

**HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY  
CAPITAL DISTRICT  
URBAN DESIGN PROJECT**

**Volume 3**

**Capacity Building and Best Practices**

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Gordon Ratcliffe Landscape Architects  
Griffiths Muecke Associates  
Semaphor Design Co.

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## **FOREWORD**

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### **ORGANIZATION OF VOLUME 3**

This volume of the Capital District Urban Design Report focuses on options, opportunities and ideas for strengthening urban design in the Capital District of HRM. The volume has two parts.

#### **Part One: Capacity Building Recommendations**

Part One includes an analysis of the current context in which urban design is delivered in HRM, and includes recommendations on expanding and enhancing this capacity.

#### **Part Two: Urban Design Best Practices**

Part Two presents a scoping review of Urban Design Best Practices in selected cities in the United States and Canada. For each city, the report summarizes the approaches being used, the policy and plans that have been adopted, the review processes in place, supporting documents and information sources, and other programs that also contribute to good urban design. From this review, a series of broad options have been developed for HRM to consider as the Capital District's urban design program evolves.

## **CAPACITY BUILDING RECOMMENDATIONS**

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### **New vision, new partnerships**

CABE<sup>1</sup> defines Urban Design as “*the art of making places for people*” through developing better spaces and better buildings. Urban design encompasses not only the visual appeal of the built environment, but also the way it functions in a social, environmental and economic context. Seen through the lens of downtown revitalization, this means making the Capital District attractive, safe, comfortable and interesting, in order to bring people back to live, work, shop, visit and have fun. At its best, good urban design is a visible demonstration of civic pride and confidence.

Investment by the municipality in a ‘livable’ environment and high quality of life in the downtown has important economic spin-off. It attracts private sector investment in residential and commercial development, tourism revenue and new retail enterprises and services. Cities in North America that have adopted a long-term strategy of excellence in urban design have generally done so for economic development reasons. The civic government has provided the leadership and been the prime advocate, usually in close association with the business community.

Urban design recognizes that the life of a city takes place as much or more in public places as it does inside private buildings. It works at a wide range of scales, from broad concerns with urban form to the small details of street bench design. The success of the urban design vision and initiatives is ultimately measured by scope and diversity of public activity and ‘publics’ that are attracted to the downtown. For this reason, effective planning must involve consultation with a wide range of stakeholders who have a real interest in the downtown, will be affected by decisions, and will contribute to implementing the plan and realizing the vision.

Key stakeholders include the Business Improvement Associations (BIAs) and other levels of government, who

- research and promote urban design ideas
- partner with HRM to commission streetscape plans and other studies
- work closely with their members on related issues
- promote and market the main business districts
- provide additional cleaning, maintenance and security services
- sponsor events.

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<sup>1</sup> Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. 2000. *By Design: Urban Planning on the Planning System*.

## **Urban design functions and responsibilities of HRM**

The Capital District, and more broadly, HRM needs to develop its capacity to

- ensure that urban design principles and considerations are an integral part of all municipal investments and functions relating to the Capital District, and
- maintain a downtown environment that is consistently attractive, accessible, clean and in good repair.

It is very important to recognize that good Urban Design cannot be dictated by any one branch of HRM's administrative structure, rather it must be implemented through actions undertaken by several departments working collaboratively and with a common set of principles and objectives. The first step in understanding the scope of capacity requirements is to identify the municipal functions that affect or are affected by the design of the urban environment. The key HRM functions relating to urban design in the Capital District include:

### *Policy direction and public support*

- briefing and advising Council on urban design needs and priorities
- facilitating stakeholder involvement in urban design
- facilitating public education on urban design
- providing opportunities for public input

### *Planning and development*

- planning, at both regional and secondary scales
- developing planning and guidance tools such as design guidelines
- administering development controls
- developing/managing heritage conservation and enhancement programs
- collaborating with other levels of government on urban design related issues
- planning, designing and managing municipal facilities
- application of CPTED principles

### *Vehicle and pedestrian circulation*

- developing and revising traffic layouts, including truck routes
- designing, constructing and maintaining roadways
- managing traffic, enforcing rules and maintaining signs etc
- planning transit routes, operating and maintaining the transit system
- designing, constructing and maintaining sidewalk systems
- planning and managing on-street and off-street parking

- designing access routes for emergency vehicles

#### *Utilities and services*

- planning, installing and maintaining utilities
- managing activities/installations in the public right of way
- providing and maintaining street lighting
- planning and delivery of police and fire services

#### *Landscape and amenities*

- planting/maintaining street trees and other landscaping
- designing, constructing, maintaining park and public spaces
- installing and servicing garbage receptacles
- installing and maintaining other street furnishings and amenities
- installing and maintaining wayfinding signage

#### *Managing the streetscape*

- cleaning the streets and sidewalks
- snow and ice control management
- permitting and managing street activities (vending, parades, festivals etc)
- By-law enforcement

#### *Tourism and economic development*

- provision of tourism information
- planning and delivery of tourism activities
- identifying and marketing the Capital District.

### **Current concerns and ideas**

The following issues, relevant to capacity building, were raised during consultations with HRM staff, stakeholders and the public:

- HRM staff is looking for clear policy guidance to inform streetscape decisions, to provide a clear framework for discussions and negotiations with developers and their consultants, and to inform the general public.
- HRM needs more qualified and experienced urban design professionals (on staff or on contract) to analyze urban design problems and requirements, and to provide advice and guidance to other staff and private developers in developing effective solutions.
- There should be amendments to the Municipal Government Act to support the municipalities need to influence design in private construction.

- Planners and developers need to think more in three dimensions, getting beyond lot coverage and height.
- The current climate of opinion in HRM does not encourage exciting new architecture.
- HRM needs design “champions” at both the political and staff levels.
- While the development agreement process, in theory, allows flexibility to work towards good design solutions, HRM staff is sometimes unable to offer proactive guidance.
- The development agreement process takes far too long, in part presumably because of resource shortages.
- HRM planning staff value opportunities to work on downtown issues in a multi-disciplinary way with the staff of other departments and would like to expand opportunities to do so in the future.
- The Capital District needs designated staff resources to implement capital projects, plus a clear process to follow
- Maintenance — keeping streets clean and all streetscape elements in good working order — is the number one concern for many people. In the words of one person, “Nothing new should be built if it isn’t going to be maintained.”
- BIA stakeholders feel that not all HRM staff understand the purpose and importance of maintenance. Communications are sometimes frustrating.
- There is some uncertainty and confusion about the roles and responsibilities of the Capital District and the BIAs, particularly with respect to streetscape planning and project implementation. Clarification is needed.
- Transportation and traffic decisions should be made within a “streets” context; that is, recognizing the multi-functional purpose of streets.
- HRM needs a community-based advocacy group to help focus and organize public involvement in downtown issues. It should have a socially diverse membership with a broad geographic base. It should cover a wide range of urban and development issues, downtown regeneration, and streetscapes.

### **Current roles and responsibilities**

The Capital District initiative is a project of Regional Planning, which in turn is a strategic initiative directly under the CAO’s office. One of the central objectives of Capital District is to coordinate service delivery within HRM’s urban core. An example of this is the launch of a three-year Capital District maintenance program in partnership with Business Associations and the Waterfront Development Corporation.

Service delivery in the Capital District currently happens within a number of departments:

Planning and Development Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Development controls, negotiating development agreements and administering design guidelines (Dartmouth)</li><li>• Heritage property program</li></ul>
Public Works and Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Design and construction of roads and sidewalks</li><li>• Maintenance of roads and sidewalks</li><li>• Planning and operation of road network</li><li>• Traffic signs and pavement markings</li><li>• Operation and maintenance of wastewater collection, storm drainage infrastructure and street lighting</li><li>• Right of way management (permits for allowed uses)</li><li>• Metro Transit</li></ul>
Real Property and Asset Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Implementing capital projects</li><li>• Parks planning</li><li>• Operating or managing HRM facilities and properties</li></ul>
Recreation, Culture and Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recreation programming</li><li>• Cultural policy</li><li>• Heritage and cultural policy and programming</li><li>• Marketing and promotions</li></ul>

### **Capacity building recommendations**

To build capacity within HRM to deliver high quality urban design improvements and initiatives in the Capital District, five key elements are needed:

- Knowledge about and support for urban design on Council, and amongst HRM staff and the broader public.
- Champions on Council and among senior staff.
- Urban design goals and objectives developed through policy documents and ultimately a Capital District or Downtown Plan.

- Infusion of urban design skills into HRM staff.
- Development of urban design tools and guidelines.
- A coordinated approach to integrate urban design objectives into the work of line departments and facilitate multi-disciplinary problem solving.
- Clear expectations for the work of maintenance staff.
- Financial and staff resources.

While the Capital District is the current focus of this urban design initiative, ultimately all urban centres and neighbourhoods within HRM deserve good design solutions, and therefore one goal should be to use the Capital District initiative as a way to seed better design in other areas. This may also be instrumental in continuing to maintain support for urban design initiatives in a municipality with a significant rural population.

*Recommendation 1  
Downtown Urban Design Plan*

As part of the overall regional planning process, HRM should develop a Downtown Urban Design Plan<sup>2</sup>, through an extensive public consultation process. This plan should clearly set out the design objectives for the overall urban form, with regard to character, continuity, enclosure, quality of the public realm, ease of movement, legibility, diversity and adaptability.<sup>3</sup> The plan should also identify special heritage zones and landmark sites, and requirements for:

- new or redeveloped civic buildings and civic spaces
- heritage building conversions
- contemporary architectural design
- tall buildings
- streetscape and façades
- specific views and skylines

Depending on the level of detail considered necessary, it may also address such issues as signage on civic and private buildings, entrances from public streets, fencing and the purpose and character of landscaping. From this plan urban design guidelines would be prepared. As a preliminary step, and to provide the foundation document for a consultation process, Capital District staff should prepare an urban design policy document for public discussion.

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<sup>2</sup> It is presumed that the boundaries for this plan may need to be broader than the Capital District.

<sup>3</sup> This list is drawn from CABE's work; see Urban Design Best Practices.

*Recommendation 2  
Urban Design Guidelines*

Capital District should continue the work started in the Streetscape Design Guidelines and expand it to create Urban Design Guidelines to address the interface between the public and private realm and provide both HRM planning and development staff and private developers with design guidance.

*Recommendation 3  
Urban Design Skills*

The Capital District should strengthen the urban design expertise available to HRM. Ideally it should include individuals with design qualifications in a range of disciplines such as planning, architecture, engineering, and landscape design, and with experience working with a wide range of stakeholders and urban design challenges. These individuals may be drawn from more than one department or be on contract and on call as required. Their role would be to help develop urban design policy and guidelines, and to assist project proponents in developing effective and elegant design solutions which meet the objectives of the downtown plan and urban design guidelines. In addition, members of the team would identify opportunities to share and build urban design knowledge and skills with staff in other departments. Ultimately, HRM may need to create an urban design section in the municipal administration.

HRM may also seek to establish an independent external review body to provide advice in circumstances such as:

- On larger projects with multiple components or complex design challenges
- Where proposals are creative but diverge from the guidelines
- Where alternative design solutions are presented to those preferred by staff, or
- To lead public education and consultation processes.

*Recommendation 4  
Design Review Team to Administer New Streetscape Guidelines*

HRM should immediately form a “design review team” chaired by the Capital District specifically to administer the new streetscape design guidelines. Since each location where the guidelines are applied will have a specific combination of challenges, one of the team’s guiding principles should be to apply the guidelines in a flexible manner while still respecting their overall objectives. In the short-term, implementation of the guidelines could be approached in a series of pilots in which

guidelines/standards would be tested and adapted by a team of HRM staff including Capital District, Public Works and Transportation, and Real Property & Asset Management (Parks Division).

*Recommendation 5  
Implementing Streetscape Plans*

The Streetscape Plans for each of the five streets should be maintained as living documents to integrate ongoing streetscape improvement objectives. A plan implementation meeting should be held annually, bring together representatives of the BIA and of each of the relevant HRM departments to identify the most efficient way to proceed and also to identify further issues and opportunities.

*Recommendation 6  
Capital District Maintenance Fund*

HRM should designate a separate revenue source (possibly parking revenues) to create a Capital District Maintenance Fund. All new capital projects should include a detailed maintenance plan (10-20 years) with identified resources and budgetary commitment.

*Recommendation 7  
Dedicated Capital District Maintenance Team*

HRM should create a dedicated Capital District maintenance team with clear performance objectives.

*Recommendation 8  
Review and Revise Development Agreement Process*

The development agreement process, including and staff resources and assigned responsibilities, should be reviewed and revised with stakeholder input, to ensure that decisions are made in a timely and fair manner and that key design issues are identified and resolved appropriately. Without dictating style, HRM needs to be proactive in providing design guidance and priorities<sup>4</sup> as early in the process as possible, and encouraging innovation and creativity. Developers should also be encouraged to feel part of the downtown regeneration process and to understand ways in which they can contribute to a successful integration of the private and public realms and to the enhancement of downtown streetscapes.

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<sup>4</sup> Based on the proposed new Capital District Plan and the Urban Design Guidelines

*Recommendation 9*  
*Right of Way Management Policy and Resources*

HRM should develop clear policy for use by the Right of Way Manager incorporating urban design principles and objectives. The Manager should work closely with the design review team (Recommendation 4). The Right of Way section should identify resources needed to ensure appropriate enforcement, including regular removal of unauthorized streetscape encroachments.

*Recommendation 10*  
*Universal Design*

HRM should appoint a Universal Design Coordinator within the Public Works and Transportation Department to work closely with an inter-departmental steering committee, the Capital District and the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities to promote the incorporation of universal design principles into HRM planning, design, construction, operation and maintenance programs, and to facilitate in-house training as required.

*Recommendation 11*  
*A Civic Trust for HRM?*

HRM should encourage the development of a community-based organization representing a wide range of interests and viewpoints, to address urban issues such as downtown regeneration, development approaches, and the planning and design of public spaces<sup>5</sup>. Such an organization could help the Capital District by bringing the public interest to the table with both accountability and continuity. A first step could be the creation of a Capital District Advisory Committee.

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<sup>5</sup> The Community Planning Association of Canada used to serve this role. Another model is the network of Civic Societies in Britain, see <http://www.civictrust.org.uk/csocs/csocs.shtml>.

### **1.0 CONTEXT AND SCOPE OF THIS REPORT**

Since the 1960s, there has been a major change in the function and use of the urban downtown throughout North America and Europe. The combination of retail, employment, family residential and civic centre land uses and activity has undergone a significant shift. Changes have been driven by a number of factors including growth in automobile ownership and personal mobility, increasing interest in more spacious suburban living, the growth of suburban shopping malls and ‘big box’ retailing, the growth of business parks, and the de-centralization of government service delivery. While these influences have tended to draw local people away from the downtown, other economic activities such as tourism, and convention and conference business have brought visitors into the downtown and have increased demand for public attractions and services, usually on a broadly seasonal basis. In addition, new downtown residential development has targeted middle to upper income singles, couples and retirees rather than families.

During the period of transition, many cities, including Halifax and Dartmouth, suffered extended periods in which there was little public and private investment and no clearly articulated role for the downtown. In the past decade or so, some parts of downtown Halifax-Dartmouth have emerged from this low period, and are thriving examples of the vitality that comes with design that meets the needs of people. In Halifax, parts of the waterfront in the area of Historic Properties, Spring Garden Road, and (outside of the downtown) the Hydrostone Market are all in this category. Even here, though, future improvements can be identified through which the urban fabric can be enhanced and strengthened. Experience elsewhere has shown that when an appropriate vision, goals, and management tools guide development, the urban downtown can emerge with a renewed vitality, gain economic strength, and enhanced appeal and reputation.

In HRM, the designation of the Capital District provides an opportunity to focus on the needs of the downtown, and provides an opportunity to create a coherent vision for the physical development from which new programs and actions can flow. In order to provide some background for this activity, the Capital District Task Force has commissioned a scan of Urban Design Best Practices in Canada and selected cities in North America. The scan has been broadened somewhat to include important research and analysis that has been undertaken in the United Kingdom by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE). This report provides an overview of policies, programs and other initiatives that

have been put in place to support the revitalization of the downtown in selected locations where notable initiatives are in place or planned.

While the focus of this report is urban design in the Capital District, policies are needed for all parts of the municipality. This broader perspective will be examined as part of the Regional Planning Project that is currently underway in HRM.

## 2.0 THE VALUE OF GOOD URBAN DESIGN

### 2.1 A Definition

CABE defines Urban Design as ..”*the art of making places for people. It includes the way places work and matters such as community safety, as well as how they look. It concerns the connections between people and places, movement and urban form, nature and the built fabric, and the processes for ensuring successful villages, towns and cities...*” (By *Design: Urban Planning in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice; CABE 2000*). It encompasses much more than the visual impact of buildings and space, and includes social, environmental and functional consideration alongside visual concerns and those of urban form.

The foundation of this concept is that revitalization requires people to repopulate the downtown in a diverse range of activities. This in turn means making the downtown safe, comfortable, attractive and interesting for pedestrians, and identifying the physical attributes that need to be preserved, enhanced or created in order to increase the appeal of the downtown, support new activities, and bring people back to enjoy it as a place to live, work, shop, visit or recreate. It includes such things as:

- A mix of residential and commercial development
- Comfortable sidewalks and appropriate street furniture
- Trees and landscaping
- Signage and way-finding
- Canopies and attractive entrances
- Street level detail and visual interest in building facades
- Appropriate building materials
- The height and mass of buildings relative to the streetscape
- Integration and enhancement of heritage buildings
- Planning of space for public activities and civic events
- Accommodation of mixed uses in buildings for long term flexibility
- Sunlight penetration to the street, sun, wind and weather protection
- Awareness of views and the skyline
- Public art and the integration of local design elements and themes
- Transit access and bikeways
- Landscaped or screened parking

It also recognizes that the design of public space should accommodate the diverse needs of the young, elderly, and physically challenged.

Needless to say, it is also important to integrate efficient vehicular traffic and transit movements in order to get people into the downtown and to support an active business environment and economy in the urban center. However, the CUBE urban design concept tips the balance much further towards the interests and needs of pedestrians and other users of urban public space than has typically been the case in urban planning for several decades.

The CUBE approach puts individual development projects (single buildings or properties) into the context of a street and a district. It is concerned with how new or refurbished buildings affect and interact with the street and the people using it, the character of the community, and its valued features such as views, historic buildings or sites of civic importance. It places emphasis on how development fits into the bigger picture, and encourages building design that has a public interest component and does much more than meet narrow corporate objectives.

The CUBE approach is directed primarily at municipal government where development projects are reviewed and planning decisions are made. Here the intent is to provide guidance for evaluating proposals, and clear advice and procedures for developers to help them move efficiently through the project approval process. It is also intended to stimulate an active interest in urban design by architects, engineers, planners, developers, investors and public interest groups, and to persuade them that they all have much to gain from making the downtown work well. The improvement process needs to be led by the municipality and demonstrated in the quality of its own projects if it is to have any credibility with the private sector.

## **2.2 CUBE Analysis of Value and Beneficiaries**

Integrating Urban Design Principles into the project planning, design and approval process requires changes from current practice. It means bringing professionals with enhanced design skills into private and public sector projects, and also into the planning departments where these projects are reviewed. It may involve setting up an independent or semi-independent review body, a new structure for project approval, and a new time frame for the review process. Why do it? What are the benefits, and to whom do they flow?

In 2000, CUBE, the Department of Environment, Transport and Regions (DETR) and the University of London collaborated on research to investigate the value of Urban Design. Their report, entitled *The Value of Urban Design* was published in 2001.

The research found that when the development objectives of the municipality and the private sector are combined, the concept of value has

to be expanded to include not only economic factors but also social and environmental ones. The following summary is drawn from the report with amendments that reflect the local HRM context:

### 2.2.1 Economic Value

- Produces high return on investment (good rental returns and enhanced capital values)
- Places developments above local competition at little cost
- Responds to occupier demand
- Can deliver more rentable space through higher densities
- Reduces management, maintenance, energy and security costs
- Contributes to positive work environment
- Supports the ‘vitality-enhancing’ mixed-use element in developments
- Creates an urban regeneration and place marketing dividend
- Differentiates places and raises their prestige
- Opens up investment opportunities, raises confidence in development opportunities and may attract grant monies
- Reduces the cost to the public purse of rectifying urban design mistakes
- Attracts local people and visitors to the downtown where they spend money on goods and services
- Increases the marketability of the downtown to tourism operators and convention organizers
- Increases the marketability of events and festivals
- Increases the attractiveness of the urban area to ‘foot-loose’ business where location is strongly influenced by employee satisfaction

### 2.2.2 Social and Environmental Value

- Creates well-connected, inclusive and accessible new places
- Delivers mixed use environments with a broad range of facilities and amenities available to all
- Delivers development that is sensitive to its context
- Enhances the sense of safety and security within and beyond developments
- Returns inaccessible or run down areas and amenities to beneficial public use
- Boosts civic pride and enhances civic image
- Creates more energy efficient and less polluting development
- Respects and revitalizes urban heritage

- Provides a place for residents from all parts of the municipality to gather and celebrate civic holidays and occasions
- Extends the seasonal use of the downtown by providing improved weather protection

The beneficiaries of good urban design projects include:

- *Investors* – benefit through favourable returns on investment and satisfied occupants, though the full pay-off may take time to be realized.
- *Developers* – benefit by attracting investors and renters more easily and hence from enhanced company image. If they retain a stake in their investments for long enough, they also benefit from good returns on their investments.
- *Occupiers* – benefit from the better performance, loyalty, health and satisfaction of their employees and from the increased prestige that well-designed developments command with guests and clients.
- *Everyday users and society as a whole* – benefit from the economic advantages of a successful regeneration, including new and retained jobs, and also through access to an urban environment that is safe, attractive, socially vibrant, inclusive, low stress, and incorporates an enhanced range of amenities and facilities.
- *Public Authorities* – benefit by meeting their obligations to deliver a well designed, economically and socially viable environment, that is efficient to service and maintain, has a high social and environmental value, and promotes civic pride. This often has a ripple effect in adjoining areas. There are also improved opportunities to market the urban area to businesses and industries interested in relocating to an urban center with a good ‘quality of life’; and to attract new investment and the associated new tax revenue.

The bottom line of good urban design is that it does not necessarily cost more to deliver by either the public or private sector. For example, an efficient approval process that is put in place to encourage and facilitate well-designed projects can often reduce the length of the approval process and the frustration and economic cost of delays; incorporate substantial benefits for the general public; and provide maintenance and management efficiencies that offset additional capital costs in the long term. In order to realize these benefits, though, much work needs to be done up-front to establish the foundation of vision, goals and objectives, and to build credibility for the process and collaboration and trust among the stakeholders.

