



# MID-RISE BUILDING DESIGN GUIDELINES

**DRAFT**  
URBAN DESIGN  
GUIDELINES

**2024**





# Land Acknowledgement

We give thanks for, respect, and honour the land and the Indigenous peoples who have been its stewards for millennia. This document recognizes the need for reconciliation with Indigenous communities and acknowledges the importance of integrating Indigenous cultures and practices into city planning.

For time immemorial, the land which is now the City of Toronto has been home to Indigenous peoples. The City acknowledges it is located on the traditional territories of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. These territories are currently covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

# Table of Contents

## INTRODUCTION

1

Evolution of Mid-Rise Buildings in Toronto	1
Evolution of the Mid-Rise Building Guidelines	4
Defining Mid-Rise Buildings	4
Purpose of the Guidelines	5
Guiding Principles	6
Design Excellence	
Sustainable Design	
Heritage Conservation	
Organization of the Guidelines	9
How and Where the Guidelines Apply	9

## 1.0 SITE CONTEXT

11

1.1. CONTEXT ANALYSIS	12
1.1.1. Main Street Context	
1.1.2. Residential Context	
1.2. CULTURAL HERITAGE	18
1.2.1. Individual Heritage Properties (Part IV)	
1.2.2. Heritage Conservation Districts (Part V)	
1.3. MID-RISE SITE TYPOLOGIES	24
1.3.1. Site Planning for Deep and/or Large Sites	
1.3.2. Site Planning for Through Lot Sites	
1.4. SUNLIGHT, WIND, AND COMFORT	32

## 2.0 SITE ORGANIZATION

33

2.1. BUILDING PLACEMENT AND ADDRESS	34
2.2 PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE OPEN SPACES	37
2.3 SHARED INDOOR AND OUTDOOR AMENITY SPACES	40
2.4 PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLING CONNECTIONS	42
2.5 SITE SERVICING, ACCESS, AND PARKING	44
2.6. PUBLIC ART	47



## 3.0 MID-RISE BUILDING DESIGN 49

3.1. MID-RISE BUILDING HEIGHT	50
3.2. STREET PROPORTION AND FRONT FAÇADE	52
3.2.1. Sun/ Shadow Performance	
3.2.2. Streetwall Height and Pedestrian Perception Step-Back	
3.2.3. Streetwall Design	
3.2.4. Alignment	
3.3 REAR TRANSITION	63
3.3.1. Rear Transition to Buildings	
3.3.2. Rear Transition to Parks & Open Spaces	
3.3.3. Rear Transition for Shallow Sites	
3.4 SIDE YARD SETBACKS	72
3.4.1. Limiting Blank Side Walls	
3.4.2. Side Windows	
3.5 BUILDING WIDTH	79
3.6 GROUND FLOOR HEIGHT	82
3.7 BALCONIES AND PROJECTIONS	83
3.8 ROOFS AND ROOFSCAPES	85
3.9 EXTERIOR BUILDING MATERIALS	86
3.10 FAÇADE DESIGN AND ARTICULATION	88

## 4.0 PEDESTRIAN REALM 91

4.1 SIDEWALK ZONES	92
4.2 STREETSCAPES	94

## **5.0 GLOSSARY**

**99**

## **APPENDIX A**

**105**







# **INTRODUCTION**

**Evolution of Mid-Rise Buildings in Toronto**

**Evolution of the Mid-Rise Building Guidelines**

**Defining Mid-Rise Buildings**

**Purpose of the Guidelines**

**Guiding Principles**

**Design Excellence**

**Sustainable Design**

**Heritage Conservation**

**Organization of the Guidelines**

**How and Where the Guidelines Apply**



# Introduction

The City of Toronto is the fastest growing City in North America and is growing at varying scales. Low-rise, Mid-rise, and Tall buildings add to the built environment and provide a variety of options and choice for people to live, work, learn, and play within.

## Evolution of Mid-Rise Buildings in Toronto

Mid-rise buildings have been a defining feature of Toronto's urban landscape since the early 20th century, particularly in areas like King-Spadina, where the heritage buildings showcase this architectural legacy. These adaptable structures initially served industrial and commercial purposes, evolving over time into office buildings, residential apartments, and mixed-use buildings. This transformation underscores their capacity to respond to the city's changing needs while conserving the character and identity of these neighbourhoods.

Toronto's first mid-rise residential apartment building was completed in 1904, marking the city's initial move towards apartment living in line with trends in cities like New York and Chicago. By 1907, apartment development had grown significantly due to Toronto's doubling population and rising land values. By the 1950s, building technology had shifted, allowing concrete-form structures to rise, leading to a new generation of mid-rise apartment buildings. These buildings, primarily single-use residential structures, were built on large or deep lots and often surrounded by soft landscaping.

The design of these mid-rise buildings strikes a balance between height, density, and a comfortable human-scale, making them an integral part of



Figure 1: Heritage property at 317 Adelaide Street West, constructed in 1929.



Figure 2: Heritage property at 214 King Street West, constructed in 1917.





Figure 3: 1307 Wilson Avenue, constructed in 1961.

Toronto's urban fabric. They create vibrant, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, fostering a sense of community while accommodating growth. Their relatively modest height allows for ample sunlight, access to skyview and air circulation, contributing to a more livable and sustainable environment.

The City's Official Plan states that Toronto's future is one of growth, of rebuilding, of reurbanizing and of regenerating the City within an existing urban structure. Future growth within Toronto will continue to be steered to areas which are well served by transit, and contain a mix of uses and services to provide for the daily needs of residents. In Chapter 2 of the Official Plan, Avenues are described as "important corridors along major streets where reurbanization is anticipated and encouraged." This reurbanization aims to provide increased housing and job opportunities, enhance the pedestrian experience, improve street aesthetics, boost local shopping, and strengthen transit services.

In 2010, the City of Toronto adopted the Mid-Rise Performance Standards, guiding how mid-rise buildings could be designed. New mid-rise developments were to fit within the context of the Avenue main streets. The height of these buildings is determined by the width of the adjacent street right-of-way, —meaning mid-rise heights should generally not exceed the width of the street they face. In Toronto, where streets are narrower (20 metres wide), mid-rise buildings are typically 6 storeys. On wider arterial streets, mid-rise

buildings can rise up to 11 storeys. These buildings often feature step-backs or terraces at upper levels to reduce their apparent height from street level, allowing for sunlight and sky views on the sidewalks. Mixed-use developments, with retail on the ground floor and residential units above, became common. Many of Toronto's Avenues, including portions of Queen Street East and West, The Queensway, Kingston Road, and Sheppard Avenue, have become vibrant hubs for mid-rise developments.



Figure 4: 2A Queensbury Avenue, constructed in 2016.

In September 2020, Official Plan Amendment 480 (Built Form) came into force recognizing three scales of building types – Low-Rise, Mid-Rise, and Tall – for residential, office and mixed-use intensification as having emerged in the recent period of development. A number of mid-rise policies were approved through this Official Plan review, including policies about mid-rise heights, street proportion, daylight and privacy, corner sites, and deep sites.

