# Urban Design Guidelines

## Downtown St. Albert

Approved by Council January 20, 2014

City of St. Albert
Planning & Development

JANUARY 2014

# Intent








The goal of the downtown Urban Design Review process and these guidelines is to ensure the thoughtful integration of development proposals into the local context, and consistency with standards articulated in the St. Albert Municipal Development Plan as well as the Downtown Redevelopment Plan Bylaw (DARP). All new development should enhance the liveability of St. Albert's urban environment and create high quality and innovative design. These principles and standards are not intended to serve as a "checklist"; not all aspects included herein will apply to an individual project

The principles and guidelines outlined in this document should be taken as the minimum standard to support design excellence in St. Albert. It will be left to the skill and creativity of design professionals and builders to determine and demonstrate how these principles and guidelines are to be achieved or exceeded. This design guideline document is arranged to complement Section 11.1(The Downtown District) of the Land Use Bylaw and the Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan (DARP).

The design review process outlined herein and in the Downtown District will offer recommendations based on local knowledge, experience and expertise regarding design excellence for new developments or redevelopment. The City's desire is to allow this discussion to be undertaken in a collaborative way with development proponents, to encourage high quality urban design in the Downtown area.

The area of the City affected by these guidelines is within the boundaries established by the DARP and applicable sections of the current Land Use Bylaw.

**The steps outlined in these Guidelines must be conducted prior to application submission.**

# Application, Design Review and Approval Process

## Step 1–Pre-Application Consultation

### *Development Permits*

In order to facilitate the processing of Development Permit applications, applicants must schedule a pre-application meeting. This will allow staff to review the plans for development or redevelopment and provide feedback and direction in preparing the formal Development Permit application for submission. It will also enable staff to initiate the Urban Design Review process, which will allow the applicant to address and incorporate any urban design recommendations into the application prior to submission. It will discuss other matters such as servicing, public consultation and Council updates.

### *Redistricting, Area Redevelopment Plan Amendment and Subdivision Application*

An application requiring redistricting, an Area Redevelopment Plan amendment or a subdivision requires a Pre-application meeting with Planning staff.








## Step 2 – Design Review

There are two types of Urban Design Review undertaken as part of the pre-application consultation process. Either review is included in the application fees and will be co-ordinated by City staff prior to an application being formally submitted. This review and the guidelines provided here do not pre-empt the regulations in the Land Use Bylaw but are intended to assist applicants in bringing forward developments in accordance with the DARP principles and Land Use Bylaw regulations, including those in the Downtown District.

### *Internal Urban Design Review*

Applications that do not require an External Urban Design Review may request an Internal Urban Design Review by Planning and Development Staff prior to submission of an application. An *Urban Design Recommendations Report* will be provided and recommendations are intended to provide the applicant with direction that may range from acknowledgement of positive design qualities of the proposal, to suggestions that encourage a design that better complies with the City's policies and plans related to downtown.

### *External Urban Design Review*

An External Design Review prior to submission of the application is required for any proposed development meeting the standards specified under Part 11(5)(a) of the Land Use Bylaw.

The City contracts a third-party urban design specialist to review the proposal. The reviewer will then provide an *Urban Design Recommendations Report* which will be discussed with the City and the applicant. This Report must be completed prior to the development permit application being submitted and will include

comments from the reviewer that may range from acknowledgement of positive design qualities of the proposal to suggestions that encourage a design that better complies with the City's policies and plans related to downtown. The external design specialist does not provide a recommendation of support or non-support to the City for a future Development Permit application.

If a Development Permit application does not meet the Design Review criteria noted earlier, a development proponent may still request that the External Design Review process be undertaken.

