Urban Design Guidelines for Commercial Uses

Large-Format Retail

Ottawa

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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

INTRODUCTION

Definitions

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.

Use and Application

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide urban design guidance at the planning application stage 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 shall be applied at the development review stage for proposed Official Plan and Zoning By-law amendments and Site Plan Control applications.

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 Corridors, the guidelines for Corridors 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

The applicant should demonstrate how the proposal considers the guidelines. The guidelines are not prescriptive; they are flexible to accommodate exceptions and may not all apply equally in all cases.

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
- To promote development patterns that allow for future intensification

Official Plan and By-Law Direction

The Official Plan includes as one of its Cross Cutting Issues, the creation of "Healthy and Inclusive Communities" through establishing the 15-minute neighbourhoods. Such communities are comprised of developments that are compact, inclusive, well designed, connected, transit-supportive, environmentally sensitive, sustainable and provide access to daily needs within walking distance. Retail is an important element that supports 15-minute neighbourhoods. The Official Plan supports small-scale retail and commercial uses in various designations in all Transects and generally prohibits uses that prioritize or depend on motor vehicle access for their primary function in the Hubs.

At present, large format retails are observed in all Transects. In Downtown Core and Inner Urban Transect, the Official Plan objective is to maintain and enhance an urban pattern of built form, and site design and mix of uses, and to prioritize walking, cycling, and transit. In the Outer Urban and Suburban Transects, the Official Plan acknowledge the existing automobile-dependent development pattern and encourages taking opportunities to improve the convenience and level of service for walking, cycling and public transit modes so that overtime, these areas can be evolved into 15- minute neighborhoods. Within the Greenbelt and Rural Transects, the Official Plan recognizes a rural pattern of built form and site design. Development in the Greenbelt and Rural Transects should maintain the rural character, image and identity. The Official Plan requires parking and paved area of a development to be located away from road frontage.

Schedule C16 of the Official Plan identifies the protected rights-of-way sufficient to provide for streetscape elements and to meet the needs of pedestrians and cyclists. Section 4.6 in the Official Plan outlines a few key urban design objectives of the Official Plan that may affect the design of a large format retail development. These include promoting design excellence in the Design Priority Areas; ensuring capital investments enhance the City's streets, sidewalks and other public spaces supporting a healthy lifestyle; ensuring effective site planning that supports the objectives of Corridors, Hubs, Neighbourhoods and the character of villages and rural landscapes.

The Zoning By-law provides detailed requirements for large format retail developments where permitted.

INTRODUCTION

Context and Issues

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.

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 lifecycle. All buildings should consider using efficient mechanical and electrical systems as well as incorporating renewable energy generation features. The Official Plan encourages the installation of photovoltaic panels on expansive roof structures on large-format retail buildings.

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.rating system and the International WELL Building Institute WELL Building Standard in the planning, design, construction and operation stages of a development.

The design of Large Format Retail developments 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 community, in addition to a building of higher energy efficiency and greater climate resilience.

1.0 SITE ORGANIZATION

The site organization for a large-format retail development should support the objectives of the Official Plan. In the Downtown Core and Inner Urban Transects, the development should maintain, enhance, and establish an urban pattern of built form and site design. The site design should prioritize walking, cycling and transit. In the Outer Urban and Suburban Transects, the site design should facilitate the evolution of these areas into walkable 15-minute neighbourhoods. In the Greenbelt and Rural Transects, the design should respect the local character. The approach to site design should balance the need for vehicular circulation with pedestrian connectivity, and site efficiency with public realm quality. The following guidelines provide design guidance as it relates to Site Design offers direction on:

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

1.1 Building Placement

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 a space for pedestrian amenities and landscaping. (Figure 1)

