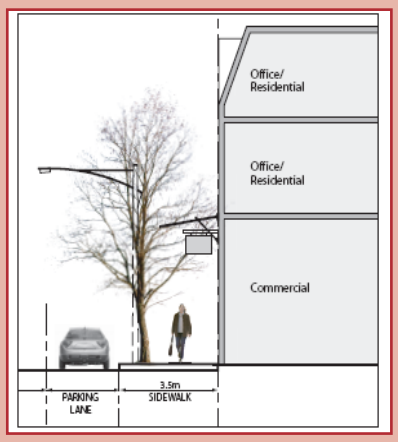
• InfoSheet •
Planning for Community Design

Ontario

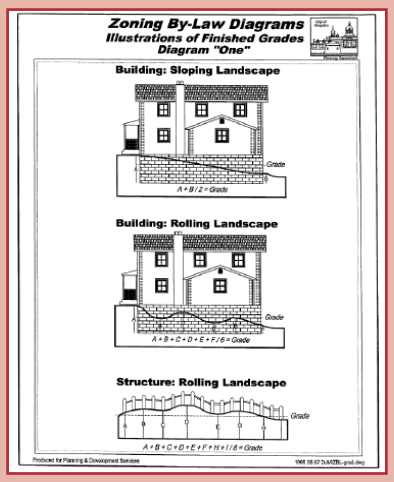


Model Urban Design Guidelines
www.smarterniagara.com

Did you know?

Region of Niagara Design Guidelines – the region is using design guidelines with a variety of three-dimensional illustrations to implement its official plan policies

City of Kingston Zoning By-Law - Diagrams are used in the city's Downtown and Harbour Zoning By-Law to communicate design expectations



Downtown and Harbour Zoning By-Law #96-259
www.cityofkingston.ca

This InfoSheet provides an overview of Planning Act tools that can help municipalities link good community design with economic growth and competitiveness.

What is Community Design?

Community design is an integral part of land use planning, involving the creation and management of the built environment – buildings, streets, transport systems, parks and natural spaces that collectively help shape the form and pattern of municipalities. Carefully planned and thoughtfully executed, community design is vital in contributing to the attractiveness, vibrancy, health and sustainability of physical landscapes.

The focus of community design is the relationship between people and the built environment in which everyday activities are undertaken. When environmental, economic and social considerations are integrated into design decisions, positive community outcomes can be achieved, including:

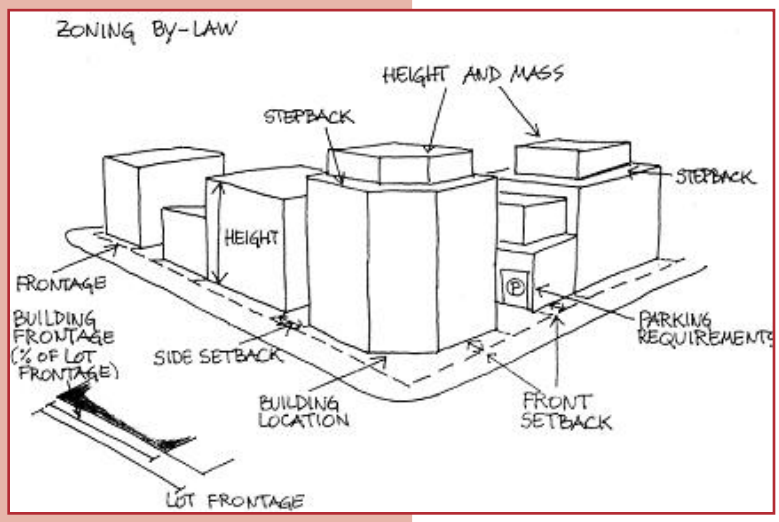
- safe, creative and attractive streets, neighbourhoods, business areas and public spaces
- enhanced property values
- balanced needs between pedestrians and motorized vehicles
- improved air quality and decreased greenhouse gas emissions
- healthier and more resilient natural environment and biodiversity
- healthier patterns of human activity
- walkable neighbourhoods with nearby services and facilities
- more low impact and energy efficient development practices
- strengthened community identity
- increased economic vitality and resiliency
- improved municipal fiscal performance

