

ST. LAWRENCE NEIGHBOURHOOD FOCUSED AREA URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

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The City of Toronto uses guidelines to clarify the urban design objectives of the Official Plan and zoning by-laws. They assist in the translation of policies and performance standards into a variety of three-dimensional options, for consideration by the municipality during the development approval process.

The City of Toronto Official Plan states that urban design guidelines are an important part of its implementation strategy. The focused area-specific St. Lawrence Design Guidelines outline the diversity of the various precincts in the area and create a template for sensitive development which is responsive to the unique historic character of the focused area of the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood.

These guidelines are an indication of Council’s broader planning and urban design aspirations for the St. Lawrence Focused Area. They follow the Official Plan and area specific secondary plans in outlining a broader picture for the future growth and development within the St. Lawrence and King-Parliament Neighbourhoods.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The St. Lawrence Neighbourhood community is one of Toronto's most vital and celebrated districts that defines the historic roots of the city and contributes to its distinct image. It is located in the downtown area along the former lakefront. For Toronto residents, St. Lawrence provides a year-round destination of citywide significance for shopping, dining and cultural attractions in a highly urbane, pedestrian oriented setting. The area also has a healthy mix of office, residential and commercial uses. This mix is essential in defining the Focused Area as a vibrant part of the city, which is alive with activity throughout most of the day, seven days a week. These amenities, mix of uses and location also make the Focused Area of St. Lawrence a desirable place to work and live. Because of these interests, the neighbourhood continues to experience growth and development. These urban design guidelines will help to outline the direction in which this community may develop in the future.

The goal of these guidelines is to improve the quality of the environment in the Focused Area of the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood and to ensure that the elements that contribute to the special character of the diverse parts of the area are retained and enhanced. The main planning and urban design objectives for achieving this goal include the enhancement of the areas of special character, enhancement of historic buildings and how they are viewed, and improvements and expansion of public realm areas such as parks, plazas and sidewalks.

These objectives can be achieved by:

- Providing a clear vision of the desired urban structure for the area including areas of special character, the public and private realms which will provide a framework for development.
- Providing a framework for appropriate relationships between buildings and the public realm, including open spaces, streets and public buildings.
- Identifying new and redevelopment opportunities and provide appropriate built form guidance addressing matters such as height, massing, setbacks and step-backs as well as quality of design.
- Identifying key opportunities to enhance, improve or add to the public realm including new public

spaces, landmarks, streetscapes, gateways and view terminus.

- Providing a tool that can be used as a guide to assess development proposals.
- Continuing to promote a mix of uses which contribute to the vitality of the area.

1.1 THE ROLE OF THE ST. LAWRENCE FOCUSED AREA GUIDELINES

Urban Design Guidelines are fundamental to areas of special identity such as the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Focused Area. The 2002 Official Plan is explicit in its reliance on the preparation of design guidelines to interpret and implement its broad policies on a more localized basis. Nowhere is this more important than in areas of distinct character that define the image of Toronto.

The central purpose of design guidelines is not to inhibit development or change it. On the contrary, it anticipates the area's transformation and puts in place the guidelines to shape development so as to ensure it enhances rather than diminishes the quality of the public realm. It goes without saying that protecting distinct and treasured areas, improving streetscapes, ensuring comfortable pedestrian conditions and providing animated sunlit public spaces are qualities that improve the viability of new development as much as benefiting the population that already lives, works and plays there. After all, it is often these very qualities that attract development in the first place.

The urban design guidelines are intended to serve the following central functions:

1) **Development Review:** In the context of redevelopment of the area, the Urban Design Guidelines provide the tools for a coordinated and consistent response related to the City's development review process for specific development applications. These also suggest public realm improvements as they relate to Section 37 benefits.

2) **Guidance to Developers:** The St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Focused Area Urban Design Guidelines is a public document that is available to the development community. The Guidelines are

intended to give clear guidance to the development industry, or their consultants in the preparation of a development concept in accordance with the criteria and impacts as set out in these Guidelines.

