

# City of Mississauga

# Corporate Report



<p>Date: November 20, 2024</p> <p>To: Chair and Members of Planning and Development Committee</p> <p>From: Andrew Whittemore, M.U.R.P., Commissioner of Planning &amp; Building</p>	<p>Originator's file: CD.21.URB</p>
	<p>Meeting date: December 9, 2024</p>

## Subject

### INFORMATION AND RECOMMENDATION REPORT

#### Review of the City's Urban Design Program

## Recommendation

That the following recommendations regarding the City of Mississauga's Urban Design Program be approved:

1. That the Planning and Building Department retain an external urban design consultant to undertake a comprehensive review to the City's Urban Design Program including the Urban Design Guidelines and Reference Notes and to make recommendations to ensure they reflect best practices, the challenges with housing affordability, climate and urban equality, and that they are consistent with those of other Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) municipalities.
2. That as part of the review, the consultant will provide recommendations on ways in which the city might optimize the development approval decision making process, including an assessment of the benefits of a dedicated Public Realm and Streetscape section.

## Executive Summary

- The report emphasizes the City's commitment to achieving good urban design, and provides an overview of:
  - the Urban Design Program and its value
  - the City's approach to urban design and its regulatory regime
  - recent provincial legislation and the impact to the Urban Design Program

- The report acknowledges that over time, conditions change, and priorities shift so it is important to review the urban design guidelines periodically.
- The report recommends retaining a consultant to undertake a review of the City's Urban Design Program which will involve an assessment of the City's existing urban design related Official Plan policies, zoning regulations and design guidelines and reference notes through the lens of housing affordability, climate change, and urban equality.
- The goal of the review is to ensure the City's Urban Design Program is aligned with the *Planning Act* changes and the Province's goal to provide "*more housing faster*".
- A component of the review will contemplate the feasibility of establishing a Public Realm and Streetscape Team aimed to expedite development approvals.

## Background

Urban design is a multidisciplinary and an ever-evolving process that has advanced through the inputs of urban designers, planners, engineers, developers, politicians, residents and academics. Mississauga Official Plan (MOP) policies and Urban Design Guidelines have been crafted to reflect current priorities. As is the case with most city programs, from time to time it is important to take a concerted look at the policy framework to ensure we are prioritizing and addressing the issues of the day. Mississauga is no exception to the current challenges facing all Canadian cities, including the housing crisis, the climate crisis, urban inequality, and healthcare emergencies. Therefore, it is important for the City to ensure that our Urban Design program is helping to assist the City's efforts to overcome these issues.

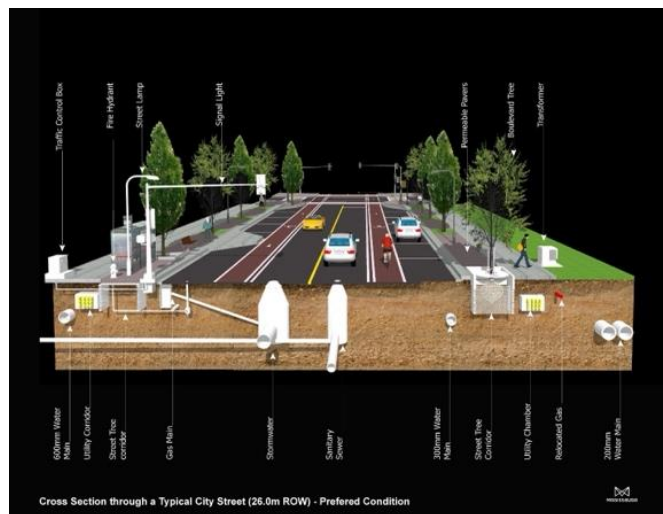
This report sets out a proposed approach to review and update the City's Urban Design Program. The background section aims to provide an overview on why urban design is important, how the city currently approaches urban design, the role of the Urban Design Advisory Panel and how the principles of good urban design are applied through the current development application review processes. The comment section outlines the staff recommended scope of review.

**What Is Urban Design And Why Is It Important?** Urban design is the process of shaping the physical layout and appearance of cities. It involves planning public spaces, streets, buildings, and landscapes to create functional, aesthetically pleasing, economically viable and sustainable environments. The primary goal of urban design is to enhance the quality of life for residents, promote social interaction, and support economic activities while considering factors like mobility, accessibility, and the natural environment. Urban design is not about making the City pretty; it is about making the City work as a whole. Implementing good urban design involves working with all departments, divisions, utilities, outside agencies, external interested parties and professions and, of course, the development industry and their consultants.

As Mississauga continues to grow and becomes denser, urban design plays a crucial role in shaping spaces that are practical, useable and sustainable. Urban design prioritizes the end user as the most important consideration. Designers anticipate, based on past experience and best practices, how the end user will perceive a space.