Mid-rise building design is evolving in response to climate action and sustainable design practices, incorporating innovations such as mass timber and prefabricated construction. As energy efficiency, carbon footprint reduction, and optimized building layouts become increasingly essential, these factors are reshaping the approach to mid-rise form and function.



Technological advancements and the economic benefits of sustainable construction have also led to simpler, more efficient building forms. This shift supports both environmental goals and streamlined construction processes, contributing to more resilient and adaptable urban developments.

Across decades, mid-rise buildings have played a significant role in shaping Toronto's urban fabric. These buildings offer an ideal scale for urban streets—tall enough to create a sense of urban density, but low enough to allow access to sunlight and views of the sky. Mid-rise buildings support vibrant pedestrian environments with active ground-floor uses, such as shops, restaurants, and services. They also contribute to a more sustainable future for the city.

## Evolution of the Mid-Rise Building Guidelines

In 2008, Toronto's City Planning Division initiated the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study to provide design guidance for mid-rise buildings. The Mid-Rise Performance Standards from this study (with the exception of Standard 5B) were adopted by City Council in July 2010. City Council also directed City Planning to encourage the implementation of the Official Plan's vision for Avenues and to monitor the Performance Standards.

In 2016, an addendum to the Mid-Rise Performance Standards was adopted by City Council. This update clarified the use of the standards and was based on the results of the monitoring period. The addendum is now used alongside the 2010 Performance Standards when evaluating development applications for mid-rise buildings.

This updated city-wide “Mid-rise Building Design Guidelines” document consolidates and builds upon previous guidelines to establish a new, unified framework. Together with area-specific urban design guidelines, it provides a comprehensive set of guidelines for evaluating mid-rise building development applications across Toronto.

## Defining Mid-Rise Buildings

Mid-rise buildings are a transit-supportive form of development that provides a level of intensification at a scale between low-rise and tall building forms. Mid-rise building heights are contextual and are informed by the width of the right-of-way onto which they front. In Toronto, where streets vary in width from 16.5 metres to over 45 metres, mid-rise buildings may vary in height between 5 and 14 storeys for residential uses and mixed uses, or fewer for office uses, depending on the floor to floor heights of the building and on the width of the adjacent right-of-way it faces.

Mid-rise buildings contribute to a vibrant urban environment through their moderate scale, predictable street proportions, and ability to allow access to sunlight and sky views. These buildings are well-suited to supporting high-quality, accessible open spaces. While some mid-rise buildings may have a single use, such as residential or office, many contain a mix of uses, including retail, office, community services, and residential spaces.

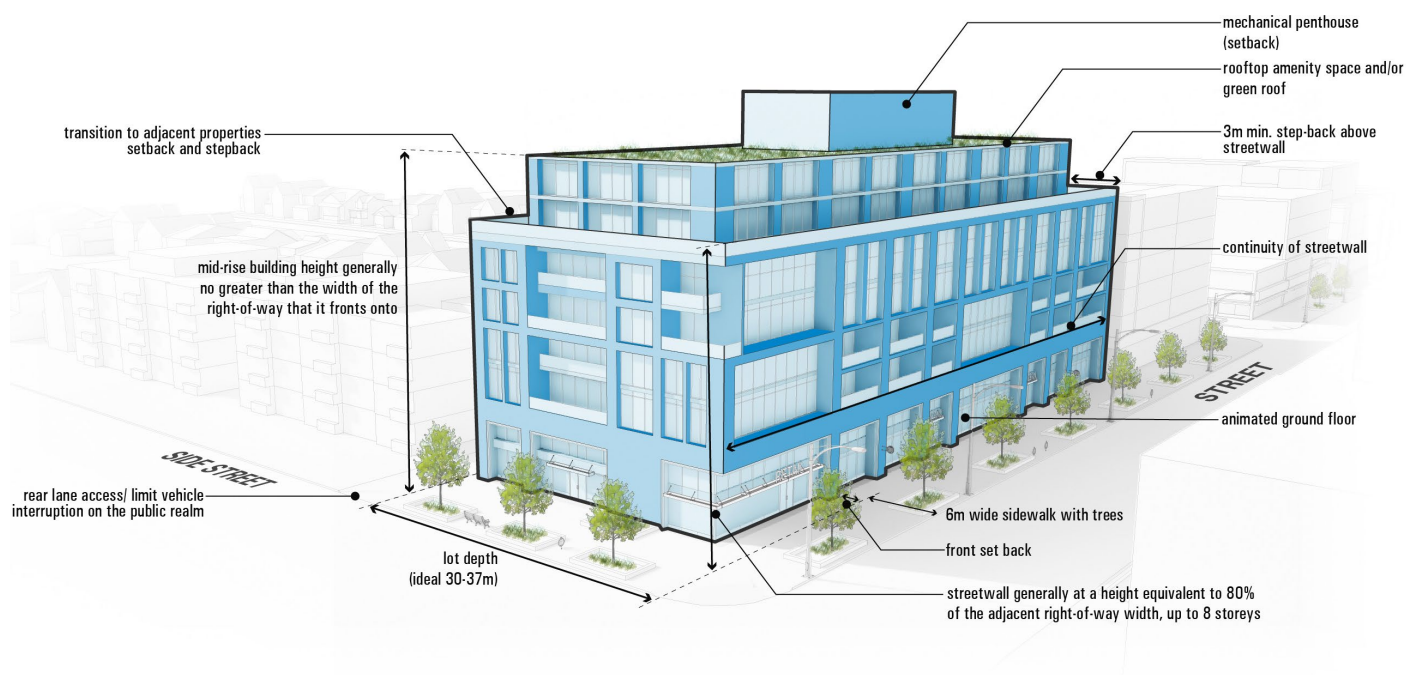


Figure 5: 3D diagram illustrating the key elements of the guidelines.

## Purpose of the Guidelines

The purpose of the Guidelines is to illustrate how the public realm and built form policy objectives of the Official Plan can be addressed by:

- identifying strategies to enhance the quality of the living environment through improved spatial relationships, design, and materials;
- establishing a balance between protecting the quality of public realm spaces and heritage features while allowing for appropriate infill development and intensification; and
- providing guidance to citizens and stakeholders, particularly land developers, planners, urban designers, architects, and landscape architects, and City staff in the creation and evaluation of development proposals.



