2.0 SITE CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

Site planning involves the spatial organization of activities on a site including the placement and orientation of buildings, landscaping, parking and pedestrian and vehicular circulation. These building and site design elements must be considered within the broader context of the City's design objectives for its streets and public spaces.

This section of the document addresses broad urban design topics, such as the public realm and streets, streetscape, heritage, safety and neighbourhood character to create the context for site planning in Hamilton. This approach will ensure that new development is integrated with its surroundings and adds to the attractiveness and livability of Hamilton.

The discussion and guidelines contained in this section of the report will provide the basis for the more specific guidelines in the subsequent sections of the document.

2.2 Built Form, Public Realm and Streetscape

Rationale

Built form and open space are the two elements which together comprise the public realm. The creation of buildings and open spaces, including the streets that link them, helps define the character of Hamilton and establishes a hierarchy of places within the city fabric.

Built Form

Built form should be used to reinforce the character of neighbourhoods within the city and in the definition of streets and roadways throughout the city. Perceptually it is the built edges of the street that transform the two-dimensional pattern of streets on a map into the three-dimensional spatial form of the city. The most dominant element of the streetscape becomes the building and landscaping which frames the street and establishes its character.

The spatial enclosure of the street creates the corridors and "rooms" of the city. This sense of enclosure contributes to the human experience of the city: what we do along the street and how we feel while using the street as a pedestrian and a motorist.

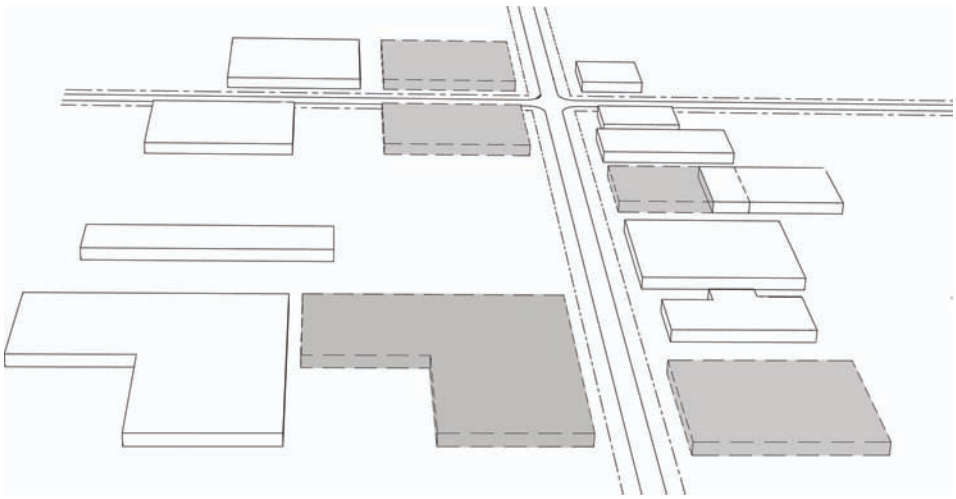
Along with buildings, open spaces and natural areas are also found along the streets of the City. Open spaces should be viewed positively and comprehensively as places created and defined by built form. The design and orientation of buildings must therefore take into account the creation of and the character of the adjacent open space and its contribution to the public realm.

The built form guidelines of this section focus on the street space, from building face to building face. It is the City of Hamilton's objective to create attractive and functional street spaces with a sense of enclosure, activity and attractiveness to create a stimulating and memorable experience for pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders and motorists. This type of street environment is often referred to as being pedestrian-oriented or of a pedestrian scale. The pedestrian-oriented street will have building, street and landscape elements which are intended to promote human use and interaction, and has buildings and landscaping which is of a scale that does not overwhelm a person walking along the street. People will feel comfortable in their surroundings on a pedestrian-oriented street.

Pedestrian oriented streets in Hamilton's downtown areas

Street Oriented Design

Many of Hamilton's major roads have developed with buildings set well back from the street creating a poorly defined street edge and inhospitable pedestrian zone. New development and redevelopment, should achieve street enclosure through building placement, massing and height, and through landscaping along the street.



Buildings massed along the street to define edges and achieve street enclosure

Buildings oriented to the street with the building mass maximized along the street edge supports the life of the street. Building placement near the street creates a sense of enclosure, reduces the apparent width of the street to a more human scale and minimizes walking distance between the public sidewalk and buildings. The activities within buildings provide reasons for people to be walking and visual interest for the pedestrian.

