



**City of Toronto****Forest Hill Village Urban Design Study - Urban Design Guidelines - February 2026**

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The City of Toronto City Planning Division would like to thank all those who participated in the community consultation process. This document has been enhanced by your knowledgeable and helpful feedback.

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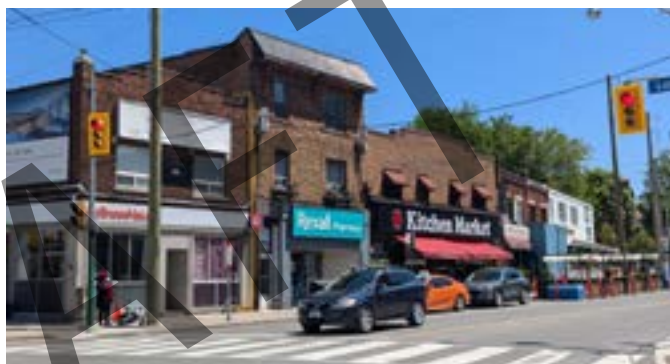


# Mandate

On February 5th, 2025, City Council adopted a motion which asked City Planning staff to review and update the Forest Hill Village Urban Design Guidelines (2015) in conjunction with the St. Clair Avenue West and Bathurst Street Planning Framework (2019). This review focuses on updating the existing guidelines with consideration of recent changes to Provincial legislation and policies and updated Official Plan policies.

Responding to this Council request, this guideline document provides updated built form and public realm principles for Forest Hill Village that reflect its unique retail and streetscape character. The guidelines ensure that growth is balanced with preserving, enhancing and animating the retail character of the community.

The Urban Design Guidelines in this document support high quality, appropriately scaled, and context-sensitive development in the study area. The guidelines implement Official Plan policies, explain how development will respect and reinforce local character, identify architectural patterns of interest, and promote an animated public realm.



# 1.0 Introduction

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Forest Hill Village is a unique retail area in Midtown Toronto. It is one of the few commercial shopping enclaves in the City that is wholly contained within a residential area. As in other areas of the City, Forest Hill Village and the surrounding area are experiencing intensification. This document will guide growth within the Village to accommodate this intensification while maintaining its character and improving the pedestrian and retail experience.

- 1.1 Study Area**
- 1.2 History**
- 1.3 Existing Heights**
- 1.4 Other Relevant Documents**

## 1.1 STUDY AREA

The 2014 Council Motion initially defined the study area as the properties with frontage on Spadina Road between Montclair Avenue and Thelma Avenue, as well as adjacent buildings fronting onto Lonsdale Avenue.

Upon careful consideration, the 2015 Urban Design Guidelines expanded the study area to include properties along Spadina Road up to Strathearn Boulevard, including

Suydam Park. The 2026 guidelines maintain the same study area.



Bird's Eye View of the Study Area



Map of the Study Area



## 1.2 HISTORY

The Village of Forest Hill was incorporated in 1923 and remained a separate municipality until it was amalgamated with the City of Toronto in 1967.

This Village was established as a bedroom community for the "fashionable society" wanting to escape the crowded and bustling City of Toronto in the 1920s. Its original limits were based on a historic school district boundary, defined by a community that wanted to maintain and control the quality of their local public schools. Forest Hill is unlike other historic villages in Ontario that typically grew out of industrial activity. The establishment and growth of Forest Hill was driven by high quality education, upscale residential development, low taxes and a local citizenry which actively put limits to industrial uses in the village. The study area in particular, is characterized by a concentration of commercial uses around the four corners of Spadina Road and Lonsdale Avenue, providing convenient goods and services to the residents of the Village of Forest Hill.

Development in the Village of Forest Hill was firmly rooted in rational urban planning. Strict by-laws were enforced that limited industrial uses and controlled the quality and appearance of new homes, requiring minimum costs to house construction and that the front elevation of all houses to be designed by an architect. The Village even established a Board of Architects to review applications for new residential construction.

Apartment buildings were strategically encouraged in order to keep taxes low for residents. The first apartment buildings in the village concentrated near the commercial intersection of Spadina Road and Lonsdale Avenue in the late 1920s. Apartment buildings developed along the northern portion of the study area provided a transition to the primarily single-detached character of Spadina Road. The apartment building at 404 Spadina Road was unique in its time as an apartment building with retail uses at grade. 404 Spadina Road was integrated with the commercial four corners at Spadina Road and Lonsdale Avenue.

The majority of buildings within the study area were constructed by the 1940s, with the exception of the Canadian Bank of Commerce building constructed at 462 Spadina Road in 1959, which introduced concrete modernist architecture to the early 20th century streetscape.

Forest Hill resisted amalgamation with the City of Toronto until 1967. Forest Hill intentionally remained a village to maintain the distinctive character of the area. Even after amalgamation with the City of Toronto, the study area remained relatively stable until two large commercial block buildings at 446 and 439 Spadina Road were built in the 1980s, replacing gas stations that were on each side of Spadina Road. These buildings extended the commercial street wall further north along Spadina Road.



Goad's Fire Insurance Plan 1924: indicating developments at corner of Spadina and Lonsdale after the Village was incorporated in 1923



Looking north on Spadina Road from Lonsdale Avenue, 1955 (Toronto Public Library)



## 1.3 EXISTING HEIGHTS

Existing buildings in the study area are predominantly of low-rise character, mostly 2-3 storeys. The tallest buildings within the Study Area are 4 storeys high, which is approximately 11-12 metres.



Existing building height in number of storeys



As-of-right height vs. existing building height

## 1.4 OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

### Forest Hill Village BIA Master Plan

In 2012, the Forest Hill Village Business Improvement Area released an updated Forest Hill Village Master Plan Outline, intended to "create a framework to both foster and shepherd growth and change in a manageable way which can be flexible and responsive to market conditions."

The Forest Hill Village BIA Master Plan recommended strategies to promote and encourage more life on the street and provided guidance on the design of landscaping, open spaces, signage, parking and street widths.

The Urban Design Guidelines build on the BIA Master Plan's objectives while providing updated guidance reflective of recent policy and development trends.

### St. Clair West & Bathurst Street Area Planning Framework, 2026

The 2025 Planning Framework is a review of the St. Clair Avenue West and Bathurst Street Planning Framework (2019) to renew the overall vision and ensure the framework and guidelines are relevant given changes to Provincial legislation and policies, updated Official Plan policies, and recently approved development. The revised Framework includes expanded boundaries which encompass the Forest Hill Village Urban Design Guideline study area. The purpose of the Planning Framework is to provide a guide to review development applications in the St. Clair Avenue West and Bathurst Street area and should be consulted in conjunction with the Forest Hill Village Urban Design Guidelines.



The Forest Hill Village Master Plan prepared by the Forest Hill Village BIA



## 2.0 Existing Character

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## 2.1 URBAN CHARACTER

### Main Street Character and Scale

This area displays character elements typically found in a Main Street that is not an Avenue. Some of these elements are:

- Appropriate street enclosure that creates a sense of comfort to the pedestrian
- Bustling sidewalks with meeting places for local neighbours and the wider community
- Human scale, with features that reduce perceived building mass at the first or second floors to reinforce the base, such as awnings, recessed entrances, overhangs, etc.



Sidewalks with meeting places for the community



Architectural elements that reinforce the human scale at a pedestrian level

### Streetwall Scale

The low-rise scale of the streetwall creates an urban landscape that maintains a pedestrian scale. This character is experienced along Spadina Road with buildings framing the street edge.



Two views of Spadina Road looking North



## 2.1 URBAN CHARACTER (CONT'D)

### Ground Floor Treatment

In the commercial zone (Character Zone A) of the study area, retail uses at grade have a strong presence, with floors above exhibiting a different architectural expression. Windows and doors at the ground floor also provide a higher level of transparency than found on the upper floors. Other building features such as awnings, overhangs, cornices, signage, change of materials, etc. also visually separate the ground level from the floors above. All these factors combined create a strong datum line that emphasizes the ground floor portion of the building.

Retail units at-grade are also characterized by small storefronts with individual entrances, creating visual diversity along the street. This diversity contrasts with the more symmetrical façades of upper floors.



Retail units along Spadina Road



## 2.2 MATERIALS

### Façade Material

The use of traditional materials such as brick and stone is dominant within the study area. The colour palette of these façade materials is displayed below. The range of colours exhibited within Forest Hill Village can be described as earthy-tones ranging from neutral to reddish-brown. Accents in façades are mostly provided through the lighter end of the colour palette.



Colour Palette



Sample of building facades and details within the study area

### Glazing

Windows and doors at the ground floor provide a high level of transparency for storefront display. By contrast, upper levels are characterized by "punched-windows" against solid walls, lower levels of transparency, and mostly symmetrical openings.



Building facades along Spadina Road

## 2.3 BUILDING RHYTHM AND ARTICULATION

### Vertical and Horizontal Articulations

In the commercial zone, upper floors are architecturally differentiated from the ground floor by elements that horizontally articulate the floor, lintel, or sill levels. Although there is a variety of building widths within the study area, buildings that are taller than two storeys display pronounced vertical articulations - mostly change of planes - to break the building mass.