### **3.0 ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL URBAN DESIGN**

There are three sets of objectives that must be integrated in order to create successful urban design.

#### *Municipal Objectives*

The first is a set of explicit and broadly supported municipal objectives that flow from a locally derived vision and goals. The scope of these objectives will reflect the array of economic, social and environmental priorities of participating stakeholders, including the municipal Council and staff, interest groups and the general public. These objectives may be formalized into policy and guidelines that provide the framework for an approval process.

#### *Developer or Project Sponsor Objectives*

Once they have been identified, the designer or planner then integrates the second set of objectives, those of the project sponsor or developer who needs to make the project work within the demands and opportunities of the marketplace.

#### *Design Objectives*

The third set of objectives are drawn from the broadly accepted attributes of good urban design - the qualities that should be promoted in order to meet the needs of the people who use the buildings and public spaces of the downtown. The designer then works with the three sets of objectives and the *aspects* of design (the building blocks of the design process) to create one or more design solutions.

The next three sections describe generalized design objectives, the aspects of design and the nature of the design challenge.

### **3.1 Generalized Design Objectives (Attributes of Good Design)**

It is acknowledged that identifying ‘good design’ is a subjective matter, yet certain places which are undoubtedly successful seem to have certain features in common. These attributes are summarized in *The Value of Urban Design* and stated below as design objectives:

*Character* – to promote character in townscapes and landscapes by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development and culture

*Continuity* - to promote the continuity of street frontages

*Enclosure* – to promote the enclosure of space through development that clearly defines private and public space

*Quality of the Public Realm* – to promote public spaces and routes that are attractive, safe and uncluttered; and work effectively for all people in society, including the elderly and disabled

*Ease of Movement* - to promote accessibility and permeability by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through, putting people before traffic and integrating land use and transportation

*Legibility* – to provide recognizable routes, intersections and landmarks to help people find their way around

*Adaptability* – to promote a form of development that is flexible enough to respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions

*Diversity* – to promote diversity and choice in the built environment through a mixture of compatible developments and land uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs

These design objectives may provide adequate guidance as stated here, but in many cases would be accompanied by statements providing additional detail for specific geographic areas, districts, neighbourhoods or streets.

### **3.2 Aspects of Urban Form**

A variety of design elements are used to create the urban downtown environment. Generally speaking they are layout, landscape, density and mix, scale and appearance. Table 3.1 provides more detail.

Table 3.1 Aspects of Urban Form

<p><i>Layout: Urban Structure</i> The framework of routes and spaces that connect locally and within the district, and the relationship between developments and open spaces.</p>	<p>The layout provides the basic structure into which all other aspects of the urban form are set.</p>
<p><i>Layout: Urban Grain</i> The pattern of streets, property lines and building placement.</p>	<p>The pattern may be fine grained (small blocks) or coarse (large blocks). It often has a historic foundation and always helps to define the character of the area.</p>
<p><i>Landscape and Natural Setting</i> This refers to the character and appearance of land and water on and around which the city is placed, and the open space in the urban area.</p>	<p>It includes the shape, form and ecology of natural features, and the planting, boundaries and treatment of landscaped areas.</p>
<p><i>Density and Mix</i> This is the amount of development on a given piece of land and the range of uses. Density influences the intensity of development and in combination with the mix of uses can affect a place's vitality and viability.</p>	<p>The density of development can be expressed in a number of ways. As people per acre, dwellings per acre, or sometimes the number of habitable rooms.</p>
<p><i>Scale: Height</i> This is the height of a building in relation to its surroundings, or the size of parts of buildings, or its details, particularly in relation to the size of a person. Height determines the impact of development on views, vistas and skylines.</p>	<p>Height can be expressed in terms of the number of floors, height of a parapet, overall height, or any of these in combination. It can also be stated as a ratio of building height to street width or space width, height relative to particular landmarks or background buildings, or strategic views.</p>
<p><i>Scale: Massing</i> The combined effect of the arrangement, volume, and shape of a building or group of buildings in relation to other buildings and space.</p>	<p>Massing is the three-dimensional expression of the amount of development on a given piece of land.</p>
<p><i>Appearance: Details</i> The craftsmanship, building techniques, decoration, styles and lighting of a building or structure.</p>	<p>This includes all building elements such as openings and bays, entrances and colonnades, balconies and rooflines, and the rhythm of the façade.</p>
<p><i>Appearance: Materials</i> The texture, colour, pattern, and durability of the building materials and how they are used.</p>	<p>Materials contribute to the attractiveness of the building's appearance and the character of an area.</p>

### 3.3 Creating the Design

The challenge for the designer is to work with the design elements listed in 3.2 to meet municipal, developer and design objectives and create a building or development that makes a positive contribution to the city or townscape, enhances the public realm, and is economically viable. This section describes the considerations and that go into that design process.

*Character* – to promote character in townscapes and landscapes by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development and culture

The intrinsic character of a place reflects its history and its building and economic traditions – the size and scale of the buildings, the building materials that were typically used, the relationship of the street grid to the topography, landmarks and views, the natural and planted vegetation, and the style of civic landscaping. New buildings that have little relationship to these factors will appear discordant or out of place. Standard designs that reflect purely corporate objectives are usually not appropriate.

Sympathetic design reinforces important elements of local character and strives for integration. The scale, massing and height are selected with reference to adjoining buildings, the street grid, topography, the general pattern of heights in the area, views, vistas and landmarks. The objective here is not uniformity but thoughtful design that makes sense in the context of a specific site and the area in which it is located, and reflects local urban design objectives.

*Continuity* - to promote the continuity of street frontages

The structure may incorporate modern building technology and materials, but external detail is selected in the context of the streetscape and continuity of façade. Buildings that have ‘live edges’ of windows and entrances, no dead spaces such as vacant lots, and the integration of residential development allow for the ‘eyes on the street’ which contributes to the sense of public safety, inhibits criminal activity, and reduces the potential for graffiti.

Variations in the façade (height, roofline, windows, and projection) may be used to add visual interest without undermining the continuity of the streetscape. The height of the buildings relates to the width of the street, the need to provide sunlight at street level, and consideration of the ‘wind tunnel’ effect.

*Enclosure* – to promote the enclosure of space through development that clearly defines private and public space

The attractiveness and comfort of a development for residents, workers, and the general public is strongly affected by how well the public and private space is defined. The balance between the needs of different users needs to be carefully considered and the different types of spaces well delineated. Walls, railings, fences, arches and entranceways, signage and paving can all be used to define these areas.

The quality of the public space is strongly influenced by the scale of the adjacent buildings. Buildings that are too high relative to an adjacent street or park may make it unappealing for public use. Setback of upper stories can be used to offset this effect, but needs to be used as part of a comprehensive approach to managing height and density.

*Quality of the Public Realm* – to promote public spaces and routes that are attractive, safe and uncluttered; and work effectively for all people in society, including elderly and disabled people

The public realm is made up of those parts of the urban area that are available for all citizens to use. They may be publicly owned, such as streets and parks, or privately owned such as shopping centers and arcades. They provide the setting for everyday activities and ideally are interconnected as a network.

The quality and diversity of activities in the public realm is strongly influenced by the form and robustness of the design, the range of uses that can be accommodated, the mix of people that use it, and the degree of comfort (including sun penetration and weather protection) that it provides. The attractiveness of the space also reflects how well it is managed and maintained and the degree to which the public participates in looking after it – for instance through anti-litter programs. To a user, good maintenance makes a statement about municipal pride.

The boundary between private property and the street – such as facades, entrances and parking lots, are also important places to add visual interest at street level and improve the street experience. This can include window and doorway detailing, landscaping, signage, lighting and seasonal or permanent canopies for weather protection. Lighting and trees can also be used to reinforce the character and importance of the street.

Parks and open spaces can take advantage of valued areas such heritage sites, shorelines, slopes, greenways, plantings and views. Ideally these sites are part of a deliberately planned network, have a specific use, scale

and character, and do not just represent the space left over between developments or land in transition to other uses. However, in a highly built up or revitalized area where open space is limited, opportunities may need to be taken up as they arise with compromises and trade-off as part of the planning and decision-making process.

Safety is an important issue in public space. Informal surveillance and police protection can be supported or hindered by lighting and planting, and paths need to be as direct as possible and well overlooked at all times. Also, the microclimate of the space needs close attention including hours of sunlight, lateral winds, downdrafts and frost pockets.

*Ease of Movement* - to promote accessibility and permeability by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through, putting people before traffic and integrating land use and transport

The network of public spaces, including streets, should allow for easy and safe movement from one place to another and accommodate a range of activities and public events. This includes the needs of pedestrians (including those with restricted mobility), cyclists, and children in strollers. Street furniture, outdoor sitting areas, and sidewalk cafes need to be carefully placed so that the overall impact is of variety and vitality and not clutter or impeded walking areas. The balance of activities that are encouraged in a given street should reflect its social and economic setting.

Certain streets may be identified where vehicular use is limited or prohibited and where pedestrians have the right-of-way. In other streets, it may be desirable to slow down traffic by frequent stop lights, street parking, pedestrian crossing areas or other traffic calming measures. In order to support the efficient movement of people into and out of the downtown, transit stops and transfer location need to be frequent, designed for public comfort, and easy to find. Overall, higher density, mixed-use development helps to support transit.

*Legibility* – to provide recognizable routes, intersections and landmarks to help people find their way around

Pedestrian routes can be given identity through planting, paving, signage, and detailing such as light bollards and kiosks. They can use local icons and design features such as wrought iron rails or grates, and colour coding may be used to provide additional clarity or to identify a specific route or area – such as a historic district. Landmarks and gateways also help people to get oriented. Route marking is particularly important in areas that accommodate a lot of visitors.

Signage is also important in identifying a building's function, particularly when it incorporates public services or retail outlets. Together with clearly placed street names and numbers, signage helps to minimize the frustration of people who are new to the downtown and need to find a specific location.

*Diversity and Adaptability* – to promote a form of development that is flexible enough to respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions, offers choice, and creates viable places that respond to local needs and provide safe living and working environments.

Overall, an important aim of downtown development is to support compatible activity at all hours in order to maintain the bustle of urban life and provide the human surveillance of the street that gives a sense of safety. Mixed use at the scale of a building, street, or district can help support this by attracting people to live, work and play in the same area.

Development that is designed to accommodate a range of uses, and whose balance of uses can change over time, is likely to be more successful in the long term and result in less urban blight. As the balance of economic activity in a downtown changes, buildings that can be refurbished back and forth into shops, offices and residences are unlikely to suffer abandonment and dereliction.

Similarly, public space that has different uses - such as a parking area or plaza that can double as a festival site - also supports the vitality of the downtown. Development that has a fine-grained design with several alternative entry/exit points is also more adaptable and can accommodate major events more comfortably than super-block developments that cut off access and crosscuts.

## 4.0 BEST PRACTICES IN SELECTED US CITIES

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how selected successful urban design programs have been structured in the United States. It reviews the approach that has been adopted in three US cities, Portland (Oregon), Seattle (Washington), and Boulder (Colorado) all of which are well known for the high quality of downtown urban life they offer. They represent three different scales of urban development with populations of over 1 million, about half a million and about 100,000 respectively.

These three cities have programs that have evolved over several years and have much useful experience to draw on. They emphasize that:

- design requirements must be based on broadly accepted long-term goals;
- the design and development process should be a collaborative one between municipal officials, developers, designers and citizens; and
- the design guidelines and review process should rigorously protect the critical elements of high quality urban design as defined in the local context, but also encourage creativity and innovation

The bottom line is to ensure that new, re-built or renovated buildings ‘fit’ the context of the district in which they will stand and hopefully enhance it. The overarching goal is to enrich the experience of those who live, work and visit the downtown thereby strengthening its attractiveness to business, workers, shoppers, residents and visitors.

### 4.1 Portland, Oregon

Portland first adopted Downtown Design Guidelines in 1980. They were reviewed and amended in 1990 when they were renamed the *Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines*, and were recently revised once more in 2001. The Guidelines were based on a document called *The Identity of Place* that was produced in 1977 by Leo Dean Williams, an architect and senior planner with the Portland Bureau of Planning. The Guidelines apply to all development projects in the Central City area whether they are private sector or municipal. The Central City covers a five square mile area that includes the downtown core of Portland.

#### 4.1.1 Urban Design Vision for the Central City

The introduction to the Guidelines states that.....’ *Portland’s collective needs and aspirations shape its urban design efforts. Urban design then*

*shapes the city's physical form, giving it personality and enhancing its character. The urban design vision for Portland's Central City emphasizes a livable, walkable, urban community that focuses on the Willamette River. The Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines implement this urban design vision by providing a framework for how Central City development should look, function and feel.'*

The intent of the Guidelines and the design review process is to ..'ensure that new development and alterations to existing buildings maintain the integrity and enhance the quality of the Central City...(and to) give designers flexibility, while ensuring the compatibility of new development with the desired character.'

#### 4.1.2 Goals

The goals for Portland's process are as follows:

- To encourage urban design excellence
- To integrate urban design and preservation of heritage into the development process
- To enhance the character of the Central City's districts
- To promote the development of diversity and areas of special character within the Central City
- To establish an urban design relationship between the Central City's districts and the Central City as a whole
- To provide for a pleasant, rich and diverse experience for pedestrians
- To provide for the humanization of the Central City through promotion of the arts
- To assist in creating a 24-hour Central City which is safe, humane and prosperous; and
- To ensure that new development is at a human scale and that it relates to the scale and desired character of its setting and the Central City as a whole.

#### 4.1.3 Portland's Urban Design Framework

##### *a) Design Overlays*

Portland has four layers of design requirements for the Central City. Most developments have to meet two or three layers.

The first layer is the *Portland Zoning Code*. It includes general development standards that apply to all projects.

The second layer is the *Fundamental Design Guidelines*. These Guidelines are written as nine (9) qualitative statements that identify the desired character of development. They provide illustrations of the type of designs that are considered successful responses to the Guideline statements. Despite the qualitative language, the Guidelines are not advisory, they are mandatory and all projects in the area where they are applied must respond successfully to all nine guidelines – as judged by a Design Review Commission. The only time the Guidelines do not apply is when the proponent is able to argue that his/her proposal provides a better design solution than would be possible by applying the Guidelines. To be successful, this argument must meet with the approval of the Panel.

In specific Central City sub-districts, historic districts and unique parts of the city the Fundamental Design Guidelines are augmented by a third layer of review using *Sub-district/Historic Design Guidelines*. These are geographically defined, and are applied in areas with a character or role that needs special protection. They provide additional design criteria that the protect must reflect. In the event of conflict, these guidelines override the Fundamental Design Guidelines. One section of the design guidelines for King’s Hill Historic District is provided in Appendix 1.

In designated historic areas, a fourth layer may apply - the *Criteria for Historic Resources* found in the Portland Zoning Code. These criteria are definitive statements of how historic resources must be treated, and if conflict arises, they take precedence.

#### *b) Design Review Process*

Planners within the Office of Planning and Development Review undertake the design review, together with citizens appointed to serve on the Portland Design Review Commission and the Portland Historic Landmarks Commission. All commissioners are volunteers and include individuals with expertise in design and development. The Historic Landmarks Commission also includes members with extensive experience in historic preservation. Members of both commissions are nominated by the Mayor and confirmed by Council.

The review process provides the public with an opportunity to evaluate new construction and changes to buildings and sites. The process involves reviewing the proposal against the Guidelines and assessing the success of the design in meeting them. If a proposal is considered inadequate, the Commissioners are not required to provide advice on how it should be amended, rather it is sent back for modification.

The review process varies according to the size and complexity of the proposal. Staff review small projects and generally take two to three months to complete the process. Large proposals involve the Commission and include a public hearing where testimony from neighbours, organizations and neighbourhood associations is encouraged. This process takes three to four months.

*c) The Fundamental Design Guideline Reference Document*

The Portland Design Review Commission has produced a *Fundamental Design Guideline* reference document for all those interested in or involved with the review process. The guidelines are divided into four sections each focusing on an important aspect of urban design in Portland’s Central City – Portland Personality, Pedestrian Emphasis, Project Design, and Special Areas.

Each of the sections contains a series of individual guidelines that provide more detail on the intent of the section. The guidelines are written using the following format:

- Background – this provides the context for the guideline including the design elements considered to be of most importance and concern.
- The guideline statement
- Different ways to meet the requirements of the guideline including illustrations of successful approved designs.

Tables 4.1 to 4.3 below provide summaries of three of the sections of the Guidelines. The fourth section is concerned with Special Areas in Portland for which the design guidelines are more specific.

Table 4.1 – Portland Personality

GENERAL OBJECTIVE	GUIDELINE STATEMENT AND EXAMPLES
<i>Integrate the River</i>	<p>Orient architectural and landscape elements including but not limited to lobbies, entries, balconies, terraces and outdoor areas to the Willamette River and greenway.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect urban fabric, including streets, to the water’s edge</li> <li>• Incorporate water access points.</li> <li>• Restore or enhance riverbank ecology</li> <li>• Enhance pedestrian access to the greenway.</li> </ul>

<p><i>Emphasize Portland Themes</i></p>	<p>Integrate Portland-related themes with the developer’s overall design concept. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rose</li> <li>• Leaping salmon</li> <li>• Healthy river</li> <li>• Drinking fountains</li> </ul> <p>Also integrate themes from the local context such as historical events and traditional building styles and materials.</p>
<p><i>Respect Block Structures</i></p>	<p>Maintain and extend the traditional 200-foot block pattern to preserve the Central City’s ration of open space to built space.</p> <p>Where superblocs exist, locate public and/or private rights-of-way in a manner that reflects the 200-foot block pattern, and include landscaping and seating to enhance the pedestrian environment.</p>
<p><i>Use Unifying Elements</i></p>	<p>Integrate unifying elements and/or develop new features that help unity and connect individual buildings and different areas.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pave sections of streets that are periodically closed off for public events in the same materials as the adjacent public spaces.</li> <li>• Mark walking routes with special stones in the paved surface.</li> <li>• Maintain consistent design of street furniture, fencing, light standards etc.</li> <li>• Use window treatment as unifying element</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enhance, Embellish and Identify Areas</i></p>	<p>Enhance an area by reflecting on the local character within the right-of-way. For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commemorate landmarks, individuals, events, or establishments with paving markers</li> <li>• Include heritage trees</li> </ul> <p>Embellish an area by integrating elements in new development that build on the area’s character.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate historic downtown features –such as ironwork fences or grates.</li> <li>• Use consistent landscaping style</li> </ul> <p>Identify an area’s special features or qualities by integrating them into new development.</p>
<p><i>Reuse, Rehabilitate, or Restore Buildings</i></p>	<p>Where practical, reuse, rehabilitate, and restore buildings and/or building elements.</p>

<p><i>Establish and Maintain a Sense of Urban Enclosure</i></p>	<p>Define public rights-of-way by creating and maintaining a sense of urban enclosure.</p> <p>For Example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain consistent scale and height of buildings along a street.</li> <li>• Add architectural elements that provide a transition zone from an urban development to a park or greenway.</li> <li>• Vary the streetscape adjacent to a park to articulate the urban edge.</li> <li>• Reinforce urban character – such as development built out to the property lines where this is typical urban form.</li> <li>• Adapt or reuse building elements to create or maintain a sense of enclosure.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Contribute to a Vibrant Streetscape</i></p>	<p>Integrate building setbacks with adjacent sidewalks to increase the space for potential public use.</p> <p>Develop visual and physical connections into building’s active interior spaces from adjacent sidewalks.</p> <p>Use architectural elements such as atriums, grand entries and large ground-level windows to reveal important interior spaces and activities.</p>
<p><i>Strengthen Gateways</i></p>	<p>Develop and/or strengthen gateway locations.</p>

Table 4.2 Pedestrian Emphasis

GENERAL OBJECTIVE	GUIDELINE STATEMENT
<p><i>Reinforce and Enhance the Pedestrian System</i></p>	<p>Maintain a convenient access route for pedestrians where a public right of way exists or has existed.</p> <p>Develop and define the different zones of a sidewalk: building frontage zone, street furniture zone, movement zone, and the curb.</p> <p>Develop pedestrian access routes to supplement the public right-of-way system through super-blocks or other large blocks.</p>
<p><i>Protect the Pedestrian</i></p>	<p>Protect the pedestrian environment from vehicular movement.</p> <p>Develop integrated identification, sign, and sidewalk-oriented night-lighting systems that offer safety, interest, and diversity to the pedestrian.</p> <p>Incorporate building equipment, mechanical exhaust routing systems, and/or service areas in a manner that does not detract from the pedestrian environment.</p>

<i>Bridge Pedestrian Obstacles</i>	Bridge across barriers and obstacles to pedestrian movement by connecting the pedestrian system with innovative, well-marked crossings and consistent sidewalk designs.
<i>Provide Stopping and Viewing Places</i>	Provide safe, comfortable places where people can stop, view, socialize, and rest.  Ensure that these places do not conflict with other sidewalk uses.
<i>Make Plazas, Parks and Open Spaces Successful</i>	Orient building elements such as main entries, lobbies, windows, and balconies to face public parks, plazas and open spaces.  Where provided, integrate water features and/or public art to enhance the public open space.  Develop locally-oriented pocket parks that incorporate amenities for nearby patrons.
<i>Develop Weather Protection</i>	Develop integrated weather protection systems at the sidewalk-level of buildings to mitigate the effects of rain, wind, glare, shadow, and sunlight on the pedestrian environment.
<i>Integrate Barrier-Free Design</i>	Integrate access systems for all people with the building's overall design concept.

Table 4.3 Project Design

GENERAL OBJECTIVE	GUIDELINE STATEMENT
<i>Enhance View Opportunities</i>	Orient windows, entrances, balconies and other building elements to surrounding points of interest and activity.  Size and place new buildings to protect existing views and view corridors.  Develop building facades that create visual connections to adjacent spaces.
<i>Promote Quality and permanence in Development</i>	Use design principles and building materials that promote quality and permanence.
<i>Respect Architectural Integrity</i>	Respect the original character of an existing building when modifying its exterior.  Develop vertical and horizontal additions that are compatible with the existing building, to enhance the overall proposal's architectural integrity.

