COMMERCIAL URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

City of London Planning Division

November 1999
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Introduction

Large retail developments need high visibility and access to high volumes of consumers; therefore, locations on arterial roads are necessary. In turn, their building and site design determines much of the character and attractiveness of major gateways to the City. Large developments with large surface parking lots with limited landscaping, can be detrimental to a community's image and streetscape appearance. Several concerns have been raised by the public and members of Council with respect to the design of existing large format retailers:

- blank and windowless facades
- flat roofs
- metal clad design warehouse buildings
- lack of pedestrian access

London's Official Plan contains urban design principles to address matters related to the visual character, aesthetics and compatibility of land use and to the qualitative aspects of development. The emphasis of urban design principles is placed on the promotion of a high standard of design for buildings to be constructed in prominent locations such as along major entryways to the City.

Purpose

The purpose of the City's commercial urban design guidelines is to identify key goals and expectations to be met through urban design. Through guiding statements, illustrations and pictures, a number of performance criteria or best practices are listed to achieve these goals. The best practices are not specifications or regulations; they do not preclude alternatives being explored to accomplish design excellence. Each and every one of the listed best practices need not be addressed for every development proposal as long as the intent of the goal is achieved. The City's guidelines should be read in the context of the Official Plan and in conjunction with the various requirements of regulatory documents, including the Zoning By-law, Site Plan By-law and the Sign By-law. The numbers, fractions and percentages listed in some of the best practices describe how certain urban design features can be achieved. The numbers are not to be interpreted as regulations commonly found in Zoning By-laws or the Ontario Building Code. They will be interpreted flexibly recognizing the needs of the retail market and variability of site requirements for multiple tenant retail establishments.

Implementation

The City's commercial urban design guidelines will be used to evaluate commercial site plan applications. Using the City's guidelines as a list of best practices, the proponent will determine specific guidelines to be employed in the site plan and building design of the proposed development. This guideline, prepared by the applicant and agreed to by City Staff, will be incorporated into the site plan agreement for individual commercial projects. Where necessary, the site plan agreement will act as the rationale to remove holding provisions addressing urban design issues.
1. **Building Design**

**Goal:** To reduce the mass/scale and uniform “box like” appearance of large, blank walls of new format retail buildings, while providing visual interest through a high quality of building design.

**Best Practices:**

A) Long building facades (greater than 30m (100 ft.) in length), should incorporate elongated (extending at least 20% of the length of the facade) wall plane projections or recesses. (*Refer to Figure 1 and Photo 1*)

B) Ground floor facades that face public streets should incorporate arcades, display windows, entry areas, awnings or other features such as a repeating colour change and/or texture change along at least half the length of the facade. This can be accomplished by the use of architectural or structural bays, or through a change in plane such a reveal, an offset or a projecting rib. (*Refer to Figure 2 and Photo 2*)

C) Where possible, buildings adjacent to public streets should orient their principal entrances to the street. The street level facade should include windows for at least half the length of the building facade. Where store entrances front the parking area, the visual impact of blank walls should be mitigated by incorporating other best practices listed (wall plane projections, texture changes or roof treatments) along the streetline facade.

D) Areas for outdoor storage, truck parking, trash collection or compaction, loading, or other service uses should not be visible from abutting streets. Such areas should be located in the rear yard or in an appropriately screened side yard.

E) Non-enclosed areas for the storage and sale of seasonal inventory should be permanently defined and screened with walls and/or fences and conform to the principal materials of the building and landscaping.

F) Parapets should be used to conceal flat roofs and rooftop equipment, such as HVAC units, from public view. Such parapets should not, at any point, exceed one-third of the height of the supporting wall.

G) Variable rooflines are encouraged to reduce the mass and scale of large buildings and to add visual interest. This could be achieved through the use of dormers and parapet walls to create variety and interest. At least one such change should be located along each facade which fronts or flanks an arterial or collector roadway. (*Refer to Figure 3 and Photos 3 and 4*)

H) Each principal building on a site should have clearly defined, highly visible customer entrances incorporating several of the following features: canopies or porticos; overhangs; recesses/projections; arcades; raised corniced parapets over the door; peaked roof forms; arches; outdoor patios; or display windows. Vehicle activity uses, such automotive repair bays and customer loading facilities should not be located near the principle building entrance.
2. Parking and Pedestrian Orientation

Goal: To reduce the overall visual impact of paved parking lots and provide for safe, convenient, efficient and aesthetically pleasing vehicular and pedestrian access to, from and between commercial buildings.