Sample of building facades and details within the Study Area

### Architectural Detailing

In both the commercial and residential zones, there is a prominent use of bay windows and oriel windows (an oriel window is a bay window that does not reach to the ground) to create breaks in a building's massing. This contributes to the fine grain architectural character of the Village as these elements break up the apparent length of the building into smaller façade sections.



Oriel windows on a commercial building



Bay windows on a residential building



Oriel windows on a mixed-use building



## Corner Treatment

At prominent corners, such as the intersection of Spadina Road and Lonsdale Avenue, the historical pattern of built form is characterized by chamfered corners facing the intersection. This is where main entrances have traditionally been located. If a corner entrance has been removed, the space created by the chamfered corner is utilized as a seating area. This reinforces the character of intersections as social spaces where people congregate and meet.



Buildings with chamfered corners

## 2.3 BUILDING RHYTHM AND ARTICULATION (CONT'D)

### Recessed Entrances

Storefronts in Forest Hill Village typically have recessed entrances creating deep display windows that enliven the street. These types of entrances also help provide weather protection, a human-scale feel, and an uninterrupted sidewalk zone for pedestrians as the door swing will not encroach into the sidewalks.



Newer buildings with recessed store entrances



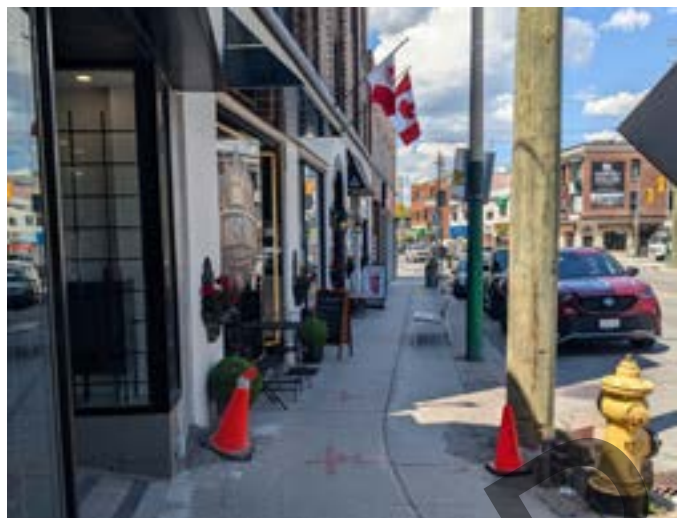
Older buildings with recessed store entrances



## 2.4 PUBLIC REALM

### Sidewalks

Sidewalk width within study area varies from approximately 3.2 - 2.3 metres. The existing width struggles to accommodate the requirements of an active retail street, pinch-points are created when several elements are in close proximity, such as utility poles, patios, benches and signage.



Narrow sidewalk conditions

### Patios and Retail Display

A range of patio and retail displays encroach on the sidewalk within the Village, in some cases creating difficult to navigate side-walk conditions. In recent years, seasonal CafeTO patios have been implemented in the curb-lane adjacent to several businesses. Patios and retail activities contribute to the activation and vitality of the public realm.



Patios, CafeTO and sidewalk retail display

## 2.4 PUBLIC REALM (CONT'D)

### Street Trees

Due to the generally narrow sidewalk conditions of Forest Hill Villiage, there is typically not enough space for street trees and the soil volume required to ensure they can grow to maturity.

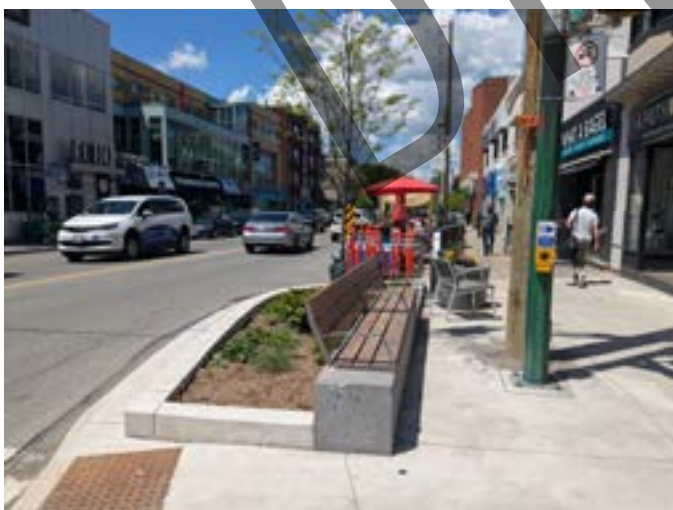
Several curb "bump outs" have recently been constructed which effectively increase sidewalk width, providing space for tree planting without encroaching on pedestrian circulation space. Additionally, planters containing small trees have been added along the Spadina frontage of the Greep P lot at Thelma Avenue.



Curb bump-outs with integrated planters, trees and seating



Integrated planters and seating adjacent to Green P lot



Curb bump-outs with integrated planters, trees and seating



Absence of street tree canopy due to insufficient sidewalk width



## Parks

Forest Hill Village is bookended by Montclair Avenue Parkette at the south boundary and Suydam Park to the North.

Redesigned in 2011, Montclair Parkette contains seating and several mature trees, offering an intimate, tree covered space to rest and meet in small groups.

Suydam Park is a large green space at the intersection of the Cedarvale Ravine and Spadina Road. It contains a mature tree canopy, benches, picnic tables and a playground further west into the ravine. Completed in 2016, the North Gateway Streetscape Project introduced lighting, planters, seating and a stage along the Park's Spadina Road frontage. The project increased the Park's presence on the street and expanded its ability to host community events such as music performances.



North Gateway Streetscape Project within Suydam Park



Montclair Parkette



North Gateway Streetscape Project within Suydam Park

## **3.0 Forest Hill Village Urban Design Guidelines**

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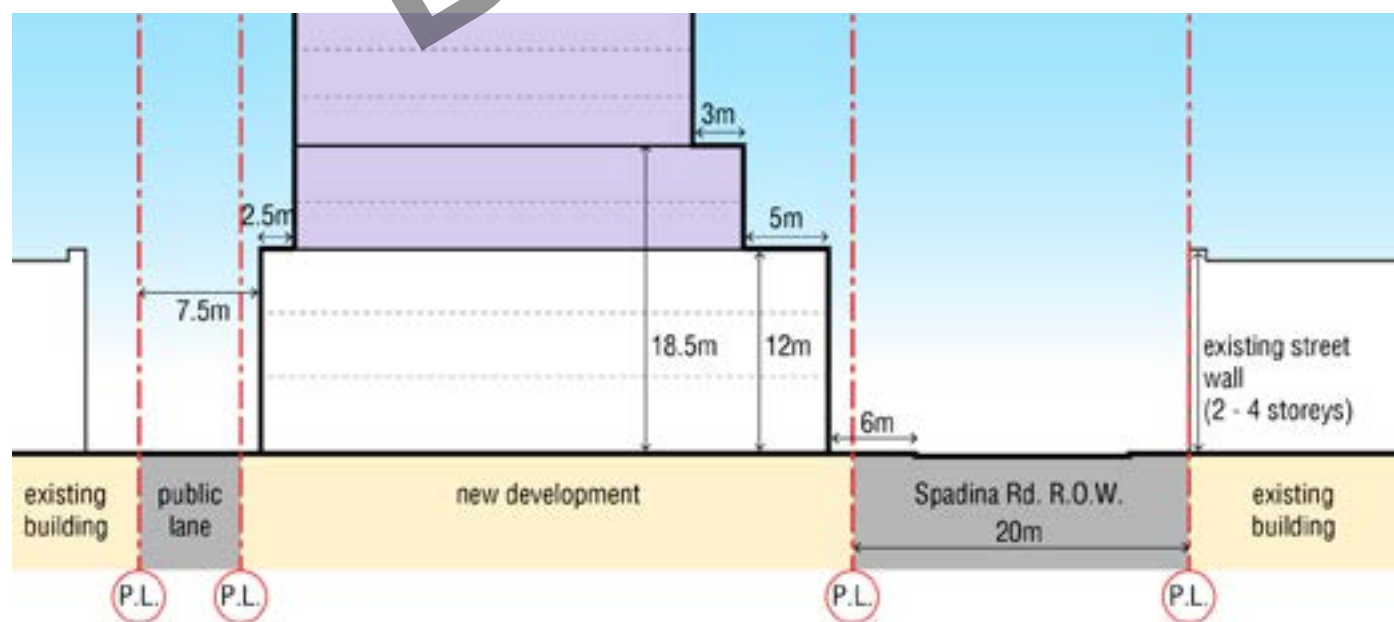
### 3.1 URBAN CHARACTER GUIDELINES