<i>Complement the Context of Existing Buildings</i>	Complement the context of existing buildings by using and adding to the local design vocabulary.
<i>Design for Coherency</i>	Integrate the different building and design elements including, but limited to, construction materials, roofs, entrances, as well as window, door, sign, and lighting systems, to achieve a coherent composition.
<i>Develop Transitions between Buildings and Public Spaces</i>	<p>Develop transitions between private development and public open space.</p> <p>Use site design features such as movement zones, landscaping elements, gathering places, and seating opportunities to develop transition areas where private development directly abuts a dedicated public open space.</p>
<i>Design Corners that Build Active Intersections</i>	<p>Use design elements including but not limited to varying building heights, changes in façade plane, large windows, awnings, canopies, marquees, signs, and pedestrian entrances to highlight building corners.</p> <p>Locate flexible sidewalk-level retail opportunities at building corners.</p> <p>Locate stairs, elevators, and other upper floor building access points towards the middle of the block.</p>
<i>Differentiate the Sidewalk-level of Buildings</i>	Differentiate the sidewalk level of the building from the middle and top by using elements including but not limited to different exterior materials, awnings, signs, and large windows.
<i>Develop Flexible Sidewalk-level Spaces</i>	Develop flexible spaces at the sidewalk level of buildings to accommodate a variety of active uses.
<i>Integrate Encroachments</i>	<p>Size and place encroachments in the public right-of-way to visually and physically enhance the pedestrian environment.</p> <p>Locate permitted skybridges towards the middle of the block, and where they will be physically unobtrusive. Design skybridges to be visually level and transparent.</p>
<i>Integrate Roofs and Rooftops</i>	<p>Integrate roof function, shape, surface materials and colours with the building's overall design concept.</p> <p>Size and place rooftop mechanical equipment, penthouses, other components, and related screening elements to enhance views of the Central City's skyline, as well as views from other buildings or vantage points.</p> <p>Develop rooftop terraces, gardens, and associated landscaped areas to be effective stormwater management tools.</p>

<i>Integrate Exterior Lighting</i>	<p>Integrate exterior lighting and its staging or structural components with the building's overall design concept.</p> <p>Use exterior lighting to highlight the building's architecture, being sensitive to its impact on the skyline at night.</p>
<i>Integrate Signs</i>	<p>Integrate signs and their associated structural components with the building's overall design concept.</p> <p>Size, place, design, and light signs so that they do not dominate the skyline.</p> <p>Signs should have only a minimal presence in the Portland skyline.</p>

## 4.2 Seattle, Washington

The City of Seattle has a population of about 570,000 and is a port city like Halifax-Dartmouth. Seattle has a multi-level approach to urban design that covers both public and private sector projects in separate but related processes. The structure has three main components:

- *The Seattle Design Commission* – This was established in 1968 to oversee projects involving public facilities and the civic environment, and ensures that these projects incorporate high standards of design quality and efficiency.
- *The Design Review Program* – This was established by City Council in 1993 to... 'help new development contribute positively to neighbourhoods by exploring ways in which new multifamily and commercial buildings can best respond to their sites and distinctive surroundings'. It includes a review process using Design Review Guidelines and design review panels.
- *CityDesign* – A group set up in 1999 within the Department of Design, Construction and Land Use to be a catalyst for design excellence. This group works in partnership with the Seattle Design Commission and the Design Review Program.

### 4.2.1 Seattle Design Commission

The Commission is a non-partisan advisory body to the Mayor, City Council and City Staff with a membership of ten people - nine design professionals representing fine art, architecture, urban planning, engineering, environmental planning and landscape architecture; and one lay member. It reviews all capital projects funded in any part by the City or on City land and makes recommendations as the projects develop. Its activities are a required component of the City's formalized design review process.

In its review process, the Commission addresses issues such as:

- The urban design context of the project
- Public access
- Open space planning
- The integration of public art
- Streetscape design

It engages in consultations with project proponents, facilitates coordinated reviews with other agencies, where this is required, and engages the public through workshops, forums and exhibits. It works closely with the CityDesign group on the design education activities undertaken with and for the public.

#### 4.2.2 Design Review Program

The design review program is a core component of development project approval in the Center City of Seattle. It is required for all commercial and residential development projects over a threshold size, and can be voluntarily undertaken for other projects. The advantage to the proponent is that, by submitting to the Design Review process, it is possible to present a project that does not fully conform to the standard requirements of the Land Use Code, but may be granted variances provided it includes enough design benefits for the area.

The standards in the Land Use Code cover the following:

- Roof height
- Structure width and depth limits
- Setback requirements
- Modulation requirements
- Street-level use standards
- Street façade requirements
- Upper-level development standards
- Coverage and floor size requirements
- Wall dimensions
- Design, location and access to parking
- Open space requirements
- Screening and landscaping requirements

The Design Review Process has three principal objectives:

1. To encourage better design and site planning to enhance the character of the city and ensure that new development sensitively fits into neighbourhoods.
2. To provide flexibility in the application of development standards; and

3. To improve communication and participation among developers, neighbours and the City early in the design and siting of new development.

The Department of Design, Construction and Land Use (DCLU) administers the process which involves applying the *Design Review Guidelines for Downtown Development*, providing opportunities for public comment, and presentations and discussion with a Design Review Board. The Board presents its recommendations to the Director of the DCLU who makes the final decision.

There are seven (7) Design Review Boards each covering a different section of the City of Seattle. The Downtown Board includes two downtown residents, and one representative from each of the downtown business, development and design communities. The Design Review Board members examine how well the proposal responds to the Design Review Guidelines, weigh the merits of the project, and may recommend changes or departures from the regulations in the Land Use Code as a trade-off for better design. The Board measures the success of the proposal in the public realm by evaluating how it affects the public's perception and use of the urban environment. Success is deemed to have occurred when:

- The project's site planning and massing respond to the larger context of downtown and the region;
- The building's architectural expression relates to the neighbourhood context;
- The building's street façade creates a safe and interactive pedestrian environment;
- The project's public amenities enhance the streetscape and open space; and
- The project's vehicular access and parking impacts on the pedestrian environment are minimized.

A summary of the Design Review guidelines for Downtown Developments is presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Seattle Design Review Guidelines for Downtown Developments

GUIDELINE	CLARIFICATION
<i>A. Site Planning and Massing</i>	<i>Responding to the Larger Context</i>
A-1 Respond to the physical environment	Develop an architectural concept and compose the building's massing in response to geographic conditions and patterns of urban form found beyond the immediate context of the building site.
A-2 Enhance the skyline	Design the upper portion of the building to promote visual interest and variety in the downtown skyline.
<i>B. Architectural Expression</i>	<i>Relating to the Neighbourhood Context</i>
B-1 Respond to the neighbourhood context	Develop an architectural concept and compose the major building elements to reinforce desirable urban features existing in the surrounding neighbourhood.
B-2 Create a transition in bulk and scale.	Compose the massing of the building to create a transition to the height, bulk and scale of development in neighbouring or nearby less intensive zones.
B-3 Reinforce the positive urban form and architectural attributes of the immediate area.	Consider the predominant attributes of the immediate neighbourhood and reinforce desirable siting patterns, massing arrangements, and streetscape characteristics of nearby development.
B-4 Design a well-proportioned and unified building.	Compose the massing and organize the publicly accessible interior and exterior spaces to create a well-proportioned building that exhibits a coherent architectural concept. Design the architectural elements and finish details to create a unified building, so that all components appear integral to the whole.
<i>C. The Streetscape</i>	<i>Creating the Pedestrian Environment</i>
C-1 Promote pedestrian interaction	Spaces for street level uses should be designed to engage pedestrians with the activities occurring within them. Sidewalk-related spaces should be open to the general public and appear safe and welcoming.
C-2 Design Facades of many scales	Design architectural features, fenestration patterns and materials compositions that refer to the scale of human activities contained of elements scaled to promote pedestrian comfort, safety and orientation.
C-3 Provide active facades.	Buildings should not have large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks.
C-4 Reinforce building entries	To promote pedestrian comfort, safety, and orientation, reinforce the building's entry.

C-5 Encourage overhead weather protection	Encourage project applicants to provide continuous, well-lit, overhead weather protection to improve pedestrian comfort and safety along major pedestrian routes.
C-6 Develop the alley façade	To increase pedestrian safety, comfort, and interest, develop portions of the alley façade in response to the unique conditions of the site or project.
<i>D. Public Amenities</i>	<i>Enhancing the Streetscape and Open Space</i>
D-1 Provide inviting and usable open space	Design public open spaces to promote visually pleasing, safe, and active environment for workers, residents, and visitors. Views and solar access from the principal area of the open space should be especially emphasized.
D-2 Enhance the building with landscaping	Enhance the building and site with substantial landscaping- which includes special pavements, trellises, screen walls, planters, and site furniture, as well as living plant material.
D-3 Provide elements that define the place.	Provide special elements on the facades, within public open spaces, or on the sidewalk to create a distinct, attractive and memorable ‘sense of place’ associated with the building.
D-4 Provide appropriate signage	Design signage appropriate for the scale and character of the project and immediate neighbourhood. All signs should be oriented to pedestrians and/or persons in vehicles on streets within the immediate neighbourhood.
D-5 Provide adequate lighting	To promote a sense of security for people downtown during nighttime hours, provide appropriate levels of lighting on the building façade, on the underside of overhead weather protection, on and around street furniture, in merchandising display windows, and on signage.
D-6 Design for personal safety and security	Design the building and site to enhance the real and perceived feeling of personal safety and security in the immediate area.
<i>E. Vehicular Access and Parking</i>	<i>Minimizing the Adverse Impacts</i>
E – Minimize curb cut impacts	Minimize adverse impacts of curb cuts on the safety and comfort of pedestrians.

E-2 Integrate parking facilities	Minimize the visual impact of parking by integrating parking facilities with surrounding development. Incorporate architectural treatments of suitable landscaping to provide for the safety and comfort of people using the facility as well as those walking by.
E-3 Minimize the presence of service areas	Locate service areas for trash dumpsters, loading docks, mechanical equipment and the like away from the street front where possible, Screen from view those elements which for programmatic reasons cannot be located away from the street front.

### 4.2.3 CityDesign Group

The CityDesign group is made up of nine municipal staff members including three urban designers and a coordinator who acts as a link to the Design Commission. The mission of the group is ... *'to shape the civic character of Seattle's built and natural environment by:*

- *Developing and maintaining an Urban Design Vision for Seattle;*
- *Upholding standards of design excellence in the City's review of public and private developments;*
- *Collaborating with other City commissions and agencies responsible for the public realm;*
- *Facilitating citizen dialogue on urban design issues, policies, and actions affecting the public realm; and*
- *Serving as a public resource on urban design issues for a variety of constituencies.'*

The CityDesign group occupies a strategic position with connections to City government, the community and professionals, and is empowered to provide proactive design leadership and to be a catalyst for:

- Developing a 'connective public realm' with strong visual and spatial linkages that support city life and interaction among citizens;
- Balancing historical values and innovation in urban design; and
- Ensuring effective and ongoing communication amongst diverse constituencies.

Its mandate is to:

- Sponsor public workshops, forums and charettes for problem solving, networking, and building public leadership within the urban design community;
- Form strategic partnerships and leverage resources for planning and implementing key urban design projects;

- Coordinate urban design projects, and play a pivotal role in the policy, procedural and organizational work needed to create quality urban spaces;
- Build and facilitate dialogue amongst citizens, professional planners and designers, developers, scholars, and governmental representatives on urban design strategies and future directions.

In support of design education, CityDesign has commissioned a strategic plan for an *Urban Design Resource Centre*, is developing a *Design Folio*, and has prepared a glossary of design terms. All of these are available on the City’s web site. CityDesign has also developed a strong relationship with design professionals at the University of Washington.

The Design Folio is a compendium of photographs illustrating good urban design principles as they have been applied in actual projects in Seattle and other cities. They provide positive examples illustrating the vision of the City’s Design Review Guidelines, Great Streets, urban spaces and elements in the public realm, and public use facilities. Table 4.5 provides a summary of the illustrations catalogue.

Table 4.5 Catalogue of Illustrations from Seattle’s Design Folio

CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIONS
Seattle’s Design Review Guidelines	Architectural Elements and Materials Landscaping Pedestrian Environment Site Planning Transition in height, bulk and/or scale
Great Streets	Alleys Boulevards Pedestrian streets / paths Residential streets Retail streets
Urban Spaces and Elements in the Public Realm	Parks Plazas and public squares Unique objects Urban green spaces
Public Use Facilities	Community centers Public buildings Public utilities Schools Transportation facilities

Examples of these illustrations can be found in Appendix 2.

CityDesign has so far prepared an open space plan for the City center called ‘*The Blue Ring: Connecting Places*’, and a *Wayfinding Plan*. The open space strategy establishes concepts and implementation strategies for

connecting the Center City’s open space assets and amenities and developing new additions to create a ‘ring’ of interconnected open space. It works with a 100-year vision, but on one-to-ten-year implementation plans.

CityDesign is currently in the early stages of preparing a framework for actions and projects in the public realm of the Center City, involving streets, open spaces and activities. It will be called *Connections and Places: A Center City Urban Design and Implementation Strategy*. The first step of this process was to commission a review of all plans and urban design efforts for the target area that have been completed since 1985. The objectives of this review (called the Center City Mosaic) was to:

- Identify urban design elements from neighbourhood plans, especially those that may contribute significantly to the larger context of the Center City.
- Review the framework, vision and goals for Downtown/Center city urban design.
- Identify geographic, policy and procedural gaps in urban design.

The common themes and issues that emerged from this analysis are summarized in Table 4.6 below. Most of the themes are common to many urban centers in North America, including the Halifax-Dartmouth Capital District.

Table 4.6 Themes and Issues, Center City Urban Design, Seattle

<p><b>PLACES</b></p> <p><i>The Downtown integrates civic commercial, retail and residential aspects of downtown</i>  Downtown accommodates a variety of uses at different times of day. It acts as a center for government, retail and commercial office activity. It is also becoming a home to diverse residents. Downtown must be designed with all these users in mind.</p> <p><i>Distinctive of Neighbourhoods and Districts</i>  Most, if not all, of the key planning and urban design efforts for downtown have recognized importance of neighbourhoods. Each of the nine Center City neighbourhoods has distinct qualities that we would like to retain and enhance.</p> <p><i>Retain diversity, historical character and cultural heritage while accommodating change.</i></p> <p><i>Safe neighbourhoods</i></p> <p><i>Signature public projects</i>  There are a significant number of public buildings and spaces under construction, being designed or proposed.</p>
---

*Increase quality housing that is affordable to all.*

## CONNECTIONS

### *Connect Distinct Neighbourhoods and Districts*

Although downtown neighbourhoods are distinctive in character, the sense of connection or transition between them is important. Avoid ‘dead zones’ between neighbourhoods. Provide strong pedestrian experience as people move from neighbourhood to neighbourhood.

### *Pay attention to Pedestrian Environment and Linkages*

Downtowns should be attractive to walkers throughout all hours of the day and all seasons of the year. The downtown streetscape is a place for people and not just cars. The public realm should be inviting to people, and the streetscape should be a stimulating, comfortable and interactive place.

*Create pedestrian-friendly and human-scaled street environments.*

*Support the co-existence of vehicle and pedestrian traffic.*

## CONFLICTS

There are potential conflicts between the desire for pedestrian-oriented street environments and efficient vehicle access and traffic flow. Currently, housing developments in the downtown and adjacent neighbourhoods are on the rise. At the same time mobility demands in the South Downtown and waterfront areas have intensified due to the building of two new major league stadiums, increasing ferry traffic, and increased Port of Seattle and industrial area activity. The various plans for South Downtown, the waterfront and other neighbourhoods attempt to balance the needs of pedestrian, trucks and trains.

The second step was to set up the Center City Urban Design Forum 2000. This was a three-day workshop attended by 150 designers, community members and City staff. The purpose of the Forum was to confirm themes and identify key urban design principles, opportunities for action, and project ideas. CityDesign staff will use the output from the plan review, the Forum and the Design Review Guidelines to assemble the first draft of the ‘*Connections and Places*’ strategy.

### **4.3 Boulder, Colorado**

Boulder has a population of just over 100,000. The City approved its first set of design guidelines in 1976 (*Downtown Boulder Private Development Guidelines for Architecture and Signs*). Following this, a number of other design-related documents were published: *Downtown Boulder Urban Design Plan* (1986), *Downtown Illustrative Plan* (1992) and a draft *Downtown Boulder Pedestrian Streetscape Plan: Design and Standards* (1995). In 2002, City Council approved a set of *Downtown Urban Design Guidelines*. These guidelines now provide the foundation of an obligatory

design review process applicable to all preservation, restoration, and new construction projects in the historic district of the City, and all projects with the construction value of over \$10,000 in the other sections of the downtown. The guidelines are applicable to both public and private sector proposals, and are supported by the *Transportation Landscape Design Guidelines* (2001). This identifies appropriate paving materials, streetscape designs, planting materials, and maintenance and management programs for the Downtown.

#### 4.3.1 Downtown Alliance and Advisory Boards

The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines were authored by the *Downtown Alliance* which is a group comprised of representatives from city boards and commissions, non-profit organizations and neighbourhood groups, the Boulder Planning Board, the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, the Downtown Advisory Board, the Downtown Management Commission, Downtown Boulder Inc., Historic Boulder, and representatives from a number of downtown neighbourhoods.

The Alliance was formed in the fall of 1996 to develop a document that would:

- Guide future development in a manner that maintains the downtown's livability and is consistent with the overall 'feel' of the downtown,
- Protect downtown's historic character that is so closely associated with its image and quality of life, and
- Maintain the quality of life of surrounding neighbourhoods and their relationship to downtown.

The purpose of the guidelines is to ...*'provide a basis for understanding, discussing and assessing the design quality of proposed preservation, renovation and new construction projects' and to encourage private and public projects to preserve and enhance the form, scale and visual character that make the downtown unique within the City and the region.'*

The guidelines are designed to support ten strategies outlined in the 1992 Downtown Illustrative Plan:

1. Promotion of long term economic vitality
2. Creation of a pedestrian district
3. Improved links between the Downtown Boulder mall and the Civic Park
4. Additional public places
5. Streetscape improvements
6. Maintenance of the historic character
7. Expansion of the role of the arts and public events

8. Expanded residential development
9. Improved access for alternative transportation modes
10. Parking

Three bodies administer the guidelines: the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board (LPAB), the Downtown Design Advisory Board (DDAB), and the Downtown Management Committee (DMC). Each is responsible for a prescribed area of the downtown. The Boards provide recommendations to the Planning Department and, depending on the nature of the project and the degree of controversy, the final decision may be made by the Department, the Planning Board or City Council.

The five-person Downtown Design Advisory Board is appointed by City Council. Its members are citizens with expertise in architecture, landscape architecture, urban design and community development.

#### 4.3.2 Design Guidelines

The design guidelines are oriented heavily towards the protection and enhancement of historic buildings and streetscapes in the Historic District of the downtown.

The urban design objectives for the Downtown Historic District are to:

- Preserve and restore historic buildings
- Preserve the integrity of the historic architectural features of individual buildings
- Ensure that alterations and new construction strengthen and maintain the historic integrity of individual buildings and of the Historic Area at large.
- Encourage new development that will respect and enhance visual character
- Enhance the retail focus of the area
- Preserve the central area as a place for intense pedestrian activity

Outside the Historic District, the urban design objectives are to:

- Reinforce the character of downtown as a pedestrian place by encouraging architectural solutions that are visually interesting, stylistically appropriate to their context, and compatible in scale and character with their street.
- Strengthen the identity of downtown as a place where people feel welcome and comfortable through the careful selection of building materials and human scale design
- Encourage development that complements pedestrian activity

In both cases the emphasis is on: facades; street alignment; the height, width, mass and scale of the buildings; pedestrian interest at street level; weather protection (awnings); building materials; colour; and the quality of public open space.

Adjacent to the historic and non-historic areas of downtown is the 'Interface area' where the commercial area connects with residential neighbourhoods. The design objectives for these areas are to:

- Encourage sensitive design along the edge where the downtown commercial area abuts residential neighbourhoods
- Encourage sensitive site, building, and streetscape design that emphasizes a clear distinction between commercial and residential areas
- Maintain the diversity in building type and size and respect the adjoining residential character that is important to the area
- Discourage adverse impacts from noise, night lighting, poor building design, and commercial service areas on adjacent residential neighbourhoods

Through out the downtown, specific objectives apply to the design and location of parking. They focus on minimizing the visual impact of parking lots and parking structures, pedestrian access into and through them, and public safety. The objectives are as follows:

- Produce attractive parking facilities what are compatible additions to the downtown and that add rather than detract from the areas's historic character and function
- Enhance pedestrian activity at the sidewalk level through the use of a retail wrap on structure parking and landscape areas around surface parking
- Ensure that the design of the facility is of the highest quality

Finally, objectives have been formulated for commercial signage. They are:

- To encourage design and sign placement that promotes downtown businesses while complementing downtown's character and scale
- To promote signs that are an integral and noticeable part of a building's overall design
- To promote signs that are not intrusive within their block
- To create an overall image in which a building and its signs relate to each other in helping to draw customers

## 4.4 Summary

Although the urban design programs in Portland, Seattle and Boulder have emerged in response to local issues and deal with urban design issues at different scales and different levels of complexity, they have a lot in common. This suggests that a successful program should have a number of key components:

- Goals and objectives that reflect local issues, priorities, history and circumstances
- A collaborative approach to the identification of urban design best practices involving staff, developers, professional designers, downtown community and business groups, citizens with an interest and/or expertise in urban design issues
- A design review process applicable to public and private projects
- Clearly stated urban design guidelines and/or criteria
- Flexibility in the wording of the urban design guidelines as a means of promoting creativity and innovation
- A group within municipal government with the mandate, responsibility, expertise and resources to manage a downtown urban design program
- An independent volunteer-based review body providing a wide range of design expertise and experience
- A public involvement program that can draw on resources and include a wide range of educational activities

The foundation of vision, goals and objectives serves to underpin any subsequent planning processes, such as Seattle's plans for increasing and connecting urban open space, and its evolving strategy for enhancing the quality and vitality of the public realm in downtown; and Boulder's Transportation Landscape Design Guidelines. In some circumstances a relatively prescriptive approach, such as that adopted by Boulder out of concern for its heritage district, may become the preferred approach where vulnerable assets are considered at risk.

Each of the three cities recognizes the importance of their geographic settings to the appeal of the downtown, and pay close attention to the impact of development on views and the skyline. All three also have the same approach to the development of downtown as a prosperous center for the city - they want to make it 'livable' and very comfortable for pedestrians. In this regard, all three have been successful and are in the process of developing economically vigorous downtowns that are vibrant, attractive and interesting.

## **5.0 BEST PRACTICES IN SELECTED CANADIAN CITIES**

A scan of urban design processes, programs and activities in Canada was undertaken to assess the ‘state-of-the-art’ in this country and assemble ideas for programs that might be relevant for consideration in the HRM Capital District.

In most cases the basic research was conducted over the internet, and followed up with telephone interviews with municipal staff where clarification or to update information was needed. The search was not exhaustive and less prominent programs might well have been missed if they had a relatively low profile.

Activities and programs in each of the provincial capitals were examined, plus other major cities in each province, where relevant. The findings are described in the following sections city-by-city moving from west to east with only notable programs listed. The key points drawn from the Summary at the end of Chapter 4 has been used as a framework for describing each location.

