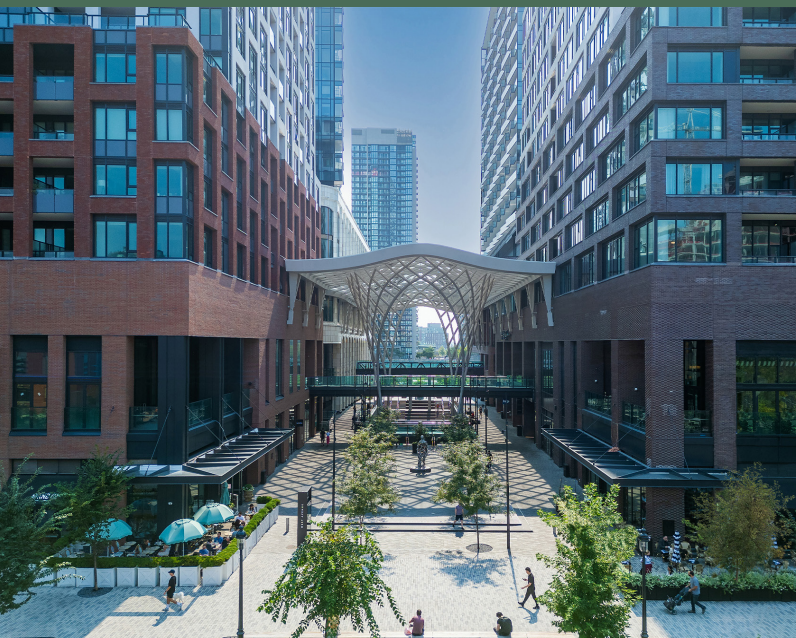




Design Guide Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

June 2026



Land Acknowledgement

We are gathering on lands that have been home to First Nations Peoples from time immemorial. We acknowledge that what we now call Richmond Hill is on the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Mississauga and Chippewa Nations of the Williams Treaty. We also recognize that we are on part of the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee and the Huron Wendat.

We would also like to acknowledge all First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples from across North America, also known as Turtle Island, who now reside in the City of Richmond Hill. We are committed to rebuilding constructive and cooperative relationships

Table of Contents

1.1 Overview	1
1.2 Scope	2
2.1 Natural Surveillance	3
2.2 Natural Access Control	4
2.3 Ownership/Territoriality	5
2.4 Image/Maintenance	7
3.1 Natural Surveillance	9
3.2 Access Control	12
3.3 Ownership/Territoriality	15
3.4 Image/Maintenance	18
4.1 The Three D Approach	21
5.0 Figures & Image Credits	25

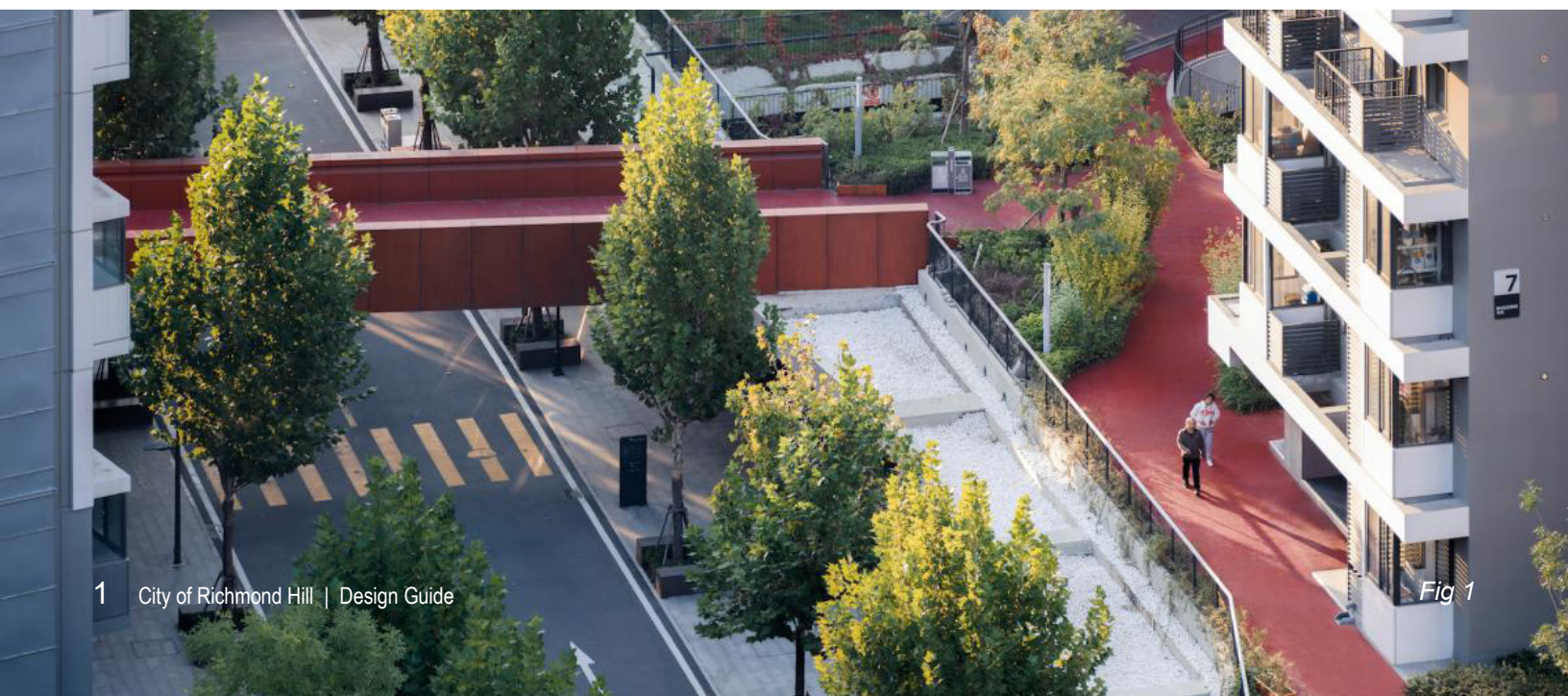
1.1 Overview

The City's Official Plan (the "Plan") directs the creation of integrated, vibrant and diverse, complete communities – that provide a balanced mix of land uses, including housing, employment, community services, parks, and open spaces. The policies of the Plan foster compact, pedestrian-oriented, human-scaled development in both the public and private realm and strives for design excellence.