#### Guideline 3.1.1 Built Form Guidelines

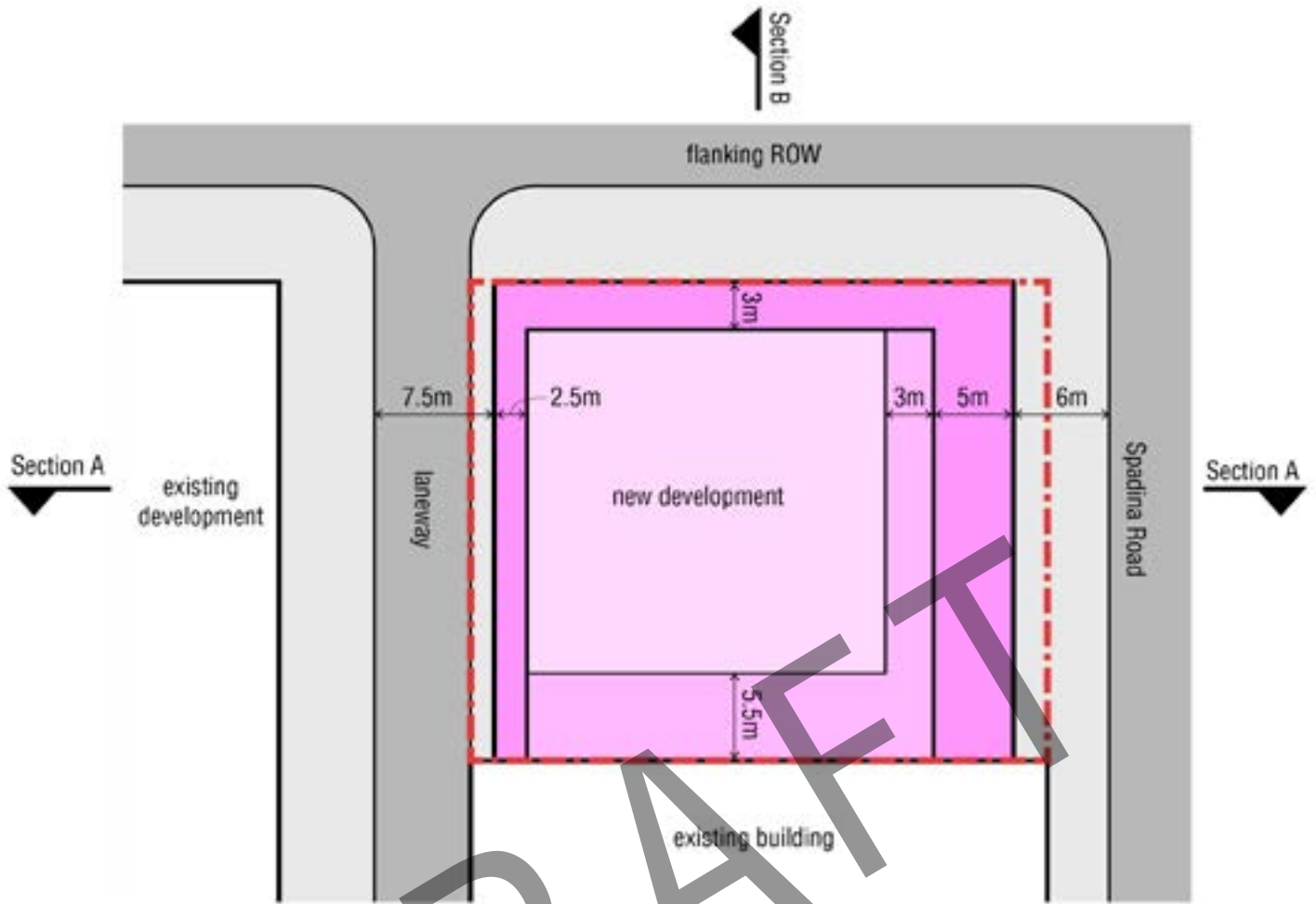
The purpose of the built form guidelines is to reinforce the established street-wall height in Forest Hill Village. Step-backs above 12.0 meters ensure the prominence of the existing scale and street enclosure while mitigating pedestrian perception of additional density and mitigating against the loss of sky-view. Ground floor set-backs contribute to an improved public realm, allowing for improvements in accessibility, street tree canopy and retail experience. Building heights will be assessed on an individual application in accordance with provincial policy.

#### GUIDELINES

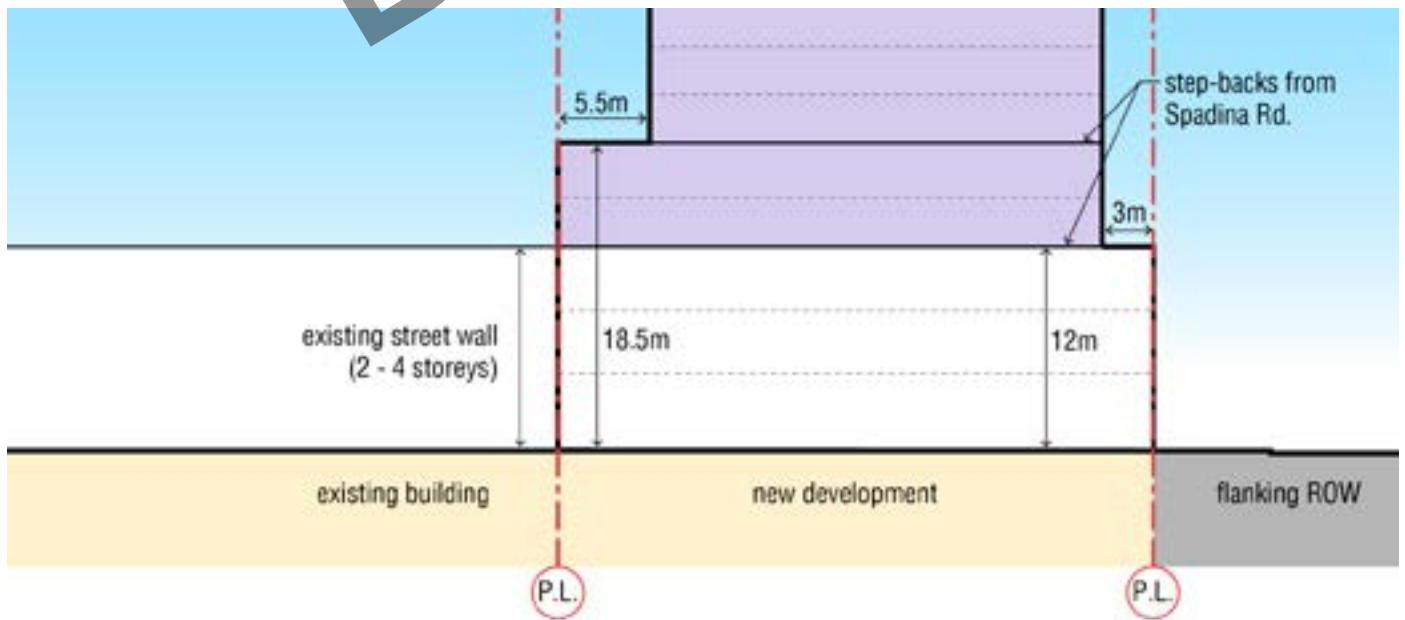
- Set-back street wall to achieve 6m curb to ground floor setback, inclusive of sidewalk widening (see guideline 3.4.3).
- 5m step-back above a height of 12m facing Spadina Rd.
- additional 3m step-back above a height of 18.5m facing Spadina Rd.
- 0m set-back to lot lines shared with adjacent properties to a height of 18.5m.
- 5.5m step-back from shared lot lines above a height of 18.5m.
- 3m step-back from flanking streets above a height of 12m.
- Set-back 7.5m from the property line on the opposite side of rear laneways.
- step-back an additional 2.5m above a height of 12m facing rear laneways.



Section A: Diagram of front yard set-backs, step-backs and rear yard transition.



Plan diagram of built form set-backs and step-backs



Section B: Diagram of side yard and flanking street step-backs.



## 3.2 MATERIALS GUIDELINES

### Guideline 3.2.1 Façade Material

Use brick and stone as main building materials, with a colour palette that complements existing context.

Buildings along Spadina Road and Lonsdale Avenue should be clad in high quality materials that reflect the character of the street such as brick and stone. Colour and patterns associated with a particular corporate brand should be designed as highlights and not as the defining colour of the building.

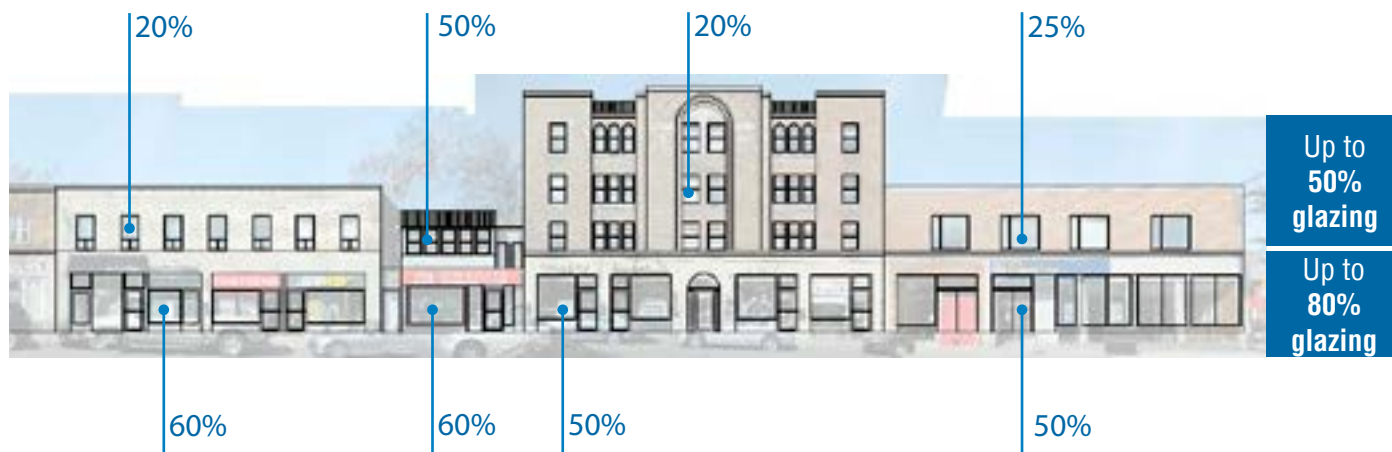


Colour palette of buildings on Spadina Road

### Guideline 3.2.2 Glazing

Glazing in new developments should be limited to a maximum of 80% at ground level and 50% on upper floors.

