



**Town of Essex**

**Urban Design Guidelines**

**for Downtown Harrow and Essex Centre**

**May 2014**



**Table of Contents**

**Section 1.0 Purpose and Intent.....3**

**Section 2.0 Streetscapes.....4**

**Section 3.0 Active and Inviting Streetscapes.....5**

**Section 4.0 Guidelines for Proper Street Definition.....6**

**Section 5.0 Infill and Redevelopment Guidelines.....10**

**Section 6.0 Complementary Design of New Buildings.....19**

## **Downtown Urban Design Guidelines**

### **1.0 Purpose and Intent**

The “Downtown” is a reflection of a community’s personality. It is at the heart of the community, serving its needs for convenient access to shops and services and providing a gathering place for social interaction. It should be a vital and attractive place with a character all its own. Like any physical place, it needs to be continually re-energized and renewed. There should be a cohesiveness and consistency to this renewal that satisfies the needs of individual businesses, provides a sense of place distinct from other downtowns in the region and is a source of community pride.

In recent years, the Town of Essex has implemented community improvement plans for downtown Harrow and Essex Centre, which provide municipal funds to stimulate the rehabilitation of individual buildings and to help bring a broader mix of land uses to them. Harrow has many buildings with strong historical and architectural elements that distinguish it from the other urban centers in the town. A streetscape plan for downtown Essex Centre with the theme, Essex Centre, the Hub of the County, has been adopted and new street furniture has been introduced to both downtown Harrow and Essex Centre.

These Urban Design Guidelines (UDG) provide broad directions for building alterations, facade improvements and infilling in the existing downtowns to help ensure that the overall approach to revitalization is cohesive, functional and attractive. They are intended to provide a base set of conditions upon which excellence in design can be expressed, bringing vitality, animation and quality to our main streets. The UDG will serve as a companion to the Community Improvement Plans for Harrow and Essex Centre to guide municipal staff and the public when considering the application of funding for site-specific projects. Together the goal is to achieve the goals of maintaining a prosperous downtown where people can live, work and play.

## 2.0 Streetscapes

While the principal downtown attractions are the businesses themselves, it should also be a gathering place for residents and visitors.

- Streets must accommodate the needs of businesses and emergency and public services in an appropriate manner;
- Streets should provide physical comfort, derived from both a sense of **security** and **welcome**;
- Physical barriers, which deter or prevent people from walking or cycling through the downtown, should be removed;
- **Complete street** (multi-use transportation) connections between the downtown and the adjoining neighbourhoods should be developed. Connect regional trails to the core area. Develop a streetscape design and direction theme to tie together the various trails, pathways and streets. Calming techniques should be employed to slow vehicular traffic as it approaches and travels the main street;



- **Entrances and gateways** to the downtown should be physically defined through signage, themed landscape elements, like planters and trees, combined with attractive street furniture and traffic calming strategies;
- **Corner bulbs and raised cross walks** of special paving materials at key pedestrian crossings are encouraged. This emphasizes the landmark status and provides traffic

calming to create safer conditions for pedestrians. Lay-by parking can be framed by building out the corners to provide more pedestrian space.

- Streets require **definition** with clear boundaries or “walls” that delineate it as an outdoor room. These “walls” are typically buildings and landscaping to provide a sense of enclosure;
- **Welcome features**, like street trees and street furniture, are encouraged where possible and should be appropriately scaled and designed in accordance with a streetscape theme to encourage community interaction.

### **3.0 Active and Inviting Streetscapes:**

- Building facades along the main street display the character and quality of a downtown so they should be attractive and well maintained;
- Buildings should be continuous, uninterrupted by uninviting gaps, to create interesting walking environments;
- Construct visually interesting building facades and signage;
- Provide accessibility to foster comfort and safety for pedestrians;
- Preserve and restore significant view corridors to the downtown, prominent buildings and landscape features. The buildings that mark these important view corridors or frame intersections should all be designed or refreshed to enhance them;
- Incorporate weather protection to ensure comfort for pedestrians and protection from inclement weather, through the use of awnings, canopies and recessed building entrances;
- Incorporate murals and a unique design scheme that detail the Town’s history, recognize its notable citizens and its community pride. Visual interest at the **human scale** adds to the positive and inviting experience;
- Buildings require **transparency**. Large windows at eye level are inviting, engaging and provide for natural surveillance;
- New buildings should, by their design and orientation, enhance street vitality, be compatible with existing buildings in scale and architectural style and reflect best practices in architecture and urban design.