### **5.1 Victoria**

#### **5.1.1 Urban Design in the Planning Process**

The City of Victoria has a *Downtown Victoria Plan (1990)* and an *Official Community Plan (1995)*. The Official Plan is a general statement of the broad land use, transportation, social and economic policies of the City. Schedule B of the plan (amended and adopted in November 2002) enables design guidelines to be prepared for 30 Development Permit and Heritage Conservation areas. For each area, the By-law specifies the intent of the guidelines, and indicates whether the emphasis is on exterior design, finish and landscaping; form and character; heritage conservation; or protection of the natural environment. Some of the guidelines pre-date the Downtown and Official Plan and are gradually being aligned and updated.

Aspects of design affecting the public realm that may be incorporated into the guidelines include: views; facades; sun exposure; areas of public activity; architectural and streetscape design; scale and massing; quality and character of development; landscaping; protection of shoreline; and public access to the shoreline.

In the Downtown and Old Town area, which includes heritage districts, the guidelines focus on heritage conservation, ‘active’ windows, shop frontage and access from the street. Urban design manuals have been prepared for some areas, including the Legislative Precinct Lands, but at

present concern about such urban design elements such as scale and massing, roof lines, exterior finishes seems to be more focuses on residential neighbourhoods outside of the downtown. However, that may change with time.

#### 5.1.2 Design Resource Group

Victoria municipal government has an urban design section in the Planning Department headed by an architect/planner.

#### 5.1.3 Design Review Process

Victoria has an Urban Design Panel that reviews public and private development proposals in areas with guidelines. The panel has nine members, three architects, one landscape architect and three other individuals who may be a developer, a representative of the building industry, or an interested citizen. All of the members are volunteers and are appointed by Council.

The panel compares the project to the requirements of the design guidelines. Proposed adjustments to the guidelines have to be justified and may or may not be approved. This permits a degree of flexibility and opportunity for innovation in the process. It is not clear how much opportunity there is to improve the quality of the public realm as part of the trade off.

#### 5.1.4 Public Involvement and Education Program

There is no city-wide public involvement and education program emphasizing urban design. Public consultation is undertaken at a program level, within the Development Permit and Heritage Conservation Areas, and in neighbourhood planning processes.

#### 5.1.5 Related Projects, Plans and Design Tools

Victoria has a number of programs oriented to improving the quality of public space:

##### *Art in Public Places*

One percent (1%) of the value of municipal construction and renovation projects in excess of \$250,000 is allocated for the purchase of art for display in new buildings or to incorporate artist's designs or concepts into the design of the building or structure. Contracts are awarded on the basis of competitions. The private sector is encouraged to follow suit but is not required to do so.

### *Design Recognition Program*

The local newspaper runs a design recognition program. The City is also considering establishing one.

### *Greenway Program*

Victoria has prepared a draft Greenways Plan (May 2003). The goals of this plan are:

- To establish a ‘human-powered’ transportation network
- To restore native, aquatic and cultural habitats
- To provide opportunities for recreation

Over time, all neighbourhood plans will be amended to include policies and routes contained in this Plan unless they already include policies or objectives related to public pathways and walkways.

### *Tree-Bylaw*

Victoria has three protected species, Garry Oak, Arbutus, and Pacific Dogwood. Also other individual trees may be protected. It is stipulated that during the construction process, all trees of these species must be retained beyond the footprint of the building, driveway, or off-street parking. An arborist’s report is required to ensure that other live trees will be protected on the site. There are financial penalties for contravention, and a replacement tree must be planted and maintained for each one removed.

### *Graffiti*

To address the problem of graffiti, the city has a clean up team but also has established a graffiti park.

### *CPTED*

Victoria has a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) program.

### *Green Building Policy*

The municipality has a policy and guidelines for ‘green’ buildings emphasize energy savings and the municipality’s responsibilities for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

## **5.2 Vancouver**

### **5.2.1 Urban Design in the Planning Process**

Prior to 1992, Vancouver had many policies but no overall plan to guide decisions. In 1992, an exhaustive and fully inclusive public consultation process was initiated, and in 1995, City Council adopted CityPlan, a broad

vision for the city. The Vision, described in detail in a 27-page report, includes the following references to urban design:

- Vancouver is a city of neighbourhoods that accommodate people at all stages of life, are safe, and have ‘character’ provided through trees and greenery, heritage buildings and areas and distinctive identities
- Art and culture contribute to the city’s identity
- There are new and more diverse public places such as parks, pedestrian streets and greenways, and more welcoming public places downtown
- Nature is protected, together with the public views to the mountains and the water
- Transit, walking and biking are priorities
- The downtown is welcoming and a good place to work, live and visit
- Residential neighbourhoods providing livable environments for a variety of people will surround the two downtown office districts. Specialty character and heritage area, lively retail streets, waterfront walkways, and diverse plazas and open spaces will be welcoming public places for resident, employees, visitors and tourists.

Each section of CityPlan includes a proposal for new directions and initiatives, all of which are to be defined and implemented through a local area planning process. For the Downtown area, the proposal includes the following relevant items:

- To develop more detailed policies for the central area such as the public realm, transportation, skyline, people and social issues
- To develop a concept for public places in the central area and specific proposals for capital plans
- To encourage more intensive, shared use of public space parks, streets, schools and hospital grounds
- Increase the number and variety of trees on public streets
- Promote lively neighbourhood shopping streets where it is comfortable to buy, sell, stroll, relax and perform
- Encourage the city’s thoroughfares to develop their own look and feel
- Build city-wide and neighbourhood greenways and access to the waterfront
- Promote more attractive, usable downtown plazas and parks
- Continue to protect public views of water and mountains.

### 5.2.2 Design Resource Group

The City Plans Division of the Community Services Department in Vancouver is responsible for the development of policy, plans and regulations for city-wide and community land use. Responsibility for urban design is dispersed within the City government, and much responsibility rests with a volunteer Urban Design Review Panel.

### 5.2.3 Design Review Process

The City of Vancouver has had an Urban Design Panel since 1956 in response to a citizen's movement that called for better urban design. The panel's terms of reference states that it reviews major development proposals in the city, rezoning applications and other projects of public interest including civic works such as bridges, roadworks, parks, beautification projects, transit systems and civic buildings. It also oversees design competitions. The panel assists the Planning Department and City Council in the formulation of urban design policy and criteria, including the design and inter-relationship of all physical components of the City.

The density of tall buildings in downtown Vancouver and pace of development, particularly through the 1990s, have presented considerable challenges for the public realm including maintaining adequate public space, protecting mountain views, providing for sun penetration and preventing the wind tunnel effect. Before 2000, there was no mandatory Panel review of residential and commercial developments in C-2 zones, but this has now been added to the Panel's mandate.

The examples presented in the report *Vancouver's Urban Design: A Decade of Achievement* suggest that the projects are judged heavily on their architectural qualities and the solutions proposed for site-specific problems. While the quality of design for the public realm is certainly important in the panel's assessment, it is not clear how much trade-off may be possible to improve the quality of public space. This aspect of the design review process will likely be given additional weight when the new policy for public space and the public realm is developed for the Downtown.

The Panel has evolved over the years in terms of its composition and management, the type of projects it reviews, and the type of advice it has provided. It has deliberately maintained an arms-length relationship with Council. The Panel has up to 12 members – six (6) architects, two (2) landscape architects, two (2) professional engineers, one (1) member of the City Planning Commission, and one (1) member from the Urban

Development Institute (UDI). The names of potential appointees are submitted by the professional associations and endorsed by City Council.

#### 5.2.4 Public Involvement and Education Program

Extensive public involvement and education programs have been undertaken in Vancouver through the city's planning program. This has included efforts to make citizens more aware of the value of public space and the quality of the public realm, but has not specifically targeted urban design education.

#### 5.2.5 Related Projects, Plans and Design Tools

##### *Street Design Standards (July 2002)*

A design manual has been developed through interdepartmental collaboration that describes and illustrates Vancouver's long-range urban design objectives for the city's streetscapes. It is intended to support the creation of enhanced streetscapes for Vancouver's public realm through the establishment of streetscape design standards for all City streets. It establishes standards for sidewalk paving design, street furniture, street trees and landscaping, lighting, public amenities, public information signs, etc. It is intended to ensure consistency in streetscape design throughout the City and clear roles for private developers, city staff, and street furniture contractors.

##### *Greenstreet Program*

This program began in 1994 with a pilot project and focuses on the beautification of traffic circles and street corner bulges. There are now 165 volunteers engaged in neighbourhoods throughout the city. The volunteers plant gardens in the circles and bulges mostly at their own expense but with support and recognition from the City. The support comes in the form of safety advice, information, compost and some plant materials that are made available at low cost. Recognition comes in the form of a newsletter, and an annual party hosted by the City.

The gardens have made the traffic calming measures more acceptable, and city staff note that drivers often slow down to look at them. City staff is now considering expanding the project to boulevards. The participation in this program is more common in areas where a community vision plan has been developed and citizens have worked on goals for their community.

## 5.3 Calgary

### 5.3.1 Urban Design in the Planning Process

In 1998, Calgary City Council adopted the *Calgary Plan* to guide municipal infrastructure investment and policy development for the next 25 years. The primary focus of the plan is growth management and transportation, however there is also recognition that a balance has to be created between economic development, environmental management and social development in order to maintain the quality of life that is important to Calgarians.

The Plan as a whole includes few specifics about urban design in the Downtown. Policies focus on strengthening retail, attracting more residential development, and providing infrastructure. However, it does make reference to the importance of urban design in establishing transitions between the intensively commercial areas and residential precincts. It describes the importance of an at-grade pedestrian system, at-grade open space, and amenity space for residential units. A bonus system is proposed to promote the provision of on-site open space and pedestrian components, off-site improvements on public lands, and density transfers for heritage preservation purposes.

The Plan highlights areas in the Downtown that merit special attention and design guidelines – for example Chinatown, Stephen Avenue Mall (a Special Heritage Area) and Olympic Plaza. It also identifies the importance of converting underused and underutilized lands to residential development, and recognizes that successful downtown residential development requires a new approach to development and different standards. This includes revisions to the requirements for open space, and the integration of transportation involving transit, cars, trucks, pedestrians and cyclists. The quality of the pedestrian environment is particularly highlighted. The objectives for the four residential areas in the Downtown (Chinatown, Eau Claire, East Village, and the West End) are as follows:

- Creation of livable environments that include pleasant, orderly streetscapes; ready access to sunlight and open space; safe environments; and opportunities to access private, quiet spaces.
- Minimization of through traffic
- Provision of safe pedestrian systems
- Development of a sense of identity and place
- Design of appropriate building forms
- Provision of appropriate land uses
- Assurance of appropriate physical and land use transitions between residential precincts and commercial core areas when possible.

Overall the urban design policies for the Downtown are as follows (Policies 3-4.2A to 3-4.2H):

- To maintain an on-going environmental improvements program to ensure a level of amenity that reinforces the attractiveness of the Downtown for existing and new businesses
- To endeavour to create a continuous, attractive setting in the Downtown for diverse recreational activities which satisfy local community and regional needs
- To endeavour to improve the accessibility to and the visibility of the riverbank
- To endeavour to ensure that all buildings, regardless of density, contribute to high-quality development within the Downtown
- To encourage the design of buildings edges that help create a comfortable pedestrian environment in terms of scale, orientation, visibility and protection from adverse weather
- To adhere to standards for sunlight access in special areas such as pedestrian malls, public open spaces and the riverbank in accordance with Council standards and guidelines
- To endeavour to minimize the impacts of buildings on one another in terms of wind, shadowing, overview and so on.

A follow-up report on the Downtown was released in September 2002 called *A Framework for Planning the future of Calgary's Downtown*. The report, based on an analysis by Urban Strategies Inc. states that ..” *the downtown, as the most prominent, visited and influential section of any city, plays a critical role in the projection of the character, qualities and values of the city to the world at large. Increasing emphasis is being placed on high quality architectural design and those elements that go to improving the quality of life and sense of place downtown, including park improvements, trail systems, pedestrian malls, streetscaping and public art.*’

The report recommends the following directions for Calgary's downtown:

1. *Reinforce the Downtown's primacy* - through an alternative growth model that encourages residential development, transit improvements, support for cycling and walking.
2. *Create a 24-hour downtown* - through the addition of cultural and entertainment destinations, mixed use, and the creation of attractive and 'imageable' urban environments.
3. *Invest in the public environment* - by building a number of attractive linked places that bring delight and interest to the resident, worker and tourist alike. Enhancement of the street experience is a priority and essential to contemporary urban tourism and the prerequisite for strong downtown residential growth. Street edges and traffic management need

particular attention to improve the quality of the street level visual and walking experience. In the new mixed-use development areas, careful attention to urban design is essential to create a strong sense of place and the necessary activity at street level. The architecture should demonstrate an adventurous edge, expressing the distinctiveness of these new districts. This sense of excitement should extend to the open space system and neighbourhoods adjacent to the downtown.

4. *Lead by example* - in raising the standard of urban design and architecture. The City should hold design competitions on key public projects, invite leading architects to take particular commissions, host conferences and events to celebrate design quality, and generally raise awareness of the importance of design not only for the enjoyment it brings but also as a key element in attracting the activities and employees of the new economy.

5. *Build downtown partnerships* - between the municipality, business leaders, cultural organizations, downtown residents, and other stakeholders that have an action-oriented approach to downtown initiatives.

The report also recommends that rather than undertake a traditional land use plan for the Downtown, the City focus on creating ‘memorable places’ and animating the linkages between them. The next steps will involve the design (or re-design) of key civic spaces and buildings. Three new tools are required:

- Policies that include broad public objectives including housing, heritage and the public realm.
- Destination facilities
- Improvements to the public realm

The two main recommended planning outcomes of this report are a *Downtown Urban Structure Plan*, and a *Program of Public Improvements*. The Plan will:

- Identify key civic spaces and buildings and the linkages between them
- Provide guidelines for developing and enhancing those features
- Guide changes to the regulatory system to encourage mixed forms of development, and especially housing;
- Identify and provide for future public facilities, amenities and attractions
- Recommend funding and regulatory tools that can secure heritage resources and create a broader range of housing throughout the downtown

The Program will identify significant projects that will enhance the public realm and make the downtown more exciting and attractive.

### 5.3.2 Design Resource Group

The City of Calgary does not have an urban design team, and has usually contracted out this work.

### 5.3.3 Design Review Process

The integration of urban design into Calgary's planning process is in the early stages. At present general goals have been identified and more work is needed to develop objectives.

There is no citywide urban design review process, though design review is being considered as part of an expanded role for the *Calgary Planning Commission*. As a first step towards better urban design, an Urban Design Panel and urban design criteria are being established for the East Village – a major development area in the downtown. Proposed criteria for the panel to use in evaluating projects are as follows:

The project design should:

- Make a positive contribution to the spatial enclosure, spatial hierarchy and spatial continuity of the public realm and the area to which the public has access.
- Pay attention to generally recognized compositional principles of design (unity, variety, novelty, hierarchy, balance, veracity, rhythm, rhyme, fit, etc.)
- Preserve and/or reveal significant vistas
- Pay attention to appropriate scale/massing/surface richness; impact on urban grain.
- Have regard for the impact on the pedestrian environment (sun, wind, air, quality)
- Provide diversity in the mix and intensity of uses
- Provide clarity on the use and function (legibility) of structures and places
- Contribute to the accessibility of the public realm
- Clearly define the public versus the private realm
- Contribute to the safety of the public realm
- Consider the contextual fit and effect on the Downtown silhouette
- Consider the robustness / sustainability / adaptability of the proposal
- Contribution to the vitality of the public realm
- Provide appropriate landscape treatment

### 5.3.4 Public Involvement and Education Program

Public involvement and education in the planning process has been extensive in the past, particularly during the development of the Calgary Plan. There was no notable previous focus on urban design in this process but this is likely to change as the City moves to develop new mixed land use areas in the downtown where a balance must be established between commercial, residential, transportation, public space and public realm priorities.

### 5.3.5 Related Projects, Plans and Design Tools

Calgary has completed an examination of opportunities to site public sculpture in the downtown and central Calgary.

## 5.4 Edmonton

### 5.4.1 Urban Design in the Planning Process

Within the last five years, Edmonton has adopted a number of documents that provide a clear framework for enhancing urban design in the downtown. There are four key documents:

- Municipal Development Plan (1998)
- Capital City Downtown Plan (1999)
- Downtown Edmonton Design Guidelines Manual (1999)
- Downtown Gateway Program (2000)

#### *Municipal Development Plan*

Edmonton's Municipal Development Plan (1998) states that the priority for downtown development is to ... *'Ensure that downtown Edmonton is vibrant and alive – a magnet for business, commerce and people, with unique and attractive residential districts, and diverse entertainment, recreation and cultural opportunities.'*

The implementation strategy has nine objectives:

- To promote economic development
- To support commercial and institutional activities
- To encourage arts, culture and entertainment
- To increase Downtown's residential population
- To provide more parks, special places and open spaces for recreation
- To improve pedestrian circulation and Downtown parking

- To promote a ‘Transit First’ policy for trips to and from the Downtown
- To preserve Edmonton’s architectural heritage, and
- To promote urban design standards appropriate to the Downtown environment.

Other strategies in the Plan are to:

- Invest in the redevelopment and revitalization of mature neighbourhoods
- Preserve and enhance the natural environment and open spaces, improving access and linkages
- Ensure safe and secure communities for all citizens
- Encourage residents in developing and sustaining their neighbourhoods and communities
- Facilitate the provision of recreational, entertainment and cultural activities
- Deliver and support programs that contribute to the well-being and overall quality of life of residents
- Protect the natural environment, promote conservation, and preserve and manage green spaces.

### *Capital City Downtown Plan*

The Capital City Downtown Plan identifies policy directions to guide the development of the Downtown over five years. The Vision of the Downtown Plan is that: *‘Downtown Edmonton is a place where people linger after work. Where seniors gather. Where families meet. Where artists live and work. Where five diverse neighbourhoods provide so much life and activity that people come downtown just to be downtown.’*

Incorporated into the Downtown Plan is an *Urban Design Strategy* which:

- Proposes adopting specific design guidelines for the Downtown neighbourhoods to create a variety of distinctive identities
- Calls for design concepts to encourage more activity and interest on downtown streets
- Promotes public art, improved signage, feature lighting and downtown gateways
- Protects views and vistas, protects against wind tunneling and promotes weather protection along sidewalks
- Encourages downtown stakeholders to work in partnership to enhance the quality of the physical environment
- Ensures continued use of environmental design principles to prevent crime

- Enhances the role of the Downtown Urban Design Review Panel and encourages use of the Downtown Design Manual to promote quality in the built environment.

The objective of Urban Design in Edmonton is:

*‘To strive for excellence in the quality of the Downtown built environment, and to encourage warm, livable, diverse and exciting urban spaces, human scale architecture and a pedestrian-oriented street environment.’*

To implement this objective, a number of urban design policies have been adopted. They are divided into four groupings: Downtown Sense of Place; Human Scale Development; Streets, Open Spaces and Gathering Places; and Excellence in Design. The Urban Design Policies under these headings are as follows:

#### Downtown Sense of Place

1. *A Healthy Image* - Maintain and enhance the Downtown image as a clean, healthy livable environment that offers a visual and cultural richness, a unique sense of place and experiences for all to enjoy
2. *Distinct Downtown Neighbourhoods* – Promote the idea of the Downtown as a community with a number of distinct neighbourhoods, each with its own special sense of place and character.
3. *Neighbourhood Identity* – Strengthen the special identity of each downtown neighbourhood through distinctive designs of streetscape elements such as lighting, street furniture and landscaping.
4. *Major Boulevard Improvements* – Develop and implement boulevard / streetscape design concepts for the major roadways that define the edges of the Downtown to create distinctive images and unifying elements within the downtown area.
5. *Major Features and Special Places* – Develop design concepts and improvement programs to strengthen the major features and special places of the Downtown.
6. *Downtown Lighting Program* – Develop a Downtown Lighting Program to feature special lighting of landmark buildings and safe, ambient pedestrian lighting for park spaces, special streets and downtown area bridges.
7. *Gateway Program* – Develop a gateway program to design and construct gateways that distinguish the entrances to the Downtown and its distinct neighbourhoods.

## Human Scale Development

1. *Design and Integration of Buildings* – Provide guidelines for the design and integration of new developments, in order to ensure these developments improve the quality of the physical environment in the Downtown.
2. *Human Scale Design Principles* – Ensure that new developments incorporate human scale design principles in the first two storeys of development and that they relate to the street and enhance the pedestrian environment.
3. *Minimize blank walls* – Ensure that where a building fronts onto the street, it is designed to minimize blank walls or other flat surfaces that lack windows or sculptural relief.
4. *Compatible Building Design* – Ensure that whenever possible the design of a building complements the materials, scale, texture, proportions, patterns, colours, window rhythms, and details of its neighbouring structures to create a coordinated streetscape.
5. *Street-Oriented Shops in Complexes* – Encourage the retrofitting of the major shopping complexes in the commercial core, to provide more ground-level retail, restaurant, entertainment and pedestrian-oriented uses opening onto the street to heighten interest and activity on the street.
6. *Retail Focus on Key Shopping Streets* – Require new developments and redevelopments to provide ground-level retail and pedestrian-oriented uses with access from the street.
7. *Building Façade Improvements* – Encourage the retrofitting and beautifying of office and retail building facades on the Downtown’s ‘main street’.
8. *Design for Accessibility* – Ensure that new buildings and public spaces in the Downtown are designed to be barrier free and accessible to all persons.
9. *Wind Protection* – Ensure that the design of any new development does not create adverse wind conditions on its periphery or in the vicinity of nearby buildings or open spaces at street level
10. *Sun Penetration* – ensure that new developments allow for sun penetration to streets and open spaces.
11. *Weather Protection* – Encourage the provision of continuous weather protection, particularly in the commercial core, through the use of canopies, awnings and arcades along selected streets for pedestrian comfort.
12. *Parking Lot landscaping* – Ensure that at-grade parking areas have quality street frontage landscaping and are set back from the sidewalk.
13. *Views and Linkages* – Encourage visual linkages and protect significant views of the River Valley, historical buildings and significant landmarks.

14. *Retention and Enhancement of Views* – Ensure that the siting of new development maintains and enhances existing views, vistas and visual corridors, and where possible, creates new ones.

