



*Enhance the spirit • Live it forward*  
Planning, Property and Development  
Department  
Planning and Land Use Division





Thoughtful integration of development proposals can be achieved by recognizing the distinct sectors of the downtown.



High quality spaces and buildings enhance the livability of the urban core.

## I. INTENT

The goal of the downtown design review process and these guidelines is to ensure the thoughtful integration of development proposals into their local context and consistency with the standards articulated in *Plan Winnipeg* and *CentrePlan*. All new development should enhance the livability of Winnipeg's urban environment and create high quality and innovative design that does credit to Winnipeg.

The principles outlined in this document should be taken as the minimum standard to support design excellence in Winnipeg. It will be left to the skill and creativity of design professionals and builders to determine and demonstrate how these principles are to be achieved or exceeded.

The representatives of the design review process will offer local knowledge, experience and encouragement toward achieving design excellence for all new development.

The area of the city affected by these guidelines will coincide with the boundaries of the *Downtown Winnipeg Zoning By-law 100/2004*.

## II. DESIGN REVIEW & APPROVAL PROCESS Pursuant to Section 250 Downtown Winnipeg Zoning By-Law 100/04

### Step 1 • Early Consultation

The applicant and their design consultant are encouraged to meet with the Planning, Property and Development Department (PP&D) and/or the Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC) to review schematic design and to gain an approval in principle. Early identification and resolution of design issues leads to predictable and timely final approval.

### Step 2 • Application

The applicant is required to submit a development application to the Zoning and Permits Branch prior to formal review by PP&D and UDAC. Zoning and Permits is located at 31-30 Fort Street.

### Step 3 • Design Review

The applicant and their design consultant are required to meet with PP&D and/or UDAC to review and gain final design approval based on the City's adopted design guidelines.

### Step 4 • Recommendation and Approval

PP&D staff recommend approval or approval with conditions to the Director, who has the final approving authority.

*In circumstances where an agreement cannot be reached on design issues or when the applicant is not satisfied with the decision of the Director, the application may be appealed to Council's Standing Policy Committee on Downtown Development whose decision is final.*

For further information on application requirements and the design review process please contact the Senior Urban Designer 986.4738.

### III. DESIGN REVIEW FOCUS

There are two areas of focus for these guidelines and the design review process:

1. Review of Urban Design and the Public Realm
2. Review of Architectural Design

All projects built in the downtown should recognize and celebrate the following principles:

- Enhance pedestrian comfort, safety and accessibility
- Create identifiable places where appropriate to the context of the urban fabric
- Respect the urban tradition of streets and blocks
- Celebrate and build on the best features of the surrounding context
- Contribute to important vistas and linkages
- Animate the interface between interior and exterior space

A more detailed discussion concerning goals for urban design and the public realm is presented in Section V.

Architectural Design review will be peer-to-peer discussion. There will be no formal approval, and comments will be limited to recommendations for project development or enhancement.

Areas of focus for project review and comment will include:

- Strive for quality and character
- Integrate public art
- Practice heritage conservation
- Design for refinement and integration
- Practice sustainable design

A more detailed discussion concerning goals for Architectural Design is presented in Section VI.



*The quality of space in this back alley is improved by the unexpected shapes and hues of the parking structure.*



*Old Market Square is a gathering space for individuals in the downtown, and the site of planned events and informal lunches.*



*Art adds character to the public realm and an opportunity for the public to celebrate the creativity of a community.*



*The roots of Winnipeg began along the shores of its rivers. The view of downtown Winnipeg from St. Boniface shows how the distant silhouettes transform the skyline.*



*The broad boulevard, mature trees and building setbacks along Broadway are examples of a unique context that all new development should repeat and complement.*

## IV. WINNIPEG'S CONTEXT & CHARACTER

### The Setting

The City of Winnipeg is located at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, almost at the geographic centre of North America. The name Winnipeg has its origin in the Cree Indian name given to the lake 40 miles north, meaning "Win", muddy, "nipee", water. With an ethnically diverse population, Winnipeg is characterized by slow but steady growth. It is the eighth largest city in Canada and dominates the Manitoba economy.

