		Report No. PD-39-2022
		File No. N/A
Directed to: Mayor Joe Preston and Members of City Council		Date Authored: 06/10/2022 Meeting Date: 06/20/2022
Department: Planning and Building Services Department	Attachment Phase 1 – Background Review & Visioning Report	
Prepared by: Jim McCoomb, Manager of Planning Services		
Subject: Phase 1 Report - Urban Design Guidelines for the City of St. Thomas		
<p>RECOMMENDATION:</p> <p>THAT: Report PD-39-2022 relating to the Phase 1 Report for the City’s urban design guidelines be received for information; and further,</p> <p>THAT: Council receive the report from Dillon Consulting entitled “Phase 1 – Background Review & Visioning Report” dated June 1, 2022 and authorize the initiation of Phase 2 of the study.</p> <hr/>		
<p>ORIGIN:</p> <p>At its December 20th, 2021 meeting Council authorized the Planning and Building Services Department to initiate consultation services as part of the ongoing Official Plan Review for the update and creation of Official Plan policies for urban design and associated guideline documents. Staff retained the services of Dillon Consulting as they are already involved with the Official Plan (OP) review assisting with public consultation and are very familiar with the city having carried out many projects in the past.</p> <p>Dillon has recently completed Phase 1 of the study, which is a front-end background review and visioning that will help inform the rest of the St. Thomas City-Wide Urban Design Guidelines assignment. Phase 1 is the first step in a three-phase approach that will combine to form the final Urban Design Guidelines. The Phase 1 report is attached to this report for Council’s information.</p> <p>The Phase 1 study identifies 8 design principles meant as overarching guidelines that will steer development within the City of St. Thomas These principles are intended to be a draft for City review and include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Place Making: Engage in placemaking by creating memorable, flexible and identity strengthening spaces in both the private and public realms of the city.2. Human Scale within Urban Fabric: Create built environments (i.e. building massing, scale and details) that support comfortable, desirable and active lifestyle and pedestrian experience, while complementing the character of the existing urban fabric.3. Safe, Attractive and Green Streetscapes: Create vibrant, well-designed, safe and pedestrian oriented streets that support mobility for cyclists, pedestrians and vehicles. Additionally, promote higher quality landscape treatments that integrate the benefits of climate comfort, stormwater management, urban forestry and urban ecology.4. High Quality Materials and Building Design: Promote high quality features, materials and colours that enhance the neighbourhood/streetscape character, both residential and commercial developments. Promote urban forms and architectural design that brings interest and diversity to the public realm.5. Sustainable Development: Promote sustainability at all levels of city-building through urban design: green infrastructure, green building practices, climate change resiliency, renewable and low-carbon energy and design initiatives, native plants, and material selections.6. Heritage Preservation, Sensitive Integration: Protect and celebrate St. Thomas’ cultural heritage resources and rail history, and promote adaptive re-use of existing heritage built form. Ensure new commercial and residential developments successfully contribute to the streetscape, landscape and district/site historic values and character.7. Natural Heritage: Promote protection, enhancement, views and education on the City’s rich natural heritage system.8. Accessibility/Universal Design: Provide designed spaces that reinforce inclusivity, and allow users of all abilities and to access, navigate, interact and explore without physical and perceived barriers. <p>The Phase 1 report also identifies 6 design priorities, meant as overarching design direction that will help achieve the vision and principles put forth. These priorities are intended to be a draft for City review and include:</p> <p>Priority 1: Create a universally accessible and inclusive urban environment that supports residents and visitors of all abilities.</p>		

- Priority 2: Encourage sustainable forms of residential and commercial development in expansion areas that enhances the built form and prioritizes elements of placemaking.
- Priority 3: Protect the heritage significance and character of the Downtown, and support adaptive re-use and new built form integration that supports the heritage values.
- Priority 4: Create a walkable and pedestrian-friendly city that supports modes of active transportation, and a well-connected street network that is safe, comfortable and accessible.
- Priority 5: Support a well-connected street network that is safe, comfortable and accessible.
- Priority 6: Promote the use of green infrastructure and building practices while protecting the existing natural heritage network.

Staff did reach out to the Municipal Heritage Committee and the Downtown Development Board to see if either group wanted a special meeting to review the Phase 1 report and recommendation. However, both groups preferred to wait until the study advances to draft policy and guideline development before engaging in discussions with staff and the consultants. They are aware of this report being presented to Council and staff have offered that if there are any questions on Phase 1 that we will bring these to the attention of Dillon. Staff have also posted the Phase 1 report on the City website for anyone who is interested to access.

Staff are recommending that the Phase 1 report be received by Council and that Dillon be authorized to proceed with Phase 2, which will involve the preparation of draft guidelines/directions and text.

Respectfully submitted,

Reviewed By:



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Reviewed By: _____

Approved By: _____
City Manager

St. Thomas City-Wide Urban Design Guidelines

Phase 1 – Background Review & Visioning Report

June 1, 2022



Cover photo credit: Globe and Mail, 2021

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St. Thomas Elevated Park
Photo Credit: <http://www.elevatedpark.ca>

1.0 Introduction

This document completes Phase 1- Background Review & Visioning, the front end background review and visioning that will help inform the rest of the St. Thomas City-Wide Urban Design Guidelines assignment. Phase 1 is the first step in a three-phase approach that will combine to form the final Urban Design Guidelines for the City of St. Thomas.

Phase 1 is intended to lay the background and benchmarking groundwork that will set the stage for the development of works for Phase 2 (Draft Guidelines – Directions & Text). The second phase of work is devoted to drafting the design guidelines and finalizing the text prior to moving the document into its final formatted version as well as the graphic visualizations required for Phase 3 (Visualizations and Final Guidelines). The majority of Phase 3 will comprise of largely graphical exercises (formatting / visualizations) since it is intended that the body text will be finalized in Phase 2. Visualizations are intended to bring the text to life so it will be important to finalize the design and narrative direction prior to developing any final graphics.

This Phase 1 document, aside from the Introduction, consists of three sections; Background Review, City Wide Urban Design Guideline Benchmarking, and Vision + Principles. The Vision, Design Principles and Design Priorities are developed using knowledge gained during the background review and benchmarking exercise. They are also rooted through existing planning work and are also aligned with current urban design best practices and principles. The vision statement, priorities and principles are all intended to be a draft for City review.

2.0 Background Review

The background review includes existing City of St. Thomas (City) documents relating to urban design. The document review provides insights into existing urban design guidance and the vision for the future. Reviewing the existing urban design guidance will help to identify key priorities and important themes while also identifying overlaps and gaps across the various policies which will help to form the areas of focus for the citywide urban design guidelines in the next phase of the Urban Design Guideline Study.