**What Is One of the City's Primary Focus?** The public realm is the most visible part of the City's urban environment and is a priority focus of the Urban Design Program. They are the primary areas where most people interact with the built environment and structures. Generally, this area refers to "any publicly owned street, pathway, sidewalk, parkland, and publicly accessible open spaces on private properties".

The boulevard portion of the public right-of-way, known as the "streetscape", is especially important to consider. This is the space between a private property-line to the curb of the street and includes above and below ground utilities. Given all of the competing components within the streetscape – the primary aim of urban design is to ensure that all elements work in harmony and that there is a coordinated approach to the boulevard treatments which prioritizes the human experience.



**How Is Urban Design Currently Regulated?** The City's regulatory framework for advancing urban design goals primarily includes four tools: Official Plan policies, Zoning By-law regulations, Urban Design Guidelines and Urban Design Reference Notes. The City's Urban Design Guidelines are tools that are used to illustrate the intent of the City's policies and regulations. They are used to guide developers and design professionals when they are designing their development projects to submit for a development and they are proposing to vary from standard City requirements.

1. **Official Plan Policies:** The following are examples of current matters required by Section 9 - Building a Desirable Urban Form of Mississauga Official Plan:
  - Building Separation Distances (**9.2.1.13**). Tall buildings will be appropriately spaced to provide privacy and permit light and sky views
  - Podiums (**9.2.1.14**). In appropriate locations, tall buildings will be required to incorporate podiums to mitigate wind impacts on the pedestrian environment and maximize sunlight on the public realm

- Wind conditions (**9.2.1.16**). Tall buildings will minimize adverse microclimatic impacts on the public realm and private amenity areas.

The above policies are illustrated in the Urban Design Guidelines entitled “Downtown Core Built Form Standards” to help developers and their consultants understand the City’s intent.

2. **Zoning By-law:** In addition to regulating land use, the City’s Zoning By-law sets out regulations on the size and dimensions of properties, parking requirements, building heights and setbacks, and many other performance standards concerning built form. The following are examples of current matters regulated by the Zoning By-law:
  - Stepped front, side and rear yard setbacks based on building heights in **RA** (Residential Apartment) base zones (Table 4.15.1 Line 8.0 to 10.0)
  - Requirement for minimum landscape buffers in **RA** (Residential Apartment) base zones (Table 4.15.1 Line 15.2 and 15.3)
  - Minimum amenity area in **RA** (Residential Apartment) base zones (Table 4.15.1 Line 15.4).
3. **Urban Design Guidelines:** This collection of documents provides a framework that ensures new developments contribute positively to the overall urban environment. They are flexible documents which illustrate the City’s vision for new development. Urban Design Guidelines are used to ensure a consistent approach in cases where a developer proposes to vary from the current requirements. They are also used to reinforce and illustrate Official Plan policies and zoning regulation. Some guidelines help to inform the impact development proposals are likely to have on the surrounding context. **Appendix 1** provides a comprehensive list of the City’s Urban Guidelines and Design Reference Notes. Some examples include:
  - **Downtown Core Built Form Standards:** Offer detailed requirements to achieve a high-quality built form in the Downtown Core so that new development interfaces with the public realm in a seamless fashion.
  - **Pedestrian Wind Comfort and Safety Studies:** Evaluate anticipated wind conditions in pedestrian and amenity areas generated by a particular building design and site layout.
  - **Standards for Sun and Shadow Studies:** Examine the potential impacts of new buildings on daylight access to sun on the public and private realm.
  - **Green Development Standards:** Provide guidelines aimed at achieving green buildings and site design in order for the City to meet its environmental sustainability goals.
  - **Screening for Roof Top Mechanical units:** This reference note outlines a series of requirements for the adequate screening of roof top mechanical equipment on buildings.

- **Outdoor Amenity Areas:** Illustrates standards for two types of amenity spaces - Children's and Senior's Outdoor Amenity Areas.

**What Is the Mississauga Urban Design Advisory Panel (MUDAP)?** MUDAP consists of 12 volunteer members who provide professional advice to staff on potential physical and aesthetic impacts of proposed buildings, structures, landscapes, streetscapes, parks and infrastructure projects. The Panel members consist of professionals from various local consulting firms that have good standing with the Ontario Association of Architect (OAA), the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects (OALA), the Ontario Association of Planners (OPPI), the Professional Engineers Ontario (P Eng.), and other affiliations.

The Panel has operated since May of 2007 and has provided advice to staff on over 140 development applications, developer initiated local area plans, and the City's Urban Design Guidelines and Design Reference Notes. The Panel provides advice based on trends occurring in other GTHA cities and on their own professional experiences working in the development industry. For example, the Panel may comment on the way in which other municipalities function, how their processes for implementing boulevard works, or how matters such as amenity spaces are being treated. The Panel also provides advice on City initiated policy or guidelines such as on-site mobility planning or a new technology in building science.