Though it has been a meeting place to trade for thousands of years and there have been fur trading posts on the site since 1738, the first permanent settlement of the area occurred in 1812 when a group of Scottish crofters arrived. Winnipeg was incorporated as a city in 1873 with a population of 1,869 people. The arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885 brought a 30-year period of growth and prosperity unequalled in Canadian urban development. A flood of immigrants, high wheat prices, plentiful capital, and improved farming techniques contributed to making Winnipeg the wholesale, administrative, and financial centre of western Canada. Following the First World War, economic stagnation due to low wheat prices and the Great Depression lasted well into the 1940s. Since, Winnipeg has grown steadily, based on its position as a major grain, financial, manufacturing, and transportation centre.

While Winnipeg is known for its glorious hot summers, it is also known for the long and often bitterly cold winters. Winnipeg is a true winter city with snow generally arriving in November and staying as long as May. It experiences more hours of sunshine than Phoenix. It is famous for its windy downtown corners.



*Panoramic view of Main Street, 1906.*

## Historic Streets & Block Organization

There are several physical elements that have defined the urban form of Winnipeg's large downtown. The intersection of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers creates the southern and eastern boundaries of the downtown providing opportunities for public green space along their low and heavily treed banks. Running parallel to the rivers' banks are Winnipeg's two primary commercial routes, Portage Avenue and Main Street. They were originally ox cart trails providing trade connections to a variety of trading posts. Early settlement patterns followed the tradition of the French long-lot system where long narrow strips of river front land were allotted to settlers. Over time, the boundaries between these early lots became downtown streets that originate at the edge of both rivers. Since the rivers and their associated long lots run perpendicular to each other, eventually they intersect in parts of Winnipeg's downtown thereby creating many irregularly shaped land parcels, and a complex grid of streets.

Secondary avenues such as Broadway, Assiniboine, Ellice and Notre Dame further define the street pattern of downtown Winnipeg and divide the downtown into various Character Areas.

## Character Areas

There are a number of different Character Areas within Winnipeg's downtown, each with its special identity and mix of uses.

- Between the Assiniboine River and Broadway Avenue: an established mixed residential neighbourhood noted for its tree lined streets
- Legislative Building precinct: the seat of the Provincial government with its ceremonial grounds and public gardens
- Broadway: a grand historic boulevard that connects the Via Rail Station at the east end of the downtown to the west end
- Portage Avenue: downtown Winnipeg's main commercial street
- North of Ellice Avenue: a largely residential and mixed-use neighbourhood
- The Exchange District National Historic Site: a collection of nationally significant historic warehouses, and early skyscrapers associated with the opening of the western Canada
- Chinatown: a small area with a unique cultural expression
- Waterfront Drive: a scenic river drive through the Exchange District National Historic Site
- The Forks: a mixed-use tourist destination located at the juncture of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers



*The intersection of Albert and Arthur Streets with Bannayne Avenue emphasizes the irregularly shaped land and complex grid system of downtown Winnipeg.*



*The mixed-use residential character areas around Assiniboine Avenue and surrounding the Central Park neighbourhood provide much needed housing to the downtown.*



*Unique areas like the Exchange District National Historic Site, with its character, scale and use of materials provides a sense of differentiation from the rest of downtown. Any additions or new buildings to this area should respect the physical traditions and context of the historical neighbourhood.*



*A statue of Louis Riel stands at the entranceway to the Legislative grounds from the riverwalk, establishing a connection between both icons, and with the river system.*



*The Forks is an established gathering space as well as an important public space for Winnipeg. It creates a centre for the City's riverwalk system at the junction of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers.*