Development that interfaces with the public realm has an important civic responsibility to strengthen life between buildings and the spaces they create. The design of buildings and their edges must be carefully considered in contributing to a safe, accessible, attractive and comfortable pedestrian environment.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a proactive approach to foster community safety by leveraging the design and management of the built environment. Drawing upon principles from community policing, city planning, and urban design, CPTED fosters a multidisciplinary approach, aligning design elements with crime prevention objectives to cultivate vibrant, safe, and inclusive spaces/communities.

CPTED is rooted in the belief that people respond to environmental cues and that it is possible to influence behaviour through thoughtful land use planning and site design.



1.2 Scope



Fig 2: Mixed-use buildings provide casual surveillance onto an enhanced pedestrian forecourt.

Rather than relying on fortress-like measures—such as guarded entrances, high fences, or gated access—CPTED advocates an “urban village” model. This approach is characterized by high levels of pedestrian activity, social interaction, and increased visibility, often referred to as “eyes on the street”, as essential to advancing community safety.

By cultivating dynamic, inviting, and active spaces in both the public and private realm, CPTED emphasizes the importance of community engagement and integration over isolation and exclusion.

There is no single solution to the question of ‘how to design and manage the built environment for crime prevention’. Instead, the process must be adaptable, creative, inclusive, and context specific, within a framework of key CPTED principles.

These principles and design strategies are outlined in this Design Guide and is intended for use by architects, planners, the development industry and City staff. This Design Guide is supplementary to and should be read in conjunction with the Richmond Hill Urban Design Guidelines.

2.1 Natural Surveillance

Natural Surveillance is a principle which discourages undesired behaviour or criminal activity through increased visibility to the broader community, both during the day and night.

Through “eyes on the street” or passive surveillance of public, semi- public, or private spaces, there is an increased risk of such undesired behaviour or activity to be detected and is an effective deterrent.



Fig 3: A townhouse with appropriate fenestration provides opportunity for passive surveillance of the public realm.

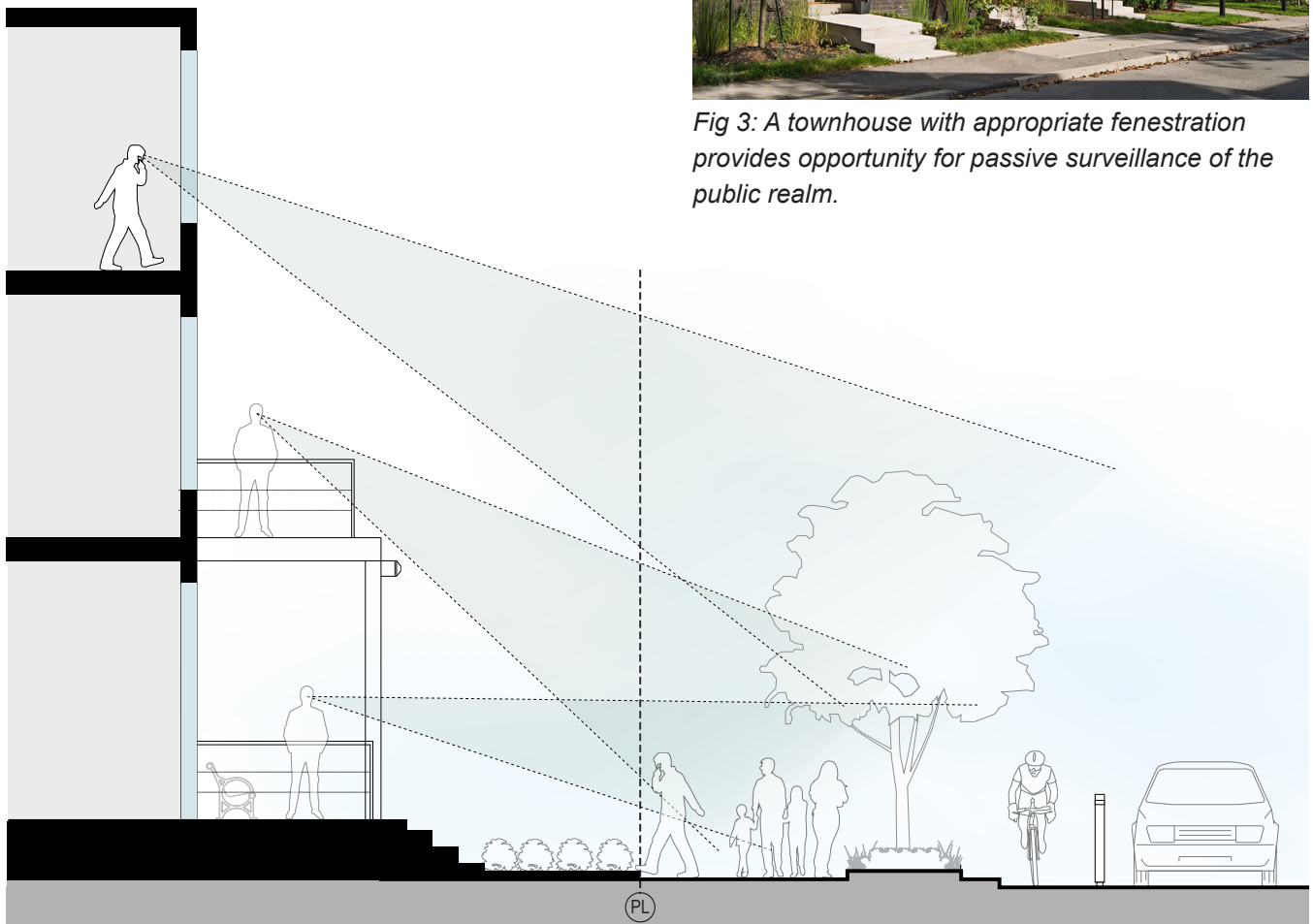


Fig 4: Casual surveillance fostered through architectural gestures, such as front porches and balconies, towards the public street.

