



Final Recommendation Report: Retail Design Manual

Date: October 5, 2020

To: Planning and Housing Committee

From: Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report recommends Council's adoption of the Retail Design Manual shown as Attachment 1 to this report and that Council direct staff to apply the manual for use in the evaluation of retail development.

The Retail Design Manual supports the objectives of complete communities and vibrant streets which are closely tied to the provision of successful, resilient and dynamic retail uses. This Manual is a collection of best practices and is intended to provide guidance on developing successful ground floor retail spaces. The Manual provides aspirational retail design best practices to inform, guide, inspire and educate those involved in the design and development of retail uses including developers, architects/designers, City staff, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and property managers. Each of these user groups will refer to this document in a different way and at different stages in the planning, design and development process.

Planning and designing high quality and diverse retail spaces helps to achieve good city building and economic objectives, and contributes to an animated and inviting public realm.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Planner and Executive Director recommends that:

1. City Council adopt the Retail Design Manual, included as Attachment 1 to this report.
2. City Council request that the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, apply the Retail Design Manual in the evaluation of new and under review development proposals containing retail uses.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The City Planning Division confirms that there are no financial implications resulting from the recommendations included in the report in the current budget year or in future years.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This report includes recommendations that address the design of retail uses in mixed use buildings. The Retail Design Manual specifically provides guidance on developing ground floor retail spaces that are adaptable, resilient, and can be easily repurposed over time to accommodate a variety of retail tenants and provide for a range of unit sizes. The best practices in the Manual are intended to support the achievement of a healthy mix of retail uses, successful retail business functionality, vibrant, animated and activated streets, and local economic development and job growth. As well, an important consideration will be the impact of Covid-19 on communities, main streets and retail uses, and how they adapt to become more resilient. Recent City initiatives such as CafeTO are a good example of adaptation and resilience applied to Toronto's main streets, and may provide insight on factors that can contribute to animated and activated streets. Although the Manual does not specifically address Covid-19 effects on retail and main streets, it applies a long-term vision for Toronto's main streets embedded in resilience and adaptation, as they are the key drivers for success.

DECISION HISTORY

At its December 2015 meeting, City Council adopted the TOcore: Planning Toronto's Downtown Summary Report and Directions. The report made reference to the TOcore Retail and Services Commercial Land Use study, which was initiated by City Planning in 2015. Both the Commercial Land Use study and TOcore: Summary Report and Directions identified the opportunity to create a graphic best practices manual on retail design, specifically related to retail space on the ground floor of mixed-use developments and identify internal and external communications and training opportunities for both industry professionals and City staff. City Council's decision can be found here:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.TE12.43>

At its December 2016 meeting, City Council endorsed and adopted the TOcore: Planning Toronto's Downtown - Proposals Report - Secondary Plan Directions and Update, which provided proposed policy directions that informed the development of the Downtown Plan (OPA 406). The Proposals Report reinforced the need for a City-wide Street Retail Best Practices Design Manual. City Council's decision can be found here:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.TE20.18>

COMMENTS

The Retail Design Manual is a collection of best practices intended to provide guidance on developing successful, vibrant and resilient ground floor retail spaces that can evolve and be repurposed over time. The goal is to provide aspirational retail design best practices to inform, guide, inspire and educate architects, retail designers, City staff and the development community. The Manual is provided as a resource to a wide variety of stakeholders involved in the design and development of retail. Each of these user groups will refer to this document in a different way and at different stages in the planning, design and development process. The Manual applies city-wide, primarily to mixed-use developments with retail uses at-grade. By planning and designing for great retail spaces, the quality and diversity of retail spaces across Toronto can improve, and will achieve city building and economic development objectives.

The following sections summarize the background and related retail initiatives, and provide an overview of the Retail Design Manual along with a summary of stakeholder engagement and consultations, and the Manual's support for the City's broader planning framework.

Background

As part of the TOcore (Downtown Plan) work, City Planning initiated a retail and service commercial land use study in 2015 to form the basis for the development of a series of strategic directions for retail uses Downtown. One of the key recommendations stemming from the study was the need for a highly graphic best practices manual on quality retail design, specifically related to retail space on the ground floor of mixed-use development.

The TOcore Proposals Report released in 2016 reinforced the need for the development of a Street Retail Best Practices Design Manual, based on the findings of the TOcore Retail and Services Commercial Land Use study. The Manual would provide guidance to developers, architects and City staff on best practices in retail design. The goal being to facilitate well-designed and flexible retail spaces that can evolve over time to meet the changing needs of tenants while better animating the public realm.