*Portage and Main is one of Manitoba's most famous landmarks and its vibrancy is enhanced with pedestrian use. Streets offer more than just vehicular movement, they are part of the public realm and are political, symbolic and social meeting places.*

## Gateways & Streetscapes

With its location bounded by two rivers, Winnipeg's downtown provides many varied access points or gateways. Arriving into the downtown from the east over the Provencher Bridge or the Esplanade Riel leads one to The Forks, Waterfront Drive, and the Exchange District National Historic Site. From the west, one enters the downtown past the contemporary Winnipeg Art Gallery and the historic Bay department store. Several gateways from the south exist, but the most memorable is the arrival over the Main Street bridge past Broadway and the Via Rail Station. The historic northern gateway into the downtown is along Main Street past Winnipeg's early financial and commercial centre.

Several notable streetscapes are found in downtown Winnipeg. These often provide linkages between parts of the downtown, help to define the sense of place in the Character Areas, as well as act as icons for the city. Iconic streetscapes include:

- Portage Avenue: views looking either east or west along the commercial street
- Broadway: views looking either east or west along the grand, tree-lined boulevard
- Memorial Park: views looking south toward the Legislative Building
- The Legislative grounds: views of the grounds from the north or from the Assiniboine River to the south
- Riverwalk system: views along the path in either direction with the downtown skyline in behind
- The Forks: views out from the site in most directions as well as views into the site from the rivers
- Portage and Main: Winnipeg's famous windy corner with views into as well as up to the surrounding skyscrapers

## V. URBAN DESIGN & THE PUBLIC REALM

Urban design is concerned with the physical characteristics of the city and the impact of design and planning decisions on the “public realm” of the city. The urban design strategy serves as an integrating tool, which coordinates how various public and private developments, including transportation and public infrastructure, will affect the experience of the city. The focus of concern is the public realm of the city: the public faces of buildings, the streets, enclosed walkways, sidewalks, parks and plazas that provide the outdoor public venues for a wide range of activity.

The obligation of all projects in downtown Winnipeg is to contribute to the life of all who pass through and participate within the built environment.

*All projects built in the downtown should recognize and celebrate the following principles:*

### 1. Principle - Enhance pedestrian comfort, safety and accessibility

#### Guidelines:

- Place pedestrian enjoyment and safety first
- Protect from adverse environmental elements
- Clarify location and destination
- Provide visibility to public areas
- Develop a universally accessible pedestrian system that provides for the needs of all users

### 2. Principle - Create identifiable places where appropriate to the context of the urban fabric

#### Guidelines:

- Provide visual permeability. Public spaces should be open along the edges, with multiple points of entry and direct access from adjacent streets and sidewalks
- Create clear points of arrival
- Provide comfortable places to withdraw and to observe
- Provide clearly defined spaces
- Integrate civic art and enhanced public infrastructure
- Provide continuity in the public environment. Not all projects must be landmark statements, and there is an important place for well designed “background buildings and spaces”



*The elevated walkways have transformed the patterns of pedestrian movement and have altered the manner in which Winnipeggers experience the downtown.*



*Sun, food and places to gather are the main attractions on a summer's day along Broadway, when the boulevard becomes a destination for lunch breaks.*



*The small pocket park off Portage Avenue is the perfect place to withdraw and observe the bustle of the street.*



*Building edges can permit activity to spill onto the street and complement pedestrian flow.*



*The character of the Exchange District National Historic Site helps create a sense of place for the downtown and reinforces Winnipeg's unique history.*



*Buildings on the edge of the Exchange District National Historic Site complement the towers of Portage and Main.*

### **3. Principle - Respect the urban tradition of streets and blocks**

#### **Guidelines:**

- Maintain the street as the primary public space
- Maintain the characteristic building setback that defines the street and public environment
- Alternate building alignments should contribute to clearly defined public walkways, plazas, entry courtyards, parks or boulevards

