



WINDSOR

SEEN

A M U N I C I P A L
U R B A N D E S I G N
A G E N D A
F O R T H E
W I N D S O R
C O M M U N I T Y



CITY OF WINDSOR



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WHAT is “urban design”?

There is no universally accepted definition. It changes to some degree, depending on whether you work in academia, business, or government. A good simple definition for a municipality is: **Creative city-building.**

Operation of space vs. creation of place

Building a city requires putting together individual elements of the city – such as streets, buildings, parks, and utilities. Coordinating their safe, efficient, installation is an operational service provided by the municipality, so that the community can function. Keeping these elements tidy and in good working condition is a maintenance service provided by the municipality and private property owners.

Building a city creatively is not simply about installing and maintaining functional elements in the city that are “pretty”. Ensuring that when they appear side by side, the whole city adds up to more than the sum of these elements, is a strategic service provided by the municipality, so that the functioning community becomes a memorable, desirable, attractive place to live, work, and visit.

The “logo” is the promise; the city is the product

Urban design, as undertaken by the municipality, is probably *the* main conscious effort to ensure the community has and keeps a positive civic image and a discernible identity. When the municipality adopts a standard “signature” [such as a logo, slogan, or word-mark] to identify and promote itself and the community, the words and images in that signature are meant to instantly imply a certain image. Urban design is what the municipality does to see that the city as a “product” matches the image implied by the municipal signature. Similarly customer service is what the municipality does to see that the city as a “service” matches what the municipal signature implies. Many of the functional elements in capital projects undertaken by the municipality should artfully integrate [not just “paste on”] the municipal signature, to build up its value as the civic image identifier. You might see it etched on doors to the library or imprinted on a manhole cover as readily as it appears on letterhead or a travel brochure. Therefore, the sooner a decision is made, the better, regarding whether to produce a new municipal logo and slogan for Windsor, or stay with what we have.



Avoiding the “geography of nowhere”

A *place* is an environment that *looks* and *feels* well put together. Urban design measures how city-building activities add up to a place, a setting that is an intentional consequence. The best urban design is people-oriented, pedestrian-friendly, and human scaled. The lack of attention to urban design leaves a city that is at best a display of unintended coincidence.





WHY “do” urban design?

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What you “See” is what you “Get”

Good urban design should always result in a city that looks attractive. But that alone is too superficial an expectation to have from this activity. Attractive for attractive sake, is urban decoration. Decorating implements what is seasonal or fashionable. Urban design dwells on what is enduring and what makes a place distinctive.

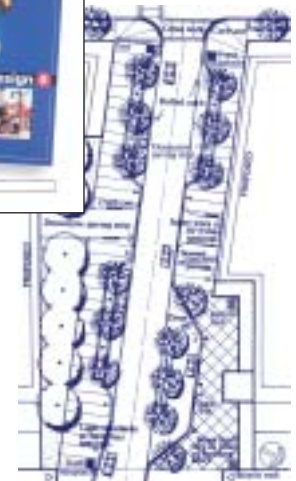
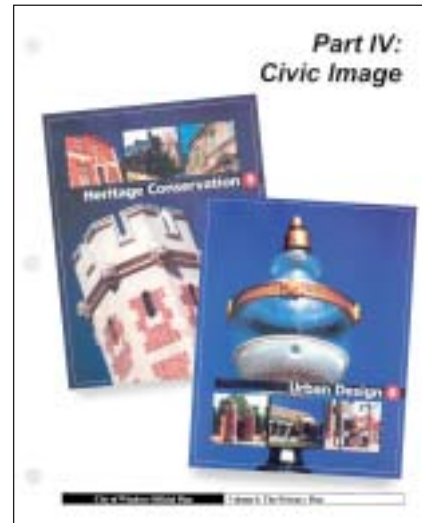
We take some control of how others see us

Why do we care if Windsor looks and feels well put together? Why is the qualitative impression Windsor leaves important for the community? The first and most important answer to those questions is: Because ‘sense of place’ has become a standard benchmark in remaining economically competitive. In the 20th century manufacturing-dominated economy, which had a comparatively large workforce of baby-boomers, “place” figured into investment decisions, and the jobs that come with them, generally as a location of materials and labour. In the 21st century service-dominated economy which has a small and shrinking workforce, “place” figures into investment decisions as a location compelling enough to draw the most talented people.

Urban design activities are an investment in the city's expression of its livability and economic vitality. Cities that leave poor qualitative impressions, those with an unremarkable or negative civic image, tend to be overlooked by capital and people that fuel economic stability. In his January 18, 2004 State of the University address, Dr. Ross Paul emphasized that local institutions must work together with the municipal government because the consequences of civic image are shared. The CreateDetroit movement launched in March 2004 is another regional response intended address to this situation. By the time the 2006 Superbowl draws the visitation and global media attention of millions to the shores of the Detroit River, we must be seen at our best. We must challenge decades-old assumptions about the quality of the place we call home.