Based on the recommendations in the TOcore Proposals Report and Commercial Land Use study, City Planning retained a consultant team in 2018 with expertise in retail design and development strategies, architecture, planning, retail leasing, market analysis and stakeholder engagement to assist with development of the Retail Design Manual.

The work completed by the City staff and consultant team included:

- Stakeholder engagement and consultation;
- Review of the planning framework;
- Review of precedent retail guidelines and manuals;
- Preparation of a Background Report; and
- Development of the Retail Design Manual.

The Retail Design Manual and the supporting Background Report apply a holistic approach to analyzing retail success, with consideration for the design of retail spaces, market conditions and retail accessibility for neighbourhoods as a whole, commercial blocks and individual buildings and retail units.

The best practices from the Manual, as well as the recommendations included in the Background Report, are anticipated to result in more easily tenantable and marketable retail spaces, improved quality of leasable space and reduced need for modifications to the building envelope to accommodate different retail tenants over time.

Material associated with the Retail Design Manual can be found on the Study's website here - <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/official-plan-guidelines/design-guidelines/retail-design/>.

Related Retail Initiatives

The Retail Design Manual is one of three current City-led retail initiatives. The other two retail initiatives are:

- The Retail Main Streets study, led by Economic Development and Culture, which assesses the current state and future of Toronto's main streets in an effort to ensure the sustainability of retail main streets and small, independent businesses. The findings and recommendations of this Study are intended to inform and guide City policies, programs and advocacy positions. A report on this Study will be considered at Economic and Community Development Committee's on its November 12, 2020 meeting. More information on the Retail Main Streets study can be found at: <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/get-involved/public-consultations/retail-main-streets-study/>
- The Priority Retail Streets Zoning By-law amendments, which is intended to ensure that the frontages and grade-related uses on these streets are active, contain non-residential gross floor area and animate the street frontage through high-quality design. The Zoning By-law applies to the Downtown and was adopted by City Council in November 2019. As part of the development of the By-law, five public consultation sessions were held during the summer of 2019 to solicit feedback and commentary. The By-law has been appealed by several property owners to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal. City Council's decision can be found here: <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.PH10.1>

Both initiatives highlight the coordination and collaboration between Economic Development and Culture and City Planning in recognition of the value of retail uses in helping achieve complete communities, and to support the resilience and animation of Toronto's retail main streets.

Summary of Retail Design Manual & Supporting Documents

The work completed by the consultant and City team comprises two deliverables: the Retail Design Manual and a supporting Background Report.

The Retail Design Manual provides guidance on the design of retail spaces as it pertains to the overall building design, the public realm interface and the retail units themselves. The intent is to encourage the integration of design considerations for retail space into the planning of new development at an early stage in the process and reviewed as part of development applications with retail uses.

The Introduction section of the Manual focuses on the organization of the manual, how it is to be applied and used, the value of retail in achieving complete communities and a set of principles for successful retail development. This section of the Manual also includes guiding principles and best practices for Toronto's diverse retail contexts.

The Retail Design Manual is grounded by a set of principles that underpin most successful retail developments. The four key principles included in the Manual are:

- Support retail business functionality and profitability.
- Support the achievement of complete communities and city building objectives.
- Support local economic development and job growth.
- Design adaptable structures that can accommodate the evolution and repurposing of retail space over time.

Understanding that retail success is not solely tied to design, the four principles illustrate how retail design best practices should be supported by other considerations to achieve successful retail environments and complete communities.

The general approach to the organization of the Manual focuses on the public's experience of the retail street, encompassing the public realm, building façade and retail frontage. It begins with the overall building as seen from far away and then proceeds to consider other elements that the public become aware of as they move closer.

The best practices have been organized into three sections to follow this logic – The Building, The Street and Retail Frontage, and The Retail Space. This structure proceeds from the macro scale (e.g. overall building massing, material differentiation) to the micro scale (e.g. entrances, display windows) to the functionality of retail operations from the public's perspective (e.g. lighting, interior column spacing). Each of these considerations influences how retail can contribute to its context.

Each section of the Manual includes best practices that apply the retail design principles to the associated design elements.

- The Building – this section focuses on the overall building design and how it can contribute to the legibility of a retail space within a building. The best practices in this section elaborate on building massing and geometry, differentiation in materials, weather protection and unit configuration.
- The Street and Retail Frontage – this section focuses on the intersection between the retail space and public realm, and how the building façade and street work together to create a welcoming retail environment and animated public realm. The

best practices in this section elaborate on elements such as the sidewalk interface, hierarchy of retail frontages, entrances, display windows and signage.