#### Streets, Open Spaces and Gathering Places

1. *Streets as Defining Elements* – Develop streetscape and urban design concepts for special streets to ensure that they are distinctive and that they help define a sense of place in each of the downtown neighbourhoods.
2. *Amenities and Design Throughout Downtown* – Provide high quality amenities throughout the Downtown for the comfort and visual interest of the pedestrian – such as trees, landscaping, green spaces, benches, public art, pedestrian signage, warm-up places, public toilets, water fountains and banners.
3. *Priority Streetscape Improvements* – Identify a network of downtown pedestrian routes and place a priority on these routes for the implementation of special public improvements.
4. *Pedestrian Zones* – Improve existing pedestrian zones and create new zones where warranted by street patterns, pedestrian traffic and adjacent development.
5. *Gathering Places* – Create and enhance a wide variety of small open spaces, parks, plazas and streets as gathering places for social interaction.
6. *Animation of Sidewalks and Open Spaces* – Encourage activities like sidewalk cafes, open air markets, street vendors and year-round programmed events on downtown sidewalks and open spaces.
7. *Public Art in Prominent Places* – Locate artwork in prominent public spaces and encourage the inclusion of artwork and / or performing arts programs in public and private developments.
8. *Quality of Downtown Signs* – Provide a system of distinctive, clear and well-designed public signs in the Downtown that contributes to the overall aesthetics of the pedestrian environment.
9. *Public Safety* – Ensure that Pedestrian routes and public open spaces are safe and secure by conducting safety audits and by implementing design guidelines for crime prevention.

#### Excellence in Design

1. *Design Awards Program* – Ensure the City’s commitment to excellence in urban design in the Downtown through continuing support of a Design Awards Program.
2. *Urban Design Review Panel* – Maintain and enhance the role of the Downtown Urban Design Review Panel to provide advice and guidance on development proposals in the Downtown.

3. *Design Guidelines Manual* – Update the Downtown Design Guidelines Manual to reflect the policies, objectives, design principles and guidelines in the new Downtown Plan.
4. *Partnership Programs* – Develop a variety of partnership programs with residents, property owners and businesses to enhance the quality of the physical environment.

*Design Guidelines Manual*

The Design Guidelines Manual provides guidance for designers, developers and City officials in designing and reviewing building and streetscape projects in Downtown Edmonton. Table 5.1 provides summary of the Principles that provide direction for the Guidelines, and a capsule version of the Urban Design Guidelines themselves.

Table 5.1 Summary of Urban Design Guidelines for Edmonton

PRINCIPLE	GUIDELINE
<p><i>Structure of the Downtown</i> Preserving and extending the alignment of streets and blocks enables an ease of pedestrian access from one part of downtown to another.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The historic grid of streets avenues and lanes will be preserved and extended</li> <li>• Supplementary pedestrian walks and connections will be located through the blocks at their approximate mid-point to enhance the ease of pedestrian access throughout the Downtown</li> </ul>
<p><i>Streetwalls</i> Conventional city streets are characterized by streetwalls. Typically streetwalls are building fronts, parallel to the right-of-way. There is a greater sense of streetwall where building fronts are continuous, and gaps between the buildings are eliminated. Streetwalls enclose the street, Well-proportioned, they engender comfort to the users. Their continuity contributes to the vitality and life of the streets, offering ‘eyes on the street’.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buildings will be situated parallel to the street to respect the traditional development pattern of streets and blocks.</li> <li>• Buildings will be located to provide continuity of enclosure to the street space</li> <li>• Buildings will be built up to the property line (non-residential) or to the setback line (residential) at a minimum of three storeys to provide enclosure to the street space.</li> <li>• Buildings on corner lots will front both streets and distinguish the street intersection to give it prominence</li> <li>• Towers will have a separate base to maintain streetwall continuity, enclosure and pedestrian street proportions</li> </ul> <p>The tower portions of buildings will be massed to permit optimal sunlight onto the surrounding streets and properties</p>

<p><i>Buildings at the Ground</i> Frequent entrances increase pedestrian interaction with the street. The most vital and interesting streets, typically, have a fine grain of entrances along the street edge. Building entrances will be located and designed in a manner that enhances the life of the adjoining streets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buildings will address the adjoining street with entrances that are clearly visible to and lend a sense of occupancy to the street.</li> <li>• Streetwalls along the Special Pedestrian Streets and others with a predominance of commercial retail activity, will be highly transparent and articulated at ground level to reflect a high level of pedestrian activity, amenity and interest.</li> <li>• Street level residential development will achieve a balance between privacy for the unit and overlook to the street to enhance opportunities for interaction along the street.</li> <li>• Buildings adjacent to parks and open space will provide overlook and a sense of enclosure.</li> <li>• Blank walls facing streets, either as part of a building or free-standing, will be formed as elements which are engaging to pedestrians</li> <li>• Building entrances from the street will be designed for accessibility</li> <li>• Buildings will provide weather protection for pedestrians</li> </ul>
<p><i>The Pedestrian Environment of Sidewalks</i> There are 50,000 pedestrians in the Downtown every working day. Sidewalks are the primary way for pedestrians to move around the Downtown. The makeup of the sidewalks should contribute to ensuring a pedestrian-friendly environment both in function, amenity, and character.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sidewalks in the Downtown will have a preferred width of 4.3m to allow two couples to pass one another without deflection. 3.7m width will be the minimum.</li> <li>• Setback: Pedestrian amenities will be built in the setbacks of commercial and residential developments along the city sidewalks.</li> <li>• Greening of back lanes: The network of lanes will be developed as attractive ways to get around for pedestrians.</li> <li>• Street Tree Planting: Existing trees will be maintained and protected. New trees will be planted where trees or boulevard plantings are missing.</li> <li>• Pedestrian-oriented lighting will be provided along sidewalks, in addition to roadway lighting for a pedestrian friendly character.</li> <li>• Seating will be provided along streets, especially at street corners. The provision of comfortable and properly located seating is fundamental to the popularity of urban open spaces.</li> </ul>

<p><i>Parks, Squares and Plazas</i> A range of park spaces is to be developed in the Downtown to increase the variety and amount of area available for pedestrian amenities beyond that available as part of the right-of-way. Park spaces are to satisfy neighbourhood needs and complement other open spaces, including the streets. Each open space is to offer a high level of interest, distinction, address, and value. Parks, squares plazas and other public open spaces act as public focuses and activity centers, ranging from formal to informal, and from active to passive or reflective.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parks, squares, plazas and other public open space will be comfortable, usable and safe.</li> </ul> <p>They should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- have distinction</li> <li>- be located in an area which receives direct sunlight at the times it will be most used.</li> <li>- Be designed to allow direct views and access from adjacent streets and buildings</li> <li>- Encourage the interaction with and awareness of others</li> <li>- Define the edges of the space with plantings and amenities to offer a sense of enclosure and promote its comfortable use.</li> <li>- Provide shade and shelter from prevailing winds</li> <li>- Provide buffers, such as walls and heavy planting, from sources of noise.</li> <li>- Separate active and passive uses through changes such as planting and grading.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Vehicle Access and Surface parking Lots</i> Parking lots are to provide comprehensive, high quality coordinated streetscape and open space improvements to promote greening, pedestrian access and confidence of personal safety.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All surface parking lots, accessory and non-accessory, will be paved to contribute to a cleaner and better looking Downtown.</li> <li>• Parking and service access will be from the back lane, where available, to minimize disruptions to the surrounding sidewalks.</li> <li>• Parking lot organization will balance pedestrian and vehicle use.</li> <li>• Surface parking lots will be landscaped at the street edge to minimize their visual impact and to improve the pedestrian environment.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Building Roof Lines</i> Edmonton's skyline can be seen from long distances including many points up and down the North Saskatchewan River Valley. The unique profile of the Downtown has come to symbolize the whole city. Each tower it so consider its impact on the skyline.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Towers will enhance the Downtown skyline, through articulation and massing, which will emphasize the building's uniqueness.</li> <li>• Low and mid-rise building roofs will screen the views to mechanical equipment and should consider the provision of amenity for occupants.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Lighting of Buildings</i> Illuminating the facades of buildings is a gesture that contributes to animating the Downtown experience, especially in a northern location such as Edmonton's where winter nights are long.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consideration will be given to lighting building exteriors to highlight their architectural and sculptural characteristics.</li> </ul>

<p><i>Pedestrian Bridges (pedways)</i> Climate controlled pedestrian access in the Downtown is improved with pedways, however the visual impact of overhead pedways is to be minimized.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedestrian bridges will be designed to minimize their visual impact.</li> <li>• There will be a maximum of one pedway bridge per block.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Gateways to Downtown</i> Gateways and entrances are a means to announce arrival into Downtown and its five neighbourhoods. The bring distinction and a sense of celebration to their respective areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sense of entering into the Downtown should be emphasized with enhancements of the built form and streetscapes.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Public Art</i> Site-specific artwork is to be created to enhance publicly accessible space.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public art will reinforce the urban design objectives to affirm a sense of place for sites, streets and neighbourhoods.</li> <li>• Construction fencing along Downtown streets will be designed with the same level of care and attention that is being given to the project being built.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Construction Fencing (hoarding)</i> Construction fencing or hoarding offers the opportunity to animate the street while attractively screening construction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction fencing along Downtown streets will be designed with the same level of care and attention that is being given to the project being built.</li> </ul>

### *Gateway Program*

The Purpose of the Gateway Program is:

a) To develop a unique vision and specific guidelines for downtown gateway enhancement, shaped through the integration of existing natural and urban built form features found within each distinct neighbourhood district and the introduction of a common language of gateway components.

b) To provide a common reference document for City Departments and the Urban Design Review Panel that coordinates the implementation of public and private land gateway enhancements within each district.

The report contains a summary of research; an assessment of previously proposed and perceived gateways into the downtown; a review of potential gateways; research on gateways worldwide; a compendium of gateway ideas; the gateway corridors; gateway program leads; and financing strategies.

Outside of the downtown, streetscape design is regulated through a system of ‘overlays’. There is a City-wide Master Overlay that describes the status of the overlays in that they override the requirements of the applicable zoning. The overlays cover development situations such as mature neighbourhoods, medium-density residential neighbourhoods, and high-rise residential developments, and Pedestrian Commercial Shopping Streets. The Overlays are sets of design guidelines that are prepared for specific districts and are similar to Portland’s Sub-District guidelines. The Pedestrian Commercial Shopping District Overlay, for example, covers:

- Maximum length of frontage
- Modulation of the façade
- Setback and sideyard requirements
- Parking and service vehicle access
- Maximum height of the building(s)
- Pedestrian-friendly street environment including canopies, entrances,
- Outdoor sitting areas and landscaping
- Architectural design to promote of pedestrian-oriented shopping
- A Comprehensive Sign Design Plan and Schedule

The City of Edmonton monitors progress in the implementation of its Plan, and publishes annual reports documenting its performance in its priority areas.

#### 5.4.2 Design Resource Group

Edmonton does not have a design resource group within the planning department, but includes individuals with architectural training on staff. The Capital City Downtown Plan was facilitated and supported by the Downtown Planning Group – a group within the Planning and Development Department, and led by the Downtown Plan Review Steering Committee which was a public/private partnership involving representatives of Downtown interest groups and organizations, Council representatives, and citizens-at-large. Formulation of the Design Guidelines involved the Design Review Panel and a Downtown Advisory Committee supported by City staff and a number of architecture and urban planning consultants.

#### 5.4.3 Design Review Process

Edmonton’s Urban Design Review Panel was formed in 1986. It is a voluntary advisory body that is sponsored by the Downtown Business Association, and operates at arms length from the municipality. The 15-person panel includes individuals with expertise in architecture, planning, engineering, property development, real estate, and fine art. Its role is to

provide design comments on proposed major developments in the Downtown, greenfield sites, and projects with an urban design impact – particularly in situations involving gateways or entry points into the City. These projects may be initiated by the public sector or the private sector. Submission of projects to the Panel is not mandatory, but is strongly recommended.

The Panel played an important role in the development of the Downtown Design Guidelines Manual, and through this process its profile has increased and its authority has been enhanced.

#### 5.4.3 Public Involvement and Education Program

The intense focus on planning in Edmonton, with a particular focus on downtown began in the early 1990s. During the six-year period when the Downtown Plan, the Design Guidelines Manual and the Gateway Plan were being developed, Edmonton was running an almost continuous public consultation process. Now that the documents have been adopted, the city does not appear to be continuing this work by developing an on-going education program or resource tools, but is hoping to focus public attention on design through bi-annual design competitions.

#### 5.4.4 Related Projects, Plans and Design Tool

##### *Tree By-Law*

Edmonton has an aggressive tree by-law that sets out an evaluation mechanism and penalties for damage to City trees. If a tree on city property is destroyed, the evaluation system takes into account:

- the basic unit value of all shade and ornamental trees (\$47.32 per square inch of trunk cross section at 4.5 feet above ground);
- the intrinsic value of the tree expressed as Class 1 to 4; and
- the condition of the tree (nearly perfect to very poor).

In this classification, a mature highly classified tree species in good condition can be worth several thousand dollars. This then becomes the cost that must be paid to the City to cover replacement. The bill is sent to the developer, householder or other government department that is responsible for the damaging or removing the tree.

##### *CPTED*

Edmonton has adopted the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design program.

## 5.5 Toronto

### 5.5.1 Urban Design in the Planning Process

In November 2002, after an extensive research and consultation program, *Toronto's Official Plan* was adopted by Toronto City Council. It includes a number of broad strategies to shape the development of the Greater Toronto Area, and enhance the city economically, socially and environmentally over the next 30 years.

The preamble to the Plan emphasizes that people want to have vibrant neighbourhoods; diverse and affordable housing; attractive and walkable streets; green spaces and 'people places'; an efficient and effective public transit system; clean land, air and water; a strong economy with a competitive downtown; beautiful architecture and urban design; and a spectacular waterfront. These can be effectively the goals of the plan. Geographically, the plan focuses on the development of:

- Downtown Toronto
- Toronto's Central Waterfront
- urban centres of Scarborough, North York, Etobicoke, Young-Eglinton
- transportation avenues
- residential neighbourhoods and
- employment districts.

Secondary strategies will be developed for each of these areas and will be supported by plans such as the *Green Space System* that sets out a vision and strategy for enhancing the network of green areas and open space in the City.

Chapter three of the Plan is entitled *Building a Successful City* and it is here that most of the urban design policies can be found. The chapter has five sections:

1. The Built Environment,
2. The Human Environment,
3. Building New Neighbourhoods,
4. The Natural Environment, and
5. Toronto's Economic Health.

Section one contains forty (40) urban design policies under five sub-headings: Public Realm; Built Form; Tall Buildings; Public Art; and Heritage Resources. In the other sections, there are frequent linkages to these policies emphasizing how the key building blocks of good urban design draw on the same reference points. For example, policies referencing art, culture and architectural design can be found in section

one and section five; while open space is referenced in sections one, two and three and four.

The purpose of the Toronto Plan is to provide guidance for the preparation of more detailed local areas plans. Many of the policies relating to urban design are quite explicit and provide a clear framework for subsequent planning activities. A consolidated summary of the policies is provided below, but the reader is recommended to read the full text of the policies that has been reproduced in Appendix 4.

#### Public Realm Policies

1. Quality architectural, landscape and urban design and construction will be promoted by committing the necessary funds for public buildings, and public spaces; encouraging new development that includes enhancements to the public realm; and encouraging design excellence through design competitions and Urban Design Awards
2. Development will preserve views and vistas from the valleys and ravines in order to protect enjoyment of these natural features. Also physical and visual access to the Lake Ontario shoreline, escarpments, woodlots, ravines and valley lands from adjacent public lands will be enhanced and become part of an open space network.
3. City streets will be designed to balance the diverse needs of existing and future users including pedestrians, people with mobility aids, cyclists, utilities, automobiles and landscaping.
4. Sidewalks and boulevards will provide safe, attractive, interesting and comfortable spaces for pedestrians through trees and other landscaping, street furnishings, decorative paving. Utilities will be located underground or in a manner that minimized their impact on pedestrians and visual environment, and will allow plantings and trees to grow to maturity.
5. The public roads should provide routes for pedestrian and cyclists across topographic and other barriers, and the scenic nature of routes should be preserved and improved.
6. Public works and private development will maintain, frame and enhance views of natural and man-made features from other public places.

7. Public buildings will be located and designed to promote their public status on prominent site, and open space will be designed to support the public function of the building and support other functions.
8. Universal physical access to publicly accessible spaces and buildings will be ensured. This will include streets, parks and open spaces, sidewalks, pathways and curb cuts. Existing buildings will be retrofitted and new buildings must meet accessibility guidelines.
9. Design measures that promote safety will be applied to streetscapes, parks, public and private open spaces, all new and renovated buildings, Shopping malls, concourses, plazas will be designed to extend but not replace the role of the street as the main place for pedestrian activity. The design of new communities will emphasize the importance of public streets and open space as the structural framework that supports high quality city living.
10. There will be new requirements for the design of new streets.
11. New city blocks and development lots will be designed to: have an appropriate size and configuration for the proposed land use, scale of development and intended form of building and open space; promote street-oriented development; provide room for servicing and parking; allow for incremental phased development.
12. New parks and open spaces will be located and designed to connect other open spaces, provide a setting for community events and individual use, provide space for productive activities such as community gardening, and emphasize the natural and man-made heritage. They will also front onto a street for good visibility, access and safety.

#### Built Form Policies

1. New development will be located and organized to fit with its neighbours or planned context. It will frame and support adjacent streets, parks and open spaces to improve the safety, pedestrian interest and casual views to these spaces from the development. Also mature trees will be preserved wherever possible.
2. New development will locate and organize vehicle parking, vehicular access, service areas and utilities to minimize their

impact on the property and on surrounding properties and to improve the safety and attractiveness of adjacent streets, parks and open spaces.

3. New development will be massed to fit harmoniously into its surroundings and will respect and improve the local scale and character. It will minimize the impact on neighbouring buildings and open space.
4. New development should be massed to define the edges of the streets, parks and open spaces at good proportion and locate taller buildings to ensure adequate access to sky views, sunlight and appropriate pedestrian level wind conditions for the proposed and future uses of these spaces.
5. New development will provide amenity for adjacent streets and open spaces to make these areas attractive, interesting, comfortable and functional for pedestrians. This will include street trees, landscaping, street furniture, lighting, weather protection, and public art.
6. New multi-residential development will provide indoor and outdoor amenity space for residents of the development. Each resident will have access to outdoor amenity spaces such as balconies, terraces, courtyards, rooftop gardens and other types of outdoor spaces.

#### Built Form – Tall Buildings Policies

In addition to the Built Form policies above, tall buildings must comply with additional requirements covering:

- Integration at the street level
- Consideration of shadowing, loss of light, loss of views, and impact on the skyline
- Making a positive impact on the city structure
- Its relationship to and impact on adjacent buildings, neighbourhoods and public spaces
- The transition between taller buildings and adjacent buildings
- The provision of high quality comfortable and publicly accessible open spaces and areas

#### Public Art Policy

The creation of public art that reflects cultural diversity and history will be promoted by adopting a Public Art master Plan; promoting and enhancing the Public Art Reserve fund; encouraging public art initiatives on civic properties; dedicating one percent of the capital budget of all civic

buildings and structures to art; and encouraging the inclusion of public art in private sector developments.

#### Heritage Resources Policies

1. Significant heritage resources will be conserved by listing properties of architectural and/or historic interest, entering into agreements with owners of designated heritage properties; designating areas with a concentration of heritage resources as conservation districts and adopting guidelines to maintain and improve their character.
2. Heritage properties will be conserved, and adjacent development will respect the scale, character and form of the heritage buildings and landscape.
3. The impact of public works projects in the vicinity of heritage resources will be assessed and efforts made to minimize the impact on these resources.
4. Properties under development that include heritage resources will be awarded additional density credits provided conservation of those resources is included in the plan.
5. Heritage landscapes and historic cemeteries will be protected and improved.
6. An Archeological Master Plan will be developed.
7. Lost historical sites should be commemorated whenever a new private development or public work is undertaken in the vicinity.
8. A Heritage Management Plan will be prepared and adopted. It will be a comprehensive and evolving strategy for the conservation and management of the city's heritage resources.

These policies will provide the framework for preparing detailed plans and guidance documents as the strategy moves on to the next stage of development.

#### 5.5.2 Design Resource Group

There is no municipal group that has a specific focus on urban design. Rather this expertise is integrated into the work of the City Planning department that is leading the planning process. The City has taken the position that it must provide leadership in the design of civic projects and

has used its demonstrated commitment to excellence in design to encourage high quality development from the private sector.

### 5.5.3 Design Review Process

The design review process, including the urban design perspective is conducted 'in-house' by the staff of the City Planning Division and does not involve an independent design review body. The process may be revised as the new policies for urban design are implemented, but no proposals have been articulated to date. Thus far, city staff has been able to leverage privately funded improvements of the public realm through rezoning and site plan approvals, which have resulting in sidewalk and open space investments as part of a private sector development. There has also been a significant private sector investment in public art. This suggests that the negotiation process has been used effectively to gain benefits for public amenities. In order to be successful, this approach must be strongly supported by city council.

### 5.5.4 Public Involvement and Education Program

Toronto city staff and consultants undertook an extensive consultation program that resulted in statements showing considerable public interest in the quality of the public realm. There does not appear to have been a specific campaign of public education on urban design issues specifically, however the public is encouraged to engage in discussion of high profile projects such as the Toronto Waterfront Design Initiative and submissions to major design competitions – such as for the new gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum, and the Harbourfront Parks and Open Space. In that sense the public is regularly encouraged to engage in discussions about beauty and inspiration in the urban landscape and the creation of 'places'. This is more broadly emphasizes in the Campaign for Beautiful Places which the City has also adopted.

### 5.5.5 Related Projects, Plans and Design Tools

#### *Architecture and Urban Design Awards*

Each year entries are invited for the City of Toronto's Architecture and Urban Design Awards. Submissions may be made in several categories: Elements (small-scale piece of the building or landscape); Buildings; Small Open Spaces (courtyards, plazas, forecourts, gardens, news, trails, neighbourhood parks); Large Place or Neighbourhood Designs; Visions and Master Plans; and Student Awards.

### *City Patterns*

This is an inventory and analysis of Toronto's physical form and structure described through a series of 44 maps. This work promotes a common understanding of the form of the city.

### *Street Hierarchy*

This is a classification system developed to facilitate decision-making for streetscape improvements. Unlike most street classification systems, it is not based on transportation capacity but rather on the cultural and civic role of the streets. It is being used to prepare a list of strategic priorities for civic improvements as part of a five-year capital plan.

### *Streetscape Manual*

The manual guides the development and implementation of both public and private sector streetscape improvements based on the street hierarchy, including detailed drawings and specifications on paving, lighting, tree planting and street furniture by street and by district.

### *Tree Advocacy Program / Protection of Street Trees*

The program was set up in 2000 in support of the City's Urban Forestry Section to promote the sustainability of a healthy urban forest canopy in Toronto. A member of City Council has been designated the City's Tree Advocate.

### *Public Art Collection / LRT Public Art Program*

Toronto has over 150 pieces of public art, including war memorials that require conservation and restoration. An art program is also sponsored by the Toronto Transit Corporation, which commissions art for its stations.