We agree on how we see ourselves

From “Ottawa by Design” to “Omaha by Design”, municipalities are spending money and effort on urban design. Closer to home, Kitchener and London have made important progress in using urban design to maintain a competitive civic image. Windsor needs to



catch up. Fortunately there is ample recent evidence that many Windsorites want their city to leave a lasting memorable impression. The 1997-1998 Urban Design Task Force identified in their public consultation that there were more negative than positive urban design attributes in Windsor. As a result, for the first time here “Civic Image” became a strong thrust – a whole separate chapter – among the policies in Windsor's 2000 Official Plan. That chapter starts by saying “Council is committed to urban design principles that enhance the enjoyment and image of Windsor”. Council's approval in 2002 and 2003 of the Planning Division's reorganization created and maintained an Urban Design Section to make these urban design principles live in practice. Setting these practices out in an urban design agenda for Windsor is an essential part of the work program for the mandatory 5-year-review of the Official Plan. They will build on the lessons learned and successes achieved in maintaining a made-in-Windsor community identity, which has happened as part of the City's heritage planning program. They will state how newer Official Plan provisions, like “design in harmony with nature”, translate into actual developments.

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HOW do you “do” urban design? Do it well

It is very important that urban design policies & practices, be thoughtfully and carefully developed, to ensure that creative city-building crafts for Windsor a civic image that is a positive, intentional consequence in the long-term. This work can only be effective and worthwhile if it occurs because of Council will and with citizen participation. How the community sees and manages its identity are what make a municipality a memorable place. If this participation is not sustained, the quality resulting from urban design will devolve into the superficiality of ordering urban decorations out of a catalogue.

The Scope is External & Internal

Council, at its first meeting in 2004, took a significant step in implementing **urban design through policy**. It decided the site plan review process, the most basic urban design tool available in Ontario, must apply to all parts of the city. To make this process work well in practice, there must be urban design standards & guidelines that set out what creative city-building means in various parts of the city, for various kinds of development, and for various functional elements in the city. **Design guidelines** exist to show both developers and citizens how the municipality interprets abstract policies and applies them to actual construction. They are useful to developers and their financiers who will know what results the city expects before money is spent to buy a certain piece of property, hire consultants, or invest capital. They can make Council and administrative review of development applications go smoother and faster because they focus the approval discussions on pre-stated, community-endorsed, general limits of “what is expected”. **Design standards** are specific quality and performance benchmarks for various kinds developments and functional elements, so that when they appear side by side, the whole city adds up to more than the sum of these parts. In the best case, urban design standards & guidelines are put together into one City-wide, or several neighbourhood-level chapters, of an **urban design manual**. This is how the municipality fulfills its responsibility for applying urban design policy to developments undertaken by others. The effectiveness of urban design policy is enhanced when the municipality itself “leads by example” in the projects it undertakes and the decisions it makes when it approves capital expenditures for parks, libraries, roads, and so on. Thus, internal municipal urban design policies can

be set in Council resolutions tied to capital projects – those done infrequently, such as building a new fire hall, and those done routinely, such as crosswalk repairs.

Get Started Soon

It is also urgent that some practical examples of **urban design projects** occur sooner rather than later, to foster a collective understanding of what creative city-building might actually look like. Recent council resolutions, letters to the newspaper editor, and some local media stories direct a well-reasoned sense of impatience to making a better first impression of how Windsor is seen at the 12 strategic “gateway” entrances into the city which are defined in the Official Plan. The same applies to enhancing streetscapes along the less-than-10% of Windsor’s roads designated as key “civic ways” and “theme streets” in our Official Plan.

Dollar Value

Urban design focuses thinking about how money is spent. Windsor is the third highest Canadian census area in median family income and in the last decade grew the most in this prosperity measure of any Canadian metropolitan area.



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Hard-earned wealth deserves to be invested and enjoyed. Windsor's urban design agenda can help make Windsor be seen as the relatively wealthy place it is. For private developments, urban design policies help direct *how* money is spent, more than *how much* money is spent. Attractive doesn't always cost more. Municipal urban design spending, in most jurisdictions, is a small fractional amount of capital projects budgets, returning a higher value for money spent than if urban design was not a matter of concern in these projects.

WHO will "do" urban design in Windsor?

The Urban Design section in the City Planner's Office coordinates the activities Council chooses to pursue as part of the municipal urban design agenda. The results of these activities, even their continued existence, rely on connections with many others. Support for urban design projects, policy and practice depends on a mindset in the community that values the qualitative impression Windsor leaves. Municipalities typically take a lead in nurturing this mindset as part of their municipal urban design program. Civic Design awards programs are often used as a way to promote and praise people and projects that set the highest urban design standards. Starting such a program here could be the first task in an **urban design communications program** undertaken by a "Civic Design Commission", a group Council could appoint as the stewards of the community's urban design agenda. Eventually a peer-review urban design panel might be established to engender collaborative development reviews. City staff could develop a deeper regard for urban design quality through formal training opportunities offered internally and informal "brown bag" lunch discussions.