2.2 Natural Access Control



Fig 5: Landscape planting helps to define the semi-private zone and directs users to formal entrances.

Natural Access Control is a principle which discourages undesired behaviour or criminal activity through reduced access to target areas within the private realm, strategically directing people to areas of good natural surveillance, while ensuring a positive interface with the public realm.

Appropriate community and site design, clearly defined realms indicate public or semi-private spaces and discourage access to private spaces. It is important to note this may be achieved without creating fortress-like conditions, with walls and gates.

2.3 Ownership/Territoriality

Ownership and Territoriality are principles that recognize physical design can create or extend a sphere of influence over a space. Where a space is clearly defined as public, semi-public, semi-private, or private, a sense of ownership can be fostered at an individual, neighbourhood, or community scale.

In this regard, it is important to create spaces that people feel they have some level of ownership and are therefore more likely to uphold.

Public Realm

Public ownership: space is accessible to all users (i.e. public streets, parks, plazas) and is best suited to natural surveillance approaches.

Private Realm

Private ownership: space is accessible to a mix of users or may be limited (i.e. courtyard, POPs, pedestrian forecourt).

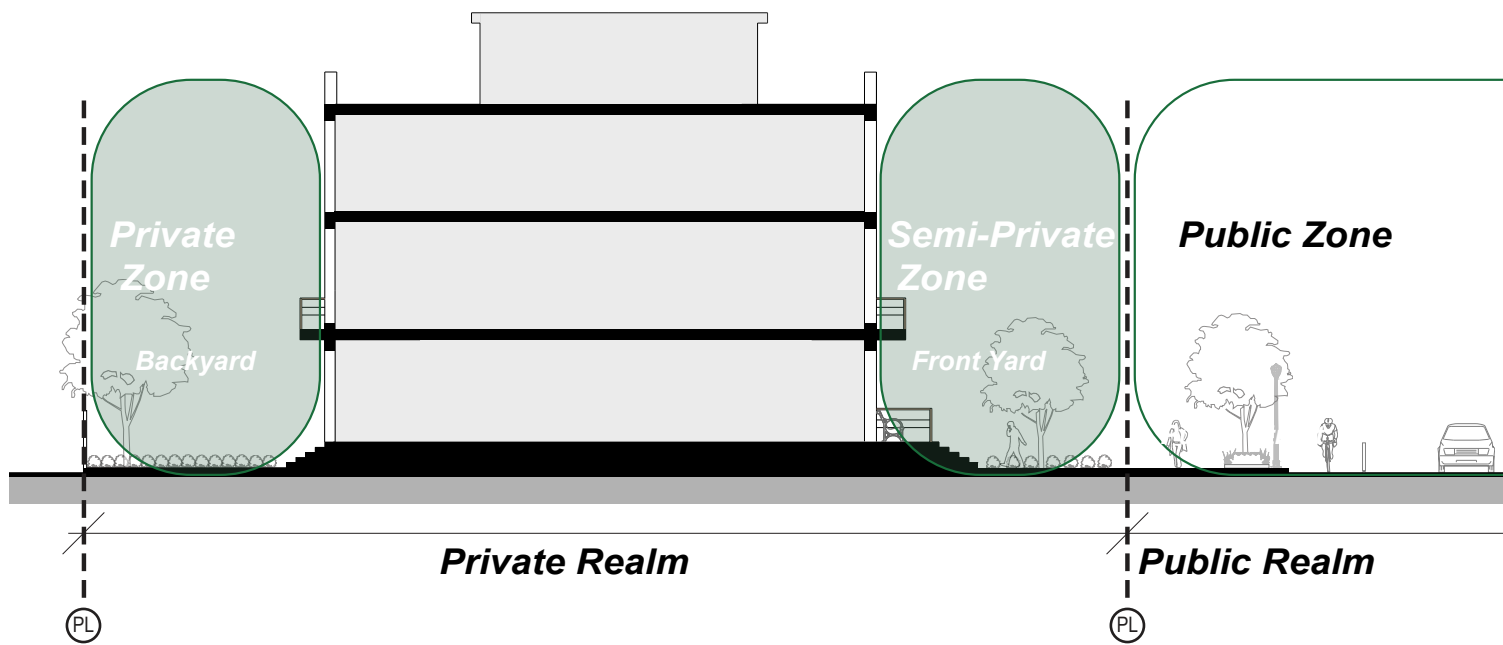


Fig 6: Defined areas within the private realm and their sphere of influence over a zone.

Public Zone

Public ownership: Open to anyone (i.e. public sidewalk, multi-use path, etc.).