## *Urban Design Review Submission*

If an Urban Design Review is required or requested, the applicant shall submit to the Development Branch:

- Urban design review application form; and
- Submission requirements for Urban Design Review include: Design drawings, elevations, or any other materials to be confirmed at the discretion of City staff. All required information should be provided in 11"x17" hardcopy format (3 copies) and an electronic version in PDF format. Provide all required materials at a scale sufficient to fully describe and explain the intention of the design. Include a relative scale. Information may be combined on maps and drawings provided the information is clear.
- The Project Summary should describe the nature of the site and the development project. The Summary should clearly reference the specific items of the DARP and the Land Use Bylaw, and the Downtown District that the proposed development is addressing. If the proposal is in full compliance, this can be stated; if not, reasons for non-compliance should be outlined.
- Context Information
    i. Aerial photographs of the site indicating its location within the larger Downtown area context.
    ii. A set of context photographs of the subject site, and a context plan that identifies surrounding buildings and uses within a 100m radius of the site, as well as the site location on the block. The context plans should also identify the relationship of the site to the public transport facilities and local street and pathway pedestrian linkages.
    iii. A discussion on how the proposed development integrates with surrounding development on the immediate streescape.
- The Urban Design Plan should illustrate the specific elements of the Urban Design Guidelines that are being addressed by the proposed development. The Urban Design Plan should identify how the design achieves the intent and objectives of the Guidelines, and should be supported by drawings, diagrams and figures.
- Site Information
    i. Views from and to the development and how these are incorporated into the design.
    ii. A parking plan should be provided if it is at grade or is incorporated within a public realm
    iii. A Site Plan that includes existing and proposed development, land, buildings, pedestrian circulation, and the location of adjacent buildings.
    iv. Proposed public art strategy or approach, identifying the relationship to public artwork(s) to public space,



including public access and public visibility if applicable.

v. Preliminary Grading plan and spot elevations.

- Building Information
  i. Main floor plan and other sample floor plans, including dimensions of all public sidewalks, arcades, plazas and terrace elevations.
  ii. A parking plan identifying surface parking or parking incorporated within the building, including identification of parking access and egress points to adjacent public roadways.
  iii. Elevation drawing showing each individual side of the building.
  iv. Coloured 3D renderings of the building showing selected views of the proposed development.
  v. Street-level perspective rendering that clearly illustrate the building's interface with the surrounding streetscape and pedestrian realm/public space.
  vi. Detailed descriptions/images or samples of the proposed building cladding materials, including all glazing types.

Upon completion, the *Urban Design Recommendations Report* will be forwarded to the applicant.

## Step 3 –Public Consultation

If Public Consultation is required by the Development Officer, it is to be conducted at the pre-application stage. Court reporter records will be required at the time a formal Development Permit application is submitted . Consultation must be conducted in accordance with the City of St. Albert City Council Policy: Public Consultation requirements for Planning and Development processes.

## Step 4 – Application Submission





After completing steps 1, 2 and 3 the applicant may submit a formal application for a Development Permit to the Planning and Development (P&D) Department, in accordance with Sections 3.3 and 11.1 of the Land Use Bylaw. Failure to incorporate the design recommendations suggested may result in an application being deemed incomplete by the Development Officer. At the request of the applicant the Development Officer may accept an application that does not address all recommendations made in the Urban Design Recommendations Report. The Development Branch will formally review the development permit application and circulate the application to relevant City departments and external stakeholders. If the Development Officer finds issues with the application, they will notify the applicant, and work with the applicant to address them.

## Step 5 – Recommendation and Approval

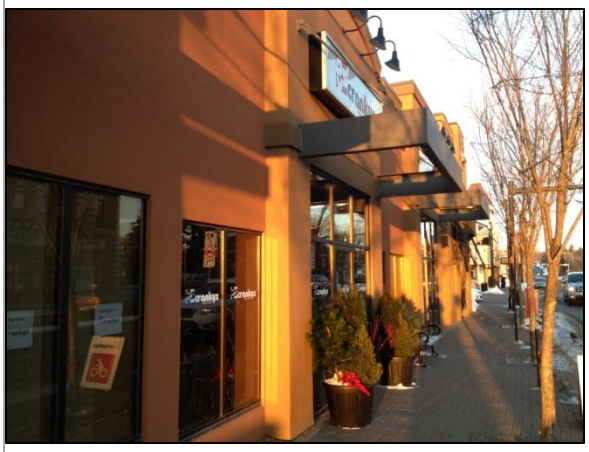
The *Urban Design Recommendations Report* will outline the proposed design and its compliance with City design policy and guidelines, and may recommend changes or adjustments that could be made to the building design, architecture or the siting. Based on the recommendations, City staff can work with the applicant on how the recommendations could be incorporated into the final design. The external design review specialist may be engaged at this stage to further assist in identifying elements for a proposed development to achieve higher quality design and the objectives of the DARP. The

Development Officer will then complete the processing of the Development Permit Application.