3) **Guidance to the Municipality:** The guidelines will help direct the City and prioritize public realm enhancements, streetscape improvements and the creation of new parks and open spaces.

4) **Community Improvement Plan:** The guidelines are intended to assist in the preparation of the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Community Improvement Plan. Council gave direction to prepare the Plan in October 2000. The study area for the plan is included on Figure 2: Key Plan Map. The Community Improvement Plan will identify strategies for improving the quality of life in the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Focused Area by highlighting various issues to be identified, e.g., facade improvement, street closures, new streets and pedestrian crosswalks, heritage preservation and interpretation, new parkland, railway underpass improvements, tree planting, environmental sustainability, street lighting, public realm enhancements and sidewalk widenings.

5) **Heritage Conservation District:** The St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Focused Area contains one of the largest concentrations of historic structures in the City of Toronto, including St. Lawrence Hall, the King Edward Hotel, and the Gooderham Flat Iron building. In addition to buildings of outstanding architectural merit, there are a number of solid groupings of historic structures which provide the area with an identifiable heritage character. Given these attributes, it is foreseeable that the neighbourhood could be designated as a Heritage Conservation District under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act. If this were the case, these urban design guidelines could also be used as a reference document for the Heritage Conservation District study process.

1.2 OLD TOWN

These Urban Design Guidelines make several references to the character of the area. This character is defined primarily by the architectural quality and built form scale as derived from the original historic fabric that remains intact. As demonstrated by many existing contemporary buildings, new developments that respect the historic quality and scale of the area can reinforce and enhance the distinct character of the St. Lawrence Focused Area.



Figure 1 – Map of Toronto, 1858, showing the Walks and Gardens Trust lands

Some of the original buildings within the city are found in Old Town Toronto. The following text is largely taken from The Old Town Toronto Action Plan with the permission of SEDERI (South East Downtown Economic Revitalization Initiative). Old Town Toronto is a community of distinct yet connected neighbourhoods which have a remarkable history. The area is bounded by Yonge Street to the west, Queen and Shuter Streets to the north, the Don River to the east and the railway embankment to the south. The Focused Area for these guidelines occupies the western section of Old Town Toronto.

The lands that encompass the Old Town Toronto have one of the largest concentrations of 19th Century buildings in Ontario. These lands include the original site of the Town of York, and are a tremendous heritage resource. The area's historic buildings and landscapes have the potential to serve as a unique framework for cultural and economic revitalization.

The original Old Town was on the shoreline at Front Street. Old Town Toronto's original street grid, established in 1793, has been expanded to all corners of the modern city, and still serves to connect the urban areas of the waterfront. Jarvis, Yonge, Church, Sherbourne, Parliament and Cherry Streets provide north-south linkages within and throughout the community, while the major east-west streets are Queen, Richmond, Adelaide, King, Front and The Esplanade.

The Old Town also holds many significant cultural and entertainment attractions and historical points of interest. These significant landmarks are interspersed between multi-unit residential buildings, office buildings, established commercial areas along King Street, and the restaurant and entertainment district on Front Street and The Esplanade.

Old Town Toronto is also a major tourism destination, a place where residents, workers, and visitors congregate to celebrate arts, culture and heritage. The area has significant potential to be a first-class example of a vibrant and sociable downtown live/work community.