Figure 1 St. Thomas Art Installation "Perseverance" at City Gateway

2.1 City of St. Thomas Strategic Plan, 2021-2023

The Strategic Plan outlines priorities, goals and commitments for the City to achieve between 2021 and 2023. Through community engagement of residents and stakeholders, three strategic priorities and goals were identified, including:

1. **Compassionate Community:** support and engage vulnerable people to enhance the quality of life for all citizens;
2. **Vibrant Community:** enhance opportunities for connection and development to promote growth for people and businesses in the City; and
3. **Thriving Community:** invest in the development of planned assets to advance access for people in the community.



Figure 2 Lake Margaret Neighbourhood Development

The guiding principle identified in the Strategic Plan is to be an “environmentally responsible community” and to “lead from a sustainable perspective”.

In meeting the commitments of the Strategic Plan, St. Thomas will advance its resiliency and foster opportunities for a progressive community through the development of more affordable housing, the industrial lands at Windon Farm, and a new community and aquatic centre. Also the Strategic Plan supports downtown enhancements, improvements to the City’s roads, bridges, parks and sidewalks, expansion of the City’s trail system, and improved transit experience.

The urban design guidelines will strategically address both public and private realms in achieving a St. Thomas **identity, accessibility and connectivity that advances the three strategic priorities.**

2.2 St. Thomas Official Plan, 2020

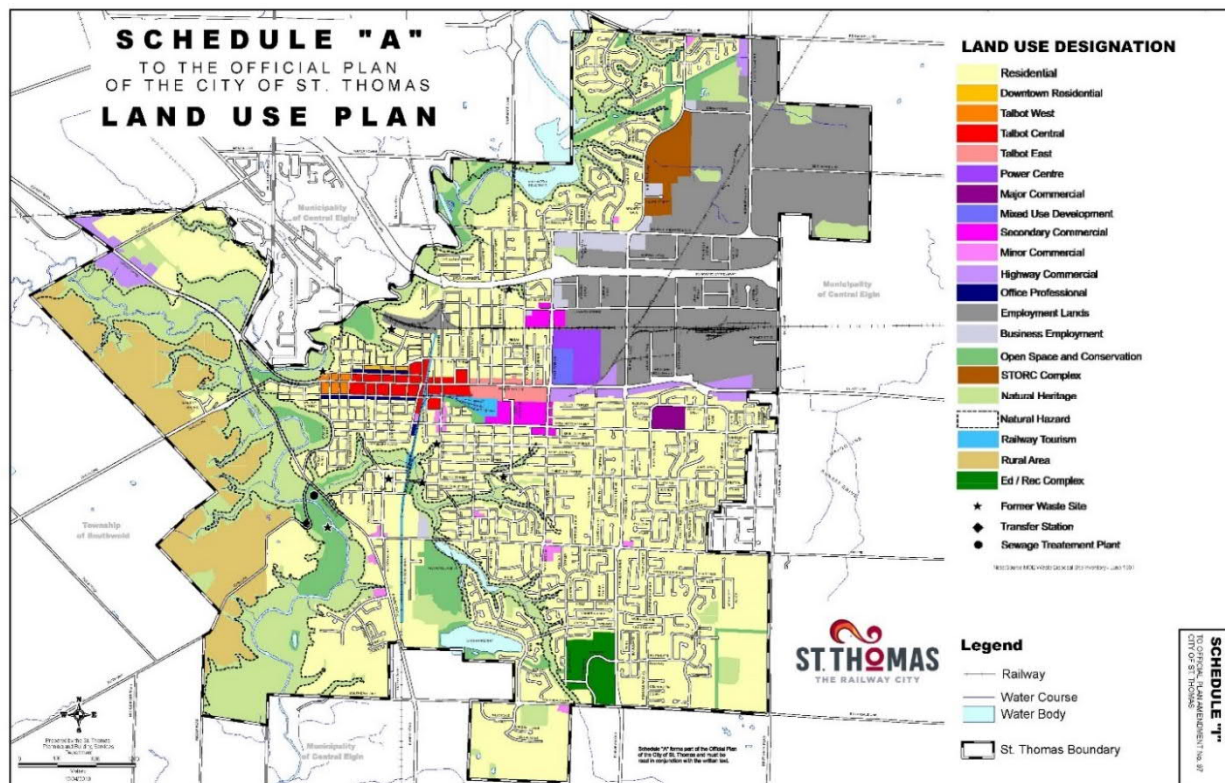


Figure 3 St. Thomas Land Use Plan

The City's Official Plan details the goals and policies that will guide growth, economic development and the protection of architectural and natural heritage in the city. The Official Plan, formally updated in 2017 and currently undergoing an additional review as per the 2020 PPS, identifies the general objectives of community improvement in St. Thomas, including: rehabilitation for residential use of obsolete buildings; maintenance and reuse of architecturally significant buildings; streetscape and building facade improvements; redevelopment of the Downtown as a civic centre; and the revitalization of older industrial lands.

The Official Plan also identifies the key priorities, including the intensification of residential development through the reuse of existing buildings and new construction. The City prioritizes urban improvements including streetscape and facade revitalization, improvements to accessibility, the enhancement of public space, and the pedestrian realm, particularly in the Downtown. The City's Official Plan is key to understanding the principles and needs for the built environment of St. Thomas going forward. The City has a desire to see private business contribute to the redevelopment of the city and ultimately the quality of life for their residents.

It is important to note that the Official Plan has several references to building or site design throughout and, while these statements illustrate the City's desire to have well designed places, the vague nature of these directions can and have created issues for City staff, the development community, and the public. The Official Plan has certain policy gaps as well as a general lack of

visual examples for guidance which create implementation concerns and an inability to adequately communicate the vision of the City to its private sector developers and builders through the application process. The vision itself is absent from the current version of the Plan.

The Urban Design Guidelines will be a key document to help implement the updated policies of the City's Official Plan (2020), as well as implement a city-wide vision guiding development and growth in **St. Thomas within a cohesive, practical and high-quality urban environment.**

2.3 St. Thomas Design Guidelines Manual, 2018

The Design Guidelines Manual provides engineering design standards for construction projects in the City of St. Thomas. All development related engineering and design projects must conform to these standards. The standards include guidelines related to engineering drawings, site plan, roadway design, intersection design, stormwater management, parks, open space and landscaping, bicycle lanes and multi-use trails, as well as street lighting. Sections within this document provide basic engineering guidance for the design of elements such as roadways within the City but they do not advise on specifics related to urban design such as street furniture, paving, signage etc.

The Design Guidelines Manual provides insights into the City's approval process and design standards, **which are critical in the implementation of the urban design vision and frameworks** through various development applications.

2.4 Downtown Planning Implementation Strategy, 2015

The Downtown Planning Implementation Strategy contains key recommendations on the CIP incentive programs, administration, application material and marketing. It subsequently provides recommendations alongside action plans and priorities to update the CIP. The document recommends updating the zoning by-law and Official Plan policies for the downtown in the short term alongside an immediate update to the CIP. Between 2017 and 2020 the document recommended updating the urban design study from 2003, the intensification study and providing a new CIP.