## 4.0 Guidelines for Proper Street Definition

### 4.1 Building to the sidewalk

Buildings should positively frame and define streets and other public open spaces.

- While it may be necessary to locate and design buildings in response to specific site conditions or opportunities related to lotting, site location, significant vegetation and view lines, buildings set close to the public sidewalk create a strong street **definition** and **enclosure**;
- The upper storeys should be built to the street (exterior lot line), while portions of the ground floor can be set back to create sheltered entrances;
- A setback from the public sidewalk may also be considered or encouraged for a pedestrian courtyard, outdoor cafe or similar feature that adds character and vibrancy to the business activity and the downtown;
- The use of landscaping and low walls to define the street frontage can also compensate for greater building setbacks from the exterior lot line;
- Entrances to parking areas should be by way of a side street or rear alley so as not to intrude on main street activities and pedestrian movements;
- Outdoor cafes, patios and displays on or adjacent to the street or a laneway are encouraged. A specific and consistent public sidewalk width will be maintained for unencumbered pedestrian movement.

### 4.2 Maintaining Transparency

Buildings should be designed for visual interest and public safety and accessibility.

- Provide pedestrian access to businesses directly from the public street, and orient upper storey windows and balconies to overlook adjoining public open spaces;
- On corner lots develop both street facing facades as front elevations with pronounced entrances oriented to the corner and or primary streets;

- Ensure shop fronts are **transparent**. Good transparency is when interior private uses are clearly visible from and can even spill out onto the public sidewalk. The public space should also be visible from inside buildings to allow for casual surveillance;
- Avoid expansive blank walls over 5 metres in length adjacent to public streets. When blank walls are unavoidable or existing, they should be **mitigated** using appropriate design treatments that can include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Installing a vertical trellis in front of the wall with climbing vines or plant materials;
  - Setting the wall back slightly to provide room for evergreens and conifers to provide year round screening;
  - Providing art, such as a mural, over a substantial portion of the wall surface;
  - Employing different texture and colours to make the wall visually more interesting;
  - Providing false window displays, special lighting, a canopy, awning, horizontal trellis or other pedestrian oriented features that break up the wall surface and to add visual interest;

### 4.3 Parking and Servicing

The provision of adequate servicing, vehicle access and parking, while minimizing negative impacts on public safety and maximizing the attractiveness of the public realm is important to the proper functioning of the downtown.

- A welcoming and safe pedestrian environment with continuous “**street edge definition**” is critical to the character of the downtown, particularly along a primary retail street. Therefore, it is important that vehicular and service functions and other “**back of house**” activities be re-directed to a secondary street or lane where possible, so as not to conflict with pedestrian oriented street activity.
- Off-street surface parking and loading areas should be located to the rear of the building with access from the lane or side-street;
- Off-street parking and loading should not be located between the front of a building and the public sidewalk;
- If located beside the building adjacent to the public sidewalk, parking and loading areas should be separated from public sidewalks and other active open spaces using

materials that provide an attractive visual buffer, while still allowing clear visibility into the parking areas for personal safety and security. Screening could include landscaping, wrought-iron fencing, a trellis or grillwork with climbing vines or a brick or decorative wall.

#### **4.4 Accommodating Residential Buildings and Dwelling Units**

The integration of multiple residential buildings and upper floor residential units in commercial buildings in the downtown provides affordable housing, eyes on the street and convenient access to commercial activities.

- Orient residential buildings and or upper floor apartments to overlook public streets, parks, and walkways or private communal spaces, while ensuring the security and privacy of its residents;
- Incorporate individual entrances to ground dwelling floor units that are accessible from the fronting street. This provides easy pedestrian connections to buildings, encourages street use and enhances safety;
- Apartment lobbies and residential entrances in a commercial building should be clearly visible from the fronting street and have direct sight lines into them.
- Exterior residential entrances should be architecturally differentiated from business entrances in mixed-use buildings.
- Design residential buildings in the downtown to accommodate a future ground floor commercial use by incorporating a minimum ground floor to ceiling height of 4 metres. This allows for adaptability and flexibility in use over time.