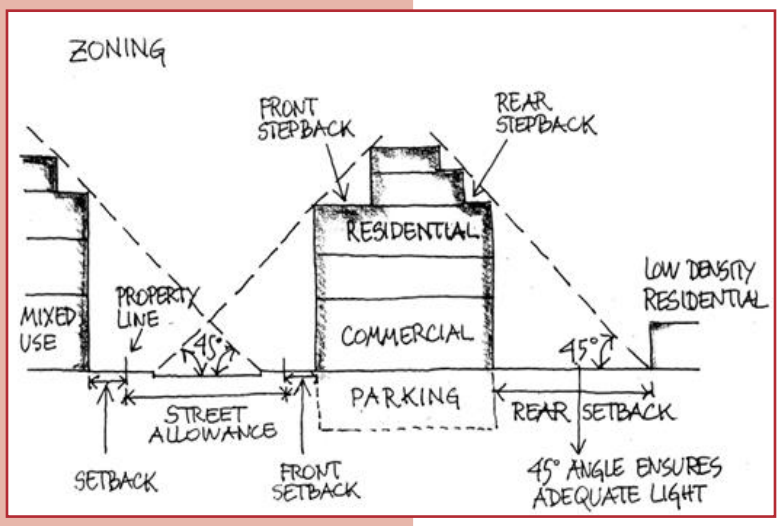
Community Design and the Provincial Land Use Planning System

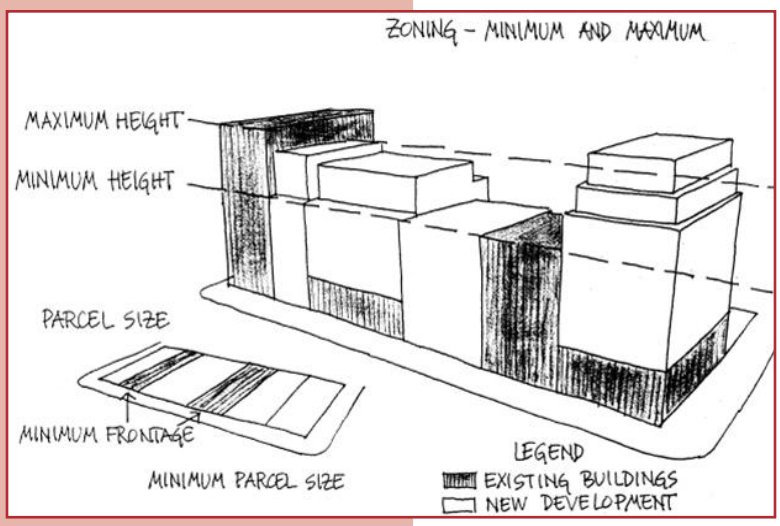
Ontario's Provincial Policy Statement, 2005 supports well-planned and well-designed sustainable communities. In 2007, the principle of sustainable communities was incorporated in the Planning Act through "the promotion of development that is designed to be sustainable, to support public transit and to be oriented to pedestrians".

To support sustainability, municipalities have been provided with a range of planning tools that can be used to plan and design the built environment.

Key Planning Act Tools to Address Community Design







Official Plans – Sections 17, 22 and 26

Through official plan design policies, municipalities articulate and reflect community values on how the built environment should look and feel (e.g., downtown centres, public spaces, transit nodes and corridors, green spaces, gateways and settlement edges). Objectives often include attractive, comfortable and safe streetscapes, heritage preservation, well-connected walking and cycling pathways, more compact form, environmentally sustainable neighbourhoods and barrier-free walkways and buildings.

As a supplement to an official plan, some municipalities have created more detailed design guidelines to provide specific direction for special municipal interest areas such as the character of the business district through the treatment of building facades, the design of pedestrian areas, streetscaping and lighting. Design guidelines will often address the connection of the public realm - streets, sidewalks, trees, parks, open spaces with private development.

Community Improvement Plans – Section 28

Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) can support municipal design goals through municipally-driven programs that focus on infrastructure provision and public realm improvements. They may also provide for grant or loan programs that encourage development activities that support community design (e.g., building facade improvements, historic building restoration and preservation, streetscaping that includes elements such as urban forestration, street furniture, clear signage and enhancement of pedestrian walkways (e.g., street patterning).

Zoning By-Laws – Section 34

Through zoning by-laws, good community design can be achieved through provisions that regulate the built environment, including use, location, size (including density, height, and setbacks), character and off-street parking requirements.