A) Where a single building is proposed, the appearance of large parking areas should be mitigated by dividing the parking area into smaller parking modules through the use of landscaped parking lot islands. The provision of these islands and other landscaping should be to a scale relative to the size of the larger parking area. Clearly defined pedestrian routes should be provided from the fronting street and parking area to the main entrance of the building. If there are multiple tenants, there should be clearly defined, unobstructed pedestrian access between main entrances. (Refer to Photo 3)

B) Where multiple buildings are proposed, parking areas should also be broken into smaller parking modules. Pedestrian routes should be provided through the parking areas across the site to other retail destinations. These pedestrian routes (minimum width of at least 2.4m (8 ft.)) should include trees, shrubs, benches, flower beds, ground covers, textured materials or other such materials to emphasize the significance of the route.

C) Where smaller commercial buildings are proposed along the street frontage, the maximum building setback should accommodate not more than two rows of parking spaces and associated landscaping.

D) Where a number of commercial buildings are located in a larger commercial area, parking areas should be coordinated to allow for joint access points between parking areas.

E) Sidewalks should be distinguished from driving surfaces through the use of durable, low maintenance surface materials such as pavers, bricks or scored concrete to enhance pedestrian safety and comfort, as well as the attractiveness of the walkways.

F) Sidewalks (minimum width of at least 2.4m (8 ft.)) shall be provided along the full length of the building along any facade featuring a customer entrance, and along any facade abutting public parking areas. Weather protection features such as awnings or arcades should be provided for customer entrances.

G) Loading docks, truck parking, outdoor storage, trash collection and other service functions shall be incorporated into the overall design of the building and these areas should be screened from adjacent residential properties and public streets by appropriate landscaping features. The combination of vegetation and berming should provide for full screening of the above items from public view.

H) Perimeter/edge landscaping (minimum width of 5m (16 ft.)) and island landscaping (minimum width of 3m (9.8 ft.)) should provide a suitable environment so that the vegetation can grow and mature. Vegetation should be mixed in terms of height and appearance to create visual interest. (Refer to Photo 6)
The following photos illustrate local examples of recently built commercial buildings which contain features which conform to the proposed commercial guidelines.

Photo 1  Home Depot- Fanshawe Park Road
Example of building recesses

Photo 2  Toys R Us - Wellington Road
Example of entry area and display windows facing public street
Photo 3  Sears - Wharncliffe Road
Example of vertical change in roof condition on facade facing arterial roadway.

Photo 4  Chapters / Pet Smart - Fanshawe Park Road
Example of roof changes
Photo 5 Wal-Mart - Wellington Road
Example of common sidewalks from parking spaces to building entrance.

Photo 6 Loblaws - Fanshawe Park Road
Example of landscaping along arterial road
Jeff Malpass
Corporate Services Department
The Corporation of the City of London
Deputy City Manager

CITY OF LONDON
PLANNING DIVISION

December 7, 1999

V. A. Coté
Commissioner of Planning and Development

I hereby certify that the Municipal Council, at its session held on December 6, 1999 resolved:

9. That, on the recommendation of the Commissioner of Planning and Development, the following actions be taken with respect to the establishment of commercial urban design guidelines:

(a) the attached Commercial Urban Design Guidelines BE ADOPTED as guidelines pursuant to Section 19.2 of the Official Plan; and

(b) the attached guidelines BE APPLIED to the proposed commercial developments at the intersection of Fanshawe Park Road and Hyde Park Road as a pilot project;

it being pointed out that at the public participation meeting associated with this matter, the following individuals made an oral submission in connection therewith:

- Ric Knutson, Knutson Planning Inc., on behalf of Charcomp Developments - expressing support for the proposed guidelines;
- Glen Scheels, on behalf of First London Professional Developments - expressing support for the proposed guidelines; and
- Charlie Ross, McKenzie, Lake, on behalf of Stanton Bros. Ltd. - expressing support for the proposed guidelines. (9/29/PC)

R. J. Tolmie
Deputy City Clerk

attach.

cc:
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