## Guiding Principles

The Guidelines do not determine where mid-rise buildings are permitted. Rather, they assist with the implementation of the City's Official Plan policies to help to ensure that mid-rise buildings, are located and organized to fit with their existing and planned context. The Mid-rise Building Design Guidelines provide specific and often measurable directions related to the following guiding principles:

- Promote sustainable practices to achieve climate resilience and carbon reduction goals;
- Promote architectural and urban design excellence, innovation, longevity, and creative expression with visionary design, high-quality materials, and leading-edge construction methods;
- Encourage the development of mid-rise buildings to expand housing options for residents and promote cost-effective building design and construction methods to reduce development barriers, making housing more accessible and affordable;
- Promote harmonious fit and compatibility with the existing and planned context, emphasizing relationships to surrounding buildings, parks, and open spaces;
- Explore opportunities, in collaboration with First Nations and Indigenous communities, to celebrate Indigenous cultures and heritage;
- Conserve and integrate on-site and adjacent heritage properties so that new mid-rise buildings are sympathetic to, and compatible with, the heritage property;
- Create a safe, comfortable, accessible, vibrant, and attractive public realm and pedestrian environment;
- Have good, predictable street proportion, allow for access to sunlight in the spring and autumn, have open views to the sky from the street, and limit and mitigate pedestrian level wind impacts;
- Respond appropriately to prominent sites and landmarks, and significant views from the public realm; and
- Ensure high-quality living and working conditions, including access to public and private open space, interior daylighting, natural ventilation, and privacy for building occupants.

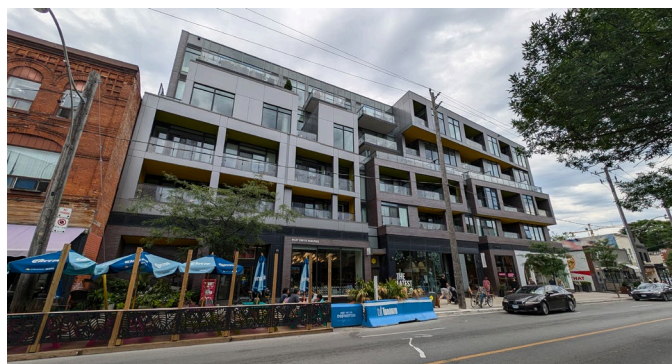


Figure 6: Examples of recently constructed mid-rise buildings, 109 Ossington Avenue & 875 Queen Street East.

## Design Excellence

Mid-rise buildings play an important role in defining the image of Toronto's Avenues and select Apartment Neighbourhoods, and should embody design excellence. Mid-rise buildings will reflect design excellence and innovation through the effective use of resources, high-quality materials, innovative and sustainable building design and construction, and through a sensitive and thoughtful response to the existing and planned context.

## Sustainable Design

Sustainable design is an approach to developing sites and buildings to be less resource intensive and to improve the economic, social, and natural environment we live in.

Sustainable design involves technical aspects relating to building performance, alternative energy supply, materials and construction methods, water management, and the quality of the internal environment. Mid-rise buildings should be compact and designed as efficient building envelopes and embrace sustainable building technologies and materials such as mass timber, modular and prefabricated construction to reduce energy use and embodied carbon.

There are also site design aspects, including landscaping, building organization and facade design that addresses directional orientation for maximum passive solar gain, which can be applied to improve both the adjacent pedestrian realm comfort and the energy performance of buildings.

Sustainable design measures should be identified at the project's initial or site planning stage when fundamental design decisions are being made, followed by an integrated design process ensuring that all design and construction disciplines are involved to achieve better results.

The City of Toronto both requires and encourages sustainable design through the Official Plan and the Toronto Green Standard (TGS). The TGS sets out performance measures for buildings and sites and specifies strategies that can be used to achieve cost-effective, environmentally- and socially-responsible results.

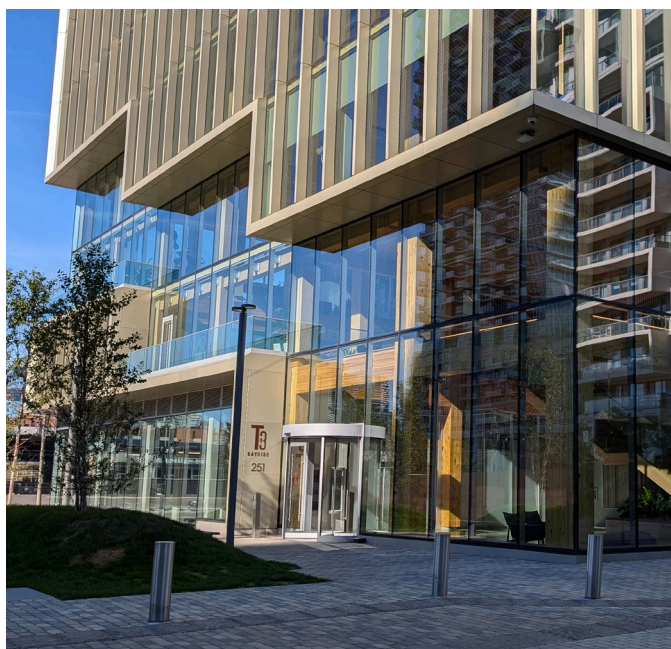


Figure 7: Example of a mass timber mid-rise building, 251 Queens Quay East.



## Heritage Conservation

The City of Toronto values its heritage properties and requires that new developments on, or adjacent to, properties on the Heritage Register conserve the cultural heritage values, attributes, integrity, and character of those properties. Development should be consistent with accepted principles of good heritage conservation and the City's Official Plan Heritage Policies (Section 3.1.6).

New development should strive for the long-term protection, integration, and re-use of heritage resources. Heritage properties should inform the scale and contextual treatment of new developments. When well-designed and appropriately sited in the context, mid-rise buildings can positively contribute to certain historical settings.

Where a development is within a Heritage Conservation District (HCD), mid-rise buildings must conform to the HCD Plan's policies and guidelines specific to that district. HCDs are special areas with a concentration of cultural heritage resources and distinct heritage character. HCD Plans and Guidelines are designed to ensure that the district's heritage significance and character is conserved and enhanced.



Figure 8: Example of heritage conservation in mid-rise buildings.



## Organization of the Guidelines

The Mid-Rise Building Design Guidelines are organized into the following sections:

-  Introduction
-  1.0 Site Context
-  2.0 Site Organization
-  3.0 Mid-rise Building Design
-  4.0 Pedestrian Realm
-  5.0 Glossary

Design guidelines with supporting illustrations, photos, rationales, and select related references, such as Official Plan policies and the Toronto Green Standard performance measures, are provided in Sections 1.0, 3.0 and 4.0.

Section 5.0 Glossary provides terms and definitions.

## How and Where the Guidelines Apply

The Mid-Rise Building Design Guidelines are intended to be read together with, and to implement the relevant Official Plan policies, applicable Zoning By-laws, Heritage Conservation District Plans, area-specific Urban Design Guidelines, the Toronto Green Standard, as well as any other applicable regulations, policies, and guidelines. The Guidelines apply to the design, review, and approval of new mid-rise developments. They will be applied through the evaluation of development proposals and design alternatives in Official Plan Amendments, Zoning By-law Amendments, Plans of Subdivision, and Site Plan Control applications.

The Guidelines are intended to provide a degree of certainty and clarity of common interpretation; however, as guidelines, they should also be afforded some flexibility in application, particularly when

looked at cumulatively and be balanced against broad city building objectives. In some cases, not all guidelines can be met in full; however a development may be acceptable when it achieves the objectives of the Official Plan. The Guidelines should be weighed across the board with other City guidelines to determine whether a development application has successfully met the overall intent of the applicable guidelines, policies, and the Official Plan.