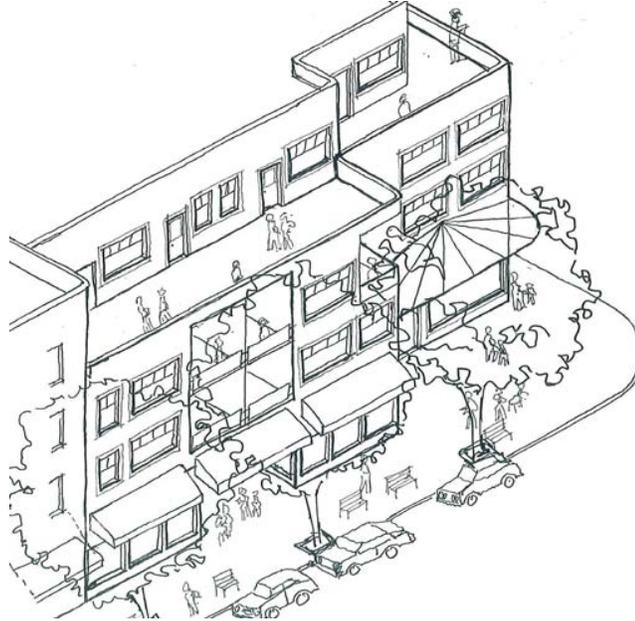
#### 4.5 Outdoor Cafes and Patios

- When feasible restaurants are encouraged to provide outdoor cafe seating and patios;
- Patios can also be provided in the front yard, within the street right of way, in the laneway and other unique space;
- Wrought iron railings or other materials complementary to the streetscape and building should be used to define the 'outdoor room';
- This has the effect of creating a gathering place, a destination downtown.
- A consistent zone determined in the sidewalk width should be set for patio locations, and also be made available for outdoor displays of merchandise for other uses.



## 5.0 Infill and Redevelopment Initiatives

Infill and redevelopment initiatives should reflect a streetscape theme, heritage values and preserve significant attributes that appeal to visitors and residents.



Examples of **architectural features** include:

- Building height, massing, articulation and modulation;
- Bay windows and balconies;
- Corner features accent, such as turrets or cupolas;
- Decorative roof lines and cornices;
- Building entries;
- Canopies and overhangs.

Examples of **architectural details** include:

- Accent treatment of masonry, such as ceramic tile, paving stones, brick patterns;
- Siding treatment through the use of score lines, textures and different materials or patterning to distinguish between different floors;
- Articulation of columns and pilasters;
- Ornamental or integrated art work;
- Architectural lighting;
- Detailed grills and railings;

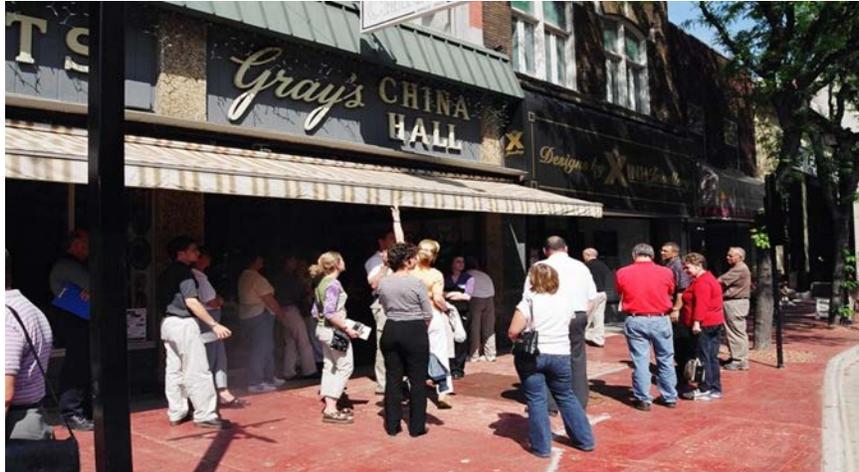
- Substantial trim details and mouldings;
- Trellises and arbours.

