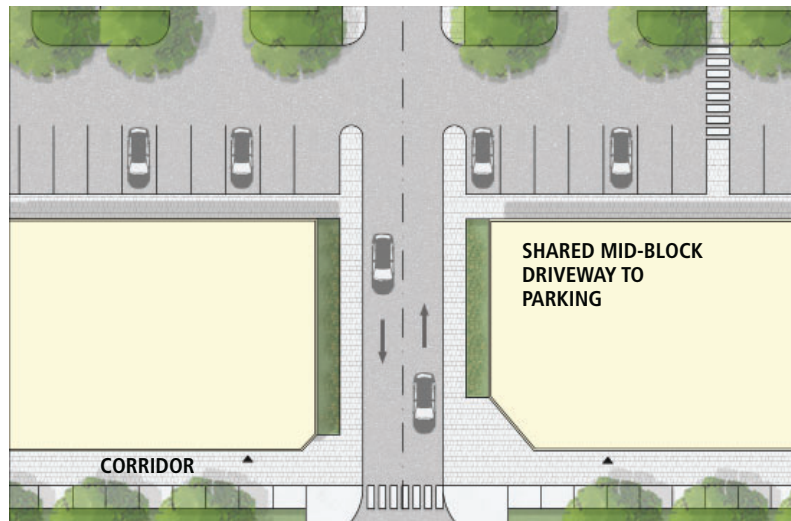
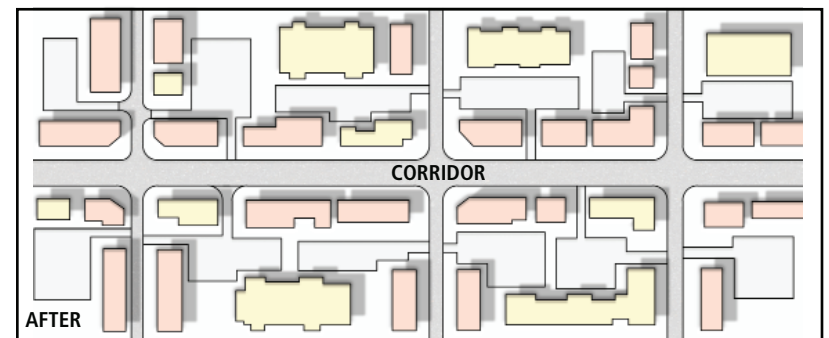
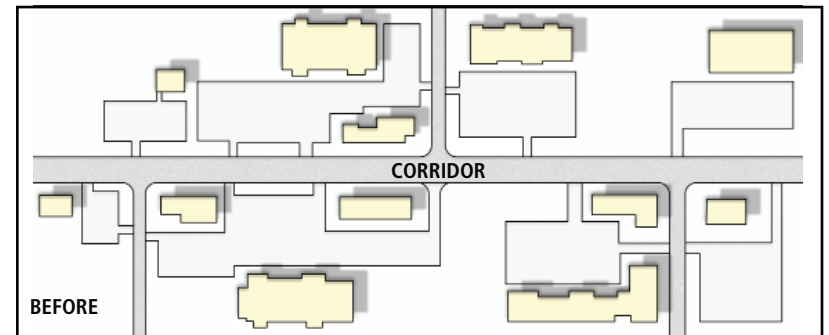


Diagram 3: Shared driveways reduce the number of curb cuts and thus the potential for pedestrian/vehicular conflict.



■ EXISTING BUILDING
■ FUTURE BUILDING

Diagram 4: New streets are logical extensions of the mainstreet and support intensification.

- 5 Locate parking structures that serve multiple properties in the interior of the block as intensification occurs. Do not front the parking structure onto the corridor unless commercial facilities line the edges of the building and face the street.
- 6 Orient car parking spaces to minimize the number of traffic aisles that pedestrians must cross (Diagram 5).
- 7 Use continuous landscaping to reinforce pedestrian walkways within parking areas (Figure 6).
- 8 Consider electric vehicle charging spaces and dedicated car share spaces.