The Guidelines are periodically reviewed and may be revised from time to time, to reflect new findings or study recommendations that have an impact on the effective evaluation of mid-rise building applications.

This page is intentionally left blank



# **1.0 SITE CONTEXT**

## **1.1. CONTEXT ANALYSIS**

### **1.1.1. Main Street Context**

### **1.1.2. Residential Context**

## **1.2. CULTURAL HERITAGE**

### **1.2.1. Individual Heritage Properties (Part IV)**

### **1.2.2. Heritage Conservation Districts (Part V)**

## **1.3. MID-RISE SITE TYPOLOGIES**

### **1.3.1. Site Planning for Deep and/or Large Sites**

### **1.3.2. Site Planning for Through-Lot Sites**

## **1.4. SUNLIGHT, WIND, AND COMFORT**



## 1.1. CONTEXT ANALYSIS

**Evaluate the existing and planned context and consider on a site-by-site basis how the proposed mid-rise building responds to the patterns, opportunities, and challenges of the surrounding context and broader area.**

Within the Planning Rationale, include a “walkable” context analysis, that uses text and graphics to illustrate the proposal at an appropriate scale, including but not limited to:

- a. Official Plan land use designations and zoning permissions
- b. 250m and 500m walksheds from the site
- c. general layout and dimensions of streets, blocks, parks and public or private open spaces
- d. area amenities and destinations (e.g. community centres, trails, libraries, schools, retail areas)
- e. existing and planned pedestrian/cycling routes
- f. existing and potential heritage properties and Heritage Conservation Districts
- g. transit routes, stations, and stops, including distance to rapid transit nodes.

Include a Block Context Plan based on the Development Guide Terms of Reference requirements.

For larger or more complex areas with multiple properties and/or buildings, a master plan may be required. In addition to the guidelines above, the master plan should include:

- a. a vision for the development of the entire site area, incorporating a hierarchy of streets and open spaces with characteristics based on their role as a place and as part of the movement network;
- b. municipal servicing, vehicular circulation and major utility connections. Include shared

systems such as district community energy when appropriate;

- c. a range of unit sizes, including the provision of larger units suitable for families;
- d. where possible, a percentage of the proposed units designed as universally accessible with a barrier-free connection from the public sidewalk; and
- e. a phasing plan, schedule and interim landscape plan where two or more construction phases are involved.

---

### Rationale

Context refers to the setting for a development, including both the existing physical surroundings and the planned vision for the future of the area. The planned context includes relevant planning regulations and policies that apply to the site, most notably the Official Plan land use designation(s) and zoning controls. The intent of the context analysis is to identify patterns and opportunities, and to demonstrate how the proposed development will fit within and appropriately respond to its context.

The 250- and 500- metre radii are generally accepted measures for “walkability” and are roughly equivalent to a 5- and 10-minute walk. The intent of the context analysis at a “walkable” scale is to develop an understanding of how the proposed development will fit within and reinforce existing or planned built form patterns, while responding appropriately to changes in land use and scale.

The block context analysis will also be used to determine what amenities, community facilities, and public realm elements may need to be provided around or within the building site to achieve a high-quality living environment.

A Master Plan provides a planning and design framework to guide the incremental development of larger or more complex areas with multiple buildings, new streets, parks and open spaces. The Plan should provide a vision for the development of the entire site area, including how new streets, pedestrian and cycling routes, parks, and publicly accessible and private open spaces will be organized. When there is a Secondary Plan or Site and Area Specific Policy that applies to the site, with associated Context or Precinct Plans that includes comparable information and detail, a Master Plan may not be required.



#### **Official Plan Reference:**

2.2 Structuring Growth in the City | 2.2.3 Avenues: Reurbanizing Arterial Corridors | 2.3.1 Healthy Neighbourhoods | 2.4 Bringing the City Together | 3.1.1 The Public Realm | 3.1.3 Built Form | 3.1.6 Heritage Resources | 3.3 Building New Neighbourhoods | 3.4 The Natural Environment | 4.1 Neighbourhoods | 4.2 Apartment Neighbourhoods | 4.5 Mixed Use Areas | 5.1.3 Site Plan Control

### 1.1.1. MAIN STREET CONTEXT

Main street contexts are typically defined by a continuous, pedestrian-scale streetwall with occasional breaks for mid-block connections, parks or open spaces. The fine-grained a streetwall is articulated by a rhythm of narrow lot frontages and storefronts with recessed entrances and cornices and sign bands, creating a datum line.



Figure 1.1.1: Example of a mid-rise building within a main street context.

Typical characteristics of main street contexts include:

- Retail, office and institutional uses on the ground floor facing the street;
- Fine-grain unit entrances accessed from the street frontage;
- Buildings built to or close to the front property lines;
- Buildings built to all side property lines;
- Upper floor step-backs starting at the sixth floor or lower determined by the surrounding context; and
- Loading, servicing, and parking access via the side street or laneway at the rear of the property.



---

## Rationale

The characteristics of mid-rise buildings are determined by their various uses and surrounding contexts. Analyzing the existing and planned context is essential for designing the appropriate mid-rise building to fit into the surrounding context.

In Toronto, sections of major streets such as Queen Street East, and West the Queensway, and Danforth Avenue are characterized by continuous retail, office and institutional uses. Existing buildings on main streets are typically built to the front and side property lines, forming a continuous streetscape defined by fine-grained built form and a low-scale streetwall. Loading, servicing and parking access are generally provided via side streets or rear laneways. In this context, mid-rise buildings often feature lower floors built to the front and side property lines, with the upper floors incorporating step-backs, as determined by the surrounding context.

There are also emerging main streets identified through the policy framework. The mid-rise buildings along sections of these streets, like Sheppard Avenue East and West, and Kingston Road feature retail, office and institutional uses on the ground floor, with continuous streetwalls that reinforce a pedestrian scale streetscape. Some emerging main streets are also characterized by generous landscaped setbacks.

## 1.1.2. RESIDENTIAL CONTEXT

**Residential contexts are typically defined by a streetwall that is not continuous, but instead includes regular landscaped breaks between buildings to establish a pavilion rhythm along the street. The streetscape is expanded with landscaped front yard setbacks and breaks between buildings occur regularly and may also include mid-block connections, parks, and open spaces.**



Figure 1.1.2: Example of a mid-rise building in a residential context.

Typical characteristics of residential contexts include:

- Active residential uses, such as townhouse or garden units with individual entrances on the ground floor facing the street;
- Small-scale non-res uses, such as cafes, community rooms or local service shops on the ground floor that serve both building residents and the local community;
- Generous landscaped setback in the front yard, allowing for the opportunity to plant opportunity to plant additional trees;
- Windows on all elevations to maximize residential units' comfort and avoid blank Façades; and
- Loading, servicing, and parking access via the side street or at the rear of the property.