But community involvement, broader than what the municipality alone does, occurs in cities with a well-regarded civic image. If Windsor is to be counted among such cities, numerous measures aimed at informing citizens about the benefits of good design need to happen with and through our community firms and organizations such as the media, university and college, service clubs, business organizations, the development industry and its suppliers, adjacent municipalities and interested citizens. These community pillars can contribute time, talent, and money to sponsored projects, invited speakers, design charettes, and other means of sustaining a mindset in Windsor that appreciates and expects a quality civic image.



WHO does WHAT?

W Windsor City Council, on March 29, 2004, adopted policies, practices, and projects to be pursued based on the premises in this proposed urban design agenda, and on the people, timelines, and 2004 costs associated with implementing them. Those that are pursued will depend on time, personnel, and financial resources available. These are summarized in the table on the following page.

	Reference Number	Relative Priority	Relative Urgency	ACTIVITY	YEAR(S)	LEAD PERSONNEL	2004 Municipal UDCD Budget Cost Estimate
POLICIES							
1	A	1		Develop & adopt City Centre West Urban Design Guidelines	2004	City UD Staff	\$15K
2	A	1		Develop & adopt Glengarry-Marentette Waterfront Village Urban Design Guidelines	2004-5	City UD Staff	\$10K
3	A	1		Develop & adopt Design Guidelines & Standards for City Gateways	2005-6	City UD Staff	0
4	B	3		Develop & adopt Design Guidelines & Standards for Civic Ways & Theme Streets	2005-6	City UD Staff	0
5	A	1		Develop & adopt City Centre Streetscaping Standards Manual	2004	City UD Staff	\$30K
6	B	1		Adopt City Centre Orientation Signage Design Standards Manual [concludes 2003 policy development assistance to CCBA]	2004	Council / CCBA's consultants	0
7	C	3		Develop City-wide Orientation Signage Design Standards Manual	2007	City UD Staff	0
8	B	2		Revise 1996 Sidewalk Café Guidelines Handbook	2005	City UD Staff	0
9	A	1		Revise 1988 Landscape Manual into Site Plan Review Standards Manual	2004-5	City UD Staff	\$5K
10	A	1		Draft "Best Practices" User's Guide to new Sign By-Law	2004-5	City UD Staff	0
11	B	3		Research cost & benefits of establishing a municipal public art policy	2006+	Cultural Services Staff	0
12	A	2		Undertake comprehensive Urban Design Study for city	2005	City UD Staff	0
13	B	3		Develop City of Windsor Urban Design Manual	2005-6	City UD Staff	0
14	A	3		Review Urban Design policy during mandatory 5-year Official Plan review	2005	"Windsor Civic Design Commission"	0
15	C	2		Develop policies to promote "Green Architecture"	2006+	City UD Staff	0
PRACTICES							
16	A	2		Establish through Council Resolution role of urban design staff in development of capital projects	2004	City UD Staff	0
17	B	2		Establish through Council Resolution role of urban design staff in maintenance decisions affecting the original design objectives of capital projects	2004	City UD Staff	0
18	A	1		Develop and monitor Urban Design Indicators with, and for the use of, Development Processing Services	2004	City UD&DPS Staff	0
19	A	2		Prioritize civic ways and theme streets for planned "1 million trees" street-tree planting	2004	City Forester Staff	0
20	A	3		Establish Urban Design Peer-Review Panel [based on Technical Review Panel recommended in 2000 Central Riverfront Implementation Plan]	2007+	Council	0
PROJECTS							
21	A	1		Re/Design Huron Church Road Civic Way Features	2004	City UD Staff & University of Windsor Faculty/Students	0
22	A	3		Design & Install "Phase 1" Airport-area Gateway Features	2004-5	Consultant	\$25K
23	A	1		Design & Install Huron Church Road pedestrian overpass(es)	2004-5	Consultant	TBD
24	B	3		Design Train Station Gateway Features	2005	Consultant	0
25	A	1		Design Walker-Grand Marais Railway Underpass	2004-5	City UD Staff	TBD
26	A	2		Design Dougall-Ouellette Civic Way Features	2004-5	City UD Staff	TBD
27	A	1		Redesign Tunnel Plaza	2004-5	City UD Staff	TBD
PROMOTION & EDUCATION							
28	A	1		Establish "Windsor Civic Design Commission"	2004	Council	0
29	A	2		Establish Windsor Civic Design Awards Program	2005	"Windsor Civic Design Commission"	0
30	C	3		Develop Urban Design Awareness Program for school-age children	2006+	TBD	0
31	C	2		Set up City urban design interactive website [e.g. project profiles, award pgm. details, chat room]	2004-5	City UD Staff	0
32	B	2		Offer "urban design 101" course in-house	2005	City UD Staff	0
33	C	3		Set up City Staff urban design interest group ["brown bag" discussion group]	2004	City UD Staff	0
34	A	2		Institute Distinguished Speaker series	2005	"Windsor Civic Design Commission"	0
35	B	3		Introduce "Windsor SEEN" regular column/feature in local media	2005+	"Windsor Civic Design Commission"	0