### **5.1 Storefront Canopies and Awnings**

Pedestrian comfort, weather protection and a more intimate people friendly environment make the downtown more attractive to residents and visitors.



- Awnings and similar features are desirable for weather protection, the provision of urban colour and to create a distinctive identity for the business operation and storefront, in a manner which would also complement the general architectural character of the downtown;
- They should integrate with and be sympathetic to the principal design features and fenestration of the building;
- Operable awnings should be considered in recognition of weather variations and seasonal conditions.



## 5.2 Signage and Lighting

The careful design and integration of signage and lighting adds to the attractiveness and cohesive character of the business and the street.

### 5.2.1 Signage

- Limit signs in number, location and size to reduce visual clutter;
- Provide visible signage identifying the building address at all entrance ways;
- Provide attractive signage on commercial buildings that identify uses clearly and scaled and oriented to pedestrians;
- Representational and iconic signs are encouraged to supplement conventional textual signs to help to enhance the special character of the downtown;
- Signage should be externally lit except for signage within shop front glazing; backlit fluorescent acrylic box signs are not recommended;
- When used in conjunction with awnings, identification signage should project perpendicular to the building face under the awning and above the entry door;



- Signage can form part of the awning's design;
- Historical and heritage themes could be used for sign framing, individually or in conformity with a comprehensive sign policy;
- The use of signs to express a main street theme and image should be determined by collective agreement.

### **5.2.2 Lighting**

- Illuminate building facades and features by providing architectural lighting on the face of commercial buildings and at main entrances to maintain a sense of safety and security;
- Provide pedestrian scaled lighting with a high quality of design detail for night time visibility;
- Ensure the lighting style and direction is sensitive to nearby residential uses;
- Gooseneck lights and sconces applied to fascias or valence lighting in canopies and up-lighting to illuminate building facades and pathways should be considered;



- LED lighting of storefronts and street trees is encouraged because of their energy efficiency;
- Avoid the use of exterior fluorescent light sources;
- The effect of interior lighting on the character of the street at night should be recognized;
- Storefronts and their upper storeys should be well lit to create interesting and appealing night effects when the store is both open and closed.

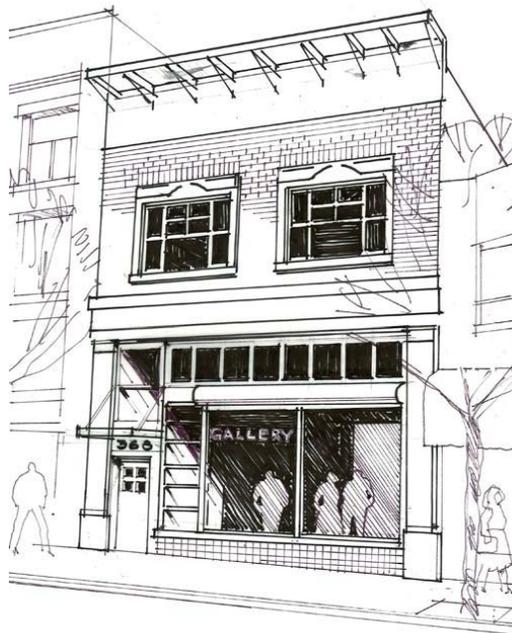
### **5.3 Restoring the Heritage Features of Building Facades**

The character of the downtown develops over time and its attractiveness to the community depends on decisions made by individual business operators, organized commercial associations and municipal regulations and incentives. Efforts should be made to preserve and embellish the positive historical architectural and design elements that give the downtown its special character and identity.