The percentage of transparency in Forest Hill Village's older buildings is an average of 20%-50% in the upper levels and 50-60% at ground level. Recognizing the need for larger displays and greater access to sunlight in newer developments, the recommended maximum percentage of glazing on the podium/streetwall is 50% in upper floors and 80% at ground level. Continuous floor to ceiling glass is discouraged, and the use of thicker mullions is preferred as a way to articulate larger surfaces of glazing.



### Guideline 3.2.3 Ground Floor

**Changes of materials at the ground level are encouraged in order to emphasize the retail at-grade.**

A horizontal rhythm and visual transition between the ground floor and the floors above in Forest Hill Village is articulated in façade designs through a change in materials

and a shift in the proportion of glazing. Creating such articulation helps to reinforce the strong retail presence of the ground floor while still maintaining some vertical rhythm.



Retail units exhibiting a change of materials at ground level



### Guideline 3.2.4 Signage

**A variety of signage will be encouraged. In general, back lit box signage is discouraged, individual lettering or cloth awnings are preferred.**

The variety of individual store signage helps to add a dynamic character to the Village. Back-lit box signage and oversized lettering detract from the character of the buildings. In overall, signage should complement, but not overpower the building façade. The City of Toronto sign by-law governs signage in the study area.



Examples of preferred individual lettering



Back lit box signage discouraged

### 3.3 BUILDING RHYTHM & ARTICULATION GUIDELINES

#### Guideline 3.3.1 Vertical Articulation

**On buildings taller than two storeys, there should be vertical articulations at a rhythm of every 8m maximum.**

Vertical articulation helps break a building's massing and create a finer grained façade that complements the existing character of Forest Hill Village. This can be achieved through

architectural detailing that provides a three-dimensional texture which creates a play of light and shadows on façades.



#### Guideline 3.3.2 Storefront Width

**At-grade retail should be articulated to look as individual store fronts of between 5m to 8m.**

Ground floor retail in Forest Hill Village currently has more articulation than the upper levels of buildings, with individual

entrances and display windows that are interrupted at a certain rhythm. This helps to create the vibrancy and diversity that characterizes the Village. Regardless of the size of the retail unit, storefronts should be articulated to reflect the fine-grain rhythm along Spadina Road.





### Guideline 3.3.3 Retail Height

Follow the retail datum line of adjacent buildings through architectural articulation.

Existing retail units on Spadina Road create a clearly defined ground level due to a shift of architectural language and façade materials that continues along the street. New developments should match this strong datum line regardless of interior ceiling height, with weather protection or decorative features such as cornices, canopies, or retractable awnings.





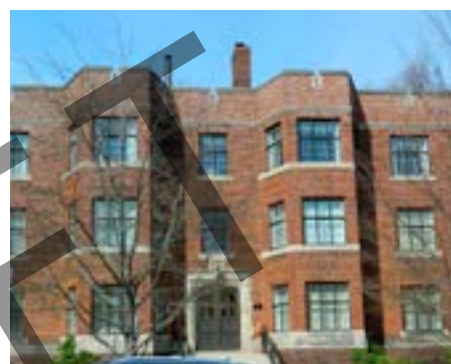
### 3.3 BUILDING RHYTHM & ARTICULATION GUIDELINES (CONT'D)

#### Guideline 3.3.4 Bay Windows

Where appropriate, incorporate bay or oriel windows to emphasize vertical articulation.

The use of bay and oriel windows is a recurrent theme in old and new buildings within Forest Hill Village. Incorporating

these features encourages an architectural pattern that is part of the character of the study area and helps reinforce vertical articulation in a building façade.

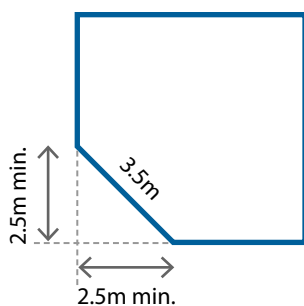


#### Guideline 3.3.5 Corners

On important street corners, chamfer building corners at 45 degrees with a minimum distance of 2.5m to allow for main entrances or seating areas.

In prominent corners, such as the intersection of Spadina Road with Lonsdale Avenue, chamfered corners are key to

creating breathing room on the sidewalks and a building entrance of greater importance. Buildings at these intersections are also made prominent by addressing all sides of the street. In less prominent corners, such as the intersection of Spadina Road and Thelma Avenue, chamfered corners can enhance the public realm and provide community meeting places through the design of seating areas.

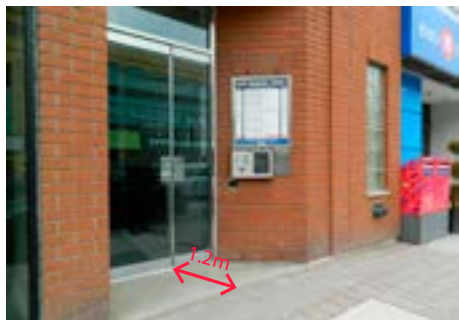


### Guideline 3.3.6 Recessed Entrances

**Where the lot width allows, retail entrances should be recessed by a minimum of 1.2m.**

A characteristic of the existing buildings along Spadina Road is their recessed store entrances. New developments should

continue this characteristic, which contributes to a wider pedestrian clearway and ensures that door swings do not interrupt the sidewalk right-of-way.



Recessed entrance in a newer building



Recessed entrance in a newer building



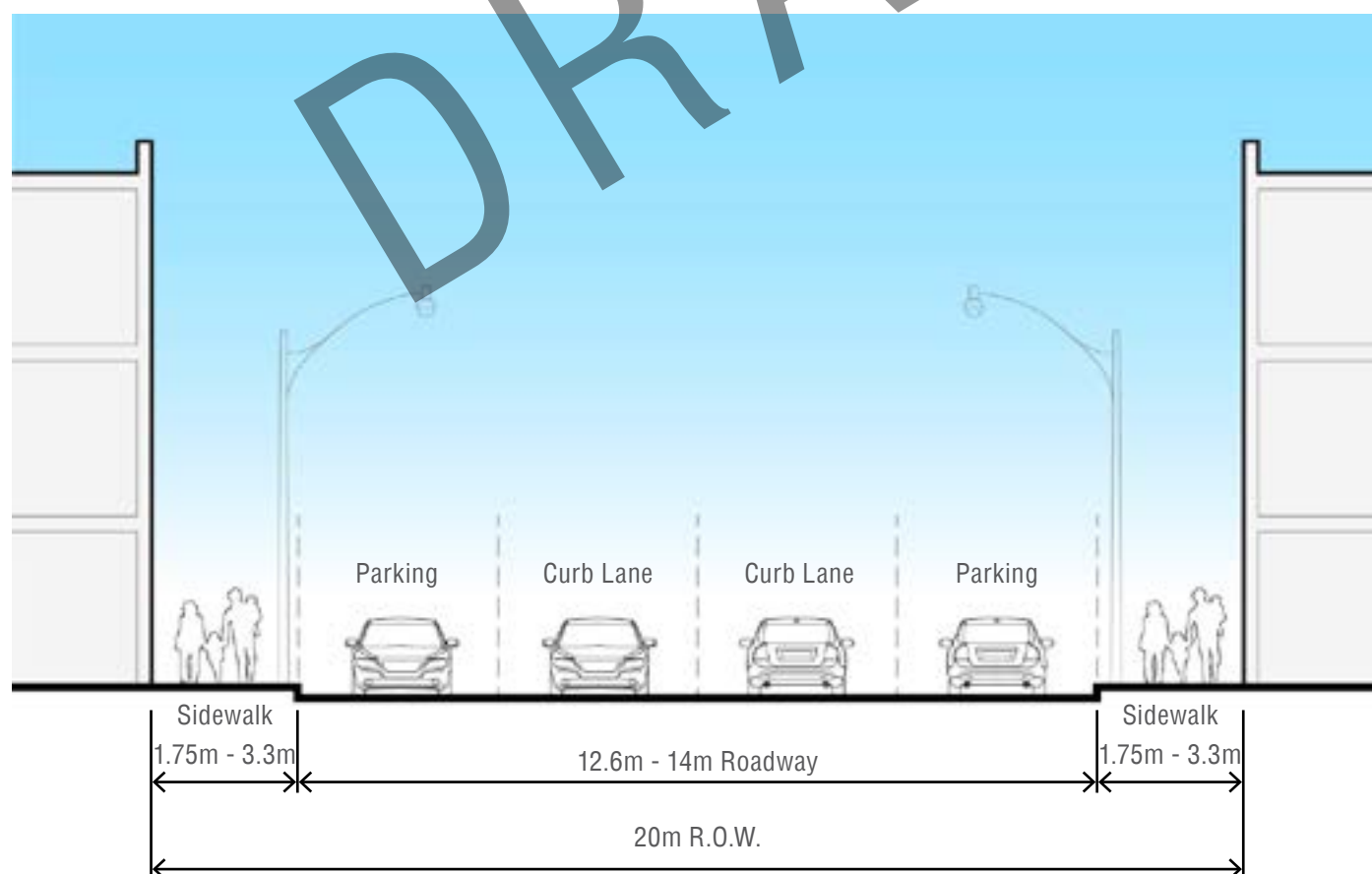
Recessed entrance in an older building

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### 3.4 PUBLIC REALM GUIDELINES

#### 3.4.1 Right sizing of road-way

In order to increase sidewalk widths to improve accessibility and create opportunities for street trees and furniture it is recommended that the existing lane widths be reviewed against the City's Lane Width Guideline targets and reduced where they are found to be larger. Excess space found through this exercise should then be allocated to the adjacent sidewalks. These improvements should be secured through redevelopment or in conjunction with planned upgrades within the right of way.