## Rationale

On streets where retail at grade is not required and residential uses are permitted, existing residential apartments often have generous landscaped setbacks in the front yards. Mid-rise buildings in these residential areas should incorporate similar landscaped setbacks, ideally including a second row of trees to create a buffer between the public and private realms. Ground floor townhouses or garden units with individual entrances are encouraged to face the streets, and buildings should feature windows on side elevations to provide natural light and ventilation to the residential units while avoiding blank façades.



Figure 1.1.3: Example of at-grade residential streetscape treatment.



## 1.2. CULTURAL HERITAGE

**All mid-rise developments are to conform to the Official Plan's heritage conservation policies and other applicable policies and guidelines and be sensitively integrated with heritage buildings within their context.**

### Rationale

Heritage conservation plays an integral role in city planning as a powerful values-based approach to city- building, helping convey what makes Toronto unique. Cultural heritage is widely understood to be an important component of sustainable development and place-making, and Toronto City Council is acting to ensure the ongoing conservation of significant heritage resources and areas.

Cultural heritage resources are protected and managed as part of planning for future growth under the Provincial Planning Statement. Heritage conservation is enabled through the Ontario Heritage Act. The Provincial Planning Statement (2024) requires that cultural heritage and archaeological resources, identified as key provincial interests, be conserved. It provides specific direction for the protection of built heritage resources, cultural heritage landscapes, archaeological resources, and areas of archaeological potential, both on development sites and where development is proposed on adjacent properties. Additionally, it emphasizes that cultural heritage and archaeology contribute to a 'sense of place'.

The Ontario Heritage Act (OHA) is the enabling legislation that allows municipalities to protect heritage resources, including buildings, districts and archaeological resources. It regulates how municipal councils can identify and safeguard heritage resources, and is supported by accompanying regulations, such as Ontario Regulation 9/06, which provides the criteria for determining cultural heritage value. The City of Toronto's Official Plan

implements the provincial policy framework and provides policies to guide decision-making within the city. Section 3.1.6 of the Official Plan outlines policies pertaining to heritage conservation for both individual heritage properties, designated under Part IV of the OHA, and properties located within Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs), designated under Part V of the OHA. It also provides direction on how heritage resources should be maintained and integrated into new developments.

The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (Standards and Guidelines) provide sound, practical guidance to achieve good conservation practice, establishing a consistent, pan-Canadian set of conservation principles and guidelines. Adopted by Toronto City Council in 2008, the Standards and Guidelines offer results-oriented guidance for sound decision-making when planning for, intervening on, and using historic places. The Official Plan references the Standards and Guidelines as a key guidance document, requiring heritage properties to be conserved and maintained consistent with these principles.

The following guidelines outline the requirements for new development:

- On, or adjacent to, individual heritage properties (Part IV)
- Within, or adjacent to, Heritage Conservation Districts (Part V)

Moreover, building design should be sympathetic and sensitive to the historic context and existing fabric. Guidance on sensitive development is provided in various sections of Section 3.0 of this document.

---



**Official Plan Reference:**

- 2.2.1: Downtown: The Heart of Toronto
- 2.2.3 Avenues: Reurbanizing Arterial Corridors
- 3.1.3 Built Form
- 3.1.6 Heritage Conservation



**Related Guidelines:**

- Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada
-

## 1.2.1. INDIVIDUAL HERITAGE PROPERTIES (PART IV)

**Where development is on, or adjacent to, heritage properties, conserve the heritage attributes of the property, be sensitive to the surrounding context, and avoid negatively impacting heritage properties.**

- a. New development on, or adjacent to, heritage properties will require additional considerations, requirements, and design solutions to conserve and maintain the cultural heritage value, heritage attributes, and historic character of the heritage properties.
- b. The design approach may include additional step-backs, at a lower height, informed by a Heritage Impact Assessment, to provide a varied a streetwall and maintain the legibility and prominence of adjacent heritage properties and historic streetwalls.
- c. Mitigation measures should be taken to ensure that heritage properties are conserved and not negatively impacted.
- d. New development should be designed to be compatible with the scale, form, and massing of adjacent heritage properties, while respecting the prevailing historic a streetwall and surrounding context.
- e. Negative impacts on the three-dimensional integrity and character of heritage properties, as well as their prominence within the existing context, should be minimized.
- f. New development adjacent to heritage properties should be generally set back to respect the existing setback conditions of the adjacent heritage property.
- g. New development should reference the vertical and horizontal articulations, proportions, and solid-to-void ratios of adjacent heritage properties, historic streetwalls, and the surrounding context.
- h. Views to heritage landmarks should be conserved, and new developments should not obstruct these views.



Figure 1.2.1: Adaptive reuse of the former Waterworks building at 497 Richmond Street West (2023).



Figure 1.2.2: Adaptive reuse of the former Waterworks building at 497 Richmond Street West (2023).



---

## Rationale

The key piece of legislation governing heritage conservation in Ontario is the Ontario Heritage Act (OHA), which was created to support the conservation, protection, and preservation of heritage resources across the province. The OHA enables municipalities to conserve cultural heritage resources primarily through the designation of individual properties under Part IV and designation of HCDs under Part V.

Certain areas of the city contain a higher concentration of heritage resources than others, but all heritage properties should be considered where redevelopment occurs on, or adjacent to, these sites. Many areas within the city have not yet been fully surveyed for heritage resources, and the City's Heritage Register is continually being updated. For the most up-to-date information on heritage properties, the City's Heritage Planning unit should be consulted. These guidelines ensure that heritage properties are protected and carefully considered during redevelopment along the Avenues.



### Official Plan Reference:

3.1.6 Heritage Conservation

## 1.2.2. HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (PART V)

**Conserve and maintain the heritage character and cultural heritage values of HCDs to ensure that new developments are compatible with the district's heritage attributes and historic character.**



Figure 1.2.3: Parkdale Main Street HCD - Queen Street West at Cowan Avenue (2022).

- a. Development within an HCD should conform to the policies and guidelines established in the HCD plan for properties within the district (see City's website: [Heritage Conservation Districts – City of Toronto](#))
- b. New mid-rise development will be permitted in HCDs, provided it is in conformity with the policies and guidelines outlined in the individual HCD plans.
- c. Where applicable, the policies and guidelines of HCD plans will prevail in the event of a conflict.
- d. New development adjacent to HCDs should conserve and maintain the heritage value, heritage attributes, and historic character of the adjacent district.

## Rationale

Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs) are an important part of the heritage planning framework in Ontario and the City of Toronto. They serve to ensure that historically significant areas are protected and reflect Toronto as a place and people through their heritage values and characteristics. HCDs are maintained so that every Torontonians, present and future, can appreciate and take pride in the City's rich cultural heritage.

The City of Toronto designates HCDs to conserve places that reflect Toronto's rich history and that contribute to its livability and appeal as a multicultural, sustainable, and equitable city. HCD Plans are valued for their ability to provide contextual, place-based policies and guidelines that conserve and enhance historic areas through the long-term management of change. By conserving our significant and historic areas, we recognize the importance of history and context within our growing city. As some areas experience rapid intensification, it is crucial to manage change in defined areas that hold cultural heritage value and reflect significant periods of the City's history and development.

