

Discussion Topic Information Sheet Discussion Group #2

Urban Design

What is Urban Design?

Through *People Plan Richmond Hill*, the Town heard that residents value a strong sense of community that celebrates Richmond Hill's unique character and identity – an aspect that is closely related to urban design. Urban design contributes to the Town by creating places that people want to visit and fosters an environment that cultivates innovation, creativity and cultural exchanges.

Urban Design considers the function, use and relationships of visible components of the Town to create an attractive, safe, transit-oriented and memorable urban environment. It also requires an integrated and comprehensive design process. Urban design policies, integrally linked to the Town's urban structure, will articulate how we should enhance and define the built environment to create a livable, attractive and interesting community.

What is the Town's Urban Structure?

Elements of the urban structure include the Town's topography, natural systems, highways, stream and river corridors, neighbourhoods, employment areas, as well as built structures, views, and landmarks. Through the People Plan Richmond Hill process that has produced the *Strategic Plan* the Town has heard that there are a number of places that are important to the people of Richmond Hill. These places include the Downtown, the David Dunlap Observatory, the Yonge Street and Highway 7 corridors, the Oak Ridges Moraine, Richmond Green, character neighbourhoods (e.g. Mill Pond neighbourhood, Lake Wilcox neighbourhood), the business parks, the Regional Centre at Yonge and Highway 7, and Hillcrest Mall. The design of the built environment will play a key role in solidifying and enhancing the uniqueness and character of these areas.

Policy Context

As the Town evolves from greenfield development to a more mature, urban form of development, there will be opportunities to create more special places. In recent years, Provincial and Regional policies have been providing direction for growth and substantive changes to the Town's existing urban structure. As a result of this policy direction, the physical fabric of the Town will change, along with the way people move around, live in, and experience the Town.

In order to shape these changes in an appropriate and integrated manner, urban design policies will be needed to guide, create, and protect the type of community that residents value.

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What should the Town's Urban Design policies focus on?

The roundtable discussion will focus on four key urban design topics that will form the basis for the development of the Town's urban design policies. These topics include:

Place-Making

Place making is about creating places that are vibrant and interesting with a strong sense of community. Good place-making comprises, among other things, access, linkages, comfort and image, a mix of uses and activities, sociability, and sustainable design.

Pedestrian-Oriented Design

Pedestrian-oriented design is about promoting and supporting pedestrian movement and comfort in the built environment. Pedestrian-oriented communities encourage healthy and active lifestyles, promote street related building designs, and may include more outdoor amenity space or other public realm improvements (e.g. benches, lighting, use of specific materials).

Identity and Character

Identity and character are key elements in creating places that people value and want to visit. Places with strong identity and character tend to be vibrant, interesting, and exciting. Landmarks, views, streetscaping and building design, gateways, public art, and site-specific character all work together to create the Town's identity and character.

Public and Private Realm Design

Public realm design includes design of those areas in public ownership such as streets, parks, and open spaces. Private realm design includes design of those areas in private ownership such as residential areas, business parks, and retail and commercial areas. The quality of the public realm and how public and private realms integrate with each other will have great impact on how people experience a place.

Questions

1. Place making is about creating places that are vibrant and interesting with a strong sense of community. **Think about the areas in Town that are outside of the Centres and Corridors – what could the OP do to enhance the look and feel of these areas?**
Think about access, linkages, comfort, and mix of uses.
2. One of the principles of the Official Plan is to promote mobility including pedestrian activities. **What design elements would encourage you to walk more in Richmond Hill?** Think about the look and feel of the street, connections among destinations and the experience of the walk.
3. **How can public buildings contribute to the feel of an urban area?** Consider where public buildings should be located, relation to other uses and buildings and how they are identified.
4. **How could Richmond Hill foster a culture of design excellence as buildings become more urban and taller in some locations?**