### *One percent for Art*

One percent of the capital cost of all major civic projects is directed to public art. This program has been successful in private developments where it is applied on a voluntary basis. The city actively solicits contributions from citizens and the private sector to its Public Art Reserve Fund.

### *Toronto Pedestrian Charter*

The Pedestrian Charter was adopted in May 2002. The purpose of the Charter is to ensure that walking is a safe, comfortable and convenient mode of urban travel. To this end the City of Toronto has adopted the following Principles:

- *Accessibility* – Walking is a free and direct means of accessing local goods, services, community amenities and public transit.

- *Equity* – Walking is the only mode of travel that is universally affordable and allows children, youth and people with specific medical conditions to travel independently
- *Health and Well-being* – Walking is a proven method of promoting personal health and well-being
- *Environmental Sustainability* – Walking relies on human power and has negligible environmental impact
- *Personal and Community Safety* – An environment in which people feel safe and comfortable walking increases community safety for all.
- *Community Cohesion and Vitality* – A pedestrian-friendly environment encourages and facilitates social interaction and local economic vitality.

To create an urban environment in all parts of the city that encourages and supports walking, the city of Toronto:

- Upholds the right of pedestrians of all ages and abilities to safe, convenient, direct and comfortable walking conditions
- Provides a walking environment within the public right of way and in public parks that encourages people to walk for travel, exercise and recreation
- Supports and encourages the planning, design, and development of a walking environment in public and private spaces (both exterior and interior) that meets the travel needs of pedestrians
- Provides and maintains infrastructure that gives pedestrians safe and convenient passage while walking along and crossing streets
- Ensures that resident’s access to basic community amenities and services does not depend on car ownership or public transit use
- Sets policies that reduce conflict between pedestrians and other users of the public right-of-way
- Creates walkable communities by giving high planning priority to compact, human-scale and mixed land use
- Encourages research and education on the social, economic, environmental and health benefits of walking as a form of travel, exercise, and recreation
- Promotes laws and regulations that respect pedestrians particular needs
- Advocates for improving the provincial and federal regulatory and funding frameworks that affect the City’s ability to improve the pedestrian environment
- Works with individual citizens, community groups and agencies, business and other levels of government to achieve these goals.

### *Campaign for a Beautiful Places*

This Campaign encourages investment in design excellence and seeks to make every public street, open space, and building an example of quality design. It includes public agencies and institutions, development industry. Examples of its activities include:

- The beautification of traffic arteries with planting trees and landscaping
- The addition of lighting, planters and street furniture to make boulevards into safer and more comfortable people-friendly places
- The addition of more parks and open spaces and the improvement of existing poorly functioning parks
- The commissioning of public art
- The design of buildings that enhance their neighbourhood
- The conservation of historic buildings and architectural treasures

## **5.6 Ottawa**

### 5.6.1 Urban Design in the Planning Process

The City of Ottawa adopted an *Official Plan* in May 2003. It is a regional development plan encompassing the old City of Ottawa and the adjacent municipalities that were recently amalgamated into the Ottawa metropolitan area. The City has five growth management strategies to be implemented over the next 20 years. Four of these are already in place, they cover:

- Human Services
- Arts and Heritage
- Economic Development
- The Environment

The *Official Plan* focuses on land development, community design, transportation and infrastructure policies. It has seven Guiding Principles: Ottawa is:

- A caring and inclusive City
- A creative City rich in heritage and unique in identity
- A green and environmentally sensitive City
- A City of distinct, livable communities
- An innovative City where property is shared among all
- A responsible and responsive City
- A healthy and active City.

The *Official Plan* describes the design strategy for Ottawa in Section 2.5.6. It describes urban design as...'*not only concerned with buildings, but equally with the spaces between them, including green and open spaces, courtyards, parking areas, and all the elements of public infrastructure, including sidewalks and streets, street lighting, street trees and street furniture. In this respect, urban design is of particular interest to the public sector, in that the public sector builds or approves many of the design elements that are of importance to designing a better urban environment. Ultimately, urban design is of critical interest to the public who, in the end, will experience the buildings and spaces created through the design process.*'

The City of Ottawa is intending to publish an Urban Design Strategy in December 2003. In preparation for that work, staff is currently engaging neighbourhood residents, the development industry, professional associations, and other parties in discussions. This dialogue is structured to build a stronger culture of design and more awareness of how urban design can contribute to the quality of the city's urban environment. The City acknowledges that while it is often relatively easy to agree on the objectives of good urban design, for each set of objectives and guidelines there are a number of alternative solutions that may not be equally pleasing to all parties. It sees the challenge as acknowledging the legitimate concerns and issues of competing interests, working towards agreed goals, objectives and guidelines, and in the end finding the best design fit that incorporates creativity and innovation.

The components of the Urban Design Strategy are expected to be:

- An exploration of incentives, design guidelines, approaches to zoning,
- Computer modeling programs, and other tools that support greater creativity and better urban design;
- An increase in design awareness through design competitions for municipal buildings, open spaces and other projects, and through design charrettes for neighbourhood plans or individual sites;
- Recognition of excellence in design through a design awards program, education and promotion in partnership with the private sector, professional associations, and others;
- Opportunities for independent peer review by architects, landscape architects, and urban designers;
- Recognition that art is a significant component in the design and enhancement of public places;
- The provision of leadership in urban design through the quality of public works delivered by the City and through its role as a partner with communities, the development industry and other levels of government.

The policies that have been adopted in the Official Plan regarding a Design Strategy are as follows:

- The City will adopt a Design Strategy by the end of 2003 that identifies the various components of the strategy and how each will increase design awareness among communities, the private sector, public and private professionals, and other parties.
- The City will develop and implement a public art policy by the end of 2003, which will establish its purpose, processes and funding sources such as a Percent For Art, in order to promote creativity, innovation, and design excellence in the build and natural environment and to add distinction, identity and artistic profile to public places, as further described in the Arts and Heritage Plan.
- As the owner of many public places, public works and buildings, the City will set an example for the community through the provision of public art in municipal facilities and encourage other public and private sector owners and developers to include art as a public component of their developments.

#### 5.6.2 Design Resource Group

At present City staff are facilitating the process through which a Design Strategy will be developed. That process may lead to the identification of a Design Resource Group within the City with responsibility for implementation of the Strategy.

#### 5.6.3 Design Review Process

The Design Strategy will describe the design review process that will be adopted in the City of Ottawa.

#### 5.6.4 Public Involvement and Education Program

As part of the process for creating the Design Strategy, a consultation process involving mutual education in urban design is being undertaken. At this point it involves invited representatives of stakeholders and interest groups, and professional practitioners. Later, it will be extended to the public at large in order to explain what urban design is all about and why the public should care about it.

#### 5.6.5 Related Projects, Plans and Design Tools

A schedule of proposed studies, strategies, guidelines and plans that have urban design implications include:

- Pedestrian Plan (December 2004)
- Cycling Plan (December 2004)
- Parking Management Strategy (2006)
- Greenspace Master Plan (2004)
  - Urban Natural Areas Environmental Evaluation Study
  - Greenspace Network Study
  - Park and Leisure Area Study
  - Forest Strategy
- Inventory of Cultural Landscapes (2005)
- Design Strategy for Ottawa including Design Guidelines for Infill and Intensification (December 2003)
- Downtown Urban Design Strategy (December 2003)

## 5.7 Summary

All of the cities examined in the review have undertaken a major planning process in the past ten years, and several have adopted new plans in the past five years. All of the cities are paying attention to urban design issues, recognizing that the economic success of downtown depends heavily on making it more attractive to people for a range of reasons. They may live, work or visit the downtown, but, it is hoped, they will want to be there – enjoying the ambience and spending money – because it has evolved with the interests of pedestrians in mind, and is a comfortable, relaxing, interesting and lively place to be.

This scan of downtown planning activity in Canada has identified a range of approaches to urban design. Table 5.2 below sets out in summary form the plans and programs that are in place, and in Table 5.3, the scope of the urban design activities in each city. The boxes in each table summarize the information that was accessible either through the city’s website or from staff. An empty box does not mean the program does not exist but rather that the information was not readily available.

As this table shows, several cities now have or are developing comprehensive urban design programs. They include:

- A vision statement
- A combination of goals, objectives and/or principles that are acceptable in the local context
- Standards or guidelines to provide direction and clarify expectations for developers and designers
- Some in-house or available expertise
- Application of the same standards to civic and private projects
- Review panels that provide an independent source of expertise

- A public design education process of some kind. Some have been placed in the context of Design Awards and competitions.

Each city in this survey is at a different stage in the process of scoping out the components of their urban design strategies. The process is complete in Edmonton. Toronto and Ottawa are well along in the process of developing comprehensive strategies while Vancouver is still in the early stages. Calgary has decided to move forward with a location-specific urban design program, and Victoria is updating its existing program rather than undertaking a full scale review and redesign.

There are many common elements in the urban design programs across the country. They reflect the basic elements of good urban design that are described in the CAFE research and are being applied in Portland, Seattle and Boulder. In this respect, there is little mystery in identifying what good design is, but there is always potential for differences of opinion in defining how it should be applied. Appropriate guidance always should include encouragement of innovation and creativity to ensure that the character of the downtown evolves and becomes more interesting and dynamic with time.

**Table 5.2 Summary of Urban Design Plans and Programs in Canada**

	Victoria	Vancouver	Calgary	Edmonton	Toronto	Ottawa
<b>Urban Design Vision</b>	General	Part of broad vision	General	Stated in Downtown Plan	General	To come in Official Plan 2003
<b>Urban Design G&amp;O</b>	General	To be developed through local area plans	N	Y	General	Dec 2003
<b>Downtown Plan</b>	Y	Policy for public space and public realm in development	In prepn.	Y	Part of Official Plan	Dec 2003
<b>Urban Design Policies</b>	Y		Some general statements	Y	Yes but generally worded	Dec 2003
<b>Design Guidelines</b>	Being updated	Not available	Local criteria	Y		Dec 2003
<b>Streetscape Design Standards</b>		Y Draft Manual		Y	Y	TBA
<b>Design Review Panel</b>	Y	Y	Being formed for one area	Y		TBA
<b>In-house expertise</b>	Y	Some, but also external expertise used	No, external expertise used	Some, also external expertise used	Some, also external expertise used	Some, also external expertise used
<b>Applicable to civic / private projects</b>	Both	Mainly civic but now C2 zones added	N/A	Both	Both	Both
<b>Design Competitions</b>		Y	Planned	Planned	Y	
<b>Design Appreciation Awards</b>	Y					
<b>Beautification</b>		Greenstreet Program	Partnership program planned	Y	Campaign for Beautiful Places	
<b>Greenspace Plan</b>						2004
<b>Street Tree Protection / Enhancement</b>	Y			Y	Y	Y
<b>Art in Public Places</b>	Y		Y	Planned	Y	Dec 2003
<b>Pedestrian Charter</b>					Y	
<b>Design Education</b>	Through regular consultation	Through regular consultation	Through regular consultation	Through Design Awards Program	Through Design Awards program	Through regular consultation

**Table 5.3 Aspects of Design Included in Canadian Programs**

	Victoria	Vancouver	Calgary	Edmonton	Toronto	Ottawa
<b>Street Grid</b>				Y	Y	TBA
<b>Building height at street level</b>				Y		TBA
<b>Scale and Massing</b>	Y		Y	Y	Y	TBA
<b>Skylines / Tall buildings</b>			Y	Y	Y	TBA
<b>Views</b>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	TBA
<b>Gateways</b>				Y	Y	TBA
<b>Specific Criteria for Downtown Streets</b>					Y	TBA
<b>Streetscapes</b>	Y			Y	Y	TBA
<b>Street Furniture and amenities</b>		Y		Y	Y	TBA
<b>Weather Protection</b>				Y	Y	TBA
<b>Facades / entrances</b>				Y	Y	TBA
<b>Rooflines</b>	Y			Y		TBA
<b>Building Illumination</b>				Y		TBA
<b>Pedestrian / cyclist Emphasis</b>		Y	Y	Y	Y	TBA
<b>Transit emphasis</b>		Y	Y	Y	Y	TBA
<b>Street Level Vitality</b>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	TBA
<b>Building Materials / Exterior Finish</b>	Y				Y	TBA
<b>Architectural Integration</b>	Y			Y	Y	TBA
<b>Heritage</b>	Y	Y		Y	Y	TBA
<b>Public Art / Performance</b>	Y	Y		Y	Y	TBA
<b>Public Safety</b>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	TBA
<b>Accessibility</b>		Y		Y	Y	TBA
<b>Landscaping and tree planting</b>	Y	Y		Y	Y	TBA
<b>Sun / shadow / wind</b>	Y		Y	Y	Y	TBA
<b>Enclosure of Public Space</b>				Y	Y	TBA
<b>Integration of Parking</b>			Y	Y	Y	TBA
<b>Downtown Open Space Network</b>		Y	Y	Y	Y	TBA
<b>Greenways / trails</b>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	TBA
<b>Waterfront Access</b>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	TBA
<b>Environmental Protection</b>	Y	Y	Y		Y	TBA
<b>Green Buildings</b>	Y					TBA
<b>Construction Fencing</b>				Y		TBA

## **6.0. URBAN DESIGN ISSUES AND EXPERIENCE IN HRM**

### **6.1 The Capital District**

The Capital District Project was launched in 2001 to bring focus to the issues, concerns, needs and opportunities in the downtown areas of Halifax and Dartmouth. It incorporates the five business districts of Downtown Halifax, Spring Garden Road, Quinpool Road, Gottingen Street, and Downtown Dartmouth, each of which is represented by a Business Association.

The Capital District designation enables staff, the Business Associations and an inter-agency task group to deliver services and infrastructure improvements in a coordinated manner within the boundaries adopted by Regional Council in May 2002. This is being done in several ways: by improved communication and clarification of roles and responsibilities, through new and enhanced programs, and through the strategic analysis and planning initiatives of the Region Planning Project (also initiated in 2001).

The Capital District is an important part of the economic engine for the whole municipality, providing 40 percent of the employment opportunities and over a quarter of the commercial tax revenues. It is also the political and cultural heart of the province. In recognition of this special role, other goals of the Capital District initiative are to:

- promote the Capital District as a special place for all
- enhance the area as a destination for business, residents and tourists, and
- promote its cultural and economic assets and opportunities.

In 2002, HRM conducted a public consultation process to help shape the future of the Capital District. It led to the development of six guiding statements:

1. Provide Capital District leadership at all levels of government, and involving stakeholders
2. Plan, organize and develop policy based on Capital District assets and empower community involvement
3. Maximize human and financial resources
4. Develop Signature Projects at both a District and neighbourhood level
5. Promote public transportation and accessibility, and provide bicycle, pedestrian and parking amenities
6. Communicate excitement through marketing and communications.

During the consultation process, considerable attention was paid to urban design issues, including the design of buildings, streetscapes and open spaces, the maintenance of local identities, and the development of special Signature projects.<sup>1</sup> These are summarized in the final report, together with a Vision Statement for the Capital District that was generated during the workshop. It is as follows:

*Together, our Harbour community will ensure the sustainability of a diverse, civilized, magnetic Capital District for the Halifax Regional Municipality and the Province of Nova Scotia.*

The consultation program was designed to scope the issues of central interest to the public. While it did not seek to bring particular focus to urban design questions, the findings did reference statements of relevance to urban design:

- There is a strong sense of history and heritage, heritage buildings, historic sites and parks
- Open spaces and green areas are important
- Arts and culture brings vitality to the downtown
- Develop festivals and events
- This is a safe, clean and proud community
- Signature projects are important
- Promote public transport and provide a balance of bicycle, pedestrian and parking amenities
- Ensure that infrastructure is accessible
- Develop a beautification and streetscape plan
- Incorporate visual themes

These statements reflect common themes that have arisen in all the cities that have been examined for this report.

HRM has not initiated broad-based public discussion around the larger issues of urban design, but the subject provides a constant undercurrent in the public hearings and review of development agreements for the downtown. To see where the municipality stands at this time, planning documents were examined that cover the Capital District. They are:

- Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy (unofficial office consolidation, 2003)
- Halifax Waterfront Openspace and Development Plan (Draft, 2000)
- Downtown Dartmouth Secondary Planning Strategy (2000)

<sup>1</sup> As identified during the Vision Symposium, these could include redevelopment of the Cogswell Interchange, completion of the Harbour Solutions project, trail development, a new Arts and Culture Centre, and a commitment to make the Capital District accessible to all.

## **6.2 Urban Design in the Downtown Planning Process**

### **6.2.1 Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy (1978)**

On the Halifax side of the Harbour, the Capital District overlays several planning areas: Central Business District (CBD), Waterfront Development Area, South End, Spring Garden Road Commercial Area, and the Peninsular North Planning Area. The design policies in these planning areas show considerable variation – even where they are in close proximity such as the CBD and Spring Garden Road. Over the years, the MPS has been updated in bits and pieces, but there has been no thorough review for 25 years.

#### *Central Business District*

The CBD encompasses the down town area east from Brunswick street to the shoreline of Halifax Harbour. It includes the Waterfront Development Area, where in addition to the CBD policies, several specific policies refer to the protection and enhancement of views and the pedestrian experience on the waterfront.

The sections of the CBD plan with most relevance for urban design are: a) Social, b) Circulation, c) Heritage, d) Open Space, e) Views and f) Scale and Design Detail. The statements of Objectives for these sections are as follows:

- a) The creation of a lively, vibrant environment throughout the CBD which promotes and supports a wide variety of living, leisure and working activities throughout the day and evening.
- b) The creation within the CBD of a circulation framework that gives priority to the pedestrian, but which accommodates the transit, automobile and service requirements of the area.
- c) The conservation or rehabilitation of areas, streetscapes, buildings, features, and spaces which mark the sequence of development in Halifax, and which identify the CBD as the City's cultural and heritage centre.
- d) The design and implementation of a public open space network which complements the characteristics of both existing and proposed developments in the CBD, accommodates human activity, and encourages pedestrian circulation throughout the area.
- e) A CBD which is visually attractive from its major approach roads, from Citadel Hill, and from the harbour.

- f) A high quality of design and construction of buildings to reflect the architectural, heritage and topographical characteristics of the CBD.

The degree of clarity and direction provided by the policies is reflected in their wording. In this case, there is roughly a 1:2 split between the authoritative 'shall' statements and the more tentative and hard to interpret 'should' statements. The 'shall' statements cover:

- Mix of residential and commercial land uses
- Phasing of mixed-use development
- Promotion of public transit
- Design and implementation of a public open space network, and establishment of design guidelines and controls
- Incorporation of vegetation and landscaping in the design of new development
- Encouragement of adjacent development sympathetic to Grand Parade
- Investigation of Heritage Conservation Zones
- Maintenance of the views from Citadel Hill
- Perpetuation of the street grid and city block pattern and encouragement of developments that is compatible with it.
- Development of design criteria for street furniture and signs on Barrington Street

The 'should' statements cover:

- Requirement for street-level retail to provide public interest and activity
- Requirement for street-level design detail that is visually stimulating
- Facilitation of use of private automobile where it does not conflict with pedestrians and public transit
- Promotion of Barrington Street as a major pedestrian circulation area
- Preparation of a plan for the improvement of current pedestrian linkages
- Seeking of weather protection for pedestrians at street level
- Ensuring that the pedestrian system is free of hazards by encouraging ramps and lower curbs
- Encouragement of establishment of open-air pedestrian malls
- Development a system of transit lanes
- Encouragement of long-term parking in convenient locations provided it does not discourage the use of public transit
- Encouragement of short-term parking

- Conservation of views of the Harbour and from the Harbour along the east-west streets, and enhancement and addition of new views as the opportunity arises
- Encouragement of rooftop landscaping
- Advice that HRM not undertake substantial street widenings in the CBD that would materially alter the street grid
- Reinforcing the character of the CBD through the control of urban design details such as massing, texture, materials, street furniture and building lines.
- Ensuring that the external architectural design of new buildings is complementary to adjacent buildings of heritage significance or importance, and be reinforced by concern for materials, colour, proportion, and rhythm.
- Design new developments such that wind levels are acceptable at street level and in public open spaces
- Investigate ways to regulate design to mitigate wind on pedestrian routes
- Design new development to minimize shadow in public open spaces.

#### *Waterfront Development Area*

The additional policies for the Waterfront Development Area listed in the MPS provide recognition of its importance as the place where land and water meet, and the historic, economic, cultural and recreational relationship between the people of HRM and Halifax Harbour. These policies are as follows:

- a) The design and development of the land/water edge to create a dynamic focus to the renewal of the waterfront area
- b) Continuous visual and as far as is practicable, physical access to the land/water edge along its length
- c) Development of the waterfront area to include a mixture of residential, commercial, institutional, cultural and marine -related uses.
- d) The conservation or rehabilitation of areas, streetscapes, buildings, features, and spaces which mark the sequence of development in Halifax, and which demonstrate the historic and architectural character of the city.
- e) The creation of a safe, comfortable and pedestrian-oriented environment which provides a choice between outdoor and weather-protected routes
- f) Minimal penetration by vehicles to the east of Water Street
- g) A network of public open space which complements the existing and proposed developments, accommodates human activity, and encourages pedestrian circulation throughout the area.

- h) The conservation and creation of a high standard of environmental quality
- i) The preservation of existing views of the HWDA from both land and water, through the HWDA to the Harbour and from the HWDA in all directions and, where possible, the creation of new views.
- j) A high quality of design and construction of buildings of human scale which reflect the architectural and topographical characteristics of the HWDA and of the CBD.
- k) The creation of micro-climates acceptable to normal human activities in their immediate vicinity, through the form and positioning of public open spaces and of new development neighbouring such spaces.

This strong emphasis on the design and development of the waterfront reflects a high level of public interest in and attachment to the waterfront. It is here that much of the vitality of downtown can be found – particularly during the summer, but also increasing in the other seasons as the visitor base of the tourism and convention industry in the Capital District expands.

The Waterfront Development Corporation, a provincial Crown Corporation, owns large areas of waterfront land and this agency maintains the mandate and responsibility for waterfront planning and development activity. In 1998, this led to a call for expressions of interest in preparing a plan for the waterfront. In 2000 a draft report was released. This document is still moving through HRM's plan approval process.

The draft Waterfront Openspace and Development Plan has five sections, four of which address urban design issues : Principles, Vision, Civic Structure, and Architecture and Place Making Guidelines.

The Principles are as follows:

- Maintain Continuous Public Access
- Increase Connections between the Waterfront and other parts of HRM
- Improve the Public Street Corridor and Views and Connections
- Improve Openspaces
- Encourage Mixed Waterfront Land Uses
- Respect the Character of the City
- New Development Should be Fiscally Responsible

These Principles place much emphasis on the enhancement of the public realm as the key to the success of this plan and the development that would follow.