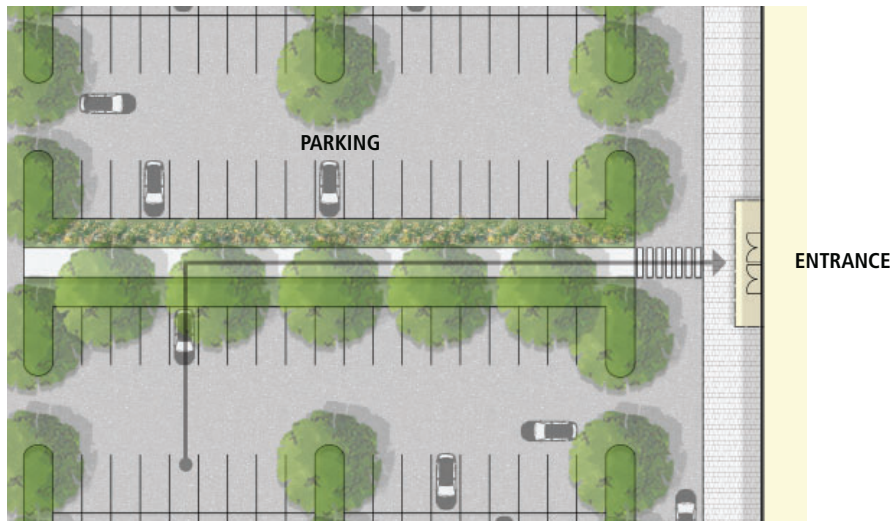


Diagram 5: Parking aisles oriented toward building entrances minimize the number of conflict points).



Figure 6: Landscaping provides a safe pedestrian route through the site.

1 SITE ORGANIZATION

Utility and Services

1.4 Utility and Services

- 1 Share service and utility areas between different users, within a single building or between different buildings, to maximize space efficiencies.
- 2 Enclose all utility equipment within buildings or screen them from both the corridor and private properties to the rear. These include utility boxes, garbage and recycling container storage, loading docks and ramps and air conditioner compressors (Figures 7 and 8)



Figure 7: Garbage containers of this multi-unit development are located at a shared space, away from the Mainstreet, and screened. .



Figure 8: This development locates loading docks, ramps, garbage and recycling containers at the back of the site.



2.0 BUILT FORM

The Official Plan section 6.2 requires that development along Mainstreet Corridors should locate the maximum permitted heights and densities close to the Corridor and incorporate appropriate building stepbacks and built form transition. The Official Plan further directs that a Mainstreet building should frame the street, provide active frontage at grade, establish a scale that relates to the context, avoid street canyon effect, and minimize microclimate impacts on the public realm and private amenity areas. The following guidelines are meant to implement these policies and organized under the following themes:

- Height and Massing
- Animation and Articulation

2 BUILT FORM

Height and Massing

2.1 Height and Massing

- 1 Design street sections with a ratio of building height to street corridor width of between 1:6 (low), 1:3 (medium) and 1:2 (high) (Diagram 6, Figure 9).
- 2 Design the built form in relation to the adjacent properties to create coherent streetscapes.
- 3 Create a transition in the scale and density of the built form on the site when located next to lower density neighbourhoods to mitigate any potential impact (Diagram 7, Figure 10).