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

3 Orient the long side of each building to be parallel to the public street. (Diagram 1)

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

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

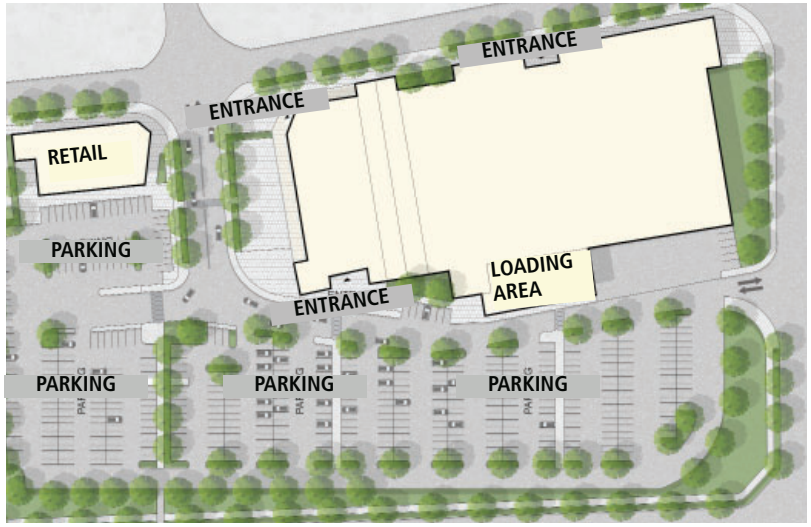

Diagram 1: This building is located on a corner and occupies more than 50% of the lot frontage.

5 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 2)

6 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 3)

7 Orient the front façade to face the public street and locate front doors to be visible, and directly accessible, from the public street. (Figure 4)

Figure 2: Both the first and second floors of this building have clear windows.

Figure 3: The main façade of this commercial building faces a public street and has over 60% transparency.

Figure 4: Both the front door and the front façade of this building face and enhance the streetscape.

8 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 2)

Diagram 2: Basing new development on a grid layout can easily accommodate redevelopment and future intensification.

9 When possible, provide continuous weather protection at building entrances by connecting canopies along building frontages. Provide weather protection close to transit stops and in areas with pedestrian amenities. (Figure 5)

10 Explore opportunities for co-location of various uses for the efficient use of land, including service uses, smaller format retail uses, multiple large- format retail, and residential uses where appropriate. (Figure 6)

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

Figure 5: Glass awnings on this building protect pedestrians from the weather.

Figure 6: Co-locating of various uses for efficient service within the site.

1.2 Pedestrians and Cyclists

1 Provide a minimum 2.0 metre wide unobstructed sidewalk in the public right-of-way across private access driveways. Ensure little or no change in elevation. (Figure 7)

2 Provide direct, safe, continuous and clearly defined pedestrian access from public sidewalks, parking areas and transit stops to building entrances. (Figure 9)

3 Connect pedestrian walkways between adjacent properties lined with shade trees in order to facilitate circulation and mitigate extreme heat protection between sites

Figure 7: Minimal grade changes and conflict points with vehicles create a comfortable pedestrian environment.

Figure 8: A broad pedestrian walkway links the main entrances of buildings within a development site adding to pedestrian amenity.

Figure 9: Sidewalk direct connected to the entrance of the building.

4 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 door swings, EV charging equipment and car bumpers are located to avoid interference with walkways. Make all other on-site pedestrian walkways at least 1.5 metres wide. (Figure 10)

5 Distinguish walkways from driving surfaces by using varied paving treatments and by raising walkways to curb level. (Figures 11 and 12).

Figure 10: This walkway permits unobstructed pedestrian movement from the store entrance to the public street.

Figure 11: Appropriately sized and clearly articulated pedestrian walkways.

Figure 12: Raised pedestrian walkways enhance safety for pedestrians crossing driveways.

6 Provide sheltered bicycle parking in visible locations near building entrances and pedestrian walkways. Ensure that these locations do not conflict with pedestrian circulation. (Figure 13)

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

8 Provide a consistent width of landscaped and pedestrian area across the site frontage. (Diagram 3)

Figure 13: Sheltered bicycle parking is incorporated into the building design.