Semi-Public Zone

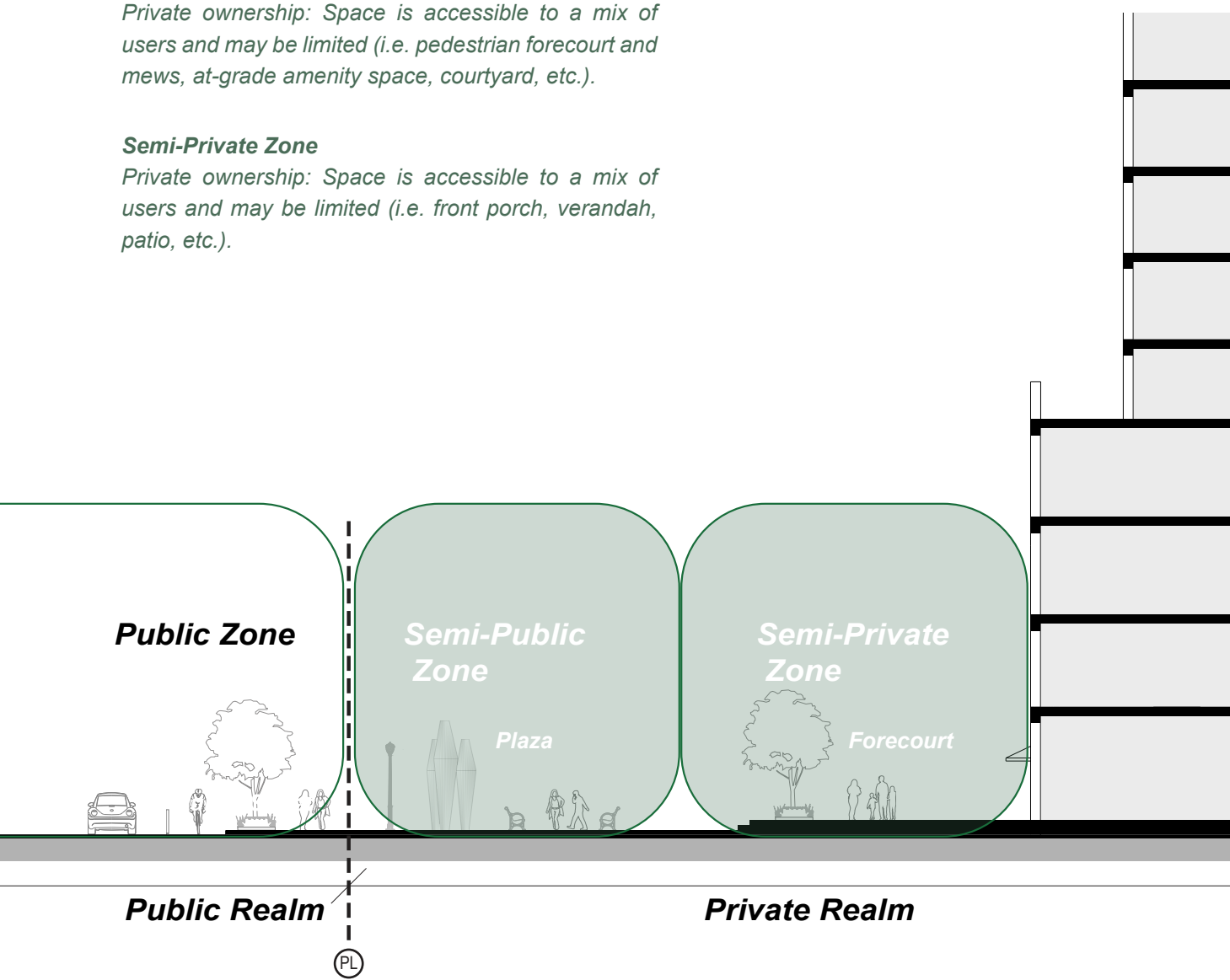
Private ownership: Space is accessible to a mix of users and may be limited (i.e. pedestrian forecourt and mews, at-grade amenity space, courtyard, etc.).

Semi-Private Zone

Private ownership: Space is accessible to a mix of users and may be limited (i.e. front porch, verandah, patio, etc.).

Private Zone

Private ownership: Areas of restricted entry, generally controlled and limited to specific individuals or groups, (i.e. private residence or unit-specific amenity space).



2.4 Image/Maintenance

Image and Maintenance are principles which hold that a well-designed built environment attracts people and promotes social activities that create natural surveillance in a casual way. This includes the celebration of local community identity and cultural heritage through design to bring people together and foster social cohesion.

An important consideration to preserving the image of the space is through ongoing maintenance. A clean, well-cared for built environment enables the continued use of a space for its intended purpose and demonstrates a sense of ownership and territorial reinforcement.



Fig 7: A well-designed built environment with cohesive design themes helps foster social interaction within the community and improve casual surveillance.

A sense of place is fostered through a well-designed built environment. Also known as “placemaking”, this process includes ongoing maintenance as an important consideration, along with natural surveillance, access control, and ownership, which collectively promotes positive responsiveness by users.



Fig 8: An enhanced pedestrian forecourt along with placemaking elements help to create a sense of place.



Fig 9: A highly visible semi-public space with site furnishings affords users comfort and security.

The following design guidance applies to **semi-public** and **semi-private** spaces within the private realm and their interface with the public realm.

3.1 Natural Surveillance

3.1.1 Building Orientation and Active Frontages

Frontages: Orient buildings towards public streets, laneways, parks, and walkways by providing transparent facades with windows that contribute to ‘eyes on the street’. Avoid long, blank, unarticulated walls that reduce activity, and surveillance.

Fenestrations

Windows and balconies overlooking the public realm contributing to ‘eyes on the street’

Active Frontage

Different at-grade uses promotes activity at various times and reduces temporal dead zones