The **recommendation for the update of the urban design guidance for St. Thomas is being fulfilled** through this study, and once approved will be used to provide feasibility study grants to developers to **incentivize the use of the new guidelines.**

2.5 City of St. Thomas CIP, 2021

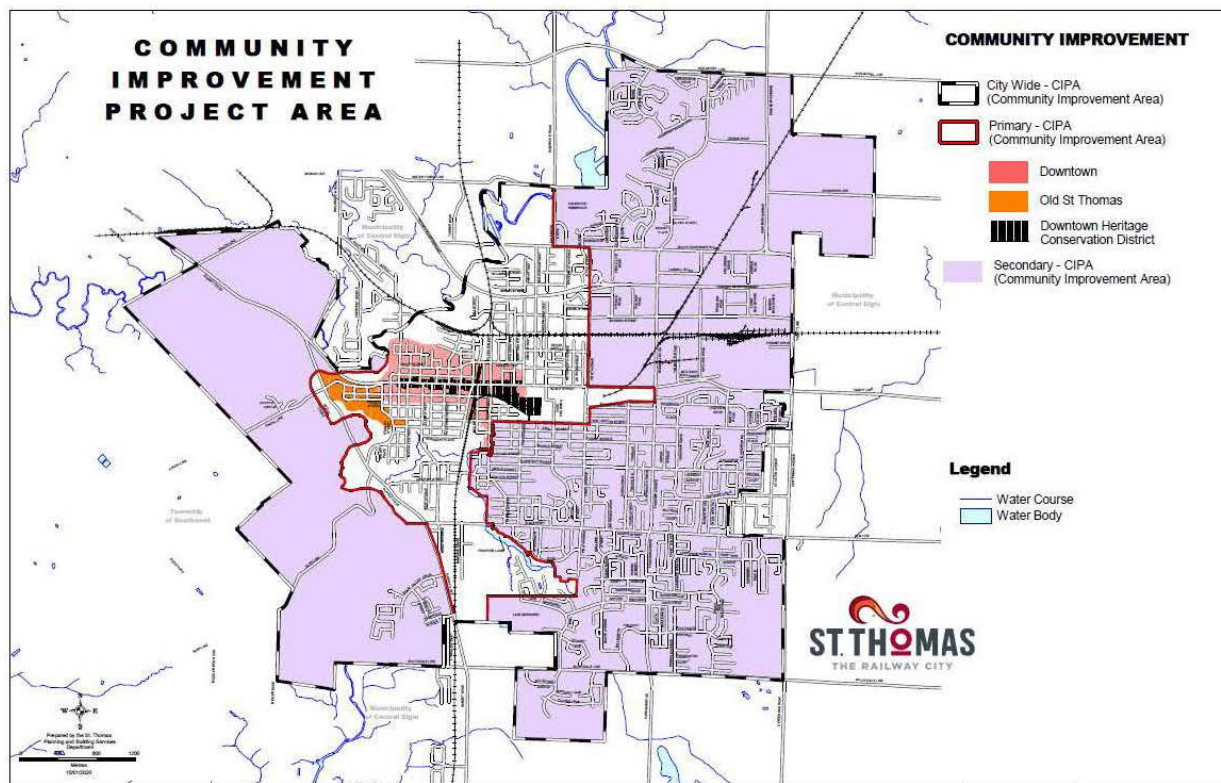


Figure 4: Community Improvement Project Area

The Community Improvement Plan (CIP) for St. Thomas consolidates and sets a plan forward in achieving the planning and economic development goals and objectives outlined in key City planning policies, including the: Official Plan, Downtown Planning Implementation Strategy, Downtown Heritage Conservation District Plan, Long Term St. Thomas-Elgin Affordable and Social Housing Strategy, and Employment Lands Review. Through the CIP, the City has already invested just under \$1.5 million into the revitalization and development of private lands through municipally funded incentive programs.

This document provides insights into the priority areas for improvement in St. Thomas, enabling a deeper understanding of the City's challenges and the urban design guidance needs to facilitate future improvements. However the priority areas of focus for this plan were in the historic area of the City **rather than the City as a whole, putting less emphasis on new development areas and subdivisions** which could represent a gap.

2.6 St. Thomas Urban Design Study, 2003

The Urban Design Study, completed as a St. Thomas Community Improvement Plan, provides design and improvement guidance for St. Thomas' three areas: Old St. Thomas, Downtown St. Thomas and the St. Thomas Canada Southern (CASO) railway lands.