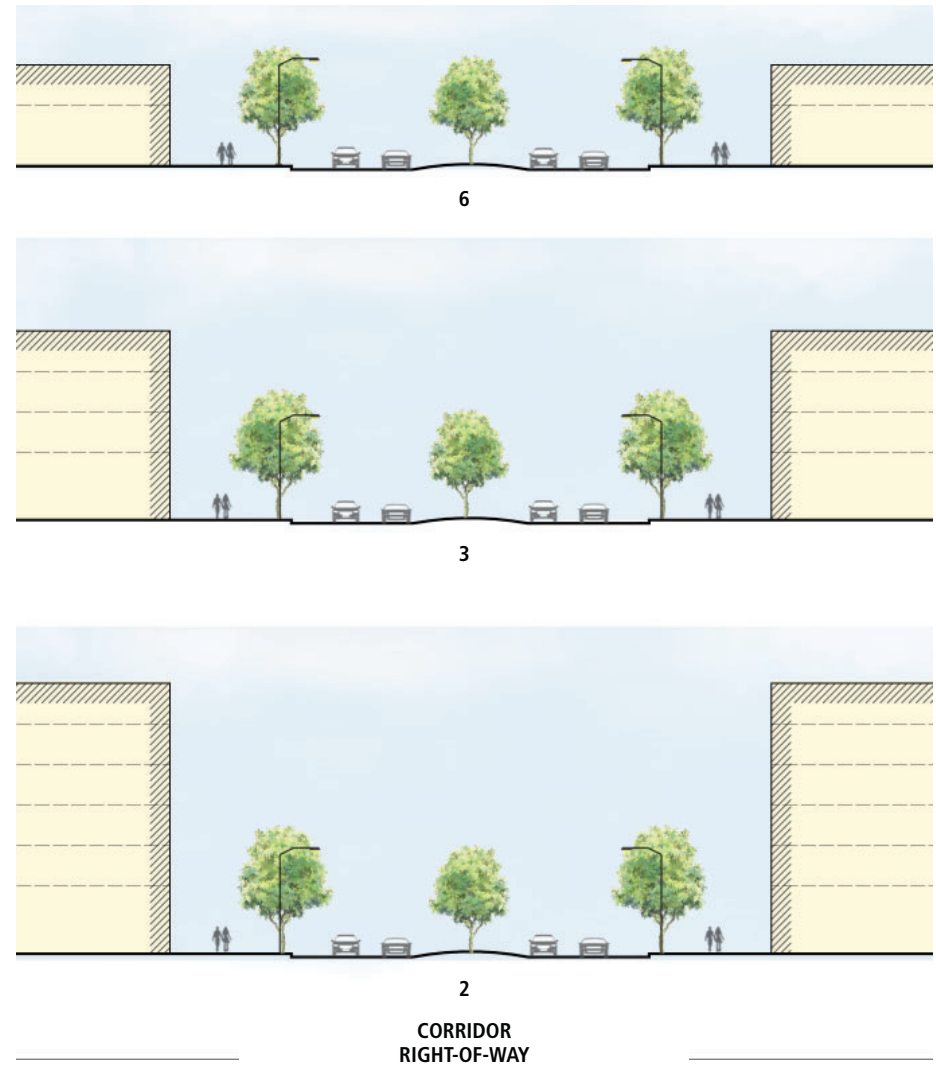


Diagram 6: Street sections illustrate the ratios of right-of-way width to building height as the street intensifies.



Figure 9: The podium of this development supports the creation of continuous streetwall with appropriate street section ratio.



Figure 10: The transition strategy of this development includes progressive reduction of heights, and massing and facade articulations.



Diagram 7: A transition in building scale better integrates new development with the adjacent residential neighbourhood.

2 BUILT FORM

Animation and Articulation

2.2 Animation and Articulation

- 1 Design richly detailed buildings that create visual interest, a sense of identity and a human scale along the public street (Figure 11).
- 2 Orient the front façade to face the public street and locate front doors to be visible, and directly accessible, from the public street.
- 3 Use clear windows and doors to make the pedestrian level façade of walls, facing the street, highly transparent. Locate active uses along the street at grade, such as restaurants, specialty in-store boutiques, food concessions, seating areas, offices and lobbies (Figure 12).



Figure 11: Architectural detail enhances the public street..



Figure 12: Generous windows and potential changing displays animate the public realm..

- 4 Provide weather protection at building entrances, close to transit stops and in places with pedestrian amenities.
- 5 Design buildings to include defined spaces to accommodate signs that respect building scale, architectural features, signage uniformity and established streetscape design objectives (Figure 13).
- 6 Design secondary doors (such as emergency exit or service doors) to blend in with the building façade.
- 7 Provide architectural or landscape features at the corner on corner sites to emphasize the public streets and enhance the streetscape.
- 8 Landscape the area in front of a building wall and use projections, recesses, arcades, awnings, colour and texture to reduce the visual size of any unglazed walls (Figure 14).