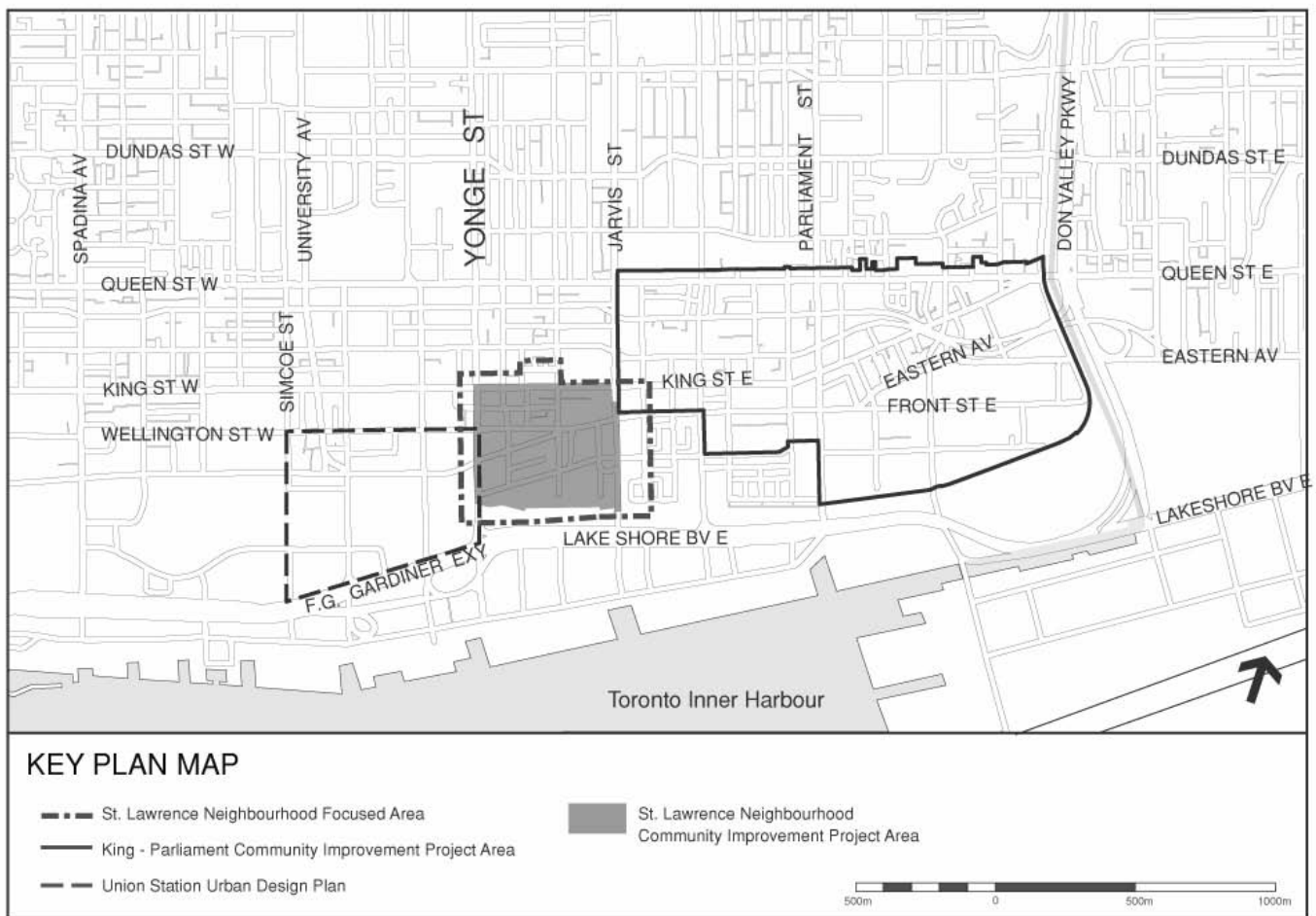
These guidelines discuss further the history of the area and the important role that heritage plays in Section 3.4.

2.0 CONTEXT

2.1 THE STUDY AREA

For the purposes of this study, the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Focused Area extends from Yonge Street to the west, King Street/Court Street to the north, George Street to the east and the rail corridor (inclusive) to the south.

Figure 2 - Key Plan Map



As mentioned earlier, the City Council adoption of the urban design guidelines will be followed by the development of a Community Improvement Plan. The City of Toronto will also continue to develop urban design guidelines for important districts in the city. One area which may warrant future guidelines is the neighbourhood immediately to the north of the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Focused Area between King and Queen Streets.

2.2 CITY OF TORONTO PLANNING DIRECTION

The City of Toronto's new Official Plan, adopted by City Council in November of 2002, identifies St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Focused Area within the Downtown and Central Waterfront Area and the land use designation is primarily Mixed Use areas.