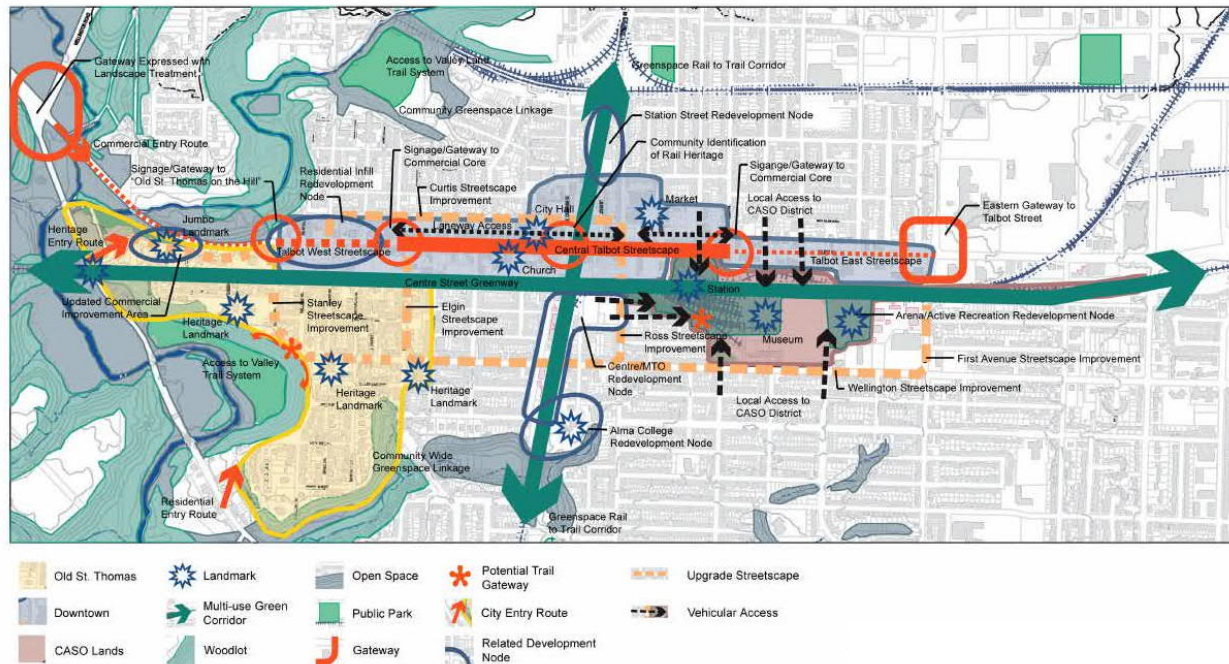


Figure 5: Urban Design Framework Plan

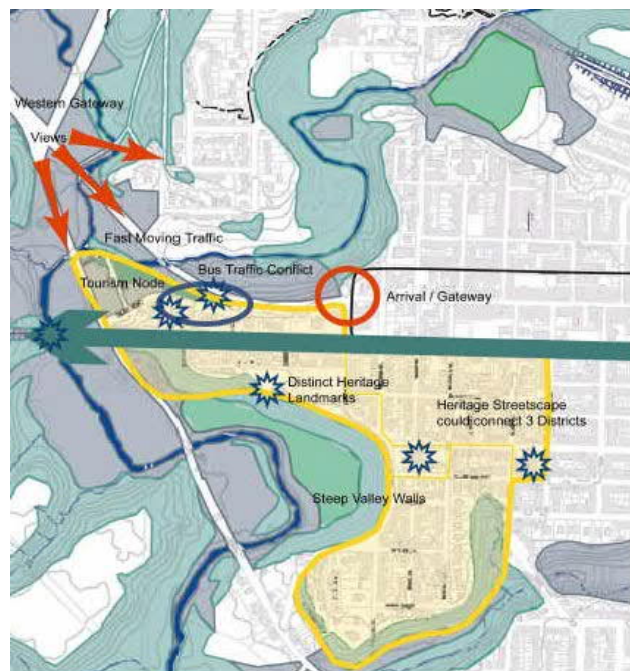


Figure 6: Old St. Thomas Features and Opportunities

The Urban Design Study was intended to produce a framework to realize the City's vision and goals (at the time) "for a vibrant and fun 'people place' where residents and visitors live, work and play". Each of the areas had their own set of design principles and they are outlined below.

Old St. Thomas

- Enhance and protect the "look and feel" Old St. Thomas' heritage buildings and streetscapes;
- Support tourism by identifying the heritage area of "Old St. Thomas";
- Support commercial activity in the area west of William Street, north of Centre Street;

City of St. Thomas

- Improve multi-use linkages to the Downtown and CASO Lands; and
- Improve the connections from Old St. Thomas to the surrounding open space system.

Downtown

- Strengthen “Main Street” attributes;
- Focus on the pedestrian shopping experience along Central Talbot Street;
- Establish a comprehensive streetscape design theme for Talbot Street that recognizes three different districts (west, central, east);
- Use design guidelines to improve the visual character of the Downtown;
- Improve linkages to other districts; and
- Improve signage and wayfinding.



Figure 7: Downtown St. Thomas Features and Opportunities

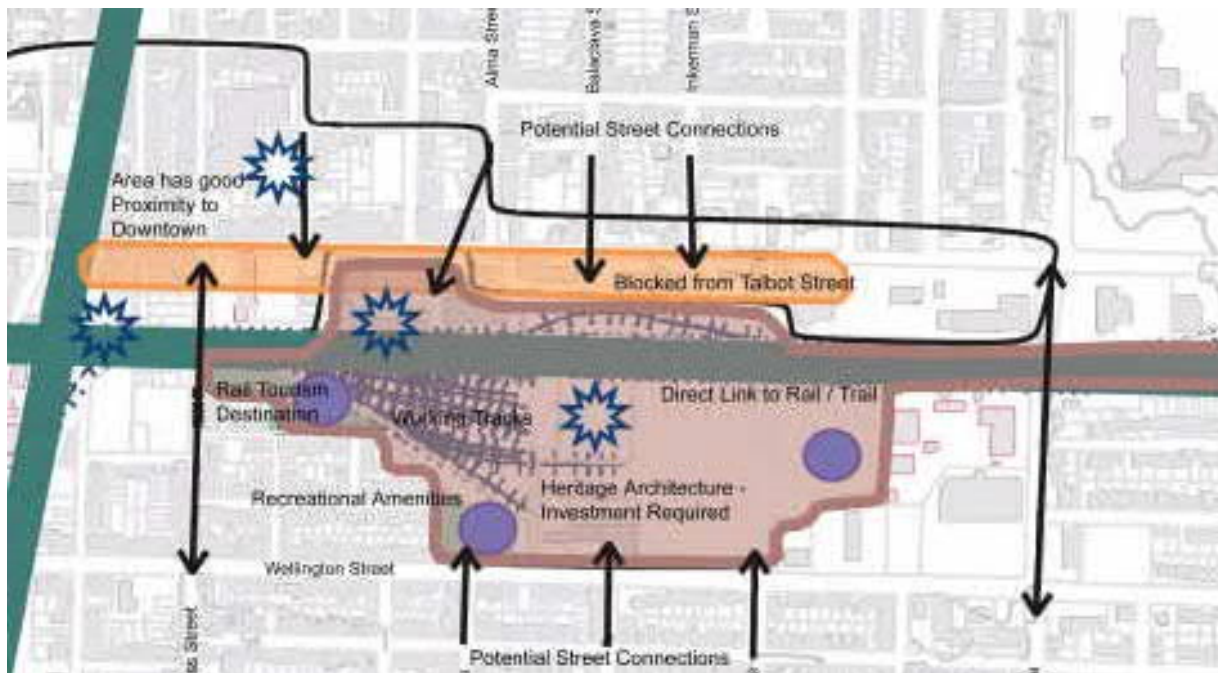


Figure 8: CASO Lands Features and Opportunities

CASO Lands

- Create a “heritage railway district” in an open space setting;
- Establish a new major open space to support community events;
- Maintain tracks to support tourism activities;
- Improve the CASO Station’s relationship with Talbot Street; and
- Maximize the opportunities for tourism related commercial redevelopment.

The overall objectives of the Urban Design Study were to:

- Preserve and promote cultural heritage through appropriate design themes and streetscape elements;
- Support streetscape beautification that will trigger private sector investment;
- Make recommendations and prepare guidelines for facade improvements and design enhancements that generally upgrade the aesthetics of the City;
- Promote intensification of residential and retail land uses along Talbot Street in order to animate the streetscapes;
- Promote the City’s railway heritage;
- Promote linkages to the CASO Lands and proposed arena;
- Improve physical and visual linkages to the City’s open space and trails system; and
- Highlight the natural features with the study area and ensure that the open space is an integral part of the urban fabric.

The Study provided guidelines for built heritage in Old St. Thomas such as guidance on building setbacks, heights and massing, roofs, windows, materials and facades, signage etc. There is also a set of façade improvement guidelines for both the private and public realms. The Study also provided Streetscape Revitalization Guidelines for elements such as (lighting, walkways, fencing, street trees and horticultural plantings, wayfinding signage, traffic calming, furnishings, public space, parking for the various areas in Old St. Thomas, the Downtown, CASO Lands etc. There are also a variety of general guidelines for Community gateways, and related development nodes.

The Study also provided implementation recommendations divided by each area outlined in the document (Old St. Thomas, Downtown, CASO Lands, Open Space and Landscape Features, General Study Recommendations).