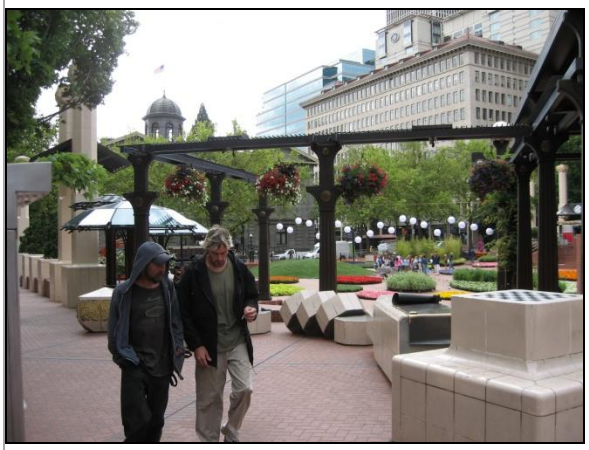
For further information on application requirements and the design review process please contact Planning and Development at

www.stalbert.ca/planning-development or 780-459-1642

# Design Review Guidelines







Urban design considers the physical characteristics of the City and the impact of design and planning decisions on the public realm. Urban design helps to smoothly integrate components of the built environment including architecture, landscape design, engineering and land use planning. This integrated approach helps create visually attractive and functional neighbourhoods and communities.

These *Downtown Urban Design Guidelines* address how various public and private developments affect people's experience ofthe downtown focusing on the public realm of the city including such things as the public faces of buildings, streets, sidewalks, parks or plazas. It is these elements that provide the backdrop to people's experiences and activities, and ensure a thriving, vibrant, and welcoming downtown. All designs must have regard for safety and CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles. All must support the direction established by DARP.

The *Downtown Urban Design Guidelines* help establish coordination of the built environment on both public and private land to support the overall vision for the neighbourhood. The focus for the *Downtown Urban Design Guidelines* and design review process addresses five key components:

- Downtown Character Areas;
- The Public Realm;
- Land Use and Site Development; and
- Building and Architectural Design.

Specialized Guidelines are provided for two elements that can have a significant impact on downtown:

- High-Rise Buildings; and
- Surface Parking and Parking Structures.

# St. Albert's Context and Character

## *The Setting*

St. Albert is located 15 km northwest of downtown Edmonton and is a member municipality of the Capital Region Board. Established in 1861, St. Albert has a significant history and is the oldest non-fortified community in Alberta. It was the largest agricultural settlement west of Winnipeg. Today, St. Albert is a city with more than 60,000 residents; boasting more than 70 kilometres of trails and 400 hectares of green space, the Arden Theatre, visual arts studios, the Musée Héritage Museum, and numerous special events including the International Children's Festival and St. Albert Farmers' Market. In recent years, St. Albert has ranked high in a number of national surveys in regards to quality of life and sense of community.

All projects built in the Downtown must recognize and celebrate the following principles of the Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan (DARP) as approved by Council:

- Embrace the Sturgeon River and Red Willow Park System with new development and enhanced open spaces;
- Expand downtown to the west by creating a mixed-use urban neighbourhood straddling Sir Winston Churchill Avenue;
- Ensure convenient access to the downtown by facilitating all modes of movement and providing new parking facilities;
- Realign and extend St. Anne Street to provide more mobility options, better frontage for new development and a better relationship to the riverfront;
- Develop a new Civic Space on St. Anne Street – a gathering place that will accommodate a range of activities and events and enhance the identity of downtown;
- Design and program Millennium Park to provide a spectacular public open space for a range of cultural facilities, activities and reinforce and extend the downtown retail environment along pedestrian-oriented streets;
- Plan for a critical mass of people in high density dwelling units and well-designed development to ensure vitality and a strong local market; and
- Establish a gateway on St. Albert Trail ensuring development that creates landmarks and an attractive entrance to downtown.

## *Approaches and Gateways*

There are three (3) primary approaches to downtown identified in the DARP: Green Grove Drive, St. Albert Trail and Sir Winston Churchill Avenue adjacent to the Riel Business Park. Redevelopment in these areas over time will play an important role in reinforcing the identity and vitality of the downtown.