**How Does Ontario's *Planning Act* Regulate Urban Design?** Prior to **Bill 23** (the *More Homes Built Faster Act*), the *Planning Act* enabled cities to create an Urban Design program through Official Plan policies, Zoning By-law regulations and by adopting and utilizing Urban Design Guidelines and Design Reference Notes. Section 41 (Site Plan) of the *Planning Act* allowed municipalities a certain amount of control over matters related to exterior design including the: character, scale appearance and design features of buildings and their sustainable design.

When **Bill 23** received royal assent on November 28, 2022, several amendments were made to the *Planning Act* which has impacted the City's approach to urban design. The most significant changes were to exempt all buildings containing 10 or less dwelling units from site plan approval. The other major change was to remove exterior design from site plan approval with some limited exceptions. Matters relating to exterior access to a building that will contain affordable housing units, green roofs (or similar alternative roof structures) and environmental standards included in the Ontario Building Code (OBC) are the primary exceptions. Site plan control is also permitted to apply to land on adjoining roads under the City's jurisdiction only to the extent that the appearance impacts matters of health, safety, accessibility, sustainable design or the protection of adjoining lands.

Following the passage of Bill 23, urban design staff undertook a comprehensive review of standard comments made on development application to ensure that they were in compliance with the new Provincial legislation.

## Comments

The City remains committed to achieving good urban design. However, recognizing that over time, conditions change, and priorities shift, staff recommend a review of the Urban Design Program. The review will serve as a “check point” with Council, the development industry, the broader community and other interested parties.

The review will assess the City's existing urban design policies, zoning regulations and design guidelines through the lens of housing affordability, climate change, and urban equality. Specifically, the scope of the review will focus on the factors identified and listed in **Appendix 2**, as well as any other factors that may be raised through the review process.

### **The Review Process:**

The review process will involve several steps including research of best practices, an analysis of the City's urban design program, and a broad consultation program. Upon conclusion of the review, it is anticipated that changes may be required to the Urban Design Guidelines and Design Reference Notes, and to the Official Plan policies and Zoning By-law regulations.

An urban design consultant will be retained to lead the review. Of particular focus will be conducting the review through the lens of housing affordability, climate change and urban equality. Through the request for proposal (RFP) process, the consultant will be required to provide a detailed timeline for this review will be developed. Staff will report back to Council on the proposed timeline and will also provide periodic updates on the progress of the review and the recommendations being proposed. The consultant's activities generally include:

- Undertake a review of the current Urban Design Guidelines, Design Reference Notes, applicable Official Plan policies (existing and proposed) and applicable zoning regulations
- Undertake a review of best practices to identify leading urban design practices and assess the City's existing urban design program against these to identify gaps or potential changes that should be considered
- Establish a small development industry-focussed working group to provide specific technical input on the existing and new Urban Design Program and regulatory tools
- Conduct a series of community engagement exercises aimed to garner an understanding of the design priorities that inform the City's Urban Design Program
- Conduct one-on-one consultations with utility providers, internal departments, professional stakeholders, and the Mayor and Members of Council to understand the organizational barriers to achieving the City's streetscape vision and goals, and to identify new service delivery models that may reduce barriers and accelerate development approvals
- Make recommendations on the feasibility of developing a Public Realm and Streetscape Team

- Provide detailed recommendations on changes to the Urban Design Program, which may include Official Plan policies, Zoning By-law regulations, Urban Design Guidelines and Design Reference Notes.

In advance of retaining the consultant, as a formal launch to the review process, staff will consult with the Mississauga Urban Design Advisory Panel (MUDAP) to identify issues, opportunities and constraints with our current Urban Design Program.

## Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts resulting from the recommendations in this report.

Budget for the consultant required to complete the comprehensive review to the City's Urban Design Program can be funded from existing capital project PN 22957 "Infrastructure and Public Realm Plan Phase 2" with an approved budget of \$350,000. This renamed capital project, "Urban Design and Public Realm Review" is to undertake a review of the Urban Design Program to ensure alignment with *Planning Act* changes and the Province's goal to provide "more housing faster".

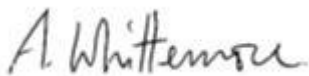
## Conclusion

Continuous improvement is a regular aspect of the City's approach to service delivery excellence. Recognizing the positive impact that the City's Urban Design Program has on the local quality of life, social interaction, and economic development, a periodic review of the city's urban design vision and its regulatory framework is appropriate and valuable. Staff recommend retaining a consultant to undertake a review of the City's existing Urban Design Program. The consultant will provide recommendations on a revised vision and accompanying implementation tools as well as an assessment of the feasibility of developing a Public Realm and Streetscape team. The review will ensure that the City grows in a healthy, meaningful and sustainable way, while supporting the ability of the development industry to provide much needed housing.

## Attachments

Appendix 1: Urban Design Guidelines

Appendix 2: Issues Identified for the Urban Design Program Review



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Andrew Whittemore, M.U.R.P., Commissioner of Planning & Building

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