### **4. Principle - Celebrate and build on the best features of the surrounding context**

#### **Guidelines:**

- Recognize and celebrate the dynamic contextual environment. Important things to reflect include scale, integration of uses, and symbolic, artistic and architectural precedents

### **5. Principle - Contribute to important vistas and linkages**

#### **Guidelines:**

- Complement and contribute to important routes or linkages in the downtown
- Strengthen and clarify smaller scale linkages within single projects or neighbouring projects

### **6. Principle - Animate the interface between interior and exterior space**

#### **Guidelines:**

- Provide multiple entry points, window openings, and diversity of uses at the perimeter of buildings to encourage active edges
- Avoid blank walls, particularly along pedestrian routes

## VI. ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

Architectural design is concerned with the design and image of buildings, as well as the detailed design of architectural elements in the public realm.

The obligation of all projects in the downtown is to represent the highest quality of construction and design, and to complement the pedestrian environment.

Though the quality of design is, to some extent, “in the eye of the beholder”, the best design is clearly stronger and more rich than weaker, or more mediocre, design.

While it is not possible to make rules for design – which will guarantee quality – it is possible to clarify goals for design, and to raise the collective level of ambition and aspiration.

Areas of focus for project review and comment will be:

### 7. Principle – Strive for quality and character

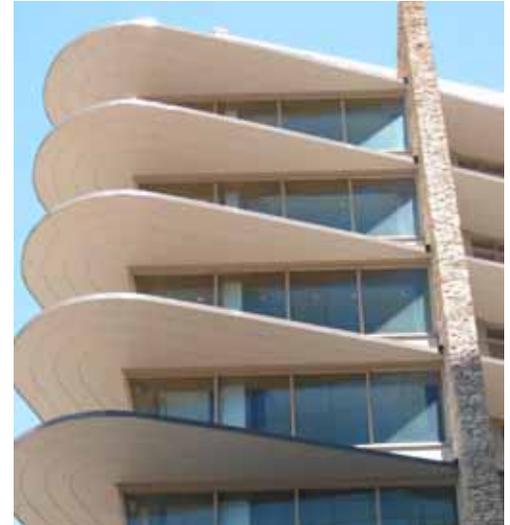
#### Guidelines

- Utilize quality building material
- Provide a consistent level of development
- Create an identifiable presence through memorable icons, conceptual coherence and reflection of surroundings
- Signage should respect the structure, scale and materials of the building

### 8. Principle - Integrate public art

#### Guidelines

- Treat architecture as an art
- Integrate public art in building fabric and in important spaces



*Scale, massing, context, colour, orientation and materials all have an effect on the outcome of a successful design and can help a City express its unique character.*



*The public realm comes alive with the street furniture, monuments and lighting, which helps to create a dialogue with passersby.*



*Public art, whether controversial or simply graceful, promotes, beautifies and commemorates the creativity of a city and encourages discussion about great urban spaces.*



*The line between art and architecture can be difficult to define. Heritage buildings, often resplendent in their architectural detailing, offer visual stimuli to the street.*



*Modern additions to historic buildings should relate to the context of the neighbourhood. Good design incorporates the past, but strives for ingenuity and innovation.*



*New architecture and new ideals coexist in buildings practicing sustainable design.*

## 9. Principle – Practice heritage conservation

### Guidelines

- Celebrate heritage and local history as an active contribution to the collective memory
- Conserve and protect heritage buildings
- Encourage adaptive re-use to support heritage building viability

*Design interventions to designated heritage structures/sectors will be reviewed under the requirements of relevant jurisdictions.*

## 10. Principle – Design for refinement and integration

### Guidelines

- Provide clarity and consistency of form and detail
- Integrate building elements within the project (building material, detail treatment, pattern of openings and fixtures etc.)
- Integrate new development and the neighbouring fabric (height, openings, street relationship etc.)

## 11. Principle – Practice sustainable design

### Guidelines

- Utilize sustainable materials
- Utilize innovative energy and material conservation strategies
- Consider and minimize environmental impacts