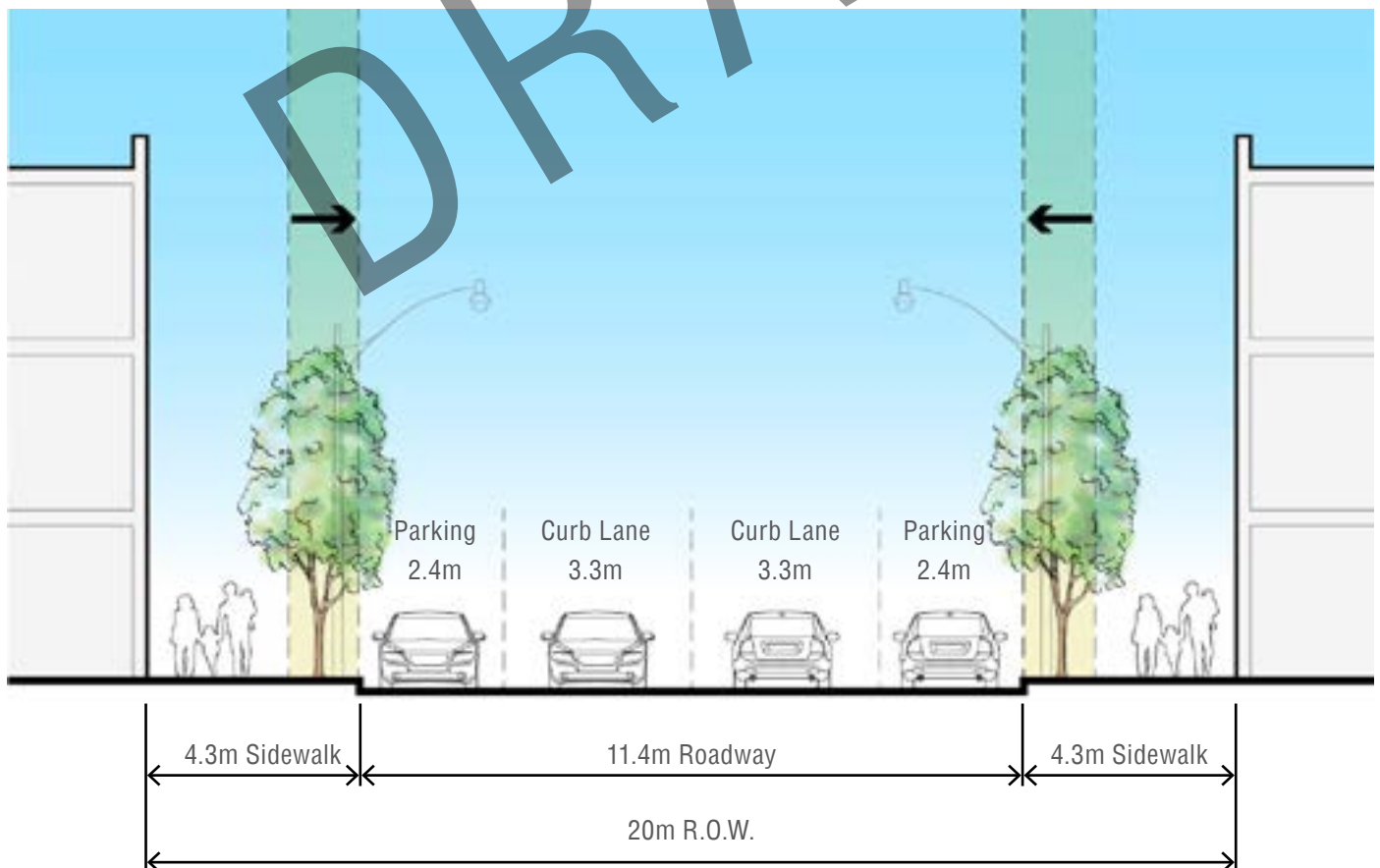


**Section Diagram:** Existing Spadina Road R.O.W. within Forest Hill Village. Width of roadway and side sidewalks vary.





Photo: Roncesvalles Ave sidewalk condition after sidewalk widening



Section Diagram: Target right of way distribution after right-sizing of roadway.

## 3.4 PUBLIC REALM GUIDELINES (CONT'D)

### 3.4.2. Streetscape Design

In an effort to reinforce the vibrant retail character of Forest Hill Village while improving the pedestrian experience, new development will be required to provide set-backs from Spadina Road. In combination with the implementation of guideline 3.4.1, the resulting side-walk width will accommodate a generous pedestrian clearway, patio space to support local businesses in the area, as well as street tree and furniture zones.

The diagrams displayed here are for illustrative purposes only, implementation will subject to further feasibility analysis.

#### GUIDELINES

- a. In combination with guideline 3.4.1, new developments will have a minimum building to curb set-back of 6m.

- b. The streetscape should consist of three different zones: Tree Planting/Furniture Zone, Pedestrian Clearway and Animation Zone.

**Animation Zone** - A portion of the sidewalk where local retail activities such as fruit stands, temporary retail sign placement, outdoor patio benches and chairs encroach onto the public right-of-way.

**Pedestrian Clearway** - An unobstructed portion of the sidewalk intended for the use of pedestrians. The minimum width of this zone is 2.1 metres.

**Tree Planting/Furniture Zone** - An area immediately abutting the road where street trees and various street furniture such as planters, waste receptacles, and/or benches can be placed.

- c. Refer to City policies, local BIA design standards, and manuals such as the Streetscape Manual, Toronto Green Streets Technical Guidelines for the design of the streetscape and other pedestrian amenities.