A lot of time has passed since the completion of this plan and the list of recommendations proposed. It is unclear at this time how many of these recommendations have been completed and if some are now no longer relevant due to being replaced by new/updated policies. Since this study was completed, the Heritage Conservation District Plan has been developed as well as an expansion to the urban area of the City of St. Thomas. While the high level ideals of this plan may still be relevant, there is likely a number of things that will require updating to reflect current policies, future goals and update population targets for the area.

The guidelines found within the 2003 Urban Design Study will provide a stepping stone for the City-wide urban design guidelines. The new **City-wide guidelines will also provide additional information** for new urban areas, and will take into account current challenges such as climate change and accessibility which are gaps in the previous study since it is nearly 20 years old.

2.7 Downtown St. Thomas Heritage Conservation District Plan, 2018

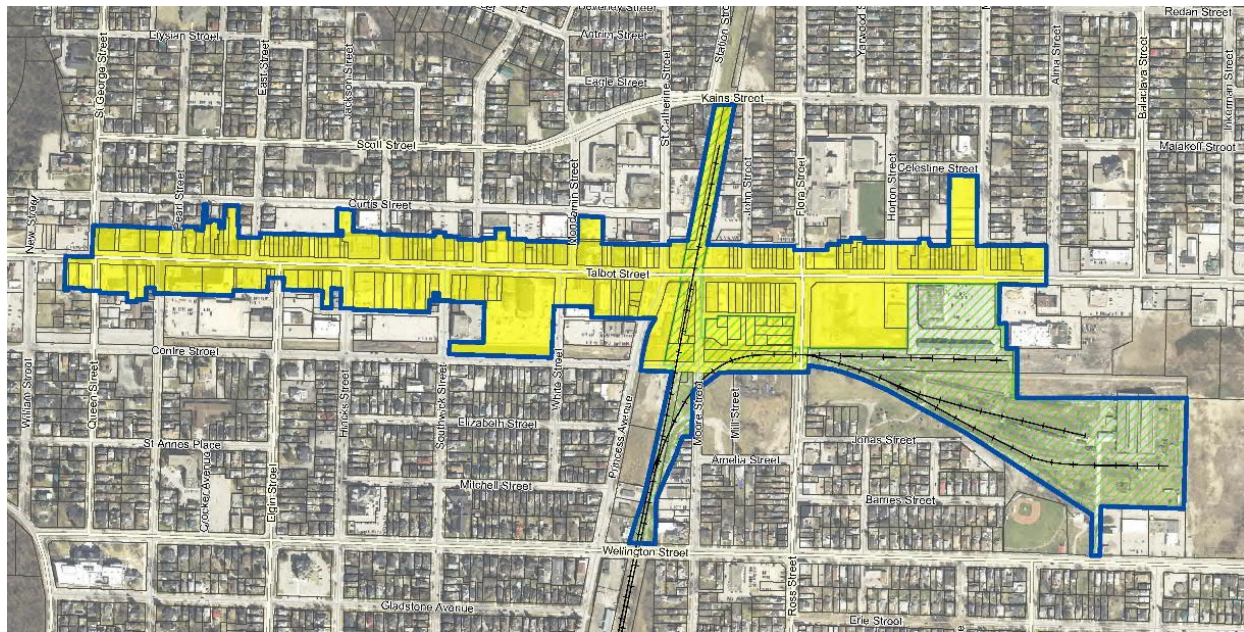


Figure 9: St. Thomas HCD

This Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Plan looks at the downtown core area of St. Thomas along Talbot Street, between Stanley Street in the west and Alma Street in the east. The HCD Study was completed in 2017. The purpose of the Study was to determine whether the proposed study area (HCD boundary) merits designation under the Ontario Heritage Act as a Heritage Conservation District and it identified cultural heritage value or interest in the area. The Study confirmed its merit as an HCD which led to the development of the HCD Plan. The HCD Plan was completed in April of 2018.

The objectives of the HCD Plan include:

- Provide a framework for managing changes to existing buildings and public spaces to conserve the heritage 'look and feel' of downtown St. Thomas;
- Conserve the historic character and heritage attributes of the downtown commercial core and railway character areas;
- Maintain and enhance the existing downtown street wall with historic building from the late 19th and early 20th century;
- Encourage and support existing use or adaptive re-use of contributing resources within the HCD;

- Avoid the loss or demolition of heritage attributes or heritage fabric within the HCD;
- Encourage compatible redevelopment in the downtown core to contribute to continued revitalization of the downtown;
- Collaborate with property owners and business owners to encourage and provide incentives for the conservation, restoration and appropriate maintenance of heritage buildings;
- Initiate other studies and programs, where applicable, that support the implementation of an HCD for the downtown core and the continued revitalization and enhancement of the downtown core;
- Encourage connectivity from within the HCD with other community assets and heritage areas;
- Encourage the enhancement of the public realm and City-owned properties within the HCD in a manner compatible with the district character; and
- Encourage the conservation of murals within the HCD.

The HCD Plan contains a Statement of Cultural Heritage Value which outlines the description of the Historic Place, summarizes the Historical Context, documents the Built Heritage, the Railway Heritage, and the Visual Context.

The policies and guidelines found within the HCD plan are intended for property owners, City staff, Council and the Heritage Committee to manage change within the HCD boundary and conserve Downtown St. Thomas' unique heritage character.

The policies and guidelines provide information for both existing Contributing and Non Contributing resources for the building form, massing, height, width and settings for a variety of circumstances such as:

- Alterations;
- Additions;
- Maintenance; and
- Demolition.

It also contains policies and guidelines for new developments located in or near the HCD which outlines elements such as:

- Windows, Entrances and Signage;
- Building Heights & Setbacks;
- Roofing;
- Storefronts;
- Building Materials, Paint or Cladding;
- Architectural Details/Style;
- Façade Composition; and
- Rear and Side Elevations

It also provides guidance for the Railway Lands within the City as this is a significant heritage element. In addition to railway heritage, built heritage and visual context are also discussed.

The Urban Design Guidelines will align with the HCD guidelines for the Downtown and will aim to transfer relevant themes to the greater parts of the City of St. Thomas.

2.8 Conclusion

The review of background documents reveals an exciting future for the City of St. Thomas. Collectively, the documents make apparent the desire of the City to invest in housing and business growth while enabling those developments to support a thriving public realm. There is a strong interest in preserving and intensifying the historic downtown while also providing guidelines for development within the specified urban expansion areas. It is clear that the City has prioritized financial incentives for development through the CIP and other development initiatives.

St. Thomas is in a position to support growth through the reuse of its existing buildings and development zones outside of the Downtown, with enhanced public realm and design excellence in the built form. The historic downtown, railway history of the city and urban development potential provide the groundwork for a vibrant and compatible public realm.

The review of background documents has highlighted the need for a set of city wide urban design guidelines to bridge the gap between policies, overall vision for St. Thomas and built form intentions. The guidelines will help guide development in St. Thomas to create a cohesive built environment that fosters a compassionate, thriving and vibrant community.