- The Retail Space – this section focuses on the details, internal layout and function of the retail space. The internal and operational objectives of retail spaces are critical to ensuring a tenatable/marketable space that contributes to animating and activating streetscapes and the public realm. The best practices in this section elaborate on elements such as lighting, mechanical, electrical and plumbing, shipping, receiving and loading and interior columns

Some of the best practices in the Manual are direct and provide guidance on quantitative measures (e.g. ideal ground floor heights), while others are more qualitative or are intended to guide tenants at later stages of development (e.g. lighting). A number of the best practices, such as recommendations for mechanical, electrical and plumbing, for example, are not subject to City Planning review as part of the development application process, but are provided as a resource for developers, architects, and retail designers to consider as they develop the retail program and space. Taken together, the best practices can be used and referenced by all those involved in the design and development of retail spaces to create productive, flexible and well-designed retail spaces that can evolve and be repurposed with different tenants over time and contribute positively to the public realm.

The Retail Design Manual is supplemented by a comprehensive Background Report that outlines the implications of market conditions, policy guidance, local and international case studies and retail trends on the design of retail spaces. It includes a detailed overview of the Planning Framework, Commercial District Typologies, Case Studies, Precedent Retail Guidelines from other cities and drivers of retail change.

Both the Retail Design Manual and Background Report are provided on the Study's website - <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/official-plan-guidelines/design-guidelines/retail-design/>.

Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation

The Retail Design Manual was developed collaboratively with City staff and the consultant team. The City's core team was supported by a Technical Advisory Committee consisting of City staff from City Planning, Economic Development and Culture, Building, and Municipal, Licensing and Standards.

Stakeholder Engagement

The City staff and consultant team relied on input from an extensive group of design professionals, retail experts and other stakeholders who possess expertise in different aspects of retail function, design and development to help shape the best practices. Consultations focused on ensuring that the Manual was a practical and easy to read document, and that it would be a valuable resource for a range of users, including those intimately involved in the design, development and leasing of retail spaces across the city and in different retail contexts, as well as City staff.

A total of thirteen workshops were held with a range of industry stakeholders including architects, urban designers, landscape architects, retail brokers, Business Improvement Area (BIA) organizations, retail developers and retailers, servicing consultants, retail designers, engineers, planners, economic development and heritage experts. Participants were supportive of a Retail Design Manual and recognized the importance of retail design excellence in nurturing animated public spaces. Stakeholders noted the Manual should be an inspiring document that is easy to use, concise and directive, and updated every 5 or 10 years to respond to retail sector changes. Participants noted that the Manual should focus on the interface between the public realm and retail spaces. These comments were addressed in the Manual by way of a section focused on the intersection between the retail space and public realm, and how the building façade and street work together to create a welcoming retail environment and animated, comfortable streets.

Additional feedback included the need to consider structural and back of house considerations in the Manual due to their impact on retail functionality, including unit configuration, column spacing, sound attenuation and servicing and loading. These comments were addressed through a section in the Manual focused specifically on providing guidance and information on the internal layout and functions of the retail space and elements such as lighting, mechanical, electrical and plumbing, shipping, receiving and loading and interior column spacing.

Design Review Panel

The Retail Design Manual was presented to the City's Design Review Panel (DRP), in May and November 2019. The presentation in May focused on the overall structure and content of the Manual, as well as the background work to-date. General commentary from the panelists in May showed support for the work in recognition of the importance of well-designed retail spaces at the base of mixed-use buildings in animating the public realm. As well, many of the comments from the DRP in May identified the need to address different retail contexts, incorporate an understanding of retail market conditions, consultation with industry experts, interior space functionality and operability and the interface between retail spaces and the public realm. The DRP's May comments were addressed in refinements to the Manual and Background Report, and were presented to the DRP in November.

For the November 2019 meeting, the DRP inquired about the Manual's application and use by City staff. Following the November DRP, the Manual was revised to clarify the intended audience, use and application of it. Additionally, the consulting team and City staff identified a number of next steps and recommendations directly in response to the November DRP comments on the education and training for the Manual to highlight where the Manual applies, how to use it and key considerations when reviewing development applications.