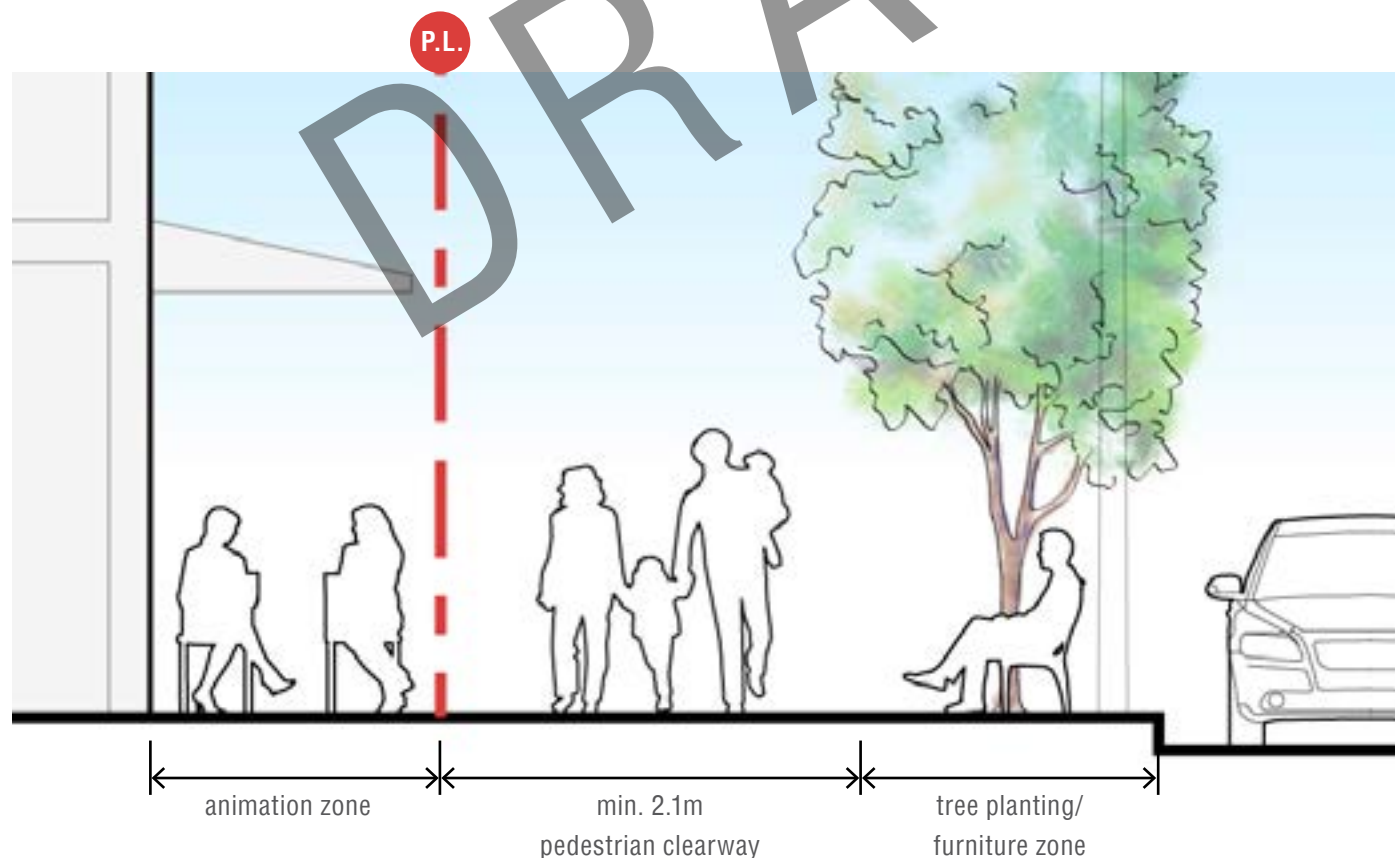






Illustration of existing streetscape condition in Forest Hill Village



Illustration of streetscape condition after implementing guideline 3.4.1, expanding sidewalk to accommodate street tree and furniture



Illustration of streetscape condition after implementing guideline 3.4.1 and 3.4.2, setting back new development to accommodate the animation zone



# Appendices

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# APPENDIX A

## Spadina Road Streetscapes

### WEST SIDE



Montclair Avenue to Lonsdale Avenue



Lonsdale Avenue to approximately Thelma Avenue



Approximately Thelma Avenue to Suydam Park



Suydam Park

## EAST SIDE



Montclair Avenue to Lonsdale Avenue



Lonsdale Avenue to Thelma Avenue



Thelma Avenue to Coulson Avenue



Coulson Avenue to approximately Strathearn Blvd.



## APPENDIX B

### Heritage Overview

#### 1.0 Evolution of Built Form in the Village Forest Hill

This section provides a historical overview of the development of the study area, located within the historic Village of Forest Hill (see Figure 1), in order to describe the evolution of its built form. The Village of Forest Hill was incorporated in 1923 and remained a separate municipality until it was amalgamated with the City of Toronto in 1967. The Village of Forest Hill was established as a bedroom community for the "fashionable society" wanting to escape the crowded and bustling City of Toronto in the 1920s (Lundell, 55). Its original limits are based on a historic school district boundary, defined by a community that wanted to maintain and control the quality of their local public schools. Forest Hill is unlike other historic villages in Ontario that typically grew out of industrial activity. Rather, the establishment and growth of Forest Hill was driven by high quality education, upscale residential development, low taxes and a local citizenry which actively put limits to industrial uses in the village (French, 76). The study area, located along Spadina Road between Strathearn Boulevard and Montclair Avenue, is characterized by a concentration of commercial uses around the four corners of Spadina Road and Lonsdale Avenue, providing convenient goods and services to the residents of the Village of Forest Hill.



Study area within the historic Village of Forest Hill (City of Toronto Archives)



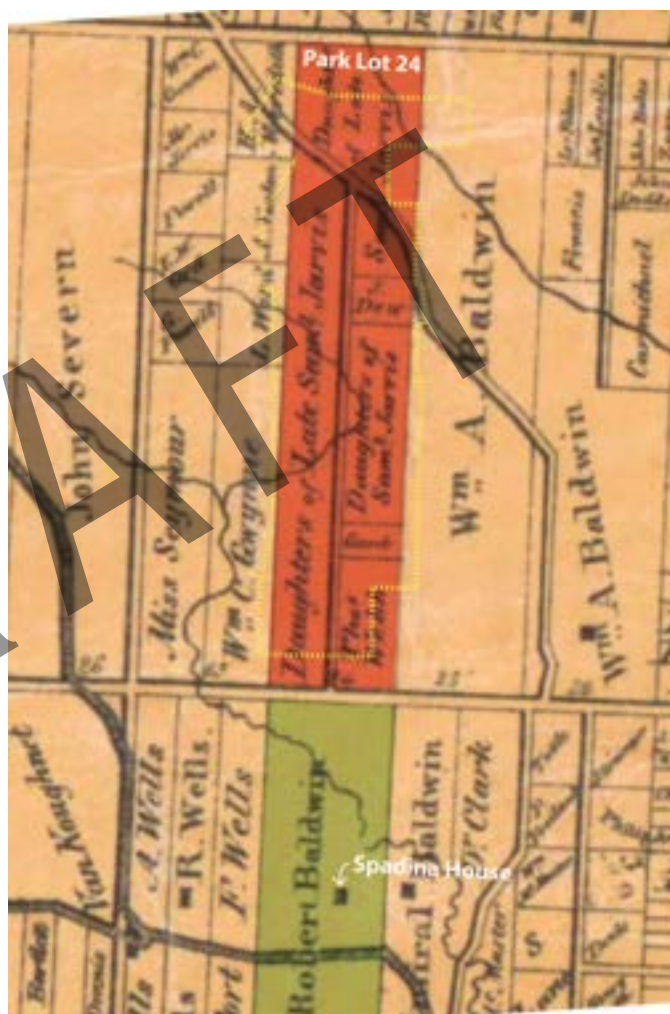
Spadina Road looking north from Heath Street, 1948 (City of Toronto Archives)

## 1.1 Early Development – Early Land Owners (1800 – 1860)

Early in Toronto's history, the study area and its surroundings were established as park lots, outside of the early city (then called the Town of York), where government officials and British landed gentry often built their summer homes. In 1860, early settler John Wickson built his summer home called "Forest Hill" at the corner of Eglinton Avenue and Old Forest Hill Road, which provided the name for the future village (Dunkelman, 63).

The study area remained largely undeveloped throughout the 19th century. The study area is part of a park lot (24, 3rd concession road), which was initially granted to the Powell family (c1800) and eventually passed to the estate of Samuel Peter Jarvis (likely through the marriage of Mary Boyles Powell, daughter of William Dummer Powell). Samuel Peter Jarvis did not build on this plot of land, preferring to build his home, the Hazelburn estate, closer to the city where he also owned land (park lot 6, 1st concession road). A map of the area from 1860 indicates that this land belonged the "daughters of late Samuel Jarvis" (see Figure 3).

The land adjacent to the study area, south of the Jarvis' property was owned by the Baldwin family, who laid out Spadina Avenue as a grand procession from the lake shore to their summer home, "Spadina House" just north of Davenport.



Tremaine's Map of the County of York, Canada West, 1860: showing the study area as part of historic park lot 24, 3rd concession road. The Baldwin family owned the adjacent park lot immediately south of the study area where Spadina House was constructed.

<sup>1</sup> Spadina Avenue was laid out in 1836 by Dr. William Warren Baldwin. He named the street after his house on top of the hill, "espadinong," meaning hill (Gould and Wise, 208).

## 1.2 Early Development – Street Layout (1860 – 1900)

The study area is located along a portion of Spadina Road that was formerly called Jarvis Street. This portion of Spadina Road, running north-south between St. Clair Avenue and the intersection of Old Forest Road, was initially called "Jarvis", after the family that owned this park lot (24, 3rd concession road). Old Forest Hill Road is one of the earliest roads in the city and follows an aboriginal trail along the historic Forest Hill stream, tributary to the Castle Frank brook ([www.lostrivers.ca](http://www.lostrivers.ca)). Currently buried underground in storm sewers, the natural topography of Cedervale Ravine serves as a reminder of these historic streams. Suydam Park at Stratheam Boulevard, at the north-western edge of the study area has long served as an access to the Cedervale Ravine for the area's earliest residents.

In 1886, James Austin purchased Spadina House and surrounding lands from the Baldwin family, directly south of the study area. In 1889, James Austin subdivided the western half of his property, extending Spadina Road through his property and connecting to the study area (see Figure 4). At this time, Jarvis Street was renamed Spadina Road. Samuel Peter Jarvis likely preferred to use his namesake for the grander Jarvis Street we know in Toronto today, which he had hired prominent Toronto architect John Howard to design in 1846 (Lundell, 55).

Similar to James Austin, land owners in the study area speculatively subdivided their lands between 1884 and 1890 in response to the booming and quickly expanding city to the south. Nevertheless, the area remained largely undeveloped to the end of the 19th century.



Goad's Fire Insurance Plan, 1890: showing Spadina Road extending north beyond St. Clair to "formerly Jarvis Street" (City of Toronto Archives)



### 1.3 Early Development - Spadina Heights (1900 - 1923)

The origin of the Village of Forest Hill as an autonomous community outside of Toronto, within York Township begins in the 20th century, with the establishment of Spadina Heights. Spadina Heights is the precursor to the Village of Forest Hill and was defined by the boundaries of York Township School District. School District 30 was established in 1910 when local residents petitioned York Township council for their own school. School District 30 provided the basis for the boundaries of the Village of Forest Hill when it was incorporated in 1923.