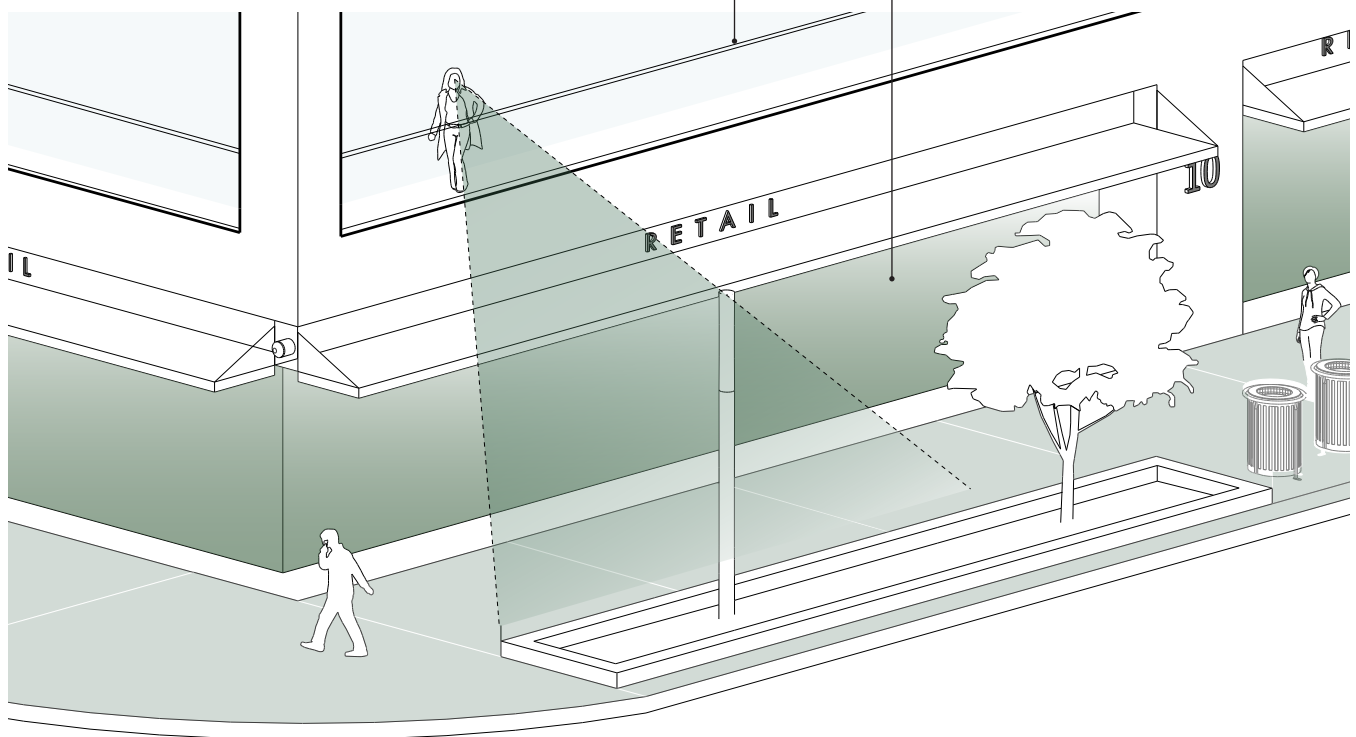


Fig 10: Development with large fenestration and at-grade retail providing opportunities for overlook and casual surveillance of the public realm.



Fig 11: A building entrance that is well-defined and highly visible from the public realm.



Fig 12: Landscape planting and decorative fencing carefully arranged to maintain clear sightlines within the common amenity space.

3.1.2 Entrances and Accessibility: Ensure building entrances are clearly defined and highly visible from the public realm, or by neighbours where units are internal to the site. Entrances should connect to the sidewalk or driveway through a minimum 1.5m wide AODA compliant walkway.

3.1.3 Sightlines and Visibility: Maintain clear sightlines from buildings to parks, open spaces, amenity areas, and pathways. Design sites with:

- appropriate landscape plantings so that sightlines are maintained;
- site furnishings in view of nearby windows for casual surveillance; and,
- decorative fencing with adequately spaced pickets to balance sightlines with physical separation, where desired.

3.1.4 Lighting and Pedestrian Safety: Provide adequate pedestrian-scale lighting at entrances, common areas, walkways and laneways to ensure pedestrian comfort, safety, and nighttime activity. Direct lighting downward and inward to reduce glare, light spillover, and uplighting in accordance with the City's Light Pollution By-law.

3.1.5 Activity, Surveillance, and Mixed Uses: Design mixed-use development with adequate streetscape activation and well-programmed areas to promote casual surveillance and foster safety, liveliness, and inclusivity through continuous human presence. Design sites to avoid spatial or temporal 'dead zones' where there is limited human activity.



Fig 13: Active ground-floor retail animates the streetscape, increasing natural surveillance of the public realm.

3.2 Access Control

3.2.1 Community Integration: Design sites to avoid dead-end or walled-off developments that isolate sites from their surroundings by ensuring development connects visually and physically with adjacent areas. Strategically manage access points without disconnecting the site from observation.



Fig 14: Townhouse with permeable block structure enhances walkability to adjacent neighbourhood, supporting natural access control by encouraging movement through defined semi-public spaces.

3.2.2 Landscaping and Entrances: Design landscape features to guide visitors toward formal entrances, away from private or restricted areas. Clearly define and separate residential entrances from commercial entrances within mixed-use buildings.



Fig 15: A well-landscaped front yard setback defines the entrance to a residential building, reinforcing natural access control.