In addition to buildings, street design should consider a range of elements to create the appropriate conditions for each street. Sidewalks, street trees, pedestrian-oriented lighting, transit shelters, on-street parking, textured paving at crossing locations, benches and other elements enhance the pedestrian experience. These elements serve to create a more attractive and safe environment for pedestrians which encourages walking and transit use.

Large retail store located along street, the parking area is beside, not in front of the building, and is edged with trees, shrubs and a pergola

Landscape planting and structures near the street also help To enclose the street and create a more pleasing pedestrian environment at the street edge. Where buildings are not located at the street edge, landscaping plays an important role in providing edges to the street.

The street and building relationships will vary across the City with the age of the neighbourhood, its function, width of street and scale of buildings.

Older neighbourhoods and downtown areas typically have narrower streets (with on-street parking), buildings located close to the street, parking located in side and rear yards and a streetscape which encourages walking. This urban form is often referred to as traditional neighbourhood design.

Traditional main street development with buildings located near the street

In the post war era of development, the automobile has been the principal mode of transportation and has influenced the form and character of development. Generally, many neighbourhoods and commercial corridors built in the past 50 years have wide streets, buildings set back from the street, parking between the street and building, and streetscapes which do not promote walking and transit use.

Major street with buildings set back from street does not promote walking

The more traditional neighbourhood form is the preferred city form for Hamilton. It provides a more attractive streetscape, creates an interesting and supportive environment for people to walk around the city and creates an efficient and compact built form.

New neighbourhoods and individual developments may not fully replicate the older urban neighbourhoods but it is the City's desire to reintroduce to a more traditional and walkable urban environment. It is recognized that there will have to be a balance between modern development requirements, the role of the automobile as the principal mode of travel and the City's urban form objectives. Where it is not practical to site buildings along the street, landscaping should be extensive to create a strong street edge and a pleasant walking environment.

Supporting Alternative Transportation Modes

Promoting alternative transportation modes, particularly transit, is a policy objective in Hamilton. A fundamental premise of the Vision 2020 project is to provide an integrated public transportation system that serves the entire City in an affordable, efficient and accessible way. A key to promoting transit use is the establishment of more pedestrian-oriented communities which encourage people to walk to transit routes. Urban development patterns of the post war period have given greater emphasis to the needs of automobile travel and through traffic rather than on the requirements of pedestrians, transit users and cyclists. A better balance must be struck between the needs of all users of the street in order to ensure that transit use is promoted.

Transit stop located at street intersection,
and integrated with commercial development

- Maximizing collector road connections with the arterial road and orienting corner lot development to the collector road; and,
- Using rear lanes to service development fronting onto the arterial road.

Internal street provides access to townhouses fronting major public street

Front lotted townhouse development with rear laneway

5. Where reverse lotting is utilized along arterial roads, the boulevard should be landscaped to create attractive streetscapes and break up the continuous solid noise barrier or fencing.

Landscaping softens street edges of reverse lotting

10. Safe, visible and direct connections should be provided from the public street to building entrances.

11. Parking lots adjacent to public streets should be screened with low level fences, walls or shrub planting. The screening treatment should be low to maintain some visibility to promote safety.

Low wall with shrub plantings provides parking screen and enhances the streetscape

12.. Hydro service and other utilities should be located underground, if possible, to minimize streetscape clutter. Where above ground services are required, consideration should be given to the location and design of structures.

2.3 Natural Environment

Rationale

Hamilton has an abundance of natural features including the Niagara Escarpment, Lake Ontario, Hamilton Harbour and Cootes Paradise as well as streams, wetlands and woodlots. These natural features perform numerous ecological functions necessary for life and health as well as providing for many recreational, aesthetic and economic benefits that enhance quality of life.

The Niagara Escarpment is the most prominent natural feature in the City of Hamilton. It provides a distinctive landscape and performs many ecological functions. Hamilton is the largest urban area located along the Niagara Escarpment and benefits from its influence on the urban form of the city.

Trees and woodlands are a significant component of the natural system of the City. Their ecological benefits are many and include the production of oxygen, soil retention, climate moderation and creation of habitat for flora and fauna. Trees can be a significant design feature, a component of a heritage landscape and a defining neighbourhood characteristic as seen in many of the City's older neighbourhoods.