The analysis of Civic Structure describes the important elements of the structure of the city that in combination make it distinctive and generate a unique sense of Place. It includes the street grid, public gathering places, landmarks, notable civic buildings, buildings with historic importance, pedestrian routes, and the historic interrelationship between the harbour, waterfront piers, and the waterfront streets reaching back 250 years to when the city was founded.

The Architectural and Place-Making Guidelines bring a foundation of urban design principles to the plan. Although these Guidelines were developed for the waterfront, they are consistent with the guidelines identified by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) that were described in Chapter 2. In summary, and generally speaking they are as follows:

- *Architectural Character* – All new building should strive for an architectural character that interprets the historic context in a modern and relevant way.
- *Streets* – Buildings should be sited to create usable, positive streets
- *Landmark and context buildings* – Structures placed in prominent locations...should all have distinctive profiles and serve as landmark buildings.
- *Roofs* – Buildings should have expressive rooflines that create a distinguished building silhouette.
- *Doors and Windows* – Well-designed building entrances can animate the street, draw people into buildings and modulate facades
- *Architectural Features and Building Elements* - The use of traditional features... is strongly encouraged.
- *Parking Structures* – Parking structures above ground should have facades that relate to the scale, proportion and character of the surrounding buildings.
- *Service Areas* – Service areas should be located away from public spaces and thoroughfares
- *Scale, Proportion and Massing* – This should reflect the character of the surrounding existing buildings, neighbourhood and overall civic structure.

*Pedways* – These remove the pedestrian from the street and discourage street-level activity.

- *Building Walls and Facades*- The exterior building material should reflect the historic setting of the structure, and the character of its surroundings.

- *Public Open Space* – Pedestrians require a safe and comfortable access through open areas. Open Space requires positive definition by buildings as well as street frontage. It should be planned as a ‘place’ and not just present left over land. The discussion covers important elements in the design of the space including: public walkways, planting, lighting, parking, the land/water interface, public art, signage and interpretation, street furniture, and the location, character, size and quality of public gathering spaces.

The remaining undeveloped waterfront lands represent the largest block of developable land in the CBD, and are likely to attract mixed-use development with a strong component of residential construction. The most recent development, Bishops Landing, incorporates an intimate mixture of residential and commercial properties, public and private spaces, and general public access to the waterfront boardwalk. Its design is in keeping with the Architectural and Place-making guidelines listed above.

#### *Spring Garden Road Commercial Area*

This plan area connects to the CBD along Brunswick Street and extends west to South Park Street, north to Sackville Street and south to Clyde and Brenton Streets. Spring Garden Road Commercial Area is a popular shopping area, and has recently attracted new apartment and condominium development that has increased its residential-commercial balance.

In contrast to the CBD and the Waterfront Development Area, there are very few urban design-related policies in the Spring Garden Area plan.

The only urban design-related objectives for the area are as follows:

- a) The retention of the present scale and character of Spring Garden Road and its enhancement as an environment for pedestrian activity
- b) The retention of a sensitive and complementary setting for Citadel Hill through the control of the height of new development in its vicinity

Under these headings the urban design sub-objectives relate to:

- The encouragement of residential development as a means of maintaining a lively street environment and enhance safety after hours
- Control of overall building height, and maximum height on the street side

- Setback controls from the street line to retain a continuous street frontage of retail and other uses that promote pedestrian activity and interest
- Design to permit sunlight penetration to the street level
- Minimization of air turbulence at the pedestrian level by stepping-back the upper stories of buildings.

Despite the stated concern for the pedestrian environment, there are no policies covering streetscapes; use of materials; scale, proportion and massing; the quality of open space; street furniture; and the overall quality of the pedestrian experience (beyond sun and wind exposure). Similarly, there is no recognition in policy of any architectural contribution to the quality of street life.

#### *South End Area Plan*

A small section of the South End Area Plan abuts the south side of the Spring Garden Road area within the Capital District. The only objective for this area that reference the quality of the urban environment is:

- The maintenance of the South End as vital inner-city neighbourhoods with a broad mix of family and non-family housing accommodation.

Despite the wording of this objective, there are no policies in this area plan that address the quality of the urban experience and support its vitality.

#### *Peninsular North Planning Area*

The Peninsular North Planning Area abuts the CBD, and includes the Quinpool Road, Gottingen Street and the extension of Barrington Street to North that are part of the Capital District.

The overall objective for this planning area is:

- To create a lively and interesting environment in Peninsular North with a mixture of land uses and a physical environment that is aesthetically pleasing, safe and well maintained.

Policy references supporting the qualitative aspects of this objective within the Capital District are very limited. Under the requirements for Residential Environments, the only property to which any addition urban design requirements are attached in order to make it compatible with the surrounding area is at the corner of Robie, West and Cunard Streets where attention to architectural design; scale, height, and massing; site landscaping and the nature of the building materials and other such factors is required. However, there is no provision to protect the good qualities of

the surrounding area to which the development of this property must adhere, and no attempt to characterize it.

Under policies for the Commercial Environment, there is some reference to urban design, particularly in the wording of the policy covering development agreements for major commercial uses. It includes, mitigation of impacts on adjacent properties, adherence to the traditional street grid, the addition of high quality design detail through such items as landscaping, signs, building entrances, and vehicle lay-by area; the provision of high quality open space and leisure areas, and encouragement for the use of high quality exterior construction material such as masonry.

The commercial property at the corner of Gottingen and Cogswell has been singled out for special attention and the following requirements must be addressed in a development agreement:

- The design should address the transition between the pedestrian orientation of Gottingen Street and the traffic movement function of Cogswell
- The development should be high quality and pedestrian-oriented throughout with attention to details such as building materials, windows, landscaping, fencing, walls, lighting, entrances and walkways.

Under Recreation, there is reference to lighting to improve safety, the need for a sense of enclosure and wind protection in recreational spaces.

The Environment section includes the following objective:

- An energy-efficient lifestyle in Peninsular North and an aesthetically pleasing environment for the activities that take place in the area.

The policies in support of this objective do mention energy efficient design of new buildings, tree planting, and the street improvements such as benches, planters or trees, and improved sidewalk conditions in support of an aesthetically pleasing environment.

Heritage protection issues are covered in the Plan Area, but are almost entirely confined to the Brunswick Street Heritage area that is outside of the Capital District. The policy requirements for this heritage area place considerable emphasis on the requirements for streetscape, facades, and architectural detail reflective of the historic character of the street.

### *Quinpool Road Commercial Area*

The policy emphasis in this area is directed to the balance of facilities in the commercial area and makes few references to the quality of the pedestrian environment other than to encourage pedestrian linkages between Quinpool Road and the adjacent residential streets.

#### 6.2.2 Downtown Dartmouth

A new plan for Downtown Dartmouth was adopted in 2000 after a lengthy public consultation process. The Vision for the plan is as follows:

*‘Downtown Dartmouth is an attractive and safe community with a lively business district, quiet and stable neighbourhoods, and an accessible and beautiful waterfront for all to enjoy. The community has retained a strong sense of its heritage and culture, provides a broad range of quality housing choices for all, and assures that all lifestyles can be met through an abundance of park and recreation facilities and employment opportunities.’*

The urban design-related objectives of the Plan are:

- a) To protect and strengthen the traditional character and stability of the downtown neighbourhoods
- b) To ensure a high level of design in all housing developments which is sensitive and complements surrounding neighbourhoods
- c) To Revitalize the business district by building on its strengths, its small town character and traditional role as a community-oriented service centre
- d) To promote a lively ‘people-friendly’ atmosphere with activity beyond 9-5 daytime hours
- e) To encourage a mix of high quality development which is dependent, related or enhanced by a waterfront location
- f) To provide visual and physical public access to the land/water edge
- g) To capitalize on the unique natural and cultural history of Dartmouth using it as a basis for future development of the waterfront
- h) To preserve and enhance the traditional small town character and fine grain development pattern within the downtown
- i) To preserve important scenic public views
- j) To foster the recognition, protection and enhancement of historically-significant properties
- k) To preserve and enhance buildings, streetscapes, areas and views that are of historical or cultural significance

- l) To ensure the provision of adequate, diverse and accessible open space and recreational opportunities, both passive and active, to meet the needs of downtown citizens and visitors
- m) To promote a visually pleasing downtown environment through the protection of important views, controls on development, landscaping, and beautification initiatives
- n) To promote environmental responsibility and stewardship in the maintenance of an attractive downtown environment
- o) To provide a safe and balanced transportation network for pedestrian, cyclists, automobiles and transit users
- p) To maximize accessibility for persons with disabilities
- q) To maintain the traditional street pattern
- r) To improve the public's sense of safety and promote a positive image of the downtown as a safe, friendly and clean place

The policies in the plan place considerable emphasis on urban design issues, in particular D-1 but also others in each section.

Policy D-1 covers the following:

The scale, massing and grain of future development and adherence to the traditional street grid

Facades and exterior architecture

- Development oriented to pedestrians rather than cars

Microclimate issues such as wind, solar orientation and shadowing

- Encouragement of pedestrian-oriented activity at the street level
- Weather protection for pedestrians
- Public Art
- Greenways and landscaping such as roof-top gardens and flower boxes
- Community gardens
- Conservation of significant views
- High quality of design for streetscape elements and furniture
- Public safety – addressed through lighting, visibility, signage and land uses that encourage 'eyes on the street'

Additional urban design matters addressed in the other policies include:

- Architectural design consistent with the traditional character of dwellings in the neighbourhood
- The protection of significant natural and cultural features
- Height and step-back of buildings to support a human scale streetscape
- Streetscape improvements
- Design considerations at the water's edge to protect views and support public access and usage of the waterfront

- Special design standards for new streets in the downtown which are in keeping with the historic and pedestrian character of the downtown.
- The design of buildings to create public spaces
- The design of signage
- The retention, preservation, rehabilitation and restoration of sites, structures and conditions that impact a sense of heritage
- The development of greenways
- Beautification through landscaping
- The removal of overhead wiring
- The protection of environmental quality – particularly regarding Halifax Harbour
- Physical issues affecting the mobility of pedestrians, cyclists and the disabled
- Public safety
- Civic pride and the maintenance of public spaces

Most of the recent development completed under the new policy has been as-of-right development. The clarity of the policies has resulted in a relatively short approval process, and a number of new residential development projects that are generally considered to be appropriate in scale and design for the area. In this respect, the policies have been successful in encouraging regeneration in the downtown area.

### **6.3 Stakeholder Perspectives**

In order to get an overview of urban design issues most pertinent to the HRM situation, a number of key informant interviews were carried out with developers, architects, HRM staff and other stakeholders.

#### **6.3.1 Downtown Developers**

Interviews were conducted with six people representing four development companies<sup>2</sup>, to get a sense of some of the factors that, from their perspective, promote or hinder better design. The following points were raised:

##### *Issues relating to specific locations*

<sup>2</sup> John Greenough, Heather Stubbard, Provident Development Ltd.  
 Danny Chedrawe  
 Albert MacDonald, Tony Hall  
 Louis Lawen, Dexel

Bedford's waterfront development process was very positive. The area was developed under a development agreement, using a set of design guidelines that were applied flexibly. The Bedford Planning Advisory Committee works well. Its members are well qualified and make decisions in a timely fashion. However, some members of the architectural community may argue that the design guidelines stifled creativity and resulted in a monotonous group of buildings.

In Dartmouth, the development process used for the Starr Manufacturing Site has been prolonged (over three years), during which time other projects have come on stream, compromising the viability of the original proposal.

In Downtown Dartmouth, as-of-right developments have some size limitations and must meet design guidelines in Land Use By-Law. Under these rules, a development may get its approval in 6 months as opposed to 9-18 months for a development agreement to be signed.

#### *Timing and delays*

The windows of opportunity for development are sometimes very short. Timing is everything — purchasers won't wait forever.

HRM staff needs to be more accountable with regards to the length of time taken to approve applications. Time is money to developers. Many companies are shying away from developing in the downtown because projects take too long to get approvals, which adds to the cost of development.

#### *Public input*

Public input is valuable but a range of mechanisms are needed to solicit comments from a broad cross section of the public.

Only a small number of people usually participate in public hearings and they may represent a fairly narrow section of the public interest.

Local special interest and lobby groups have considerable influence and can delay or derail projects that have been supported and recommended by HRM staff.

Heritage groups often do not see the big picture or know what the real issues are, but they have considerable influence on politicians.

An independent review panel would be good as long as it had teeth and could resist political pressures.

### *Development Controls and Guidelines*

There is a narrow line to tread with regards to architectural guidelines. Style and design considerations are important but they should not be mandated.

By-laws don't work. All development on the peninsula should be by development agreement, not as-of-right. Angle controls, density per acre stipulations, numbers of parking spaces, and area of open space — all these constraints do not make for quality development, because they don't address the history of an area or the quality of construction.

Developers need to be allowed more density to build in quality. There should also be merit points for projects that increase quality. In Vancouver, for example, density is negotiated.

The view plane by-law should be revisited. Street grid views may be more important now<sup>3</sup>.

Many people want to live on the peninsula, however zoning is not working. Everything could be zoned R1-1 but people will still find ways to beat the system. For example, beautiful Victorian homes are being converted into rooming houses. Two to three thousand more units, permitted through higher densities, would take the pressure off. Density is a prerequisite for higher quality.

The development agreement process is flawed because it permits considerable delay and also allows a proposal to be derailed late in the process by intervention at the political level. When this occurs, there is no right of appeal.

Many developers will not bother with development agreements because they associate them with added cost, increased delays and potential for rejection based on public disapprovals.

However, often the public does not realize that an as-of-right development may not protect the neighbourhood. The example was cited of developers in the South End building units with many bedrooms, to be rented to students.

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<sup>3</sup> Protection of east-west street grid views is a key principle in the recent Halifax Waterfront Plan.

## *Design*

Some people complain that Halifax has “no flavour”, no exciting new design. This is largely to do with the size of the city. But it may also reflect the fact that many of the local architects were trained in the same schools and generally have less “pull” on a project than in other areas, where architects also train as project managers or as structural engineers.

Architects here tend to specialize in a certain style or certain building materials and may not be willing to be flexible to suit a particular neighbourhood.

HRM staff negotiating agreements appear to be reluctant to offer guidance on type of building or design, preferring to review proposals and comment on aspects that can be measured or that are addressed by written HRM policy. Often, however, these policies are out-of-date.

### 6.3.2 Architects

Three architects provided insights into some of the factors influencing the design process in HRM.<sup>4</sup>

Architects in Nova Scotia probably have a lower status and consequently less influence on projects than in other areas. It does not help that some developers routinely bring in architects from outside the province.

Developers are able to read markets and the regulatory process very well, and usually have a good sense of what will succeed. The overall design culture in Halifax is quite conservative. Some developers feel that only certain types of design will succeed.

The design guidelines developed for the Halifax waterfront may have strengthened this perception. When certain features are specified (for example, the use of mansard roofs and punched windows), this will determine the architectural style of building, whereas it may be more important to focus on the way the building interfaces with the street, or the level of detail and quality used at and immediately above the pedestrian level.

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<sup>4</sup> Rick Buhr, Fowler Bauld & Mitchell Ltd  
George Rogers, MacFawn & Rogers Architects Limited  
Roy Willwerth, Duffus Romans Kundzins Rounsefell Ltd

The Halifax MPS was written over 20 years ago. Its policies are not particularly clear, leaving much room for interpretation, and the interpretation usually tends to favour a more conservative approach. Perhaps it is time to look at developing a much clearer physical plan that identifies objectives for different parts of the downtown and establishes clear criteria to guide how they should be developed.

There is a sense that HRM staff view the development approval process as somewhat adversarial, and think that developers are in it simply to make money and cannot really be trusted.

The length of time it takes to process an application is a serious issue. Most developers cannot afford to hold a piece of land for up to two years waiting for development approval.

Public involvement is beneficial, however, usually only a narrow segment of the community participates. The interests and ideas of younger people, for example, are rarely heard. Residents in the 17-25 year old age group tend to have very different perceptions of what makes a city work. They may make greater use of urban public spaces than settled homeowners for example<sup>5</sup>.

There appears to be reluctance to look to other cities for design ideas and solutions. People are quick to point out that “we aren’t San Francisco”. While Halifax has its own unique circumstances, other cities can provide instruction and inspiration (or cautionary examples). Vancouver, for example, is producing some fine examples of exciting new design for both large developments and small infill projects that successfully marry public and private interests, especially in the False Creek area.

There is strong prejudice against tall buildings in Halifax but this should be reexamined. Developers will argue that allowing higher density can be used to negotiate more design value. In Vancouver, it is becoming common to allow towers to be built surrounded by smaller buildings, which create a more pedestrian friendly environment.

The viewplanes by-law should now be reviewed. The Maritime Centre building was a direct design result of viewplanes being applied, yet it blocks Spring Garden off from the waterfront and relates very poorly to Barrington Street. Street views to the water are valuable and should

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<sup>5</sup> A useful reference tool for an even younger age group (12-18) is a set of guidelines prepared by the Urban Design Advisory Service, New South Wales Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, Australia, available through [www.duap.nsw.gov.au](http://www.duap.nsw.gov.au).

be retained, but there may be areas of downtown Halifax where taller buildings will fit in well.

HRM needs a Department of Urban Design with clear authority to improve the standard of design, not only in downtown areas but also, eventually, in rural communities. One function of this department should be to prepare comprehensive design briefs for specific sites, based on careful review and analysis of the context (viewplanes, movement systems, sunlight and wind etc). At present, most planning and development control staff do not seem to have the requisite design skills or confidence to guide developments successfully. Existing development controls seem to focus on two-dimensional (lot coverage, height etc) aspects of design. Three dimensional thinking is required.

Overall design quality in HRM is low and seems to be getting worse. While good design cannot be legislated, there does need to be a stringent intent on the part of HRM to achieve the highest standards of design.

### 6.3.3 Planners

Meetings were held with four HRM planners<sup>6</sup> who have been involved with development applications in the Capital District.

#### *Development Agreements*

- Development agreements are the most effective available tool to implement urban design, and are widely used in Halifax, though less so in Downtown Dartmouth. Height restrictions in Halifax trigger the development agreement process, which provides for Council and public input into development decisions.
- The planner negotiates the development based on compliance with policy objectives. ‘Shall’ and ‘should’ are key in interpreting policy intention; ‘should’ statements provide a greater measure of flexibility. HRM’s urban design policy addressing building and site design is more open to negotiation than the provision of open space, building scale and the preservation of views. There is a need to further develop urban

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<sup>6</sup> Roger Wells, Paul Morgan, Holly Richardson, Mitch Dickey

design guidelines under the Plan policy for greater clarification for planners, developers and Council.

- High-rise development has been a controversial issue in Downtown Halifax and is reflected in Plan policy.
- The Waterfront Development Area policies have been fairly well developed from an urban design perspective despite the fact that they were adopted in 1978. These policies are currently being reviewed and new draft policies outline more specific urban design guidelines.
- There used to be a design review committee of Council that functioned poorly. However, there now seems to be a greater understanding and appreciation of design in the planning and development process. Is there an opportunity to establish a review Committee of Council and would it enhance the process?
- Design awareness is also a proven powerful tool and can be used in conjunction with the regulatory process.
- It would be helpful if the Capital District would create a voluntary Urban Design Manual to communicate urban design principles and HRM's design expectations.

#### *As-of-Right Development – Dartmouth Experience*

- It is very difficult to regulate design through as-of-right zoning controls. Where does a Municipality draw the line and how do you balance regulation and flexibility?
- In Dartmouth there was considerable interest in promoting development in the downtown through streamlining the development process. Developers were complaining that the process took too long and that they had to go to Council, even for minor approvals. The Downtown Dartmouth Secondary Planning Strategy (SPS) adopted in 2000, addressed this problem by putting all appropriate downtown land uses in the as-of-right category with some size restrictions (maximum 24 units and 5 storeys) but also including design policies and regulations. It is a good example of how design can be regulated without

compromising the creative process. The Plan is current and relevant to the existing development climate in Downtown Dartmouth, where there is strong interest in bringing more people to live downtown.

- Design tools under the Land Use By-law include (a) architectural design regulations addressing materials, window detailing, etc. and (b) a process for site plan review which gives the development officer more control to address landscaping, parking design, building setback and lighting. Site Plans are not used to review architectural design.
- The design guidelines do not try to pin down a particular architectural style or era. Instead they address proportions and materials.
- While not as comprehensive as the development agreement process, the site plan review does allow for greater emphasis on site design through the as-of-right process. This is a fairly new tool to Nova Scotia and has been used by HRM in Downtown Dartmouth since 2001.
- Design regulations must be general by nature and can be used to avoid ‘worst-case scenario’ situations. They can offer predictability for developers and have been well received in Downtown Dartmouth. Developers know what is expected of them upfront, and do not have to take their proposals through a full public process. The public seems to be reasonably satisfied with the resulting developments.
- In general, the guidelines have been workable, though some adjustments may be needed. However, the policies and regulations do require a measure of interpretation by the development officer, who may not necessarily have the requisite knowledge and experience in urban design. It was suggested that an internal design review process should be established (not an external review committee), involving relevant HRM staff, to ensure that approvals are based on sound design principles.

#### *Heritage Considerations and Designation*

- To date, heritage conservation has been the main influence on HRM’s urban design approach which emphasizes the protection of existing heritage context and character. For example, the Bishop’s Landing development respects the scale and character

of the Keith's property in conjunction with more contemporary design elements. These items were negotiated through the development agreement process.

- There are problems with the current heritage designation process. Some owners in Dartmouth are actively seeking to de-register their properties because they feel too constrained. As an example, one homeowner objected to being told what colour the front door could be painted.
- While there are many properties in the Capital District that are eligible for designation, it can be hard to make a convincing economic case to owners. Designation should be accompanied by eligibility for economic incentives, such as a 50 percent cost-sharing program for façade improvements.

#### 6.3.4 Other Stakeholders

Interviews were conducted with representatives from the two design schools in Halifax, the Faculty of Architecture and Planning, Dalhousie University<sup>7</sup>, and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design<sup>8</sup>. In addition, design concerns were discussed during a meeting concerning the redevelopment of the Spring Garden branch of the Halifax Regional Library.<sup>9</sup> Some of the key urban design issues raised during these interviews include the following:

The Capital District requires greater density and intensity of use. This need not mean more high-rise buildings, but rather more diversity of uses on upper floors.

A city, by definition, has more than one centre — different districts with separate identities and sufficient attractions, services and amenities to provide alternatives for shopping, recreation and entertainment. In the Capital District context, Downtown Dartmouth's resurgence will only strengthen Halifax. NSCAD has proposed to create a Dartmouth campus that would contribute significantly to this.