#### **5.3.1 Preserving the Historical Integrity of the Building Facade**

- Preserve and restore the heritage features of the existing storefronts;
- When creating signs and window and door treatments use designs and colours that reinforce the streetscape theme and the positive heritage characteristics of the building;

- Use traditional textural techniques such as corbelling and inset panels with half and full brick;
- Preferred materials: granite, marble, sandstone, facing stone laid in regular, coursed patterns to imitate structural stone, and stone tiles such as granite and marble; wood board siding utilizing traditional wood siding sizes, patterns, and methods of application; wooden corner boards; substantial wooden trims and mouldings for windows and doors; metal, formed into traditional decorative elements such as flashings, cornice, brackets, finials and non-ferrous metals, such as copper, brass, bronze and zinc, for decorative purposes;
- Original materials should be restored and utilized wherever possible;
- Corrugated metal siding or vinyl siding should not be used on upper stories;



- Materials, which are considered for use as an exterior finish, should respect the type and style of the original materials used on the façade or the facades of the prevailing historic buildings in the block. Original building materials should be retained whenever possible during renovations. Historic material should not be covered with modern materials. If historic materials have been covered over due to a previous renovation, they should be uncovered and refurbished to near original condition, if possible.

### 5.3.2 Fenestration

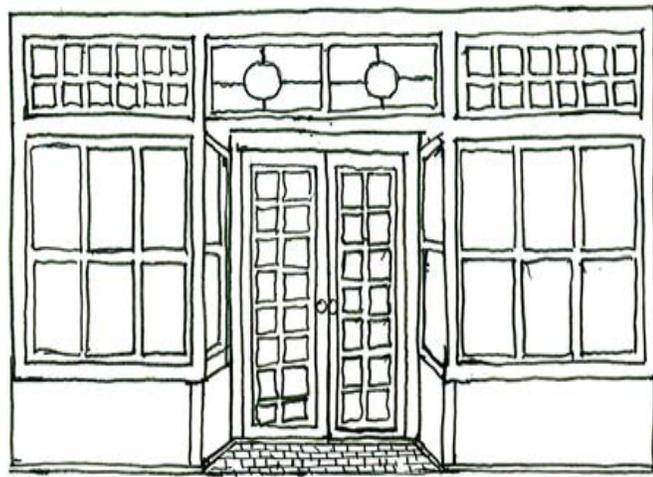
- If they positively reflect the heritage character of the building, when windows require replacement, particularly in the upper storeys, their original design and appearance should be retained;
- For main floor commercial uses maximizing the glass area is encouraged.
- Windows incorporated into upper facades should be:
  - vertically proportioned to the scale of the facade;
  - separated from adjacent windows by vertical elements;
  - made up of small panes of glass;
  - recessed and incorporate lintils and sills;
  - organized into repetitive groups in relationship to the vertical elements which frame and divide the façade with pilasters, columns and projecting bays;
  - built of wood, and painted, stained, or clad;
  - have substantial trim and mouldings.
- Design balconies as integral parts of buildings and to maximize **daylight access** into dwellings through use of transparent or translucent glazing or narrow metal spindle guardrails.

### 5.3.3 Upper Floor Design

- New buildings should be 2 and 3 storeys in height and designed to complement the existing facade and window treatments of adjacent buildings to create a uniform streetscape;
- The upper facades of buildings should:
  - be ordered by the use of vertical elements such as pilasters, columns, projecting bays and recessed balconies;
  - incorporate decorative roof lines and cornices to define the upper edge of the façade where the building steps back and at the top elevation of the building;
  - Include substantial trim or moulding or period woodwork;

### 5.3.4 Steps and Entrances

- Visible delineation of steps and entrances to commercial businesses will accent the individuality of the business and create a welcoming feature;
- Entrances should be accessible and not present a trip hazard;
- Entrances should highlight and showcase heritage features;
- Design entrances to emphasize building identity and to distinguish between individual commercial units with street front entrances.



### 5.3.5 Rear Facades

- The rear of the many buildings are visible and accessible from laneways and parking areas;
- As such an opportunity exists for repurposing of the rear entrances for general use;
- Laneway oriented building facades and signage can have an attractive and eclectic character different from the front façade;

### 5.3.6 Corner Buildings

- Corner buildings are particularly important locations on all main streets, bringing landmark status to major intersections;



- The facades of the building should reflect that status with similar entrances and architectural elements, like awnings, cornices and fenestration on both facades. Opportunities for 'greening' these zones to provide a continuation of residential tree planting should be developed.