The various municipal planning documents guiding land use and development within the City emphasize the protection and enhancement of the natural environment and the conservation of natural resources. Most of the planning policies and regulations for environmental protection and conservation are contained in other planning documents such as the Provincial Policy Statement, Official Plans, Zoning By-laws, the Niagara Escarpment Plan, Conservation Authority Regulations, the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan, and sub-watershed plans, among others. However, there are some aspects of planning for natural features which do take place at the site plan level. For example, site planning may have to address tree-saving or development adjacent to woodlots, wetlands, valleylands, ravines, creeks, Lake Ontario, and development on the Niagara Escarpment.

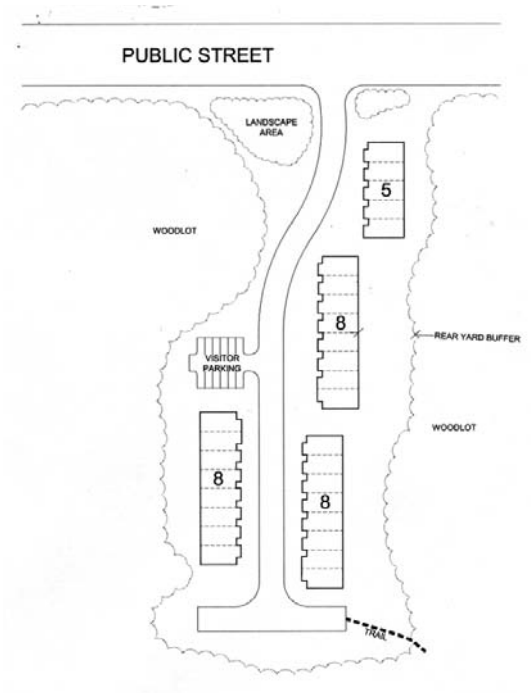
Site planning should consider natural features and systems, including conditions for their continued functioning and integration into new development in a manner which enhances the project's aesthetic, ecological, or heritage value.

There are four Conservation Authorities with jurisdiction across Hamilton. The Conservation Authority boundaries are identified in **Appendix 6**.

Guidelines

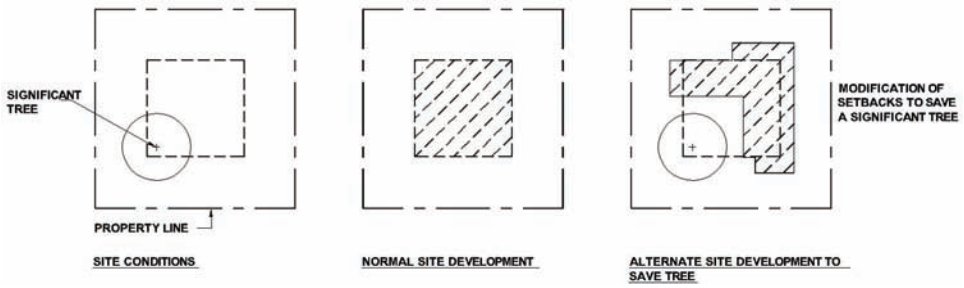
1. Site natural resources should be assessed at the outset of the design process to determine current conditions of trees, woodland, streams or other features and the changes to the environment which may impact their continued health and function.

2. Woodlot fragmentation should be avoided. Woodlots should be incorporated into new developments where possible, and buffer areas should be created around woodlots as necessary, according to any applicable site-specific or sub-watershed study.



Woodlot retention in townhouse development

3. Significant trees should be preserved on the site where possible. In some circumstances, preservation may not be possible due to the location of the tree and site configuration. Significant trees should be a large size, and display any one of the following characteristics:
   - Environmental – Trees which contribute to the enhancement of the quality of life, for example, providing shade, acting as windbreaks, and providing habitat for wildlife.
   - Prescribed Species (rarity) – Trees which are no longer prolific in the area, but have a value to the natural history of the area or any tree that has been identified as nationally, provincially or regionally rare (identified in By-law R00-054, **Appendix 7**).
   - Aesthetics – Trees which make a visual contribution to beauty of the surrounding environment.
   - Heritage or Historical – Trees which have a cultural value, were planted on a historical site or in commemoration of an historical event.
   - Landmarks – Trees which act as a prominent feature in the landscape.