The study area experienced its first wave of development between 1900 and 1924. Fire insurance plans from 1903 and 1910 provide evidence of the burgeoning community

illustrating early development around Spadina and Lonsdale (see Figures 5-6). Spadina and Lonsdale (formerly Clinton Street) would become the main intersection of the Spadina Heights community.

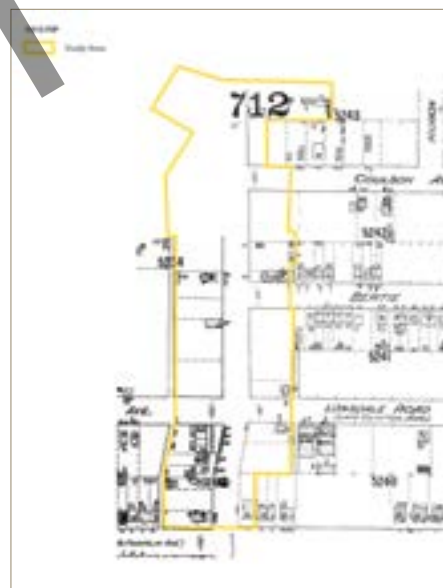
Prior to incorporation as a village, the study area consisted of a row of grocers along the south west corner of Spadina and Lonsdale, and a church building at the north east corner of Spadina and Thelma (currently a surface parking lot). 398 Spadina Road was built during this period and was one of the original grocery stores in the study area (see Figure 7).



Goad's Fire Insurance Plans 1903



Goad's Fire Insurance Plans 1910



Goad's Fire Insurance Plans 1915 (indicating grocers located at Spadina and Lonsdale and a church at Bertie Ave (now Thelma Ave))



## 1.4 Village of Forest Hill (1924-1967)

In response to what local residents observed as poor public services provided by York Township and the booming, unplanned development of Toronto to the south, the Spadina Heights community petitioned the Province for secession in 1923. They hoped to maintain lower taxes while controlling the high quality of education and residential development that characterized the area (French, 8). Forest Hill was incorporated as a village later that year (see Figure 8).

By the time of incorporation, the four corners of Spadina and Lonsdale had been reinforced as the community's central intersection with commercial buildings providing convenience goods to the local community. The intersection of Spadina Road and Montclair Avenue at the southern end of the study area was outside the village limits of Forest Hill.



View of northeast corner of Spadina Road and Lonsdale Avenue today



Northwest corner of Spadina Road and Lonsdale Avenue 1967 (in "Historic walk: Village of Forest Hill")



Map of the Village of Forest Hill at year of incorporation, 1923. The Village of Forest Hill boundaries are based on the boundaries of School District 30 in York Township (City of Toronto Archives).



Looking north on Spadina Road at Lonsdale Avenue intersection in 1927 in "A Most Unlikely Village"

the administrative offices were rented above the store at 417 Spadina Road at the northeast corner of the Spadina and Lonsdale intersection. In 1930, the municipal offices were moved to the bank building at 410 Spadina Road at the southwest corner of the Spadina and Lonsdale intersection. The municipal offices moved to the first purpose built municipal building and library complex at 700 Eglinton Avenue in 1962 (French, 23).

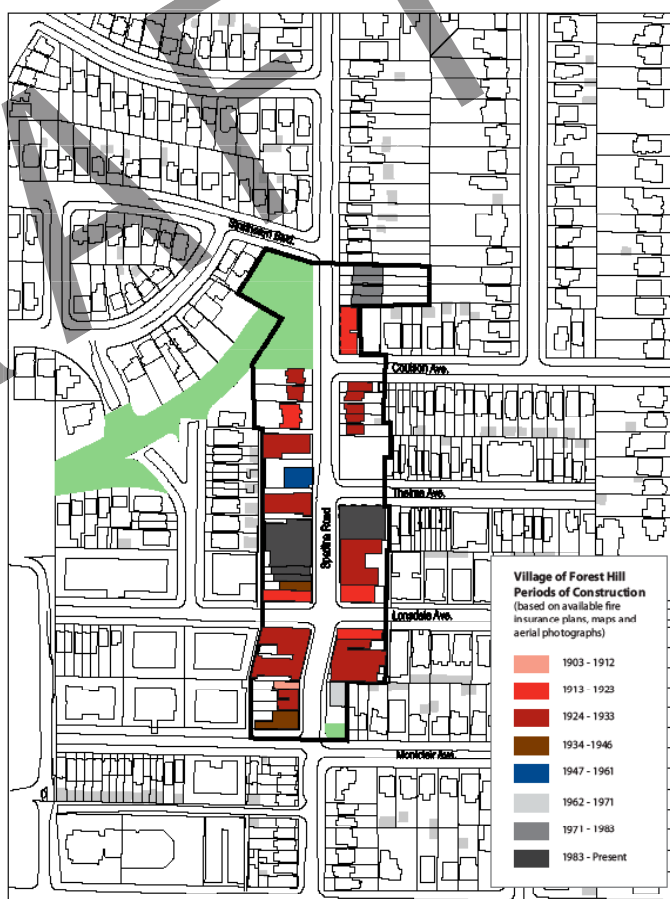
A large proportion of the study area was developed within the first ten years of the village's incorporation between 1924 and 1934 (see figure 13: Periods of Construction map). Commercial uses, concentrated around the four corners of Spadina and Lonsdale spilled north and south along Spadina Road, establishing the character of the study area. An article from the Globe and Mail in 1982 states:

*...the heart of the truly historic part of the [Village of Forest Hill] lies to the south, in a two-block area north of St. Clair on Spadina Road. Here, the tiny cluster of stores are reminiscent of small-town Ontario at the turn of the century. The buildings are mostly two-story, the storefronts modestly set in wooden frames, with little or no chrome or garish signs in evidence, and certainly none of the olde shoppe nonsense often to be found in new shopping malls.*

Kathleen Rex, Globe and Mail, January 13, 1982 SB17.



The Village of Forest Hill municipal offices were located above the bank at 410 Spadina Road



Periods of Construction Map

## 1.5 Urban Planning and Design Review in the Village of Forest Hill

Development in the Village of Forest Hill was firmly rooted in rational urban planning. Strict by-laws were enforced that limited industrial uses and controlled the quality and appearance of new homes, requiring minimum costs to house construction and that the front elevation of all houses to be designed by an architect. The Village even established a Board of Architects to review applications for new residential construction. On the other hand, there were no restrictions on who could purchase property in the village. The high quality of education, active citizenry and lack of racial discrimination drew many Jewish residents from the crowded central section of Toronto to Forest Hill, beginning in the late 1930s (French, 55). By 1961, Jewish residents comprised almost half of the Forest Hill population, the highest proportion in any Canadian municipality at the time.

Apartment buildings were strategically encouraged in the development of the Village of Forest Hill, predominantly along Eglinton Avenue in the mid 1930s, in order to keep taxes low for residents (French, 55). The first apartment buildings in the village concentrated near the Spadina Road and Lonsdale Avenue intersection in the late 1920s.

Apartment buildings developed along the northern portion of the study area provided a transition to the primarily single-detached character of Spadina Road, moving away from the commercial four corners at Spadina Road and Lonsdale Avenue. The apartment building at 404 Spadina Road is distinguished as an apartment building with retail uses at grade, integrating with the commercial four corners at Spadina Road and Lonsdale Avenue.

The Forest Hill Manor Apartments at 404 Spadina Road was designed in 1930 by Pittsburgh-born architect, Herbert George Duerr ([www.dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org](http://www.dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org)). Duerr designed several movie theatres in Toronto and other municipalities across Ontario. 404 Spadina Road was listed on the City of Toronto's Heritage Register in 1995.

The majority of buildings within the study area were constructed by the 1940s, with the exception of the Canadian Bank of Commerce building constructed at 462 Spadina Road in 1959. The bank building at 462 Spadina Road introduced concrete modernist architecture to the early 20th century streetscape.



Municipality of Forest Hill, By-law map, 1939 (City of Toronto Archives)



Forest Hill Manor Apartments at 404 Spadina Road, constructed in 1930, designed by architect Herbert George Duerr



Looking north on Spadina Road from Lonsdale Avenue, 1955 (Toronto Public Library)

## 1.6 Amalgamation with the City of Toronto (1967 – Present)

Forest Hill resisted amalgamation with the City of Toronto until 1967. Forest Hill intentionally remained a village to maintain the "distinction" that had come to characterize the area. As stated in a 1930s report on the operational and financial position of the village:

*To become a town would eliminate the distinction which the term village has assumed in connection with Forest Hill, which has had no small psychological effect in attracting the present type of development and in retaining the affection and loyalty of its residents... The loss of the word village*

*might possibly be felt insofar as future development is concerned. It is difficult to estimate any such loss in dollars and cents."*

*French, 49*

Even after amalgamation with the City of Toronto, the study area remained relatively stable until two large commercial block buildings at 446 and 439 Spadina Road were built in the 1980s, replacing gas stations that had been on each side of Spadina Road. These buildings extended the commercial street wall further north along Spadina Road.