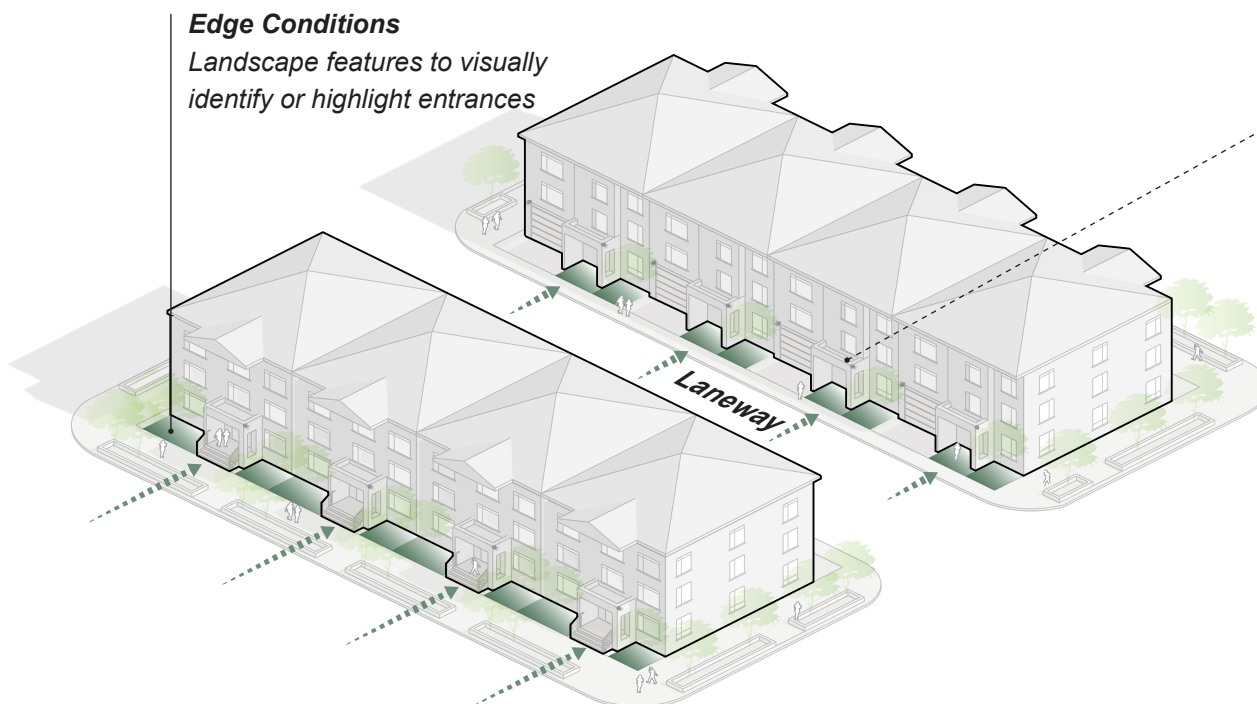


Fig 16: Hard and soft landscaping orient users to formal entrances, reducing likelihood of unintended access to private areas.

Lighting

Ensure back of the house areas are provided with sufficient lighting



Fig 17: Windows and balconies overlooking a rear laneway and unit garages supports natural surveillance in typically low-viability areas.

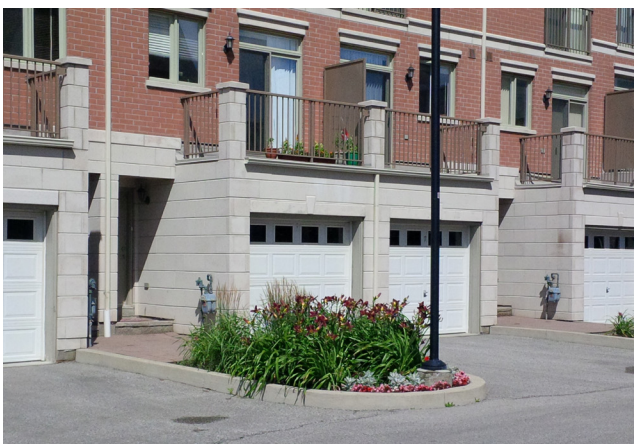


Fig 18: Secondary access provided from rear laneway with pedestrian lighting and casual surveillance from habitable space above.

3.2.3 Secondary Access and Connectivity:

Where possible, provide well-lit secondary building entrances, access to which are well lit, safe, comfortable and clearly defined from rear parking areas.

3.2.4 Servicing and Back-of-House Areas:

Design servicing, loading, and storage areas in ways that mitigate risk by providing appropriate lighting and passive surveillance, wherever possible.

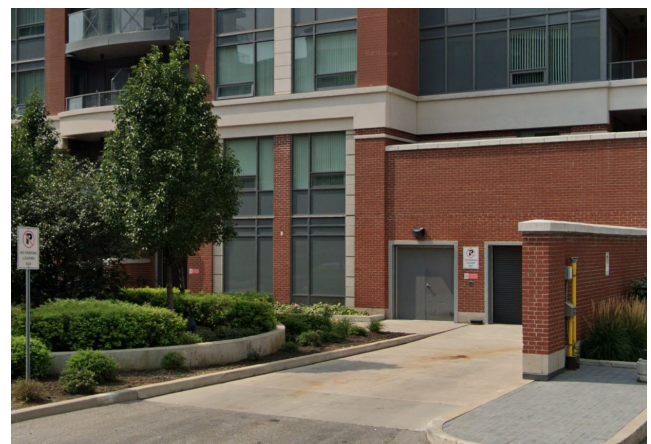


Fig 19: Back-of-house area is designed with opportunity for overlook but is screened from view of the public realm.

3.3 Ownership/Territoriality

3.3.1 Clear Orientation and Functional Layout:

Guide pedestrian movement through building placement and pathways by ensuring spaces communicate their function and intended use. Avoid residual or unprogrammed spaces, as this can encourage undesired activities.



Fig 20: Townhouse blocks sited with landscaped open space at the corner, which allows pedestrian permeability to the public street.