Councillor and Staff Briefings

Information sessions on the Retail Design Manual as well as the Economic Development and Culture-led Retail Main Streets Study, were held on two separate occasions for Councillors and their staff in October 2019. A total of nine staff from

various Councillors offices attended the sessions. Feedback largely centered on how to ensure a vibrant retail environment along transitioning streets and in auto-dependent areas, the need to consider market conditions, and how the Manual will be applied by City staff. The comments raised by the attendees were addressed throughout the Manual and supporting Background Report. There was also interest from the attendees on an assessment of chain format retailing and their impact on the vibrancy of main streets and success of independent businesses, which is being addressed as part of the Retail Main Streets Study.

Planning Framework

Existing planning policies, urban design guidelines, and other relevant regulations were reviewed in the preparation of the Retail Design Manual. This review focused on ensuring consistency and alignment with existing planning frameworks.

Provincial Policy

The Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 (PPS), which came into effect on May 1, 2020, provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. The PPS directs that planning authorities must accommodate an appropriate range and mix uses to meet long-term needs. The employment policies of the PPS speaks to the need for planning authorities to provide for an appropriate mix and range of employment and institutional uses, including opportunities for a diversified economic base, and encouraging compact, mixed-use development that incorporate compatible employment uses to support liveable and resilient communities.

A Place to Grow: The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2019 (the "Growth Plan (2019)") provides a framework for managing growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Policy 2.2.1.4 speaks to applying the policies of the Plan to support the achievement of complete communities that feature a diverse mix of land uses, including residential and employment uses, and convenient access to local stores, services and public service facilities.

Policy 2.2.5.3 states that "Retail and office uses will be directed to locations that support active transportation and have existing or planned transit." Furthermore, Policy 2.2.5.15 states "the retail sector will be supported by promoting compact built form and intensification of retail and service uses and areas and encouraging the integration of those uses with other land uses to support the achievement of complete communities."

Both the PPS and Growth Plan recognize the importance of conserving cultural heritage and built heritage resources under Policies 2.6.1, 2.6.3 in the PPS and 4.2.7.1 in the Growth Plan.

The best practices in the Manual support policy direction from the PPS and Growth Plan by recognizing the importance of retail uses in supporting the achievement of complete communities and vibrant streets. The Manual also provides direction for the integration of retail in a historic physical context.

Official Plan

The Official Plan recognizes that traditional shopping streets are more than a place for business. The Plan contains policies in Section 3.5.3, The Future of Retailing, describing traditional retail shopping streets as centres of community activity by encouraging quality development of a type, density and form that is compatible with the character of the area and with adjacent uses.

Policy 3.5.3.5 provides for limits on the size of ground floor stores on pedestrian shopping strips to provide local opportunities for small businesses, and maintain the safety, comfort and amenity of shopping areas.

Official Plan Amendment 231 (OPA 231) contains retail policies and non-policy text that are intended to replace Section 3.5.3 (The Future of Retailing) in the Official Plan. These Council-approved policies have been appealed to the LPAT and are not yet in force.

These policies provide guidance for pedestrian shopping areas and in particular, they:

- recognize the role of pedestrian shopping areas as centres of community activity;
- provide for limits on new retail development and store sizes in support of that role;
- recognize such limits may also function as 'triggers' for review of proposals; and
- identify matters to be addressed for applications for development that may exceed such limits.

A key element of the City's traditional main retail streets is their built form of small stores and a fine-grained rhythm of entrances and windows. This built form creates a comfortable and interesting experience for shoppers and pedestrians. The Future of Retailing policies within OPA 231 recognize the importance of these design elements, which are further elaborated on in the Retail Design Manual.

Chapter 3 of the Official Plan contains Public Realm and Built Form policies that provide guidance on a number of urban design objectives. The new Public Realm (OPA 479) and Built Form (OPA 480) policy framework was adopted by Council in December 2019 and approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in September 2020. The Public Realm policies cover matters such as: ensuring new development enhances the quality of the public realm, promoting a walkable city, the role of the public realm and the need for new public streets; and the Built Form section covers all building types and includes policies pertaining to building location and organization, the relationship between buildings and the street, transition in scale between buildings of different heights and/or intensities, the space between buildings, building articulation and design, and, indoor and outdoor amenity spaces. Additionally there are policies that speak to three building typologies – low-rise, mid-rise and tall buildings. The best practices in the Retail Design Manual build on the direction of the Plan's public realm and built form policies, and apply an additional level of detail and information as they pertain to the design of retail spaces and buildings.