Figure 13: Corporate signs fit with the design and scale of the building.



Figure 14: Wall projections and colour/material changes reduce the perception of building size.



3.0 PEDESTRIAN REALM

Creating quality public and private spaces that are safe, accessible, and easy to get to and move through is the direction of the Official Plan. Despite their suburban character, many of these wide 30m+ Mainstreet Corridors are often a major destination of the communities and meant to be a people place that support pedestrian activities. Some of these Corridors are also the City's Design Priority Areas and require higher design, construction, and maintenance standards. The guideline in this section highlights the following:

- Streetscape elements
- Lighting
- Landscaping

3.1 Streetscape Elements

- 1 The public realm should evolve to continuously meet AODA standards and contribute to greening and beautifying the City of Ottawa.
- 2 Provide or restore a 2.0-metre-wide unobstructed concrete sidewalk. Provide additional width where doors swing out and car bumpers can potentially interfere with the walkway. Locate the sidewalk to match the approved streetscape design plans for the area (Diagram 8, Figure 15).



Figure 15: A 2.0 metre concrete sidewalk is provided within the right-of-way. Additional walkways are provided to connect the sidewalk and the entrances of at grade uses.



Diagram 8: Streetscape section and plan showing the boulevard, sidewalk and area for retail amenity (frontage zone).

3 PEDESTRIAN REALM

Streetscape Elements

- 3 Provide a consistent width of landscape and pedestrian areas across the front of the site (Diagram 9)
- 4 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 16).
- 5 Provide streetscape elements such as trees, decorative paving, benches and bicycle parking between the building and the curb. These elements should match approved streetscape design plans for the area, or where there is no streetscape design plan, they should match and extend the existing context.



Diagram 9: Turn lanes do not diminish the consistency of the sidewalk and landscape areas.



Figure 16: Enhanced pedestrian crosswalk..

- 6 Use buildings, landscaping and other streetscape elements to create continuous streetscapes (Figure 17).
- 7 Provide site furnishings such as benches, bike racks and shelters, at building entrances and amenity areas. Ensure that these locations do not conflict with pedestrian circulation (Figure 18).
- 8 Eliminate visual clutter.



Figure 17: A double row of trees enhances the streetscape along this corridor.



Figure 18: Amenities adjacent to the entrance.

3 PEDESTRIAN REALM

Signage and Lighting

3.2 Signage and Lighting

- 1 Design sign illumination and lighting to be task oriented and avoid glare/light spillover toward adjacent or surrounding land uses.
- 2 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.
- 3 Allow for retailer identification where there are multiple buildings and uses on a site but avoid allowing individual corporate image, colour and signs to dominate both the site and public spaces.
- 4 Restrict temporary and portable signs. Prohibit billboards, revolving signs and roof signs on private property.
- 5 Design lighting so that there is no glare or light spilling onto surrounding uses.
- 6 Provide lighting that is appropriate to the street character and mainstreet ground floor use with a focus on pedestrian areas (Figures 19 and 20).



Figure 19: Pedestrian lighting that targets the pedestrian realm.



Figure 20: Additional pedestrian lighting at medium height targets the pedestrian realm.

3.3 Landscaping

- 1 Plant trees in the boulevard when it is 4.0 metres wide. If the boulevard is less than 4.0 metres wide, plant the trees in the landscape area to ensure healthy tree growth.
- 2 Select trees, shrubs and other vegetation considering their tolerance to urban conditions, such as extreme heat and road salt. Give preference to native species of the region of equal suitability.
- 3 Protect and feature heritage, specimen and mature trees on site by minimizing grade changes and preserving permeable surfaces.
- 4 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 (Figures 21 and 22).