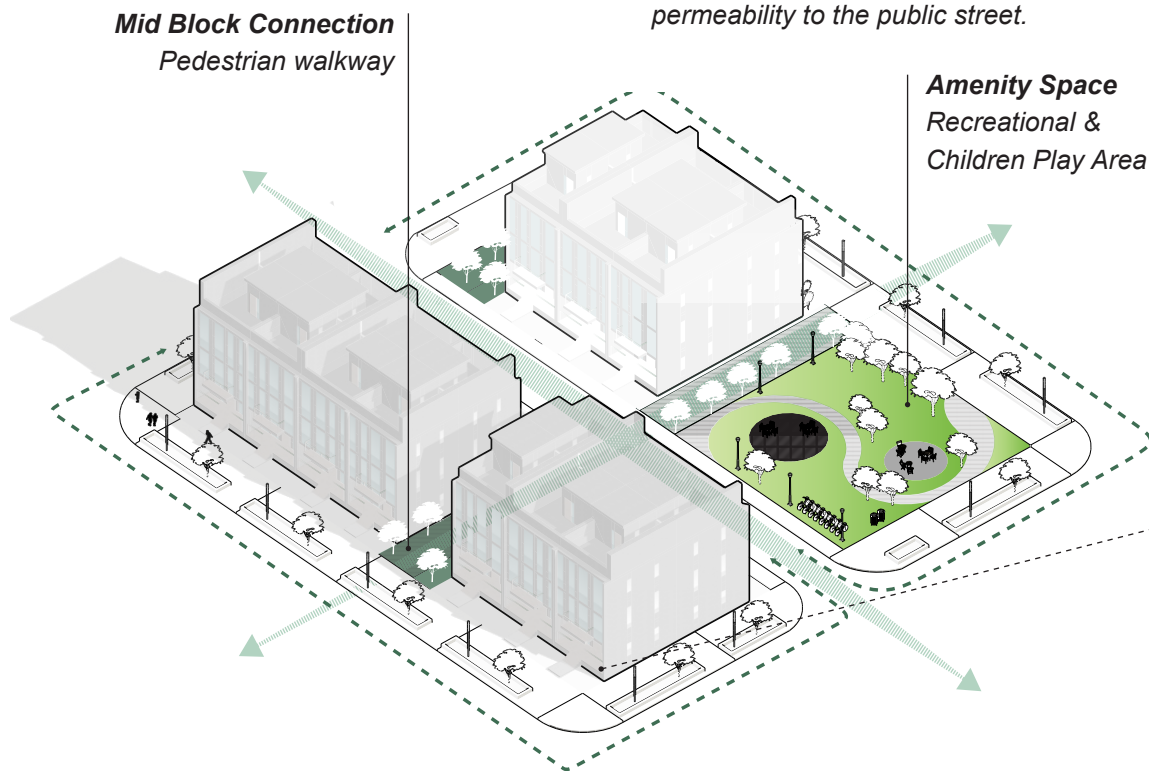


Fig 21: Well-programmed mid-block connections and private amenity spaces convey their intended use and expected behaviours.

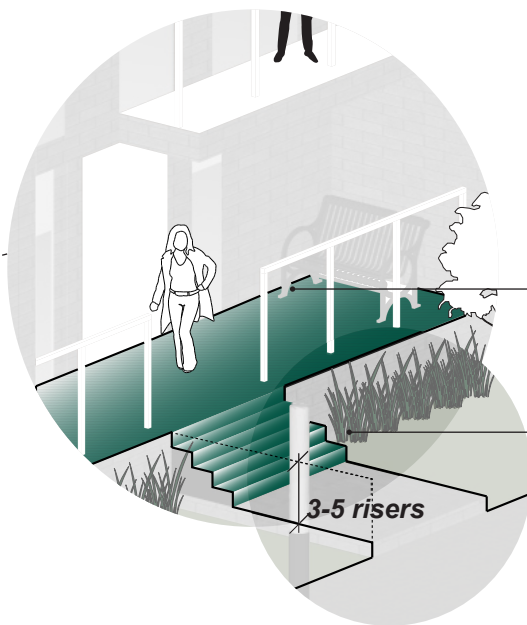


Fig 22: Landscape planting, changes in grade and paving help to define the semi-private zone and create a hierarchy of space.

3.3.2 Hierarchy and Boundary of Space:

Define a hierarchy of space and clear separation between public, semi-public, and private areas, through:

- design and placement of buildings; landscape planting;
- paving materials (i.e. unit pavers, size, colour, laying pattern);
- grade changes, raising the defined space (i.e. porches, verandahs, forecourts, etc.) by 3-5 risers;
- low masonry walls or ornamental fencing.



Front Porch

Raised private space with active use

Edge Conditions

Landscape planting defining clear boundary between the semi-public and semi-private realms

Fig 23: A raised front porch and landscaping enhances natural surveillance while delineating a territorial boundary between the public realm and semi-private zone.

3.3.3 Foster Social Interaction: Cluster unit entrances to encourage casual interaction amongst residents and provide architectural gestures towards the public street to create a strong sense of identity and presence. Design front porches, verandas, or balconies to be meaningful for end-users and foster territorial reinforcement over the abutting neighbourhood or space.



Fig 24: Clustered entrances and an appropriately sized porch which foster social interaction and ownership over the abutting space.

3.3.4 Wayfinding and Identity: Provide legible signage or wayfinding features at key site entries to guide residents and visitors to formal entrances. All buildings and units should be clearly identified by municipal addressing and/or other signage.



Fig 25: A lighting feature used as wayfinding and emphasizes the main residential entrance to the building.

3.4 Image/Maintenance

3.4.1 Placemaking Features: Incorporate elements that activate the site and contribute to a sense of place. Consider a combination of the following:

- Entry Features or Signage;
- Cohesive Design Themes;
- Public Art (murals, sculptures, etc.);
- Site Furnishings; and,
- Preservation and celebration of Cultural Heritage;



Fig 26: Placemaking elements activate semi-public and semi-private areas while promoting a safe, inclusive urban environment.

3.4.2 Visual Interest and Design Excellence:

Design buildings with appropriate visual interest using high-quality and sustainable materials, finishes, colours and detailing. Champion design excellence to create an attractive development for the end-users and community.

3.4.3 Street-level Design and Public Interface: Enhance the building design at street-level to foster a comfortable, safe, and positive interface with the public realm. Avoid long expanses of unarticulated, blank walls.

3.4.4 Maintenance and Durability: Ensure all publicly accessible spaces are well-maintained to convey a sense of place, pride, ownership, and to discourage undesired uses. Select materials, finishes, site furnishings, and fittings that are durable, vandal resistant, allowing for ease of maintenance or repair.

3.4.5 Sustainable Design: Where possible, incorporate Low Impact Development (LID) features and other sustainable design strategies into publicly accessible spaces to support CPTED principles. Refer to the City's Sustainability Metrics Program Guidebook for additional information.



Fig 27: An enhanced pedestrian forecourt with at-grade retail provides a positive interface with the public realm.