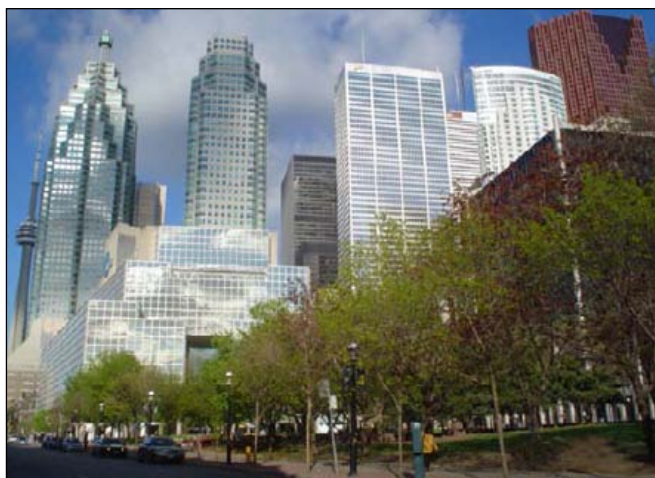


Photo 1 – Background buildings of the Financial District



Photo 2 – Consistent street wall on Front Street East

While the Downtown and Mixed Use areas are specifically identified for intensification, new development is subject to a number of standards and qualifications regarding appropriate locations, built forms, compatibility with surroundings, and contributing to the public realm. Policy 6 of Section 2.2.1 of the new Official Plan states specifically that guidelines will be developed specific to districts of historic or distinct character to ensure new development respects these contexts with respect to fit with existing streets, setbacks, heights and relationships to landmark buildings. For example, the Official Plan, Section 3.2.3 states: Built forms shall have “building massing and heights in context with, and respectful of, existing buildings and open spaces.”

2.3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles should be adhered to:

- Preserve and highlight the unique heritage character of the area
- Encourage new and preserve existing high quality architecture appropriate to the area
- Support pedestrian amenities by maintaining a human scale to development
- Maintain the identity of the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Focused Area as a unique area of the city with a distinctive character
- Expand and improve a high quality public realm including open space, parks and streetscape treatments.

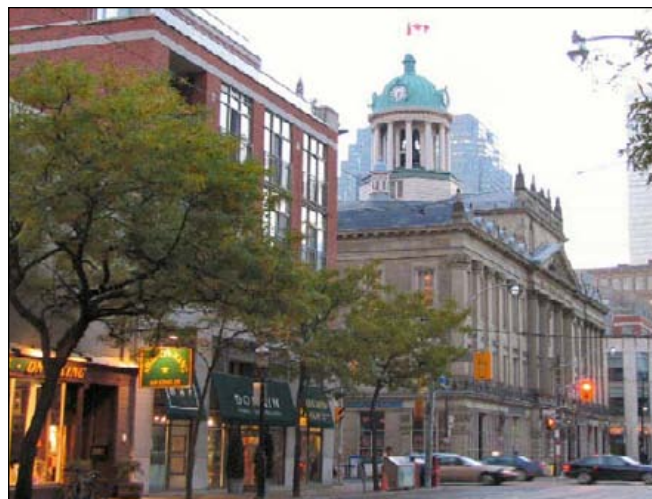


Photo 3 – Consistent scale and high quality architecture blends new and old buildings on King Street East

- Encourage the redevelopment or revitalization of under utilized sites to enhance the public realm
- Encourage a mix of uses which includes office, retail, commercial and residential
- Maintain a transition in scale from the higher height areas along Yonge Street to the pedestrian scaled environment of St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Focused Area
- Maintain the predominant pedestrian scale and building height that characterizes the area

2.4 OBJECTIVES

The following objectives have shaped the development of the Urban Design Guidelines:

1. The promotion of consistent around-the-clock and year-round active use of the Focused Area of St. Lawrence Neighbourhood. Courtyards, parks and pedestrian walkways should be the first consideration in determining an appropriate massing for development.
2. In areas where low-rise (less than 6 storeys) is predominant and it is the desired and defining built form character, new development will respect the existing scale.
3. In areas where high-rise buildings exist (such as the Yonge Street Corridor), above grade setbacks should be provided to create an appropriate street wall height to maintain a human scale at the sidewalk and to ensure the physical and

visual comfort of the pedestrian with adequate sunlight, skyview and wind conditions.