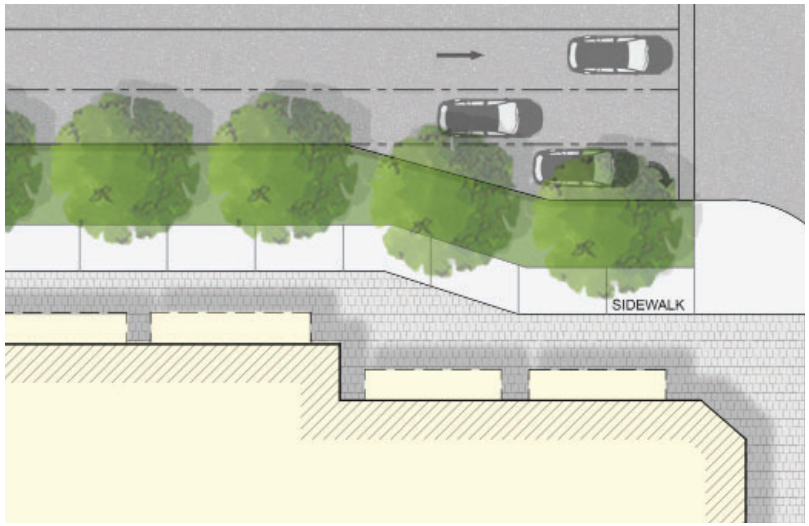

Diagram 3: The sidewalk and landscape area are a consistent width.

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

10 Plant trees along street frontages in accordance with the tree planting guidelines as per City policies. (Figure 14)

11 Define pedestrian walkways within parking areas with continuous planting areas consisting of trees and shrubs. (Figure 15)

Figure 14: Trees are planted along the length of this public frontage.

Figure 15: Landscaping along internal pedestrian walkways defines a pedestrian realm.

1.3 Vehicles and Parking

1 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. (Diagram 4)

2 Locating surface parking spaces at the side or rear of buildings.

3 Provide a landscape area along the edge of the site of sufficient size to accommodate deciduous or coniferous trees 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. A landscape width of approximately 3-5 metres is recommended to accommodate for tree planting. (Figure 16)

Figure 16: Landscaped low walls help screen the parked cars while allowing visibility to the area.

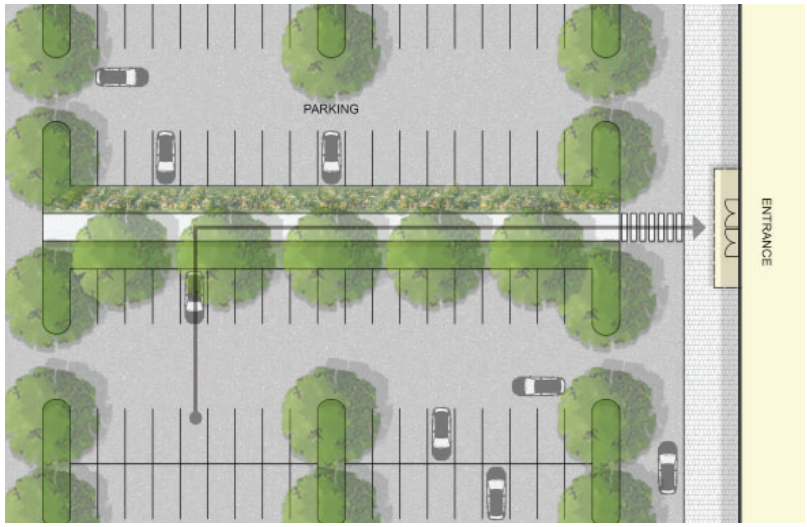

Diagram 4: Parking aisles oriented toward building entrances minimize the number of conflict points.

4 Reduce the total impervious area to incorporate low impact development measures for stormwater management where feasible.

5 Divide large parking areas into smaller and well-defined sections using soft and hard landscaping in order to minimize the amount of paved areas (Figures 17 and 18)

6 Provide only the minimum number of parking spaces required by the Zoning By-law.

Figure 17: Division of large parking area into smaller section using landscaping.

Figures 18: Planting defines the pedestrian walkway and breaks up the large parking space. parking to reflect new guideline.