Figure 21: Landscaping and decorative fences screen the parked cars while maintaining visibility to the area.



Figure 22: Low wall screens the parking area, mitigates the grade difference, and defines the edge conditions of the development.

3 PEDESTRIAN REALM

Landscaping

- 5 Plant street trees between 7.0 and 10 metres apart along public streets and internal pedestrian walkways. Plant trees a minimum 2.5m metres away from the curb of the public street and 1.5m metres from the public sidewalk. Plant in permeable surfaces within a minimum of 10.0 square metres of soil area per tree.
- 6 Coordinate tree and street-light locations with above and below-grade utilities (Figure 23).
- 7 Landscape areas between the building and the sidewalk with foundation planting, trees, street furniture, and walkways to the public sidewalk (Figure 24).

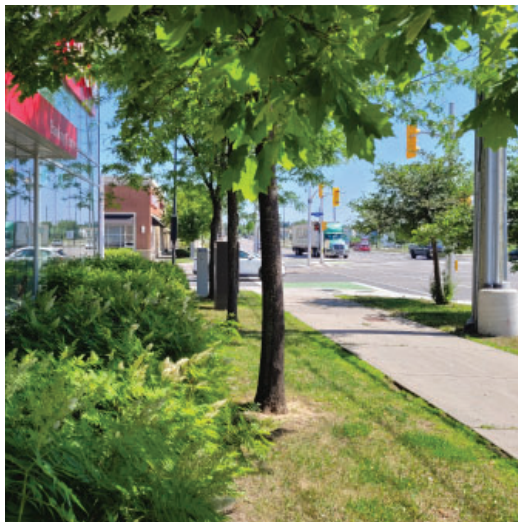


Figure 23: Trees are planted in the setback area to avoid conflict with utilities.



Figure 24: Landscaping that incorporates seating between the building and the public sidewalk, clear of the pedestrian travel routes, enhances the streetscape

- 8 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 (Figure 25).
- 9 Plant trees, shrubs and ground cover 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.
- 10 Provide a minimum 2.5-metre-wide landscape area along the site's side and rear yards in order to provide screening and enhance environmental benefits (Diagram 10).
- 11 Use green technologies such as green roofs, drip irrigation, and other approaches highlighted in sustainable design standards such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED).



Figure 25: A landscape area is provided at the rear of this development.

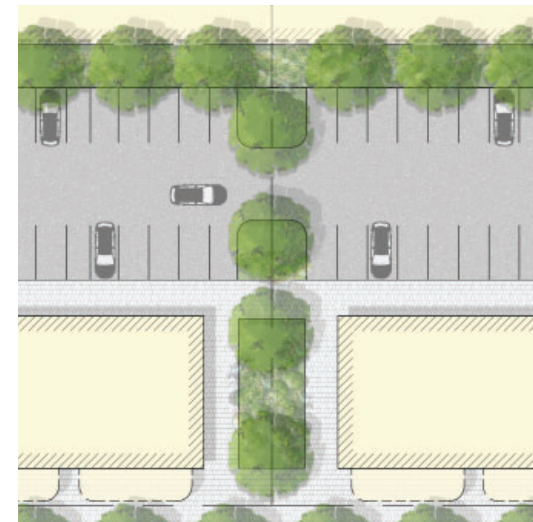


Diagram 10: Side and rear yard landscaping requirements provide amenities and greenery to the site.



IMAGE CREDIT

IMAGE CREDIT

Cover page photo, Figures 7 and 13: By Angel Torrella Reyes. Reproduction courtesy of Angel Torrella Reyes.

Figure 6, by unknown City of Ottawa staff

Photo on page 13: By JVL Photography. Reproduction courtesy of JVL Photography.

Figure 11, By Krista Jahnke Photography. Reproduction courtesy of Krista Jahnke Photography.

Photos on Table of Contents, Pages 1, 5, 18, 26, Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 : By Randolph Wang. Reproduction courtesy of Randolph Wang.

Diagrams 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10: Created by Sahara Shrestha and rendered by Karanpreet Kaur