4. Higher densities and building heights within the study area should be directed towards specific corridors and areas along major arterial roads such as Yonge Street and parts of King Street East.
5. A balance of vehicular, cycling and pedestrian traffic should be maintained in the St. Lawrence Focused Area. The neighbourhood should be considered an area of “pedestrian priority” and in many instances the pedestrian realm should be enhanced. However, continued accessibility by automobile, transit and bicycle is recognized as essential to the economic viability of the area.



Photo 5 – Outdoor cafe on Front Street



Photo 4 – Consistent street wall on The Esplanade

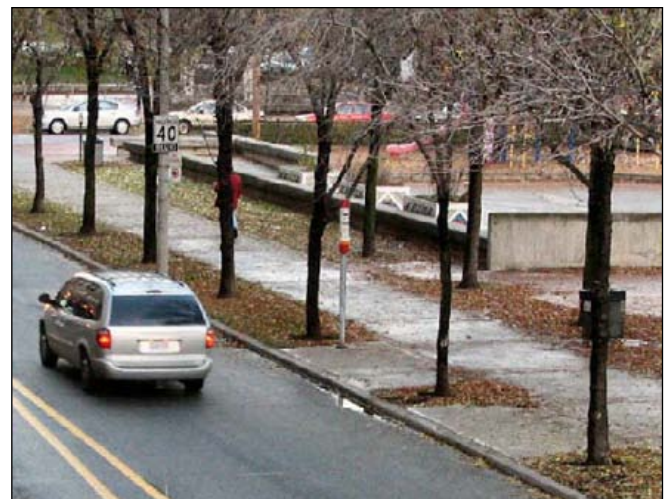


Photo 6 – Landscaped promenade on The Esplanade



Photo 7 – Existing commercial buildings on Colborne Street



Photo 8 – View terminus of St. James Cathedral

6. Providing crosswalks or boulevards where pedestrian traffic is heavy will enhance safety and pedestrian movement. Priority areas for pedestrian crossing considerations are unsignaled intersections with existing or potentially heavy pedestrian traffic such as Front Street East, Wellington Street East and King Street East at the intersections of Scott Street and Victoria Street.
7. Require the preservation and adaptive reuse of heritage and character buildings.
8. New development should respect the current use of existing older buildings that contribute to the character area.
9. The ‘greening’ of streets and open spaces should be expanded to all parts of the study area.
10. A network of publicly accessible through-block pedestrian ways, forecourts, courtyards and open spaces should be integrated throughout the area.
11. Excellence in architectural, landscape, signage, lighting and civic design should be promoted.
12. Encourage the integration of public art, including opportunities to convey aspects of the local culture throughout the area.
13. Implement environmentally sustainable designs including the use of green rooftops for new developments and redevelopment of existing structures.
14. Active at grade uses should be provided in new developments to promote a dynamic, interesting and safe street life.
15. Portions of new residential development that do not provide retail or active uses at grade should incorporate residential units with direct street access to the greatest extent possible.
16. Weather protection elements, such as glass canopies should be provided adjacent to sidewalks and other pedestrian areas where possible and desirable.
17. Sites that terminate view corridors or serve as gateways should incorporate landmark design and signature art or architectural treatments.
18. Incorporate appropriate forms of signage to complement specific character areas such as “Old Town”.
19. The facade of parking structures should incorporate lighting, signage, artist installations, vines, trellises, and other architectural elements.
20. Location of parking and service access for new development should, wherever possible, minimize through-traffic and street presence. Access should not generally be located at a terminus or gateway location.
21. Design innovation and excellence should be promoted.
22. Above-grade parking in the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Focused Area is discouraged.