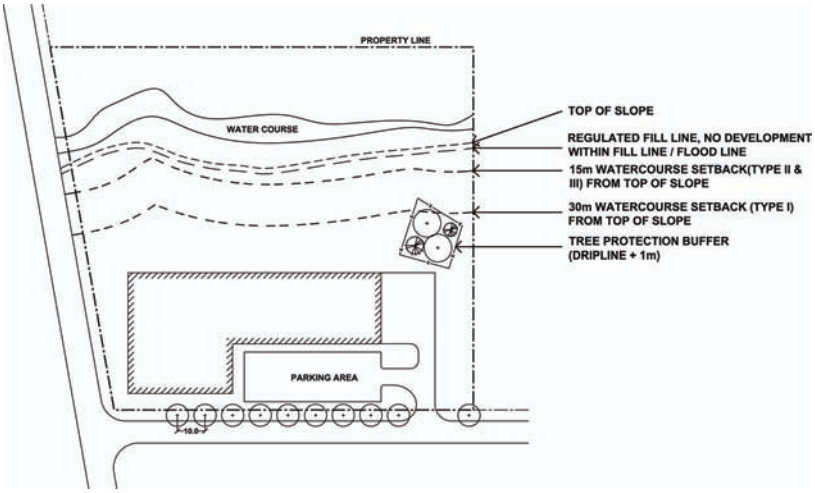


Tree preservation resulting from sensitive building siting

4. Grading and hydrological changes should be minimized within the dripline where significant trees and woodlands are to be retained in order to minimize disruption to the ecological system supporting their continued health.

5. Building setbacks, site landscaping and other screening should be considered to minimize the visual impact of development on the escarpment landscape.

6. Adequate setbacks and buffers should be provided adjacent to the lakeshore, streams and their associated valley feature and wetlands to prevent flooding and erosion, enhance water quality and provide stream shading to meet the requirements of the applicable Conservation Authority and City. Specific buffers and setbacks are provided in the Standards Section.



Appropriate stable top of bank setbacks and buffer

7. New development should not be permitted within natural valleys, which are directly associated with riverine systems.

8. Building siting should consider views to and from the Niagara Escarpment. Important public views of the Escarpment should not be adversely impacted by new development.

9. Development along Lake Ontario should be sited to protect and create views to the lake and to ensure safe conditions are created. Development siting should also consider requirements for both private and public access to the lakeshore.

Pedestrian access to Lake Ontario

Pressed and tinted asphalt that resembles a stone surface is a better fit with the heritage building than black asphalt and concrete curbing typically used

Requirements

1. Where significant built heritage, cultural heritage landscapes or archaeological resources are identified on a site, appropriate heritage assessments of the resource may be required to accurately define their significance, evaluate conservation options and determine a suitable strategy for protection and wise use.

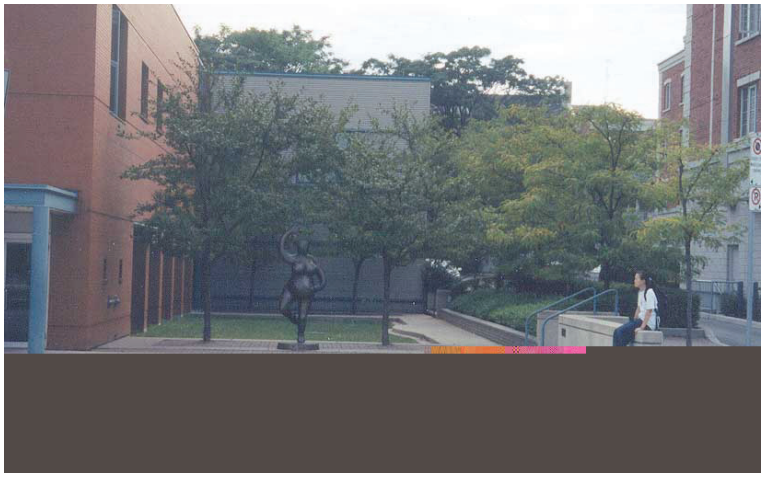
2. If significant built, cultural landscape or archaeological resources are identified of a site, it may be necessary to undertake a detailed study of the resources to evaluate their significance, and determine appropriate conservation strategies.

3. The Official Plans of the former municipalities located in Hamilton contain policies regarding heritage resources. These policies should be reviewed to provide direction for the conservation of heritage resources.

Gateway signage designed to capture the railway heritage of the area

2. The City's Arts Coordinator and Manager of Culture should be involved early in the design process to allow for proper siting and integration of public art in the overall Site Plan. The Arts Coordinator provides the appropriate staff link between City Planners and the Arts Community.

3. Public art is encouraged as a component of major commercial, office and institutional projects. The public art should include a wide range of artist-designed components in publicly accessible indoor areas and outdoor areas and could include fountains, doorways, signage, murals, sculptures, architectural features and landscape elements in addition to traditional art approaches.



Sculpture is incorporated into commercial development