## *Downtown Character Areas*

The DARP identifies four distinct character areas within St. Albert's downtown:

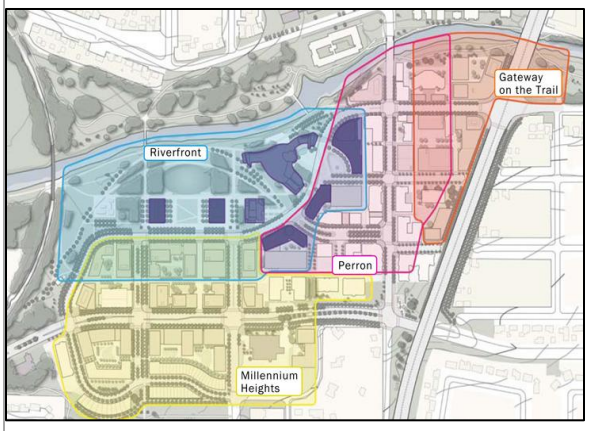
### Gateway on the Trail Character Area

The Gateway on the Trail Character Area will be downtown's face on St. Albert Trail. It will accommodate a wide array of uses including residential, office, institutional and retail. Buildings will be of a larger scale and higher density to emphasize and support higher order transit. They will give the area a higher profile within the City and signal to people they have entered a distinctly urban place. The building massing and form of development in this area must be configured so as to not impact surrounding neighbourhoods.



### Perron Character Area

The Perron Character Area will continue to be the retail core of Downtown. Gaps will be filled and shops and restaurants will extend along St. Thomas Street and line the proposed Civic Square to create a lively and continuous shopping experience. This area will feature active street level commercial-retail uses in moderately-scaled buildings to maintain a main street character. The streetscapes of Perron, St. Anne and St. Thomas Streets will be improved to give more space to the pedestrian and reduce automobile speeds. This will create an environment where businesses can thrive as shoppers are encouraged to linger and stroll. The Perron area will remain primarily commercial, but residential and other uses above retail will be strongly encouraged.




### Riverfront Character Area

The Riverfront Character Area will be an area for municipal government, civic gatherings, cultural activities and recreation. Two new significant public spaces, the Civic Square and Millennium Park, will provide settings for festivals, performances, the Farmers' Market, recreational activities and passive enjoyment. Millennium Park should include a destination for youth such as a skateboard park and winter activities such as skating. New buildings containing civic, cultural, residential and retail uses will front St. Anne Street and the new open spaces, fully engaging the riverfront and linking it to the rest of downtown.



### Millennium Heights Character Area

The Millennium Heights Character Area will consist primarily of residential uses in buildings of varying heights. It will be a new urban neighbourhood for Downtown featuring street-oriented buildings and a mix of housing types. Offices and complementary neighbourhood-oriented retail uses will enliven Sir Winston Churchill Avenue. The concentration of residents in Millennium Heights will create a sense of community in downtown. Tache Street will provide a green corridor featuring wide landscaped sidewalks and a dedicated recreational trail between Grenadier Park and a rejuvenated Millennium Park and the river.

# Land Use and Site Development

The location of a building on a site and how it relates to the street and adjacent buildings or sites reinforces the streetscape, defines the public realm and contributes to the pedestrian experience.







## *Guideline: Site Context*

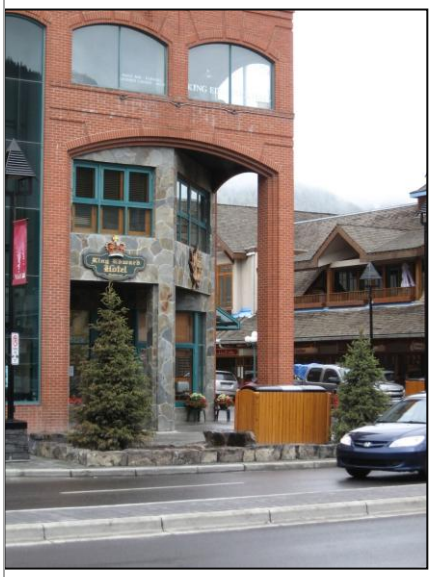
- Create continuous streetscapes and comfortably enclosed open spaces through building alignment and frontage;
- Integrate amenities such as public transit stops, benches or other seating, shade, public art or shelters;
- Demonstrate views and sightlines within and to the Downtown;
- Complement the Red Willow Park System and the Sturgeon River Valley; and
- Ensure clear and seamless transitions between public and private realms to promote shared use and connectivity.
- Ensure design of sites responds to St. Albert's four season and changing daylight patterns, creating comfortable public and private spaces.