7 Consider electric vehicle charging spaces and dedicated car share spaces, include the regular spacing of tree islands. (Figure 19)

8 Plant trees in landscaped islands in parking areas, with at least two trees together to improve shade coverage and he heat island effect. (Figure 20)

Figures 19: Provision of electric vehicle charging station along the parking.

Figures 20: Landscaped parking islands with shade coverage reduce the amount of paved area on site.

1.4 Services and Utilities

1 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 21 and 22)

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

3 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.

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

Figure 21: This building is designed with an internal service area.

Figure 22: The materials and design of the service building match the main building.

2.0 LANDSCAPING AND ELEMENTS

Landscaping is important for the environment, site functionality, public realm, visual experience, and neighbourhood character. The Official Plan includes policies relevant to the landscape design of a large format retail facility. These include policies regarding landscaping of public streets, landscaping on private lands and specifically around parking, stormwater management, tree canopy targets, and urban design. The following guidelines emphasize key landscaping elements that affect the public realm and site development, including:

- Landscaping
- Signage
- Lighting
- Sustainability

2.1 Landscaping

1 Provide a minimum 3-5-metre-wide landscape 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 23)

2 Provide a sufficient landscape space along the site's side and rear yards to plant trees and landscaping in order to provide screening and enhance site environmental benefits. A landscape width of approximately 3-5 metres is recommended to accommodate for tree planting.

3 Landscape any area between the building and the sidewalk with foundation planting, trees, street furniture, and walkways to public sidewalks. (Figure 24)

Figure 23: Landscaped buffers provide an appropriate transition between large format retail sites and residential area.

Figure 24: Foundation planting enhances the relationship between the building and the street.

4 Protect and feature heritage, specimen and mature trees on the site by designing site programming around tree preservation. Minimize grade changes and preserve permeable surfaces.

5 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.

6 Provide public amenities such as shade trees, benches, bike racks and shelters, at building entrances and amenity areas.

Figure 25: The solid brick wall establishes street edge and screens parking from the street.

Figure 26: A mature tree on site in protected and incorporated well with public amenities.

7 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.

8 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 27)

Figure 27: A corner tower, colour and material changes add interest to the corner façade of this building.

FiFigure 28: Trees planted in front of a blank wall that faces public street.

2.2 Signage

1 Design buildings, signage uniformity and established streetscape design objectives. (Figure 29)

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

3 Design sign illumination to be task-oriented and avoid uplighting and glare/light spillover toward adjacent land uses.

4 Integrate landscape features with ground mounted signs.

Figure 29: Space to provide signage that is well integrated with the site.

Figure 30: An example of using fascia signs that are in proportion with the building façade.

5 Locate and design ground-mounted and wall-mounted signs to complement the character and scale of the area (Figure 31).

6 Eliminate visual clutter.

7 Divide sign space equally between retailers for ground signs of multiple tenant projects to avoid corporate dominance.

8 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).

Figure 31: Ground mounted sign that is well integrated with entry feature and landscape.

Figure 32: This sign includes equal space for information of each retailer.

2.3 Lighting

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

2 Use DarkSky compliant lighting and consider setting non-essential lighting on timers during nighttime hours.

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

Figure 33: The wall mounted light on the ground floor provides lighting focusing on pedestrian.

Figure 34: Provide lighting with no glare and light overcast over adjacent use.

2.4 Sustainability

1 Use sodded areas and planting beds to collect, store and filter stormwater in order to reduce storm runoff. Minimize paved areas, such as parking and driveways and maximize water permeable surface to contribute to the appearance and environmental sustainability of the site and its larger context by increasing water penetration into the water table, reducing pollution of local water features and runoff demand on local infrastructure.

2 Use green building technologies such as the installation of rooftop photovoltaic panels, using cool or reflective roofing materials, and other approaches recognized by green building certification programs.

Figure 35: Use of permeable pavement in the parking area increase water penetration.

Figure 36: Use of permeable pavement and soft landscaping in the pedestrian walkway adds visual interest and also mitigates stormwater runoff.

IMAGE CREDIT

IMAGE CREDIT

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