Halifax should not focus exclusively on promoting its heritage resources. These are important, but the city also has a significant youth culture, connected with being a major university centre. Italy has done this and become a world design centre — their ancient culture is

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Palermo, Graduate Coordinator, School of Planning

<sup>8</sup> Paul Greenhalgh, President, NSCAD

<sup>9</sup> Judith Hare, CEO, Halifax Regional Library

contrasted with modern, youthful fashion. The Capital District should fill the gaps in the street with radical, modernist architecture.

In San Francisco, buildings are recognized as being an essential part of the heritage and image of the city, and in some areas it is considered a privilege rather than a right to be able to build. Development competitions are held for certain locations. A certain land use mix is suggested, proposals are reviewed by the public and judged by a panel. The sense of city identity drives everything.

The effectiveness of performance standards needs to be judged versus development controls. The “building envelope” control employed on Spring Garden (and also extensively in New York City) was cited as an example. Originally intended to maintain sunlight penetration during certain hours, the envelope has ended up dictating architectural design as developers build simply to fill the envelope. A performance target might have achieved the desired effect with more creative solutions.

Halifax needs some landmark buildings. There are just a handful of suitable sites available — for example, the Queen Street/Spring Garden corner, the waterfront, the Cogswell Interchange lands.

HRM must play a leadership role in promoting urban design, particularly through the development of new civic buildings. The low-bid procurement system does not produce good design. Design competitions should be used more frequently.

Local architects do not get much experience working on large projects. Therefore it may be necessary to team local talent with outside innovation.

Both HRM and the general public seem to have difficulty thinking “big and new”. The question needs to be asked: how much should be preserved? For example, do all the buildings on Barrington deserve to be preserved? Would the street be improved by some exciting new architecture?

While consultations with business improvement associations and the public during the development of the streetscape plans (see Capital District Streetscape and Amenity Plans volume) did not directly address best practices, a number of relevant issues were emphasized:

The importance of bringing more residents back to downtown to make streets busier and increase retail viability

The need for more density in the downtown cores  
Design that creates interest at the street level (appropriate scale, no blank walls, retail uses wherever possible, doors and windows etc)  
The need to streamline development approval processes to make it easier for developers to fill gaps on the street and redevelop outdated buildings  
The need for façade improvement incentives  
The importance of adopting universal design principles  
The vital role that public institutions such as libraries can play in promoting lively, well used streets and bringing people to business areas.

## 6.4 Summary and Conclusions

This section presents a synthesis of the findings of the consultation process and draws conclusions about what should be done to address the issues that emerged.

### 6.4.1 Municipal Planning Strategies (MPS)

The Halifax MPS is out of date. It has been amended in sections and is now uneven in its urban design policies for the Capital District. The existing MPS objectives for the Halifax CBD are much more urban-design oriented than those for any other part of the Halifax side of the Capital District. Unfortunately, the policy statements that are meant to support these objectives are often vague and tentatively worded and there is no other source of information to help developers and designers determine what kind of design would be likely to meet with success. This leads to cautious, conservative and somewhat repetitive designs that are likely to meet with approval.

On Spring Garden Road, development controls in the MPS have resulted in a ‘filling the envelope’ form of development rather than encouraging architectural creativity. If more innovative and bold design ideas are desired in this part of the Capital District, the policy will have to provide more clarity about what is really required. The use of Performance Standards has been suggested.

The Waterfront Development policies in the MPS and the principles set out in the Waterfront Development Plan (2000) put considerable emphasis on urban design and include concepts which, to be fully implemented, would require mirroring policies and principles in adjacent areas of the CBD. For example, the principle of *...Improving the Public Street Corridor and Views and Connections..* could apply throughout the CBD, and the policy concerning *...the preservation of existing views of the*

*HWDA from both land and water, through the HWDA to the Harbour, and from the HWDA in all directions and, where possible, the creation of new views ... would require a review of viewplanes throughout much of the eastern half of the CBD. The Civic Structure analysis in the Waterfront Development Plan could also be extended to the entire CBD and the Spring Garden Road Commercial Area.*

The Downtown Dartmouth SPS has been updated and has been successful in attracting development to vacant and underutilized land in the downtown. Development is largely as-of-right but is guided by design policies that have been developed with extensive public involvement. The new development approval process includes a site plan review stage that provides an opportunity for staff to provide more input than is typically possible in as-of-right development.

### *General Conclusions*

The MPS policies for the Capital District should be reviewed within a comprehensive framework of principles and objectives that reflects the importance of the Capital District within the region; the current economic, social and environmental context; and the diversity of character in different parts of the Capital District that should be celebrated and sustained. The work in Dartmouth and in the Waterfront Development Plan provides a strong base of design-oriented policy on which to base the process. The remaining challenge is to extend the work to the Halifax CBD, Spring Garden Road and the other commercial streets within the Capital District boundary.

#### 6.4.2 Development Agreements vs As-of-Right

Most of the new development on the Halifax side of the Capital District takes place through development agreements (DA), while on the Dartmouth side there is largely As-of-Right development in the downtown. Both processes have their strengths and weaknesses.

The DA process provides more opportunity to develop a design solution that reflects the opportunities and constraints of the urban site, the historical neighbourhood context, and broader objectives such as pedestrian and traffic circulation, density, open space provision, views and skylines. It also presents opportunities to negotiate public realm benefits in return for advantages for the developer. The downside is the length of time it takes, often two years or more, and the potential for delays or failure caused by public reaction. Developers are often working within narrow windows of market opportunity and many are unwilling to enter into this

process preferring the certainty but reduced flexibility of the As-of-Right process.

The As-of-Right process is shorter (generally a few months) but depends heavily on the clarity and comprehensiveness of the policy framework that guides it. The process itself is framed by regulation and gives little opportunity for outside input into the design solution presented by the proponent. The As-of-Right approach is best suited to sites that are relatively small and unconstrained by urban complexities where the design issues are clearly defined and up-to-date. At present, with the exception of the Dartmouth SDS, this is rarely the case in the Capital District. The quality of design in the As-of-Right process can be improved through the use of two mechanisms: a) site plan review, and/or b) performance standards.

### *General Conclusions*

Where As-or-Right development is the most appropriate option in the urban context, the Downtown Dartmouth experience has shown that a process can be put in place that reflects the joint objectives of developers and the local community. The use of the site plan review provides a new level of staff input that can improve the development plan. In some locations, the use of performance standards could provide another opportunity to leverage better design in more sensitive locations.

In sites where the DA process is appropriate, the challenge is to encourage creative developments through an efficient and timely process. Additional supporting measures are needed to make this process work efficiently. Some options include the use of design guidelines, design criteria, and/or design briefs each of which provides more clarity for the developer and reduces the loss of time in preparing drafts that do not meet with approval or risk rejection through public opposition.

#### 6.4.3 Public Involvement in Development Review

There was a great deal of public discussion about urban design during the development of the Waterfront Development Plan and the Downtown Dartmouth Plan, but overall there has been very little other opportunity to discuss the subject. The Capital District consultations revealed considerable public interest in the subject but did not get down to specifics.

In the absence of discussion about larger concepts such as the design vision for the Capital District, the scope of public involvement tends to be relatively narrow and predictable, and dominated by specific interest -

particularly heritage concerns. There is a significant youth culture in the Capital District but it is given little positive attention even though youth have the potential to inject energy and dynamism to the urban environment of downtown, and young people make considerable use of public space.

Public hearings are held at a late stage in site-specific development approval processes when many decisions have already been made. Comments in these hearings often go beyond what can be addressed in the proposed project, and this in turn leads to heated and frustrated dialogue. This aggravated tone contributes to delays, increases concern among developers about 'political interference' in the decisions, and exacerbates the uncertain development climate in the downtown.

### *General Conclusions*

The scope of public consultation needs to be broadened to include a wider array of interests, ages, needs and social groupings. This requires re-thinking of the current consultation methods used in planning and the adoption of more innovative consultation processes that engage and interest the citizens. The overall result should be to emphasize common interest and collaboration, and to address contentious issues in a planning context rather than after a development plan has been presented.

#### 6.4.4 Design Issues

During the consultation there was repeated criticism of the conservative and unimaginative design of much new construction in the Capital District. In its defense, the development community repeatedly pointed out that developers can only afford to include additional features, higher quality and public benefits if they are allowed to build in more value through density increases. Thus density becomes a pivot point in the discussion of 'quality'. Most discussions of density tend to move quickly to the pros and cons of high rises rather than exploring other options for density increases – such as through groupings of varied height buildings, better use of upper floors in older structures, and redevelopment incentives for older buildings. It was also argued, however, that tall buildings could be appropriate in carefully identified locations, and if they are sensitively designed at street level.

The control of height has largely been dictated by the viewplanes from the Citadel. These have worked well in ensuring that those views have been protected, but in the absence of other design criteria, have also resulted in the construction of buildings that have cut off other important east-west views, are detrimental to the streetscape, cut across the city grid, and

otherwise make little positive contribution to the overall structure of the downtown. A broader design perspective would include a more comprehensive examination of views – from the land and water - and be accompanied by a review of the street grid, the massing of buildings, and other aspects of urban structure.

While heritage is clearly important in a historic city that cherishes its past, innovative and dynamic design does not appear to be valued at present. The result is a city that projects conservatism rather than progressive or youthful aspects of culture. It was suggested that high quality contemporary design that adds a dynamic dimension to the streetscape be introduced in carefully selected sites. Barrington Street was suggested as a potential location. Overall, it would provide an opportunity to install ‘signature projects’ in the Capital District.

### *General Conclusions*

The quality and type of development, particularly in Halifax, has been strongly influenced by restrictions on height and density, by the Citadel viewplanes regulations, and by the demands of heritage conservation. If it is important to accommodate more people in the Capital District, to protect and enhance other aspects of urban structure than the views from the Citadel, and to encourage more variety and dynamism in urban architecture, these controlling influences will need to be moderated in a broader vision with a more comprehensive and innovative view of good design. Also, more attention should be given to creating landmark or signature buildings in designated locations.

### 6.4.5 Design Guidance and Expertise

Good design cannot be regulated, but it can be guided and encouraged. At present the Halifax MPS does not provide enough clarity of intent to either developers or staff. In addition to policies, information tools such as design guidelines, design criteria, site-specific design briefs, and performance standards can all be beneficial and have proven their worth in past projects. Access to expertise during the development planning process would also be helpful. It could come through a Design Review committee, but most importantly should be available at the staff level in the HRM planning department. In addition, for important projects, expertise should be brought in from elsewhere to introduce new ideas.

### *General Conclusions*

A new structure needs to be created to support good design in the Capital District. This includes up-to-date, relevant and publicly endorsed policies;

information tools; standards; guidelines; and access to appropriate expertise.

#### 6.4.6 Leadership

Leadership needs to be exercised by HRM in order to provide an appropriate example for the private sector. This can be done by setting high standards in the design of new civic buildings, running design competitions for new buildings, and seeking ideas and opportunities for landmark or signature buildings.

## **7.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS FOR HRM**

There is now a considerable body of experience and leadership to be found in other cities in Canada and the United States. The cities selected for this study are simply examples and many more could be added to the list. In the broader scan that was undertaken for this project, it became clear that there are interesting and relevant solutions to downtown issues to be found in almost every city.

This chapter examines some alternative strategies for HRM as it considers the next steps in developing its response to the urban design challenge. The options are discussed in four sections: the Plan, the Urban Design Strategy, the Guidelines, the Review Process, Other Options.

### **7.1 The Plan**

Most cities in Canada reviewed for this report have or are preparing a downtown plan. This plan may or may not be a component of a regional plan. It includes strategies for economic development, the waterfront, residential and commercial development, transportation, heritage conservation, open space and recreation, and management of environment quality. Much depends on the urgency of the issues to be addressed and whether time allows a sequential approach starting with the regional context, or requires early delivery of a specific plan for the downtown.

Whichever approach is used, the plan places the development of the downtown firmly in the economic and social realities of the new century with its global trade, international travel, businesses that are not tied to location, and important quality of life issues. It also underlines the leadership role of the downtown in the development of the city as a whole and in the surrounding region.

#### **7.1.1 HRM Options**

Prepare a plan for the Capital District as a sub-component of the Regional Plan. It would include strategies for economic development, the waterfront, residential and commercial development, transportation, heritage conservation, open space and recreation, and management of environment quality. This plan would have a section dealing with urban design that would set out goals and objectives and policies for the different areas of the Capital District, and may subsequently lead to the development of a more detailed strategy for the downtown. This is the approach being used in Toronto and Calgary.

Prepare a stand-alone plan for the Capital District in advance of completing the Regional Plan. This Capital District plan would not be as comprehensive as that described above, but would be available earlier, addressing the leading role of the Capital District in the region, and focusing on development issues that are not dependent on the regional context for definition. It would allow progress to be made guiding development in the short and medium term. This approach has been used in Edmonton and is beneficial where there are urgent matters to address, or where large-scale re-development is anticipated in the near future.

## **7.2 Urban Design Strategy**

An Urban Design Strategy is more narrowly scoped than a municipal planning strategy, focusing on design issues. It is usually one product of several products in a municipal planning process and provides considerable detail on the specific issues of design. It can also be a stand-alone document. An Urban Design strategy has the following components:

A description of the urban design issues to be addressed.

A framework of guiding statements comprised of an appropriate combination of vision statements, principles, goals and objectives.

Guidelines to clarify the intent of the objectives including those matters where flexibility and innovation are encouraged.

The description of a review process including the roles of HRM staff, any external advisory body, and opportunities for public input.

A list of associated programs and plans.

Mechanisms for ongoing public education and consultation.

### **7.2.1 Issues**

The list of issues should include all that have special significance in the Capital District. The list should be identified and confirmed through consultation with staff, stakeholders and the general public. Table 5.3 provides a starting point in the preparation of such a list.

### **7.2.2 Guidelines**

The guidelines reflect the principles, goals and objectives giving a more detailed elaboration of their intent and the values they incorporate.

Examples may be provided for clarification. The guidelines adopted in Portland or Edmonton could be used as templates. The guidelines should not be prescriptive but rather encourage creativity and innovation.

### 7.2.3 Development Review

The purpose of the development review process is to ensure that the principles, goals, objectives and guidelines, and legal requirements are being followed, and also to judge the merits of a creative solution. The review process must involve staff in order to ensure that the interests of the municipality and its citizens are fully protected, but also benefits greatly from the involvement of a range of design professionals – often including engineers and landscape designers as well as architects and planners. This expertise may be available in-house, but there are benefits to including outside (community-based) advice that draws on a wide range of experience and expertise. An external review committee is usually appointed by and reports to council, and comments on selected projects above a certain threshold of cost or complexity.

### 7.2.4 Plans and Programs

The strategy usually leads to the preparation of flow-out plans and programs that provide the next level of detail in the implementation of an urban design strategy. They may also be created as stand-alone products. The following list of potential programs and plans covers many of those that are could be undertaken, though not all are urgently needed in the Capital District. The Urban Design Study includes the first three on the list:

- Streetscape plans and Guidelines
- An Amenity Plan
- A Wayfinding Plan
- Gateways and Landmarks Plan
- Design Criteria for Streets
- An Open Space and Greenway Plan
- Plan of Pedestrian Routes
- Pedestrian Charter
- Heritage Conservation Plan
- Plan for Public Art
- Beautification programs
- Façade Incentive Program
- Program to develop upper stories of buildings facing major urban streets
- Design Award Program
- Plan for Street Trees

HRM has a number of relevant programs in place or under development. They have not been listed here but a comprehensive list should be prepared as part of the background research for the Strategy.

### 7.2.5 HRM Options

An Urban Design Strategy could be developed for the Capital District as a stand-alone document designed to address design issues of particular importance in the Capital District. Its structure and content must be determined through a broad-based consultation program involving staff, stakeholders and the public.

## 7.3 Structure of Design Guidelines

In the research for this report, four main approaches have been described for the structure of urban design guidelines. They might be described as the Portland Approach, the Boulder Approach, the Victoria Approach and the Edmonton Approach. The other cities, principally Toronto and Ottawa have evolving processes that may yield other approaches within the next year or two.

### 7.3.1 Portland Approach

The structure of the Portland Fundamental Design Guidelines is:

- A description of the intent of the guidelines, by category.
- Illustrations of good examples from Portland and other cities.
- Descriptive examples of how the guideline may be applied in the Portland context.

Other guidelines are layered onto this basic layer in areas of special interest and concern – for example in heritage areas. In HRM, this might also include the waterfront and other locations where there are special views.

This approach provides flexibility and does not impose design solutions, but it is also mandatory and requires the proponent to provide a detailed contextual analysis to support the proposed design. It requires access to considerable design expertise at the review stage.

### 7.3.2 Boulder Approach

The Boulder approach is heavily focused on design that reflects the existing built heritage and provides a relatively prescriptive set of requirements for facades, streetscapes and so on. This approach is focused on a pre-determined outcome and leaves little room for innovation and new ideas. In this situation where a highly valued resource is considered to be at risk, this approach is clearly considered to be essential. Outside of

the downtown, urban design concepts have been incorporated into other guidelines – such as those for Transportation Landscape Design.

### 7.3.3 Victoria Approach

Victoria has pre-set design guidelines for specific zones. They were developed at different times and are gradually being updated and brought into line with the goals and objectives of the *Official Community Plan*. The design requirements for each zone are laid out in a by-law and at this point have relatively general wording that may be difficult to interpret in some situations. The updating process that is currently underway may address this situation.

### 7.3.4 Edmonton Approach

Edmonton has prepared a design guidelines manual that includes an urban design framework for the Downtown, general urban design guidelines that cover the entire downtown, and neighbourhood urban design guidelines for selected streets and districts. For each guideline there is a description of what is intended, examples, and one or more illustrations. This document provides clarity and flexibility, and is an excellent tool for designers, developers and staff. It was assembled by the Urban Design Review Panel and incorporates the panel's experience since 1986.

### 7.3.5 HRM Options

The four approaches described above represent alternative ways to proceed in developing and applying design guidelines. The one selected (no doubt with variations) for HRM will reflect the scope and focus of the urban design strategy or municipal plan. There are pros and cons attached to each one. The most obvious is the time it takes to develop them. The simplest and quickest would probably be the Victoria Approach and the most complex and longest would be the Edmonton Approach. The latter is without doubt the most comprehensive, however, and in the long run will likely prove to be an important asset to the redevelopment of the city.

The difficulty that HRM faces is that while there is a considerable depth of expertise in urban design in the city, there is little experience with guidelines or collaborative review. This suggests that relatively simple system should be developed initially with opportunities for frequent review and updating.

## 7.4 The Review Process

The review processes in place elsewhere cover a range from fully voluntary to mandatory. They are applicable to civic projects only, civic plus some private projects, all project over a certain size, or all projects in given categories. None of the cities examined in this study are now applying the review process to civic projects only, though in many cases that was how they started. A review process that applies only to civic projects only or private projects only sets up a double standard and implies that the others do not need to be improved.

Almost all processes are heavily dependent on accessing appropriate expertise, and usually involve an external review panel of some kind. In some cases, such as in Edmonton, the panel has been given considerable authority. In that case this led to the development of a Guidelines Manual. There is almost always urban design expertise available at the staff level, supported with consultant advice when required. There may even be a section of the Planning Department with special responsibility for urban design.

The acceptability of the review process from the developer's perspective rests heavily on the flexibility and trade-offs that are possible within the prescribed structure, and the efficiency of the approval process. In the end, it is in everyone's interests to have good projects proceed efficiently and without undue delay. A well-designed process can support that outcome.

### 7.4.1 HRM Options

The review process adopted by HRM could include elements from the following list:

- a. As-of-right development guided by design-oriented policy and including a site plan review stage.
- b. Adopting a development agreement process requiring adherence to design guidelines and reviewed by existing advisory committees of Council restructured to include more design expertise.
- c. Adopting a development agreement process involving guidelines and voluntary review by a Design Review Panel. In this case, the Panel review may be mandatory for project above a certain threshold or in given categories, applicable to civic projects only, or applied to both civic and private projects.
- d. Restructuring of the Department of Planning and Development to include an Urban Design section.

- e. Amendment of the planning approval process to ensure that it integrates urban design principles and broad-based design expertise.
- f. Creation of an urban design team drawing together expertise from a number of departments, and collectively responsible for advising proponents and Council on design issues.

## **7.5 Other Options**

Good design can be encouraged, voluntarily, through incentive-based programs such as awards and competitions. These are most useful when integrated into a package of incentives and requirements that in combination are intended to improve design standards in the city.

Awards draw attention to good design and provide a recognition that is usually highly valued by the developer or architects. If sufficiently promoted and advertised, they can also be used to raise public awareness of design issues and provide opportunities to discuss the nature and advantages of good design. In an active development market – such as Toronto or Vancouver - they may also spur creative competition between developers. However, in smaller development markets, awards have limited potential to change the status quo. The number of eligible projects in any given year is likely to be small, the program rewards the product and does not intervene in the development process, and the awards recognize those who are already delivering good design rather than providing real incentives to others who do not.

Competitions are expensive to run, both for the participants and the proponent, and for this reason are used infrequently in municipalities of the size of HRM. However, they can be used to advantage in generating public interest in good design. They are almost always used for projects in which there is a considerable investment of public funds. They attract attention from designers and architects outside the region who have new ideas and innovations, and are often used to select the design of landmark buildings on important sites. The selection of the best design should involve the public and be supported by a broad-based advertising and promotion.

### **7.5 1 HRM Options**

- Establish an awards program that is well funded and promoted as one of a package of mechanisms to attract public interest and generate discussion about good design.

- Run design competitions for projects with public funding, and include resources for advertising and promotion in order to generate public interest.

## **7.6 End Note**

The alternative strategies set out in the Chapter are put forward for discussion. They do not represent an exhaustive list of alternatives but rather options that provide a starting point for determining the structure of a Made-in-HRM Urban Design Strategy.

This is an important but new initiative in HRM and should be developed carefully, with a great deal of stakeholder input and public discussion. It can start with awareness building and incentive-based voluntary initiatives, before moving to a more highly structure approach involving plans, regulation and changes to the development approval process.

The Regional Planning process is providing the umbrella for the review of all local planning strategies in HRM. The process has already identified draft goals and objectives for the municipality that will guide the development of subsequent plans. Once they have been adopted, detailed work could begin on a strategy for the Capital District. It will be important not to lose momentum. Urban design has already been on the downtown agenda for many years, and interest – tempered by frustration - continues to grow.

As soon as possible, interested publics should be given an opportunity to engage in a process that will lead to the preparation of a forward-looking strategy that protects what is historically important and vulnerable; encourages new and exciting design; reflects the needs of people who live, work and play there; supports vigorous commercial and residential development; and strengthens the role of the Capital District as the most important centre of civic life in Nova Scotia.

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Design Guidelines for King's Hill, Portland

Appendix 2 Seattle Design Folio

Appendix 3 Urban Design Policies in Toronto