New developments and redevelopments within HCDs must conform to the policies and guidelines of the HCD where they are located. In the event of any conflict, the HCD Plan's policies and guidelines will prevail.



Figure 1.2.4: Example illustrating the policies & guidelines for development on contributing properties - Parkdale Main Street HCD Plan.



Figure 1.2.5: Example illustrating the policies and guidelines for development on non-contributing properties - Parkdale Main Street HCD Plan.



### Official Plan Reference:

3.1.6 Heritage Conservation



## 1.3. SITE TYPOLOGY ANALYSIS

**Evaluate the site conditions to ensure that the new development fits well and responds appropriately to the patterns, opportunities, and challenges within the surrounding context.**

### Rationale

Toronto features a variety of mid-rise site conditions, such as deep vs. shallow sites, large vs. narrow sites, midblock sites vs. corner sites, and sites with or without rear lanes. Many parts of the city also include variation in topography resulting in sloping sites and changes in grade which need to be incorporated into the design solution.

Among these factors, lot depths have the most impact to the development potential of mid-rise buildings. The table below outlines the ideal lot depth in relation to the adjacent Right of Way Width and the building height.

This guideline considers the ideal lot depth for developing an efficient and well-designed mid-rise building. The ideal lot depth for a mid-rise building site increases with the width of the right-of-way and the corresponding height of the building in order to accommodate the appropriate setbacks, step-backs and separation distances within the site. Table 1 illustrates the ideal minimum lot depths on the prevailing right-of-way widths across the city.

The ideal lot depth is the preferred minimum lot depth required to support the intended development that maximizes the efficiency of a site while considering all guidelines in this document, including minimum rear yard setbacks and a front Façade designed to meet the five hours of sunlight requirement on the street boulevard. The ideal lot depths in Table 1 assume a development comprises a standard double-loaded corridor building oriented parallel to the street, with an upper storey depth of 18 metres. Properties on the

north side of east-west and diagonal streets with no shadow impact on the adjacent street may be able to achieve these requirements on shallower lot depths, based on site-specific conditions.

Understanding the site conditions early in the planning process is crucial for applying appropriate guidelines. Shallow sites may require the assembly of additional lots from adjacent neighbouring properties to accommodate mid-rise development. Deep and/or large sites can lead to a variety of design outcomes for mid-rise buildings. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Through-lot sites with dual frontages are becoming more viable for mid-rise development due to the City's Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods (EHON) major streets study and Avenues Policy Review work. These sites also require innovative, and site-specific design solutions.

**Table 1: Ideal Lot Depth in relation to the adjacent Right-of-Way Width and Building Height\***

R.O.W. WIDTH (Metres)	IDEAL LOT DEPTH (Metres)	BUILDING HEIGHT*	
		Metres	Storeys(Approximate)
20	30	20	6
27	34	27	8
30	34	30	9
36	36	36	11
45	37	45	14

*\* Heights shown in the table may be adjusted based on site conditions and geometry, geographical location in the city (or geographical location relative to proximity to transit), impacts on the public realm and solar orientation as described further in detail in these guidelines. This chart is intended to be read with the guideline document in its entirety.*

### 1.3.1. SITE PLANNING FOR DEEP AND/OR LARGE SITES

**Where a mid-rise building is on a site that is deep enough to accommodate new streets or blocks, multiple buildings, and/or buildings with elements oriented perpendicular to the main street frontage, additional considerations, such as increased setbacks, step-backs or building orientation should be evaluated on a site-by-site basis.**

- Incorporating generous public and private landscaped open spaces on the site.
- Developing a standalone small scale built form between the mid-rise and adjacent low-rise areas.
- Increasing the rear setback beyond 7.5 metres and providing additional soft landscaping along the rear property line.
- Increasing setbacks to allow for active and/or glazed façades along all four sides of the building, particularly where buildings are oriented perpendicular to the primary street frontage and provide setbacks that allow for pedestrian connections.
- Ensuring that mid-rise buildings on deep sites with irregular building wing configurations maintain privacy, and access to sunlight and sky view through appropriate side yard property line setbacks and separation distances between proposed and potential future wings.
- Locating the taller portion of the building in the middle of the site, ensuring a generous setback from both the street and surrounding properties to maintain a mid-rise scale.
- Consider the impact of inside corner conditions on unit privacy and overlook. Mitigate these effects through unit layouts (e.g. wrap corners with large units), placement and staggering of windows, and/or provision of clerestory windows.
- Consider natural ventilation, daylighting, solar orientation and energy performance when locating and orienting building elements.



Figure 1.3.1: Image of a mid-rise rear condition on a deep corner site at Avenue Road and Fairlawn Avenue, where a connected low-rise built form was included as part of the transition.



Figure 1.3.2: Image of a mid-rise rear condition on a deep corner site at Dundas Street West and Manning Street, where a standalone low-rise built form was included as part of the transition.



## Deep Corner Sites

Official Plan Policy 3.1.3.5. provides direction for mid-rise corner sites: “Mid-rise buildings on corner sites with different right-of-way widths will have building heights along each street edge that relate to their corresponding right-of-way width”. The Guidelines below provide additional direction for these unique sites (Figure 1.3.3).

- Where a mid-rise building is proposed on a deep site with building wing extensions along a local street, the building wing(s) should step down in height from the primary street frontage to the local street after a distance of approximately 30 metres from the primary street. Mid-rise wings on local streets should generally not be taller than the width of local right-of-way (typically 20 metres or 6 storeys).

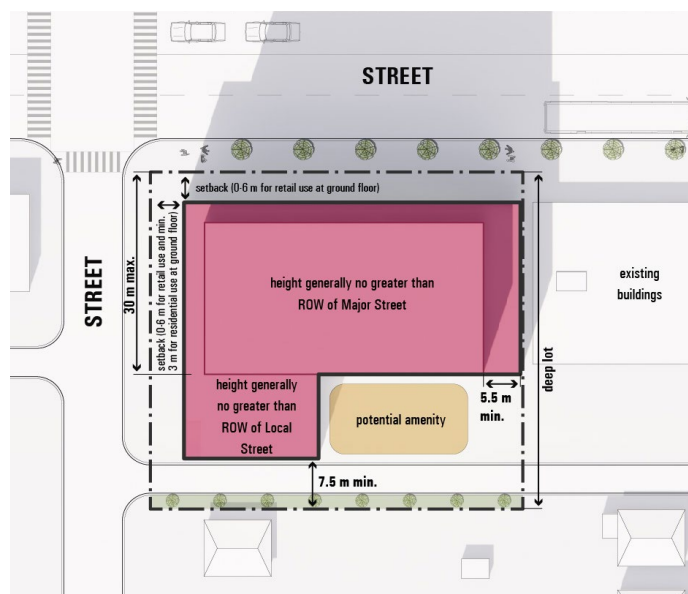


Figure 1.3.3: Sample illustration of a mid-rise building at a deep corner site.

## Deep Mid-Block Sites

Deep sites in a mid-block location can also accommodate mid-rise wings provided the site is wide enough to accommodate all appropriate setbacks. Mid-rise wings should provide transition down in height from the primary street frontage to any low-rise areas to the rear (Figure 1.3.4).