2.8.1 Key Points

- The Strategic Plan identifies the City's priorities, opportunities for growth and creating an inclusive and environmentally responsible community;
- The Official Plan, currently being updated, sets the urban structure, densities and policies that sets the parameters for future development in the City;
- Urban Area Expansion details plans for growth and associated planning frameworks;
- The Design Guideline Manual provides engineering standards for roadway and intersection design;
- The CIP & Urban Design Study provides a foundation for community investment priorities through the implementation of the enhanced urban design framework; and,
- The HCD Plan identifies the heritage value of the City's downtown and City's identity as a railway hub, along with design guidance to maintain those heritage values.

2.8.2 Summary of Gaps to Address

- A specific city wide vision for future built form (new and re-developments) across the City of St. Thomas;
- An overarching document that addresses through the guidelines both the private and public realms and their individual needs;
- Identification special areas which have an additional layer of required guidance (i.e. Old St. Thomas, Downtown St. Thomas, Urban Expansion Area);
- Reconciling the previous urban design work with new directions from the HCD Plan and the latest CIP;
- Guidance on current challenges such as climate change and accessibility; and,
- Easily digestible and visually appealing graphic guidelines for all urban design developments.

3.0 City Wide Urban Design Guideline Benchmarking

Municipalities create and use urban design guidelines in the development approval processes to achieve a desired level of design excellence, consistency and connectivity within the public and private realms. The guidelines outline and illustrate how the city's urban design principles, goals and objectives will be physically achieved. The guideline benchmarking analysis below provides examples of urban design guidance from the City of Guelph (approximate population of 140,000), City of Kitchener (approximate population of 240,000) and Niagara Region, and extracts the relevant directions for new urban design guidelines for the City of St. Thomas.

3.1 City of Guelph

3.1.1 Summary

Through consultation with industry and community stakeholders and a review of urban design policy and best practices, the City of Guelph produced a three-volume Urban Design Manual, with a goal of providing a thoughtful and consistent approach to urban design. It was approved over the course of two years, where Volumes 1 ("The Urban Design Vision for Guelph") and 2 ("Urban Design Action Plan") were approved by Council in November 2017, and the two parts of Volume 3 ("Urban Design Standards and Directions"; the first part of the volume is "Mid-Rise and Townhouse Built Form Standards", and the second part of the volume is "Commercial Built Form Standards"), were approved by Council in April 2018 and November 2019, respectively.

3.1.2 Why the City of Guelph Urban Design Manual is Relevant

Volume 1 provides the overall urban design vision for the City of Guelph:

"Guelph is growing and changing in response to local, regional, and demographic trends. Urban design is fundamental to building a great city and can help shape this change."

While the vision is Guelph-specific, their principles for urban design (e.g., make connections at multiple scales—between people and places, buildings and streets, movement and built form, natural heritage and the environment, etc.); use good urban design principles to foster and shape the local sense of place within the city. The development of St. Thomas' urban design vision that is contextual to the current physical environment and desirable and strategic future growth and redevelopment as a compassionate community is critical in setting the key principles of design, and frameworks.

Volume 2 details the City's action plan, outlining recommended priority actions that cover a range of topics (e.g., placemaking; context specific urban design for opportunity areas, including downtowns, community mixed use nodes, intensification corridors, etc.). Opportunity areas are highlighted in Part 1 of the action plan. Parts 2 and 3 delve more into what process, program and policy changes are required in order to achieve the city's vision. The opportunity areas that outlined in Part 1 include:

- Downtown;
- Community mixed-use nodes;
- Intensification corridors;
- Employment areas;
- Neighbourhood infill and residential development; and
- City-wide opportunities.

Each opportunity area has an urban design vision and a set of urban design actions to prioritize through area specific strategies. A somewhat similar approach can be adopted in the City of St. Thomas. While individual visions for each area may be excessive, the categorization of the areas may be an effective technique in the context of the City St. Thomas' UDG (i.e., St. Thomas will also have intensification corridors, mixed use nodes, opportunities for residential infill, etc.).

Volume 3 provides design direction for private investment and new development, in addition to guidance for the City's comprehensive zoning by-law review. The organization of the urban design standards found in Volume 3 are a useful example of how to lay out portions of the city-wide guidelines including mid-rise, townhouse and commercial built form standards which would all be relevant within St. Thomas' context.

3.1.3 Document Layout

The layout of the City of Guelph Urban Design Manual is outlined below:

- Volume 1: Urban Design Vision:
 - Highlights:
 - Main Components:
 - Introduction
 - Purpose
 - What is Urban Design?
 - Why is Urban Design Important?
 - Guelph Context – Design is in Guelph's DNA
 - Guelph's City Wide Urban Design Vision
 - Community Engagement Summary
 - Basic Urban Design Principles
- Volume 2: Urban Design Action Plan:
 - Highlights:
 - Opportunity Areas:
 - Downtown
 - Community Mixed Use Nodes
 - Intensification Corridors
 - Employment Areas and Innovation District

- Neighbourhood Infill and Residential Development
 - City-wide Opportunities
- Activating Public Space and Institutional Strengthening:
 - Placemaking
 - Project review, engagement, education
- Urban Design Policy Directions:
 - Citywide ZBL Directions
 - Residential ZBL Directions
 - Mixed-use ZBL Directions
 - Employment Zoning ZBL Directions
 - Commercial Zoning ZBL Directions
- Volume 3: Urban Design Standards:
 - Built Standards for:
 - Mid-rise buildings
 - Townhouses
 - Commercial Buildings
 - UD Concept Plans; and
 - Terms of Reference Standards:
 - UD Concept Plans
 - Sun and Shadow Study TOR
 - Pedestrian Level Wind Study TOR
 - Lighting Guidelines for Lighting Plans

The Volume approach may be effective for larger cities like the City of Guelph which have a larger geographic area and spatial structure to address from the Official Plan policy framework, smaller cities like the City of St. Thomas may benefit from having one document which incorporates the necessary directions for ease of use by all stakeholders.

The City of Guelph Urban Design Manual provides good examples of urban design principles, **organization of opportunity areas within the City and a logical layout of guidelines that will help guide** the development of urban design guidelines for the City of St. Thomas.

3.2 City of Kitchener

3.2.1 Summary

The City of Kitchener's Urban Design Manual, contains a City-wide Design section which sets forth the universal design expectations applicable to all lands within the City. The City-wide guidelines are split into two sections, Community Design and Site Design.