## *Guideline: Use and Development*

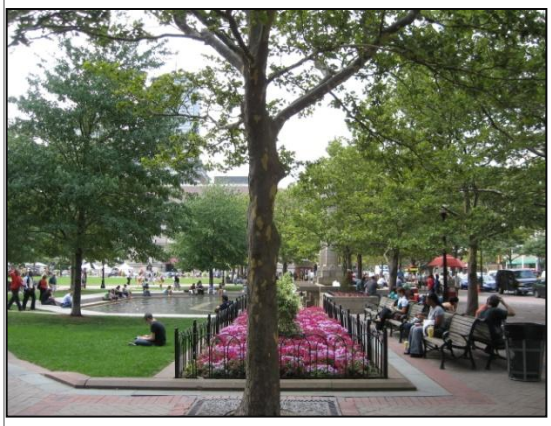
- Locate active uses to enhance, animate and support the streetscape and public spaces;
- Demonstrate visual surveillance from apartments and offices to the streets , open spaces and parking areas;
- Support character areas;
- Demonstrate mixed-use development that help create a diverse neighbourhood; and
- Demonstrate opportunities to accommodate public art elements onto a site or within a building.

# Building and Architectural Design

A building and its features reinforce the public realm and the pedestrian experience.





## *Guideline: Integrated High Quality Design*

- Design buildings that are rich in architectural detail and respect the rhythm and pattern of the streetscape;
- Avoid blank or featureless facades through the use of articulation, glazing and building entrances;
- Highlight buildings on corner sites;
- Seamless transitions between building heights and types;
- Ensure that development supports active uses both in the day and at night;
- Demonstrate new development to use strategies to achieve the highest level of site and building sustainability possible;
- Building materials must fit with the climate and character of the Downtown, and contribute to a high level of design and craftsmanship; and
- Create development that respects and enhances the history of the area and historic properties nearby.

## *Guideline: Pedestrian Orientation at-grade*

- Create an enclosure ratio of building height to road corridor (generally between 1:1 to 1:3);
- Ensure pedestrian-oriented uses predominate at grade;
- Use setbacks and other design features with taller buildings to achieve a human scale at street level;
- Provide pedestrian weather protection at building entrances and along walkways; and
- Minimize visual clutter and scale and locate signage for pedestrians.

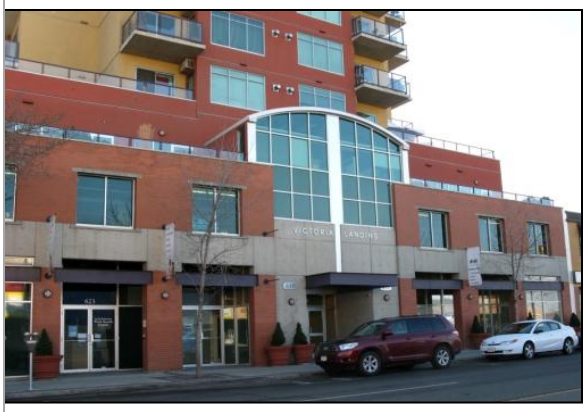
## *Guideline: Amenity Spaces*

- Provide convenient and secure amenity areas, both public and private. Consider informal 'bumping places' such as transit stops, public art or seating.

# Specialized Guidelines: High-Rise Buildings

The following guidelines shall be considered for all buildings greater than eight (8) storeys:







## *Guideline: Well-designed and Integrated High-Rise Buildings*

- Minimize impacts of high-rise development on neighbouring streets, buildings and open spaces;
- Concentrate height and mass at landmark or other key sites, key intersections and gateways; and
- Consider communal outdoor amenity space or environmental innovations such as green roofs, rainwater recovery or solar panels on roof-tops or podiums.