- Provide a minimum setback of 7.5 metres from the side property line to achieve a minimum separation distance of 15 metres between proposed mid-block wing(s) and future development to allow for facing windows as well as access to sunlight, soft landscaping and pedestrian connections.
- Mid-block, mid-rise wings should generally not be taller than 20 metres (or approximately 6 storeys).
- Where a mid-rise wing is located with units and primary windows facing the side property line, side yard setbacks must be provided in order to achieve privacy and allow access to sunlight and sky-view between the proposed wing and future development of adjacent sites.

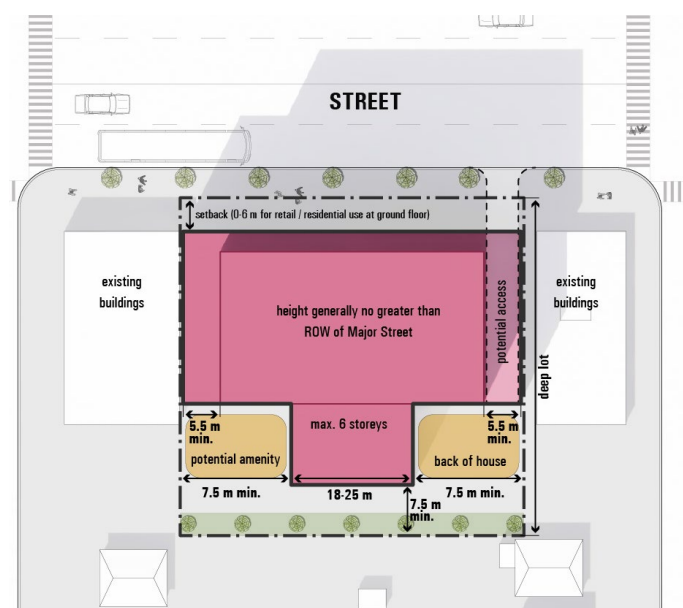


Figure 1.3.4: Sample illustration of a mid-rise building at a deep mid-block site.

## Deep Courtyard Sites

Development sites with wide frontages on either corner or mid-block sites may be able to accommodate courtyard conditions. In this configuration, units with windows may be oriented internally, facing other wings of a building. Official Plan policy 3.1.4.6. provides direction on mid-rise courtyard conditions, “Mid-rise buildings on deep sites should be designed to provide and frame accessible and well-proportioned open spaces that have access to sunlight and daylight” (Figure 1.3.5).

- e. Provide an appropriate separation distance between mid-rise building wings to maintain privacy, access to sunlight and sky view for both courtyard facing units and the courtyard itself. Courtyard width should be proportionate to the average height of the building wings, at an approximate ratio of 1:1, or a minimum of 15 metres, whichever is greater.
- f. Where possible, consider increasing the separation distance between building wings to achieve a courtyard width to wing height ratio of 1.5:1. This will promote the creation of larger, more functional landscaped courtyards with increased sunlight access.
- g. Design courtyards to provide shared landscape amenity spaces, and limit servicing and parking functions.

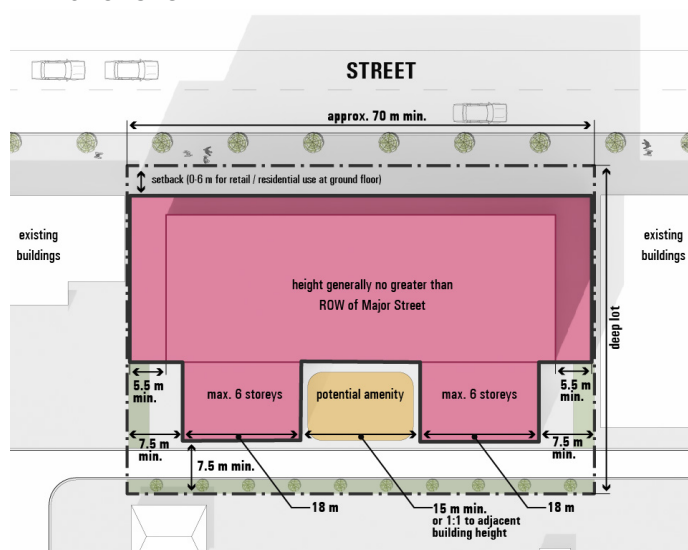


Figure 1.3.5: Sample illustration of a mid-rise building at a deep courtyard site.

## Rationale

The Official Plan's Built Form – Mid-Rise policy 3.1.3. 5 provides direction for deep sites: "Mid-rise buildings on deep sites should be designed to provide and frame accessible and well-proportioned open spaces that have access to sunlight and daylight".

There are numerous ways in which mid-rise buildings can be sited, massed and designed on a deep site. Rear transition is important for very deep and/or very wide sites, which lend themselves to the design of four-sided or irregularly-shaped buildings and careful consideration should be given to how each façade responds to its context. Some deep sites have provided transition through creation of connected (Figure 1.3.1) or standalone low-rise built forms (Figure 1.3.2). Often on deep sites, mid-rise buildings are proposed with units facing side lot lines, or as buildings with extensions or "wings" –for example, taking a C, H, L, T or U-shaped building configuration in plan. Ensuring appropriate side and rear yard setbacks and separation distance between existing or planned buildings is important for privacy and access to sunlight and sky-view. Some of the typical mid-rise site conditions are outlined as Deep Corner sites, Deep Mid-Block sites, and Deep Courtyard sites. All of these types share some attributes, and the guidelines below may apply in part or in whole. This Performance Standard does not refer to a typical double-loaded corridor building oriented parallel to the primary street frontage.





Figure 1.3.6: Image of a mid-rise courtyard condition on a deep site at 1900 Bayview Avenue.



Figure 1.3.7: Image of a mid-rise courtyard condition on a deep site at 95 The Pond Road.



#### Official Plan Reference:

3.1.1 The Public Realm | 3.1.1 Built Form | 3.1.4 Built Form - Building Types | 4.1 Neighbourhoods  
4.2 Apartment Neighbourhoods | 4.5 Mixed Use Areas



### 1.3.2. SITE PLANNING FOR THROUGH-LOT SITES

Where a mid-rise building is on a through-lot with dual frontages, ensure the development frames and supports both the adjacent streets and preserves the existing mature trees on site.