For context, the Urban Design Manual for the City of Kitchener, which was published in 2019, is divided into three sections:

- Part A contains guidelines for various land uses and built forms. It is divided into 13 sections. The City-wide design guidelines are found in Part A as indicated above and include direction on community design, inclusive design, smart city design, design for sustainability, design for outdoor comfort, street design, parks and open spaces, compatibility, cultural and natural heritage, site design, built form, shared spaces, and, site function . The other sections in Part A which include more area specific directions include:
 - Major Transit Station Areas;
 - Central Neighbourhoods;
 - New Neighbourhoods;
 - Downtown;
 - Nodes & Corridors;
 - Industrial Employment Areas;
 - Green Areas;
 - Tall Buildings;
 - Mid-rise Buildings;
 - Low-Rise Multi Residential;
 - Low-Rise Commercial & Mixed-Use Buildings; and
 - Structured Parking.
- Part B contains supplementary guidelines completed through other studies, such as streetscape master plans. The intention of these supplementary guidelines is to incorporate them into Part A, as appropriate, through updates to the Urban Design Manual.
- Part C contains design standards, which provide detailed guidance for specific elements that benefit from urban design excellence (e.g., parking, landscaping, lighting, accessibility). The intention of these design standards is to assist developers in incorporating urban design best practices into the detailed site design stage of development applications.

Part A represents the most applicable example which could be reflected in the City of St. Thomas document. The St. Thomas guidelines could likely incorporate aspects of what was outlined in Kitchener's City-wide design guidelines as well as some of the remaining sections from Part A. Parts B and C may not be as applicable for this exercise as they are more site specific and have a finer grain of detail than anticipated as part of the City of St. Thomas City-wide UDG.

3.2.2 Why the City of Kitchener City-wide Design Guidelines are Relevant

As stated above, Part A's city wide section is divided into two main topics: Community Design and Site Design. The former, Community Design, provides broader principles of urban design, with respect to designing at a community scale. These principles may be applicable to the St. Thomas context and can be further explored. The latter, Site Design, provides more site-specific (while still being general) urban guidance (on-site access, circulation, public art and landscaping, etc.).

Elements from this section that are directly applicable to St. Thomas include:

- City-wide Design; and
- Community Design:
 - Inclusive Design;
 - Design for Sustainability;
 - Design for Outdoor Comfort;
 - Street Design;
 - Parks & Open Spaces;
 - Compatibility; and
 - Cultural and Natural Heritage.
- Site Design:
 - Built Form;
 - Shared Spaces; and
 - Site Function.

3.2.3 Document Layout

The layout of the City of Kitchener Urban Design Manual is outlined below:

- Part A – Urban Structure & Built Form - Document Layout:
 - Table of Contents;
 - City-Wide Design;
 - Major Transit Station Areas;
 - Residential Infill in Central Neighbourhoods;
 - New Neighbourhoods;
 - Downtown;
 - Nodes and Corridors;
 - Industrial Employment Areas;
 - Green Areas;
 - Tall Building Urban Design Guidelines;
 - Mid-rise Buildings;
 - Low-rise Multiple Residential Buildings;
 - Low-rise Commercial and Mixed-Use; and
 - Structured Parking.
- Part B – Area Specific Guidelines:
 - Drive through facilities;

- Mixed-use Corridors; and
- Queen Street Placemaking Plan.
- Part C – Design Standards:
 - Parking structures;
 - Access to roads;
 - Surface parking facilities;
 - Outdoor lighting;
 - Accessibility standards for the built environment;
 - Pedestrian and transit supportive development;
 - Screening of rooftop mechanical equipment;
 - Private street naming and addressing;
 - Emergency services policy;
 - Multiple residential;
 - Outdoor amenity areas;
 - Outdoor play areas for children;
 - Landscape and natural features;
 - Stormwater management facilities;
 - Landscape design;
 - Community trails;
 - Building design and sustainable design elements in the right of way; and
 - Public art.

The document contains a great deal of information, however its organization can be confusing. The ideas from the elements are likely to prove the most useful in this instance versus how they are actually laid out in the document. It would be advantageous to adopt a more streamlined and simple approach to laying out the document so readers are clear about what is included in each section.

The Community-wide Design, Community Design and Site Design Sections of Part A of the City of Kitchener Urban Design Manual are applicable to the St. Thomas context.

3.3 Niagara Region

3.3.1 Summary

As part of the Region's Smart Growth Initiative, Niagara Region published their Model Urban Design Guidelines in April of 2005, to facilitate development and redevelopment that contributes to the implementation of ten Smart Growth Principles adopted by Council. The Region's Smart Growth Principles, which align with provincial interests outlined in the Growth Plan (Places to Grow), are as follows:

1. Create a mix of land uses;
2. Promote compact built form;
3. Offer a range of housing opportunities and choices;
4. Produce walkable neighbourhoods and communities;
5. Foster attractive communities and a sense of place;
6. Preserve farmland and natural resources;
7. Direct development into existing communities;
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices;
9. Make development predictable and cost-effective; and
10. Encourage community stakeholder collaboration.

The guidelines are structured to incorporate six sections. Introductory sections provide background and context for Regional policy initiatives while the remaining sections provide design principles and specific guidelines. The guidelines are also separated into two overarching categories of Public Realm or Private Realm.

Public Realm:

- Neighbourhood Structure;
- Roads;
- Sidewalks and Streetscaping;
- Parks & Open Space;
- Natural Heritage;
- Multi-use Trails;
- Stormwater Management Facilities; and
- Environmental Sustainability.

Private Realm:

- Residential;
- Main Street & Street Commercial;
- Large Format Commercial;
- High Rise Buildings;

- Industrial;
- Off-Street Surface Parking; and
- Environmental Sustainability.

3.3.2 Why Niagara Region's Model Urban Design Guidelines are Relevant

The Model Urban Design Guidelines are a good example of what was initially anticipated for the City of St. Thomas' City-wide Urban Design Guidelines. The division into public realm and private realm help to easily orient viewers to the most relevant information they are seeking in the document. Also how each of the sections of the guidelines relates back to the overarching principles is helpful to realizing the vision for the City.

The Model Urban Design Guidelines is a comprehensive document which provides guidance for both the public realm and private realms and subsections of each of those categories. Both of these are directly applicable to the St. Thomas context.

- The public realm guidelines focus on: neighbourhood structure; roads; sidewalks and streetscaping (includes commentary on commercial area sidewalks); parks and open space; natural heritage; multi-use trails; SWM facilities; and environmental sustainability; and
- The private realm guidelines focus on: residential; main street and street commercial (includes guidelines for renovations and preservation and for infill development); large format commercial; high rise development; industrial; off-street surface parking; and environmental sustainability.

3.3.3 Document Layout

The layout of Niagara Region's Model Urban Design Guidelines

- Introduction;
- Background and Context; and
- Public Realm:
 - Neighbourhood Structure;
 - Roads;
 - Sidewalks & Streetscaping;
 - Parks & Open Space;
 - Natural Heritage;
 - Multi-Use Trails;
 - Stormwater Management Facilities; and
 - Environment Sustainability.
- Private Realm:
 - Residential;
 - Main Street & Street Commercial;
 - Large Format Commercial;

- High Rise Development ;
- Industrial;
- Off-Street Surface Parking; and
- Environmental Sustainability.
- Critical Success Factors; and
- Test Site Design Opportunities.