Chapter 3 of the Official Plan also contains policies on Heritage Conservation. The preamble discusses the importance of heritage conservation and that "the preservation

of our cultural heritage is essential to the character of this urban and liveable city that can contribute to other social cultural, economic and environmental goals of the City". Vibrant retail helps to enhance local character and the Retail Design Manual recognizes the importance of ensuring the continued vibrancy of Toronto's historic main streets.

The Official Plan also contains Secondary Plans and Site and Area Specific policies that include policies to guide growth and change in defined areas of the city. A number of Secondary Plans and Site area Specific Policies were reviewed as part of the development of the Retail Design Manual to ensure general alignment between the best practices and policy direction; these include the Agincourt Mall Official Plan Amendment, Bloor West Avenue Study, Danforth Avenue Planning Study, Downtown Plan, Dufferin Secondary Plan, Dundas West and Roncesvalles Official Plan Amendment, the proposed Golden Mile Secondary Plan Study, Mimico by the Lake Secondary Plan, Mirvish Village Official Plan Amendment, North York Secondary Plan, Sheppard West Secondary Plan, and the Yonge Eglinton Secondary Plan.

Urban Design Guidelines

The Official Plan states that implementation plans, strategies and guidelines will help implement the Plan's objectives over time. In particular, urban design guidelines help to provide a more detailed framework for built form and public improvements in growth areas. The Retail Design Manual provides this more detailed framework as it pertains to the design and development of retail buildings and spaces.

The City has a number of Urban Design Guidelines, both city-wide and area-specific, that provide direction on public realm and built form for a variety of building or open space typologies or a specific geographic area. The Urban Design Guidelines reviewed as part of the development of the Retail Design Manual included the Avenues and Mid Rise Buildings Performance Standards, Tall Building Design Guidelines, Dufferin Street Urban Design Guidelines, and Dundas West and Roncesvalles Built Form Study.

Other Regulations

Additional City zoning by-laws and regulations were reviewed to inform the retail best practices. These including the Priority Retail Streets Zoning By-law, Boulevard Café and Marketing Display Regulations, Toronto Sign By-law, Complete Streets Guidelines, Vibrant Streets and Toronto Bird Friendly Development Guidelines.

Heritage Conservation Districts

There are a number of retail main streets in the city that interface with, or are part of, Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs). A number of HCDs were reviewed to provide alignment between direction contained in these HCDs and the best practices included in the Manual. The Retail Design Manual considered this heritage context and makes reference to the integration of new retail into this context. The HCDs reviewed included studies that are both completed and in progress such as Kensington Market, the Queen Street West, West Queen West and Historic Yonge Street.

Retail Design Manual: Use and Interpretation

The best practices in the Retail Design Manual are informative and instructive in development review, but not determinative. City staff will rely on the Manual to provide retail design guidance to applicants and designers on applications with a retail component, and continue to seek design excellence, implement the Official Plan and area-specific planning frameworks, and take meaningful steps forward towards creating complete communities.

Next Steps

The next steps focus on implementation. This includes training sessions for City Planning and divisional partners as it pertains to using the Manual to inform the review of development applications with retail uses.

The Manual was written pre-COVID and therefore did not consider additional measures the retail environment has taken to provide for precautions like social distancing and outdoor only use. In response to this, City Planning is exploring a supplement to the Manual that outlines best practices for these measures, such as retractable windows for walk-up service and curbside pick-up, and may build off the successes of recent City initiatives like CafeTO.

City Planning will also consider how the Retail Design Manual and Background Report can be inputs into broader area-specific planning studies. As well, City Planning will continue to be involved and provide input with the other related retail work Economic Development and Culture is pursuing.

Conclusion

The Retail Design Manual is a collection of best practices intended to provide guidance on developing successful ground floor retail spaces. The goal is to provide aspirational retail design best practices to inform, guide, inspire and educate architects, retail designers, City staff and the development community.

The Manual is a result of extensive policy, case study and precedent review as well as consultation with a variety of retail experts. By planning and designing great retail spaces, the quality and diversity of retail spaces across Toronto is anticipated to improve, which achieves city building and economic development objectives as well as contributing to an animated and inviting public realm.

This report recommends that City Council adopt the Retail Design Manual as contained in Attachment 1 of this report for use in the evaluation of existing and new development applications that include retail uses.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Retail Design Manual

Attachment 1: Retail Design Manual

Provided separately as a PDF and posted under the Agenda Item for Planning and Housing Committee's October 20, 2020 meeting.