

Urban Design Brief Terms of Reference

Description

An Urban Design Brief is intended to describe the design rationale for site development, building design and landscape elements within the proposal, in addition to how the proposed development fits with the character and vision for the local area. The Urban Design Brief should not simply be a description of, or argument for, the proposed development scheme but an explanation of why the proposed development represents the optimum design solution within the local context. The Brief is also not intended to replace a Planning Justification Report. The Urban Design Brief that is prepared in support of the proposal will be reviewed, modified and approved by staff.

The Urban Design Brief should clearly articulate a design direction of how the site should develop, including a set of design principles, why design decisions were made, and how these principles will be achieved. The brief shall also demonstrate how the proposal supports the overall vision and goals of the applicable Official Plans, relevant secondary plans, and design guidelines.

The Urban Design Brief shall be prepared by a suitably certified professional urban designer, architect, landscape architect, or planner with a demonstrated specialization in urban design.

When Required

An Urban Design Brief may be required as part of a complete planning application for an for large scale project, or in key areas such as downtowns, mixed-use nodes, intensification nodes or corridors or for infill where deemed necessary. The scope and level of detail expected in the Urban Design Brief will depend on the scale, site, sensitivity, and complexity of the development proposal. Regional and Local Planning staff will identify the need for an Urban Design Brief at the pre-consultation stage.

Rationale

The Urban Design Brief is a tool to review and evaluate such matters as the arrangement and design of the buildings, site and landscape design, compatibility with adjacent land uses, accessibility and safety, function and design of the building and its adjacent streetscapes and public spaces, as well as mitigation of negative impacts on the surrounding area to ensure high quality design of the public and private realm. Furthermore, the Urban Design Brief should demonstrate that the functional needs of the users of the site will be met over the long term.

Required Contents

The Urban Design Brief should include the following three main sections and address the design considerations listed below, unless otherwise specified.

Section 1 – Vision & Principles

Vision Statement

The vision statement is a written description that should clearly state a broad vision for the function, look and feel of the proposed design solution. It builds on the site's inherent assets and the potential strengths to set the overarching intent and objective for urban design, and is a direction setting tool that sets the basis for all subsequent urban design initiatives.

Design Principles

Identify the design principles that were used to guide urban design decisions throughout the design process. These principles are interdependent and must support one cohesive vision.

Section 2 – Policy Context & Site Analysis

Response to policy documents

Provide a summary and analysis of relevant documents, including a description of how the proposed design accounts for, and implements, the policies as established in:

- Official Plan documents;
- Relevant Secondary Plan Policy and/or Guidelines for specific areas; and
- Applicable Urban Design Guidelines.

If there are areas of non-compliance, the Urban Design Brief shall explain why there is non-compliance and illustrate how the proposed design represents the best/optimum design scheme.

Site Analysis: Opportunities and Challenges

Provide a contextual drawing including supporting images of the site as well as the surrounding context (at least a 400m radius from the site) noting any on-site attributes and considerations and how they relate to the proposed development, including but not limited to:

- Existing topography, vegetation, and environmental features;
- Lot fabric (including frontage and depth);
- General street/block pattern (including block lengths);
- Built form character of surrounding area (including boundary treatments, street frontages/ street enclosure, building setbacks, height and massing, roof forms);
- Spatial analysis and landscape character of the surrounding area (character of public realm—streetscapes and public open spaces, how they work at different times, days and seasons and how they visually and physically interconnect);
- Surrounding land uses and building heights;
- Views and vistas to and from the site;
- Existing or planned landmarks or gateways;

- Existing or planned transportation networks (including vehicular, cycling, pedestrian, transit, etc.);
- Linkages to public open spaces; and,
- Existing building(s) and/ or structure(s) (location on site, identification of heritage attributes, description of architectural style, massing, size, exterior materials, significance of the structure, and any existing walls or fences).

Section 3 – Design Considerations

The Urban Design Brief shall demonstrate how the design principles have guided the design of the site and built form. Through written descriptions, concept plans, conceptual building elevations, sections, diagrams and/or photographs, the Urban Design Brief shall explain how the design proposal deals with each of the following design considerations:

Site Design

- Identification if site is part of a landmark or gateway location;
- Demonstrate how the development concept takes into account distinctive local context and characteristics;
- Transition of built form massing within the neighbourhood including future developments;
- Street and block pattern (permeability, connectivity) if applicable;
- Access to transit and active transportation;
- Pedestrian network, including accessible design considerations;
- Integration with streetscape elements (landscaping, furniture, public art, signage, lighting etc.);
- Transition between the private and public realm, pedestrian circulation connections etc.;
- Show grading and ground floor elevation in relation to the street;
- Compatibility with on-site heritage attributes, or adjacent heritage attributes;
- Sustainable site and building design elements such as Low impact development, stormwater retention, energy efficiency measures, green energy or any green building technologies;
- Provision for cycling facilities (e.g. access to indoor and outdoor bike parking);
- Vehicular access and circulation;
- Location of parking (surface or underground), driveways, ramps and/or drop-off areas;
- Location of servicing areas (loading, garbage, storage, delivery, utilities, etc.); and,
- Conceptual site lighting; and
- Conceptual design of landscape areas, including:
 - Planting areas
 - Private and shared amenity areas (if applicable)
 - Landscape elements (fencing, walls, landscape structures)
 - Areas used for landscape buffering, setbacks or screening
 - Integration with the streetscape (contribute to creating attractive and functional streetscapes),

Built Form Massing

- Building siting
 - on larger sites or where phasing is proposed, demonstrate how the site has been master planned;
- Building height(s) and massing);
- Microclimate considerations for Pedestrian safety and comfort (i.e. Sun/shadow impacts, wind impacts, and proposed mitigation);
- Setbacks from adjacent properties and street;
- Building step-backs; and,
- Floor plate shape and design.

Tall Building Massing

- Floorplate plans may be required as part of the study. Floorplate sizes should be analyzed and provided. For tall buildings, demonstrate the setback and siting of floor plates above the base building (i.e. podium); and
- Appropriate distances between tall buildings should be demonstrated.

Building and Architectural Design

- Enhancing corner locations;
- Roof Treatment;
- Location of garage(s) and driveways;
- Location of utilities and mechanical equipment;
- Location of windows and doors;
- Architectural expression (how it responds to or reflects the local context);
- Street wall and architectural treatment at grade level (ie. podium design, animation, entrances, glazing);
- Architectural style;
- Architectural features and details;
- Architectural treatment (Materials and colour palette);
- Building lighting (i.e. safety, night-time illumination, etc.); and,
- Building signage.