It should be noted that regional level guidelines may be at a higher level than a municipality that is developing their own context specific guidelines. The takeaways from the Niagara example is more in how the content is presented versus the detail in which the guidelines were included. It is desirable to separate out the public and private realms as it helps the City and interested parties locate information easily. It may be worth incorporating aspects of other examples such as having overall City-wide guidelines applicable to both private and public realms in order to streamline the subsequent sections and reduce repetition in the document.

The organization of the Niagara Region's Model Urban Design Guidelines relates to the potential structure for the St. Thomas Urban Design Guidelines. The guidelines are divided into public and private realm while each section relates back to the overarching principles of the document.

4.0 Vision + Principles

The Vision, Principles and Priorities presented in the next section are intended to provide direction for the future state of the public realm, built form and site design for the City of St. Thomas. They will also aid in the development of the next phase, Phase 2- Draft Guidelines. The design vision, principles and priorities are based on the background review of St. Thomas municipal documents, benchmarking of other municipalities and region's urban design guidelines and are rooted through existing planning work throughout the province. They are also aligned with current urban design best practices and principles. The vision statement, priorities and principles are all intended to be a draft for City review.

4.1 Vision

The City of St. Thomas is committed to promoting a consistent and high standard of urban design for all development in the City, which responds to the needs of a growing and thriving community that is sustainable, inclusive and celebrated while remaining connected to its rich cultural heritage.

4.2 Urban Design in St. Thomas

The City of St. Thomas is a growing urban centre within Elgin County in southwestern Ontario. The City currently has a population of 42,918 and a land area of 35.53 km². Talbot Street is the primary corridor that runs east-west through the City and defines the City's downtown. The City's downtown has a number of heritage buildings with active street related retail. However, there are also some vacant lots, unused buildings and large building setbacks with parking facing the street that diminish the character of the street. Historically, St. Thomas has existed as a railway hub within southern Ontario. St. Thomas's history plays an important role in the richness of the city's built form and its current urban design character. The Canada Southern Railway (CASO) Station is located along Talbot Street. Its architecture and unique character is distinctive in St. Thomas. The CASO lands represent a unique opportunity for the City but are currently hidden from Talbot Street by expansive parking lots and big box stores.



Figure 10: St. Thomas Courthouse Renovation

South of Talbot Street is Old St. Thomas which is located on a hill near the western gateway of the city. Old St. Thomas is recognized as the City's heritage residential core and is characterized by a variety of lot configurations, open space, streetscapes and building types. The surrounding St. Thomas area consists of suburban developments and an integrated open space network. Additionally, there is an industrial area in the north-east portion of the City. The City has been studying areas for urban expansion. These areas are located within the north and south ends of the City and are intended for residential expansion.

Another striking aspect of urban design in the City of St. Thomas is the St. Thomas Elevated Park (STEP) which represents leadership in advancing the relationship between cultural heritage, trails and open space with design innovation. This represents a creative way to adaptively reused underutilized infrastructure in the City while also providing an amenity for residents and visitors. There have also been investments in the public realm that reference the railway heritage in elements such as planters and benches.



Figure 11: Railway Feature Bench in Downtown St. Thomas

The City is facing a number of challenges stemming from growth pressures, resulting in a larger number of projects for medium and high-density developments and intensification. New commercial and retail proposals threaten the current character and look and feel of the community. Having a set of City-wide design guidelines would help keep new and re-developments aligned with the overall vision for the city. The City is experiencing a variety of implementation challenges related to the design of medium/high density residential developments, residential/infill projects, new commercial and retail proposals, and other residential developments. Absence of clear directions and ambiguous guidelines are cause for concern and create conflicts for city staff during the application review process. For example the need to study whether there will be negative shade/shadow impacts and how to mitigate. As such the guidelines will provide direction for both private and public realm.

This high level snapshot of the current state of Urban Design Guidelines in the City of St. Thomas is a starting point for the development of the design priorities as well as the urban design guidelines. Some initial directions from this snapshot include: consideration of the integration of built form within the historic core, integration of St. Thomas' rich railway heritage, complementing while also planning for new built forms within the growing residential neighbourhoods.

4.3 Design Principles

The design principles are based on the background review of St. Thomas municipal documents, benchmarking of other municipalities and region's urban design guidelines and are rooted through existing planning work throughout the province. The principles are aligned with current urban design best practices and principles. The principles are meant as overarching guidelines that will steer development within the City of St. Thomas. These principles are intended to be a draft for City review.

1. **Place Making:** Engage in placemaking by creating memorable, flexible and identity-strengthening spaces in both the private and public realms of the city.
2. **Human Scale within Urban Fabric:** Create built environments (i.e. building massing, scale and details) that support comfortable, desirable and active lifestyle and pedestrian experience, while complementing the character of the existing urban fabric.
3. **Safe, Attractive and Green Streetscapes:** Create vibrant, well-designed, safe and pedestrian oriented streets that support mobility for cyclists, pedestrians and vehicles. Additionally, promote higher quality landscape treatments that integrate the benefits of climate comfort, stormwater management, urban forestry and urban ecology.
4. **High Quality Materials and Building Design:** Promote high quality features, materials and colours that enhance the neighbourhood/streetscape character, both residential and commercial developments. Promote urban forms and architectural design that brings interest and diversity to the public realm.
5. **Sustainable Development:** Promote sustainability at all levels of city-building through urban design: green infrastructure, green building practices, climate change resiliency, renewable and low-carbon energy and design initiatives, native plants, and material selections.
6. **Heritage Preservation, Sensitive Integration:** Protect and celebrate St. Thomas' cultural heritage resources and rail history, and promote adaptive re-use of existing heritage built form. Ensure new commercial and residential developments successfully contribute to the streetscape, landscape and district/site historic values and character.
7. **Natural Heritage:** Promote protection, enhancement, views and education on the City's rich natural heritage system.
8. **Accessibility/Universal Design:** Provide designed spaces that reinforce inclusivity, and allow users of all abilities and to access, navigate, interact and explore without physical and perceived barriers.

8.1 Design Priorities

The design priorities are based on the background review of St. Thomas municipal documents, benchmarking of other municipalities and region's urban design guidelines and are rooted through existing planning work throughout the province. The principles are aligned with current urban design best practices and principles. The priorities are meant as overarching design direction that will help achieve the vision and principles put forth. These priorities are intended to be a draft for City review.

Priority 1: Create a universally accessible and inclusive urban environment that supports residents and visitors of all abilities.

Priority 2: Encourage sustainable forms of residential and commercial development in expansion areas that enhances the built form and prioritizes elements of placemaking.

Priority 3: Protect the heritage significance and character of the Downtown, and support adaptive re-use and new built form integration that supports the heritage values.

Priority 4: Create a walkable and pedestrian-friendly city that supports modes of active transportation, and a well-connected street network that is safe, comfortable and accessible.

Priority 5: Support a well-connected street network that is safe, comfortable and accessible

Priority 6: Promote the use of green infrastructure and building practices while protecting the existing natural heritage network.