Zoning by-laws can also promote efficient land use patterns by allowing a greater mix of uses in specified areas and by regulating minimum heights, densities and lot sizes for more compact neighbourhoods.

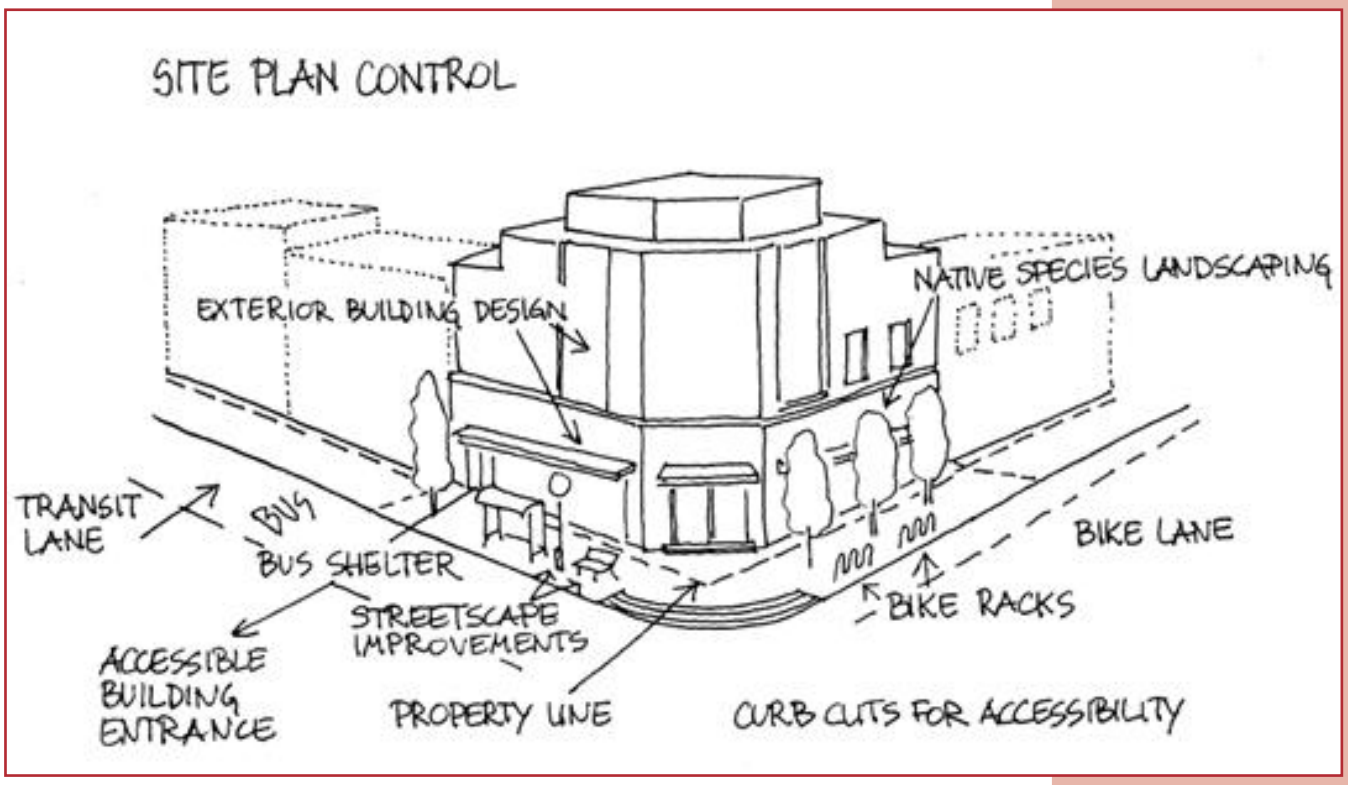
Preconsultation – Sections 22, 34, 41 and 51
Municipalities may require pre-consultation on specified planning applications to ensure development proposals align with design policies.

Increased Height and Density – Section 37
Municipalities may exchange additional building height and density for specified facilities, services or matters set out in a by-law. Community design elements may include public realm improvements to enhance the appearance of an area (e.g., public art, building façade improvements, public realm upgrades and transit-corridor treescaping).