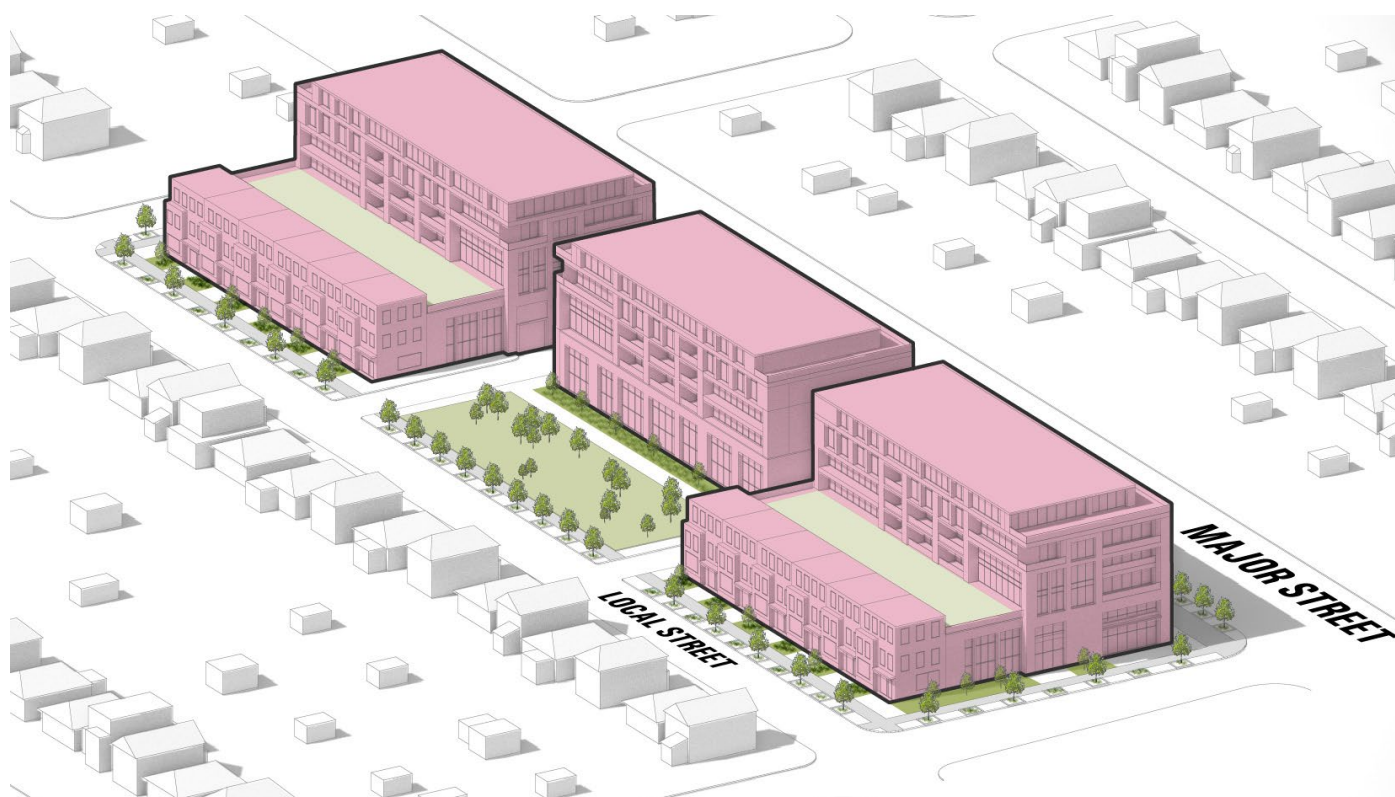


Figure 1.3.7: Sample illustration of a mid-rise development on a through-lot site.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to through-lot sites, but there are a number of guidelines that provide appropriate site planning and built form relationship that can be adapted where site conditions allow, including:

- a. Provide generous landscape setbacks along both major and local streets to protect the existing mature trees and/or allow space for planting a new row of trees.
- b. Encourage retail opportunities along the street frontages.
- c. Create mid-block pedestrian and cycling connections between the major street and the interior of the site and adjacent areas.
- d. Frame and support the adjacent streets with taller built form along wider rights-of-way and transition down to a maximum of 6 storeys or 19 metres facing local streets.
- e. Consolidate and enclose loading, servicing, and access to parking in the side yard to maintain an attractive streetscape along the public street.

---

## Rationale

Through-lots on major streets offer unique opportunities and challenges for mid-rise development. The majority of through-lots are found in the Scarborough, North York and Etobicoke Districts. The sites often feature extensive soft landscaping, mature trees and fences facing major streets, requiring careful planning to integrate new development successfully into the context and preserve existing mature trees.

In addition, lower scaled massing up to maximum of 6 storeys or 19 metres should be placed facing local streets to ensure appropriate transition in scale to the inner neighbourhoods and be consistent with the transition set in the EHON Major Street Zoning By-law.



### Official Plan Reference:

3.1.1 The Public Realm | 3.1.1 Built Form Policy | 3.1.4 Built Form - Building Types | 4.1 Neighbourhoods  
4.2 Apartment Neighbourhoods | 4.5 Mixed Use Areas

## 1.4. SUNLIGHT, WIND, AND COMFORT

**Locate and design mid-rise buildings to protect access to sunlight, provide protection from prevailing winds, and improve comfort in the surrounding context of streets, parks, public and private open spaces, and natural areas.**

- Design the scale and height of the mid-rise building to appropriately frame the public realm, while maintaining access to at least 5 hours of midday sunlight on the public sidewalks at the equinoxes, generally between 9:18am and 6:18pm (see also 3.2.1. Sun/Shadow Performance).
- Through a Sun / Shadow study, demonstrate how the proposed mid-rise building maximizes access to sunlight and minimizes shadowing of streets, parks, public and private open spaces and natural areas such as ravines.
- Through a Pedestrian Level Wind Study, demonstrate how the proposed mid-rise building is massed and designed to shield adjacent streets, parks, and public and private open spaces from the prevailing winds.
- Implement thermal comfort design strategies to improve thermal comfort in the surrounding streets, parks and public and private open spaces.
- For large sites, locate, orient and design the parks and public and private open spaces to maximize access of sunlight and protection from prevailing winds.

### Rationale

The Official Plan Parks and Open Spaces Policy 3.2.3 provides direction for developments near parks and open spaces: “The effects of development from adjacent properties, including additional shadows, noise, traffic and wind on parks and open spaces will be minimized as necessary to preserve their utility.” In addition, the Official Plan Built Form Policy 3.1.3 requires development to provide “comfortable wind conditions and air circulation at the street and adjacent open spaces to preserve the utility and intended use of the public realm, including sitting and standing.” The Built Form – Building Types section in the Official Plan also indicates that mid-rise buildings provide a balanced and predictable street proportion, which allows for access to midday sunlight in the spring and autumn and maintains open views to the sky from the street.

Toronto’s climate is one of extremes, characterized by hot, humid summers, and cold, grey, damp winters. In summer, shade from trees and light breezes make the public realm more comfortable. In the shoulder seasons, spring and fall, access to direct sunlight and shelter from the wind become very important to improve the comfort, usability, and enjoyment of outdoor spaces. Required Sun/Shadow studies focus on the equinoxes to emphasize the importance of access to sunlight during these seasons. The review of other times of day and other seasons may be required depending on the type and shadow sensitivity of adjacent uses.

#### Official Plan Reference:



3.1.1 The Public Realm | 3.1.3 Built Form | 3.1.4 Built Form- Building Types | 3.2.3. Parks and Open Spaces  
4.1 Neighbourhoods | 4.2 Apartment Neighbourhoods | 4.5 Mixed Use Areas