## *Guideline: Integrate three building components:*

- The Pedestal is the primary interface with the City's context and its street, people and services. It should:
  - define the lower portion of the building with a pedestal that is similar in height, proportions and rhythm to the neighbouring buildings to visually unify the street;
  - contribute to a quality pedestrian environment by directly engaging the street and providing high quality architectural design;
  - provide pedestrian entrances at-grade that are directly accessible, clear, prominent, weather-protected and directly linked to the sidewalk.
- The Tower connects the pedestal and the top and has an impact on the pedestrian environment and skyline. It should:
  - contribute to the physical and visual quality of the building;
  - ensure the penetration of sunlight to the ground level, but minimize effects of wind and shadow;
- The roof top is the most defining portion of the building for the broader area. It should:
  - integrate mechanical equipment;
  - contribute to the city's skyline; and
  - provide opportunities for green roof or private outdoor amenity area.

## *Guideline: Distinguish between Landmark and Background Buildings*

Three special overlay sites have been identified. These are considered special landmark sites where buildings taller than the underlying height limits and up to the maximums indicated may be permitted subject to the approval of City Council. Less dominating buildings are considered Background Buildings.

- Landmark Buildings should:
  - be distinctive in form and detail when viewed close-up or from a distance;
  - have major destination(s) nearby such as a public transit station or plaza;
  - incorporate extra richness and quality in architectural design, materials, detail and colour;
  - be located in high profile locations such as the identified landmark sites or, secondarily, on corner sites;
  - be considered for the subject of design competitions; and

- stand-out by unique, statement-making architecture, yet be complementary to Downtown and its skyline.

- Background Buildings should:
  - maintain a similar form and design detailing as surrounding buildings;
  - enhance and frame significant places, public open spaces, streets and landmark or historic buildings;
  - contribute to the transition between high-rise buildings and adjacent lower profile areas; and
  - distribute building form and massing in a manner appropriate to the scale and proportion of the building's surroundings.

# Specialized Guidelines: Parking

Parking should be unobtrusive, within close proximity and fit within the character of Downtown. Expansive surface parking lots are not appropriate. Parking structures and lots should adhere to the design guidelines for Land Use & Site Development and Building & Architectural Design.

## Vehicle Access

- Vehicle access must from service lanes or secondary (not 'A') streets;
- Minimize obstruction of the free flow of traffic on adjoining public streets;
- Avoid pedestrian/vehicle conflicts;
- Provide loading areas within any structure for carpooling or passengers.

## Parking Structures







- Provide a supporting secondary role to the pedestrian focus of Downtown;
- Reduce pedestrian/vehicular conflict;
- Maintain the character of the public realm; and
- Integrate seamlessly with the fabric of the downtown.

### *Guideline: Integrate structure facade with streetscape*

- Active ground-storey uses must be incorporated;
- Design facades to create a building frontage that is compatible with the streetscape considering:
  - maintain a horizontal line, it should not reflect the sloping interior;
  - public art;
  - landscaping;
  - design features such as repeating color, texture and material changes; vertical elements such as reveals, projecting ribs or offsets; or
  - using elevator and stair shafts as design elements.

### *Guideline: Ensure pedestrian safety*

- Provide uniform, high light levels (10 footcandles) throughout all areas with extra light in pedestrian areas such as stairs, elevator lobbies, entrances, exits, and ramps;
- Minimize contrasts in light levels between the outside and inside of the structure;
- Use glass or transparent material for visibility of elevator cabs, shafts, stairways, lobbies and entrances and exits;
- Pedestrian access should:
  - be channelled through one or two points; and
  - have surveillance by a cashier, ground-storey retail or remote television camera;
- Use tamper-proof sound detection equipment and cameras to monitor pedestrian activity; especially in remote sections, and at entrances and exits; and
- Use drop safes and silent alarms in the cashier's booth if on-site cashiers are to be considered.

## Surface Parking Lots

- Clearly define pedestrian access within and to and from the parking lot, with continuous connections to nearby pedestrian facilities;
- Use landscaping, low or see-through fences, or public art to screen vehicles and create a building frontage compatible with the streetscape;
- Ensure lighting and clear visibility both within and from outside the parking lot; and
- Hardsurfacing is required for all surface parking lots or on-site surface parking areas associated with development.