Parkland Dedication – Subsection 42(6.2)
Where on-site parkland dedication cannot be accommodated, municipalities may reduce their cash-in-lieu requirements in exchange for sustainability features. Features that address community design could include green roofs, permeable surfaces, tree planting for shade and cooling, and water efficiency and conservation measures.

Site Plan Control – Section 41
Exterior design control can regulate external building, site and boulevard matters such as character, scale, appearance and sustainable design. Examples of site plan design elements include:

- street furniture, tree planting, energy-efficient lighting and landscaping for sustainable and vibrant public spaces
- active and transparent streetfront design to create accessible, safe and attractive buildings and streetscapes
- facade elements that complement adjacent buildings to better reflect community character
- permeable surfaces to reduce stormwater runoff
- bicycle parking to facilitate active transportation choices
- curb cuts to improve universal accessibility and mobility
- green roofs and walls to reduce localized heat island effect, capture rainwater and provide habitat to promote biodiversity.



Ontario

For More Information

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Provincial Planning Policy Branch
(416) 585-6014
ontario.ca/mah

Municipal Services Office

Central (Toronto)
(416) 585-6226
Toll Free: 800-668-0230

Eastern (Kingston)
(613) 545-2100
Toll Free: 800-267-9438

Northeastern (Sudbury)
(705) 564-0120
Toll Free: 800-461-1193

Northwestern (Thunder Bay)
(807) 475-1651
Toll Free: 800-465-5027

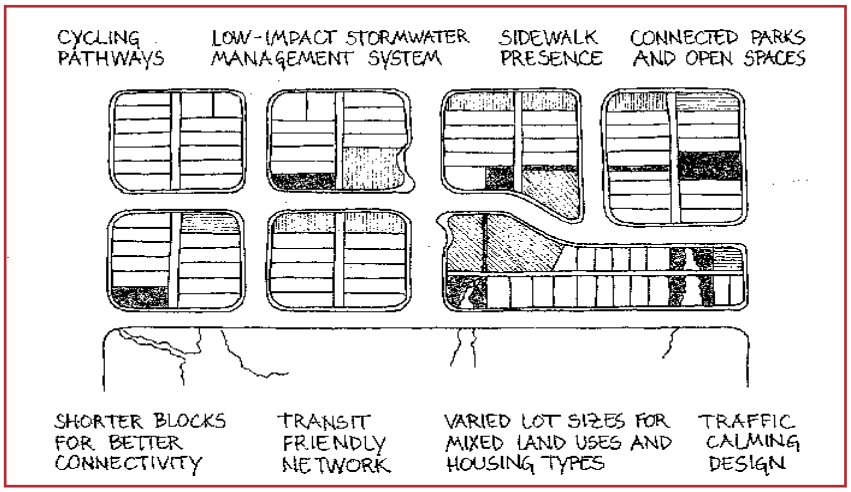
Western (London)
(519) 873-4020
Toll Free: 800-265-4736

Other Resources

Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure
Places to Grow initiative
ontario.ca/placestogrow

Plans of Subdivision – Section 51

Approval authorities may review plans of subdivision to assess design aspects and layout to support sustainability. Plan of subdivision can encourage a variety of housing choices and mix of uses by planning for different lot shapes and sizes. This tool may improve transportation choices through improved street connectivity and the provision of bicycle and pedestrian pathways and public transitways. It may also be used to promote energy efficiency and conservation through the design and orientation of streets and lots. Plan of subdivision is also instrumental in providing parks and open spaces and conserving natural features.



Development Permit System (DPS) – Section 70.2 and O.Reg. 608/06

The DPS is a streamlining tool that combines zoning, site plan control, and minor variance approvals. A DPS by-law can set out discretionary uses that may be permitted if criteria in the by-law are met. Community design matters that could be considered include:

- exterior features on buildings such as solar panels that provide clean energy and reduce greenhouse gases
- fish habit restoration where development is adjacent to water bodies
- architectural design requirements to ensure an appropriate fit with existing neighbourhoods
- Reforestation requirements to create street shading, promote carbon uptake and reduce rain water runoff

Note to User: This InfoSheet deals in summarized fashion with complex matters and reflects legislation, policies and practices that are subject to change. It should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialized legal or professional advice in connection with any particular matter and should not be construed as legal advice by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The user is solely responsible for any use or the application of this information. As such, this Ministry does not accept any legal responsibility for the contents of this InfoSheet or for any consequences, including direct or indirect liability, arising from its use.

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