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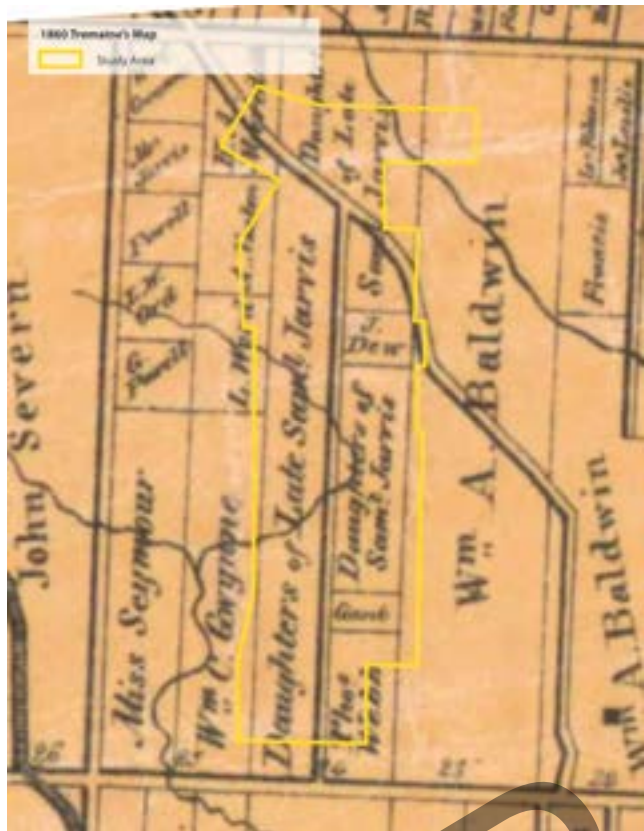
*Gould, Allan and Leonard Wise. Toronto Street Names: An Illustrated Guide to Their Origins. Richmond Hill: Firefly Books Ltd, 2011.*

*Lundell, Liz. The Estates of Old Toronto. Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1997.*

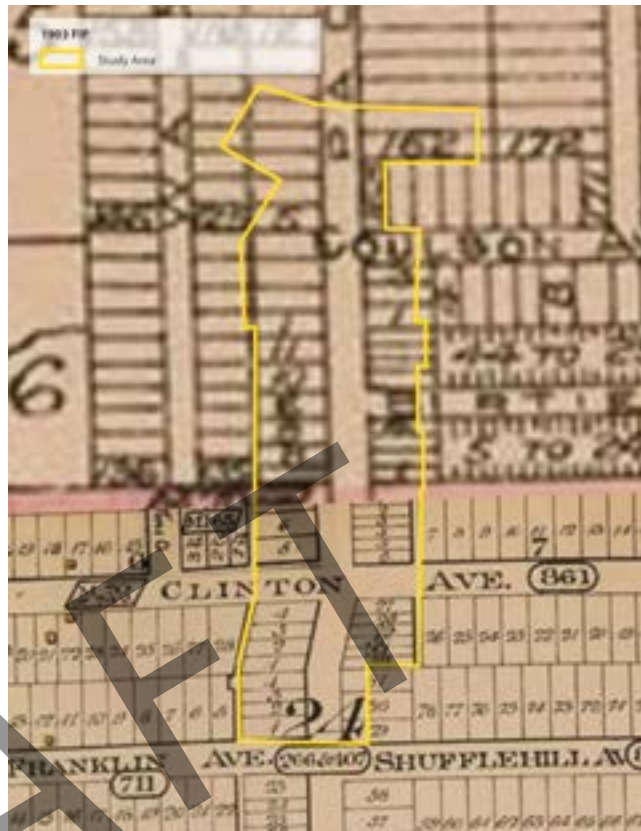
*Toronto Public Library. "Historic Walk: The Village of Forest Hill". Date unknown.*



## Historical Maps



1860 Tremaine's Map



1903 Goad's Fire Insurance Plan



1923 Map of Forest Hill on year of incorporation

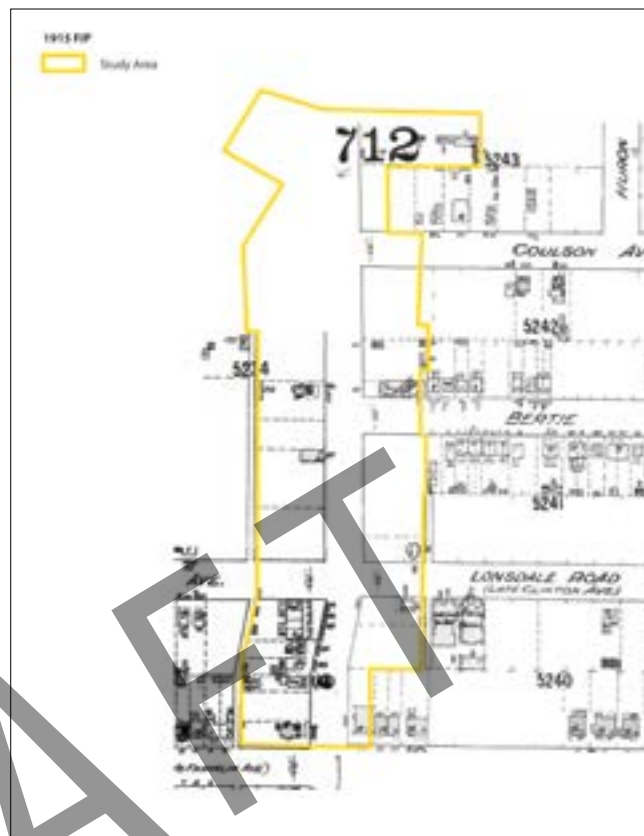


1924 Goad's Fire Insurance Plan





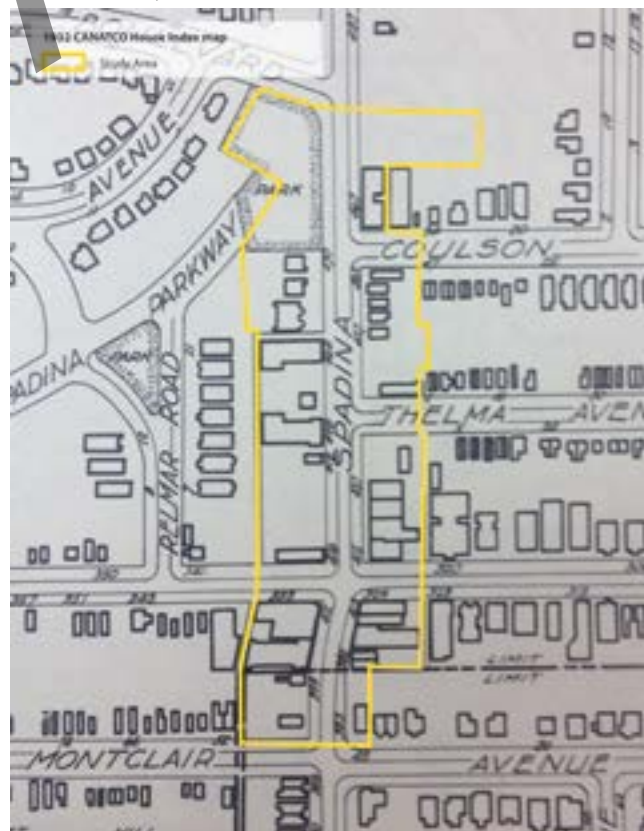
1910 Goad's Fire Insurance Plan



1915 Goad's Fire Insurance Plans

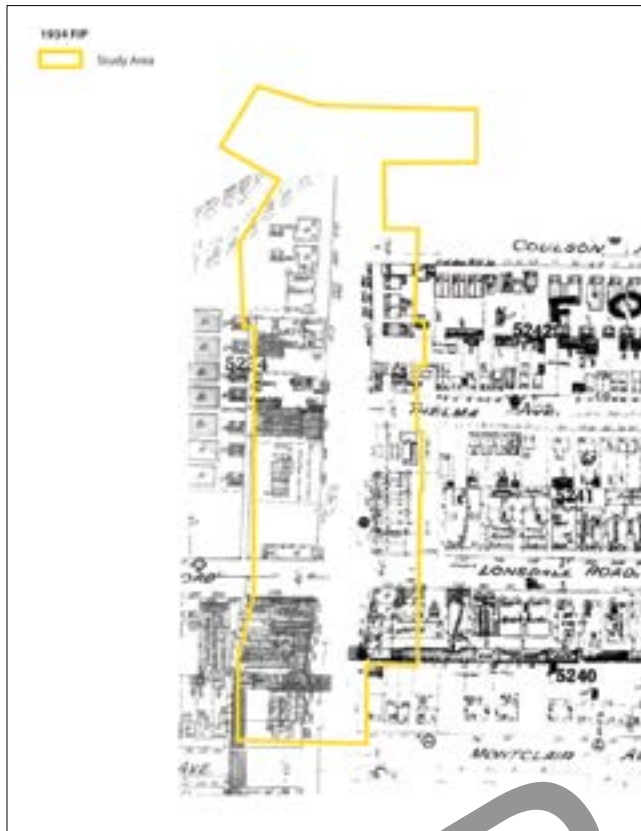


1928 Goad's Fire Insurance Plan



1932 CANATCO House Index Map

## Historical Maps



1934 Goad's Fire Insurance Plan



1947 Aerial Photograph



1971 Aerial Photograph



1983 Aerial Photograph





1958 Goad's Fire Insurance Plan



1962 Aerial Photograph



1992 Aerial Photograph



# Forest Hill Village

## Urban Design Guidelines

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2026