

Urban Design Brief

Terms of Reference



June, 2017

Introduction

What is the purpose of an Urban Design Brief?

The purpose of an Urban Design Brief is to allow for the urban design elements of development to be evaluated. The City of Guelph, through documents such as the [Urban Design Action Plan](#) and the [City's Official Plan](#), has emphasized the importance of urban design excellence. This requires conscious and coordinated efforts on the part of the public and private sectors. The Urban Design Brief is one tool the City uses to:

- ensure new developments have examined opportunities/constraints of a site; and
- provide design solutions that are context-sensitive and respond to urban design policy context

It will also help coordinate and articulate how the elements of the public and private realm will work together.

When is an Urban Design Brief required?

Generally, as part of the pre-consultation process, an Urban Design Brief is required for larger projects and/or in key areas within the City's urban structure such as downtown, mixed-use nodes, intensification corridors, and sensitive infill. The level of detail in the Urban Design Brief will reflect the scale and/or sensitivity of the development project.

How will an Urban Design Brief be used?

When required, an Urban Design Brief is submitted as part of a complete planning application. Early consultation with City staff regarding concept development and the preparation of the brief will help ensure a collaborative and efficient process. The brief is not intended to replace a Planning Justification Report, but set the stage for what types of applications are required in order to realize the proposal. The brief shall explain and illustrate why the proposed development represents the optimum

design solution. It cannot be simply an argument for a preferred development scheme. Through the planning application evaluation process additional clarifications and submissions may be required.

An Urban Design Brief may also synthesize conclusions from any other required built form submissions such as:

- Building mass model
- Pedestrian level wind study
- Sun and shadow study and
- Streetscape analyses

An Urban Design Brief shall be completed by a design professional such as an architect and/or planner with a background in urban design.

Structure and format

An Urban Design Brief should follow the following format.

Part 1

The purpose of Part 1 is to examine and understand the site's physical and policy context and how these translate into site-specific goals and guidelines for the site.

1.1 Physical context

a. Site definition

- What is the boundary to the site?
- Where is it located?

b. On site attributes

- Describe the topography.
- Provide information about existing built form and structures, vegetation, and heritage features.

c. The site in context

- How does the site fit into the City's and neighbourhood structure (landmarks, gateways etc.)?
- Describe the surrounding street network and urban pattern.
- Are there existing public views and/or public vistas through the site?
- What are the surrounding land uses, and what is their relationship to the current site?

- Are there any existing barriers or potential connections?
- Analyze the site in relationship to surrounding transportation systems and open space systems (including the Natural Heritage System).
- Are there any adjacent heritage elements?

1.2 Response to policy context

a. Official Plan

- How will the development be guided and respond to the Official Plan and specifically the Urban Design policies?
- Provide justification on how the proposed development follows and /or implements the policies.
- Other applicable guidelines and documents.
- How will the development be guided and respond to any other applicable built form standards and planning documents such as the [Downtown Built Form Standards](#), [Urban Design Concept Plans](#) etc.?

1.3 Urban design goals and objectives for the site

a. Urban Design Goals and Objectives

- Based on the physical and policy context, what are the urban design goals of the development?
- What are the urban design objectives of the development?
- What process will be used?

Part 2

The purpose of Part 2 is to describe the proposed development concept and design solutions that respond to the goals established in Part 1.

2.1 Development concept

a. Site design

- Describe the proposed design concept.
- On larger sites or where phasing is proposed, demonstrate how the site has been master planned.
- How will the building(s) address the street and public open spaces?
- Show the location of building entrances.
- Show proposed building setbacks.
- If there are any heritage elements, or adjacent heritage elements, how is the new development compatible?
- Show grading and ground floor elevation in relation to the street.

b. Transitions

How are transitions to the surrounding context being achieved using strategies such as appropriate massing and landscaping?

c. Public views and/or public vistas

Are there public views and/or public vistas being maintained and/or established?

d. Parking

- How will parking be dealt with on the site?
- How will parking be screened and located?
- What other opportunities are there for parking?

e. Access, accessibility circulation, loading, storage

Show and demonstrate internal circulation and connections to the surrounding transportation network including: sidewalks, bicycle facilities, vehicular entrances and circulation, bus stops, and accessible routes.

f. Materials

Describe proposed building materials and colours keeping in mind durability, sustainability, and context.

g. Lighting and signage

- How will the building look at night?
- How will appropriate lighting be established to ensure safety and minimize impacts on adjacent properties?
- How will signage be dealt with?

h. Architectural treatment

- How is the architectural treatment been established?
- How is it responding to and/or reflecting its local context?
- What is the design treatment at-grade for pedestrians?
- Where applicable, how does the building address the corner?

2.1.1. High-density development

High-density development can present additional opportunities and potential issues. Therefore, the following information should be provided and addressed for this type of development.

a. Built form

- Floor plates sizes should be analyzed and provided. For tall buildings, floor plates above the base (generally five storeys and above) should be limited to create elegant buildings. Generally they should not exceed 1000 square metres. Large and tall slab-like buildings do not create good urbanism.
- Appropriate distances between tall buildings need to be demonstrated.
- Buildings should contain bases, middle and tops. Each of these portions of the buildings should be addressed with particular emphasis on how the base of the building will contribute to the pedestrian experience.
- Long mid-rise and high rise buildings need to be broken up and well-articulated, demonstrate how the buildings are pedestrian friendly at ground level.

b. Transitions

- Demonstrate how the proposed massing creates appropriate transitions within the surrounding context including issues of privacy.
- If any tools such as angular planes have been used include explanatory diagram.

c. Microclimate: wind and shadows

Identify and analyze micro-climate impacts regarding comfort. For example, show how wind, shadows and sky views, etc. have been addressed through tools such as sections, perspectives and/or shadow studies.

2.2 Integration with the public realm

a. Integration with the streetscape

- How will the interface between the public and private realm contribute to creating attractive and functional streetscapes?
- Show how landscaping (either hard or soft) will be used to create a transition between the private and public realm, be sure to show pedestrian circulation connections.
- Show the streetscape features (street furniture, trees, street lights etc.). In the downtown refer to the [Downtown Streetscape Manual](#).
- If proposed, include details on how mid-block connections will be designed to create attractive, durable and functional spaces.

b. Development Adjacent to River Corridors

If adjacent to a river corridor, building design and elevations should be provided to show how they address the river, including public access.

c. Publicly accessible open space and features

- Show any public art (may include elements such as special lighting, street furniture etc.)
- For any proposed urban squares or similar features such as plazas and/or courtyard, include information on their design elements and materials.

2.3 Sustainable urban design

a. General environmental sustainability

- Is the project applying for green building certification such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design® (LEED)?
- What building and landscaping approaches or technologies are being used to reduce the building environmental impact?

b. Energy

How is the project responding to the [City's Community Energy Initiative](#)?

For more information

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Alternate formats are available as per the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.