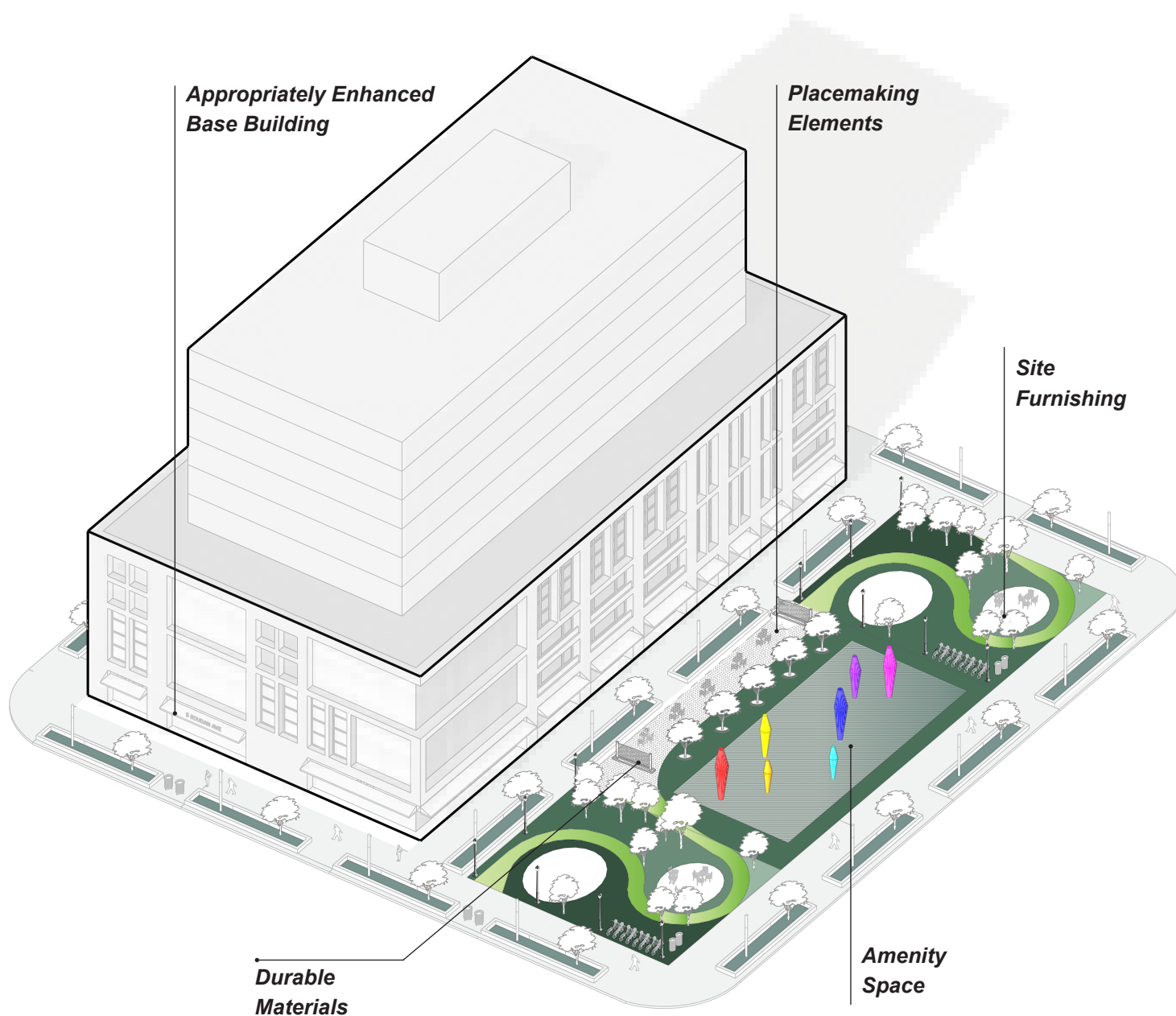


Fig 28: Placemaking elements within the private realm provide a sense of ownership, enhance image and maintenance, and support natural surveillance through active use of space.

4.1 The Three D Approach:

Through the site design process, the development industry, architects, and planners, should use the Three-D approach for space assessment; a simple framework to determine the appropriateness of how semi-public/private, or private space is designed and used.

The Three-D approach is based on the three functions or dimensions of human space:



01 Designate

All human space has some designated purpose;

02 Define

All human space has social, cultural, and natural/physical definitions that prescribe the desired and accepted use and behaviour; and,

03 Design

All human space is designed to support and control the desired behaviours.

4.1.1 Designate

- What is the designated purpose of this space?
- Does the purpose of the space change depending on time of day or season?
- How well does the space support its desired use?
- Are conflicts foreseen or identified?



Fig 29: A semi-public space programmed with active uses to foster social interaction.

4.1.2 Define

- How is the space defined?
- Is the ownership of the space clear?
- Where are the defined limits?
- Are there social or cultural definitions that affect how that space is used?
- Are there legal or administrative rules clearly set out and reinforced in policy?
- Are there signs?
- Is there conflict or confusion between the space's designed purpose and its definition?



Fig 30: A townhouse with landscaping and raised entrances define private ownership and delineate the semi-private space.



Fig 31: Placemaking elements help to celebrate cultural heritage and contribute to an artful semi-public zone.

4.1.3 Design

- How well does the physical design support the intended function?
- Does the design facilitate safe, barrier-free use that is inclusive of all ages and abilities?
- How well does the design support the definition of the desired or accepted behaviours?
- Does the design conflict or impede the productive use of the space or the proper functioning of the intended human activity?
- Is there confusion or conflict in terms of how the design is intended to control behaviour?
- Is the design flexible and can adapt to changing user needs over time?

5.0 Figures & Image Credits

Disclaimer: Images shown in this design guide are representative of exemplary projects as works of others. Through this document, they are cited for education and awareness purposes only, highlighting projects that illustrate design excellence in both the public realm and built environment.

Front Cover (Left to Right): a. The Well (Tridel Corp, Toronto, ON) b. Nicholas Baier (Quad Student Residence, Toronto, ON) c. Artwork at the Quad (Quad at York, Toronto, ON) d. Beach Towns (Tact Architecture Inc., Toronto, ON);

Rear Cover (Left to Right): a. Riverdale Towns (Tact Architecture Inc., Toronto, ON) b. 441 Jane St (Tact Architecture Inc., Toronto, ON) c. The Well (The Well Residences, Toronto, ON);

Figures:

1. Baiziwan Social Housing (MAD Architects, Beijing, CH)
2. The Well (Tridel, Toronto, ON)
3. Riverdale Towns (Tact Architecture Inc., Toronto, ON)
4. City of Richmond Hill
5. Beach Towns (Tact Architecture Inc., Toronto, ON)
6. City of Richmond Hill
7. Quad at York University (Nicolas Baier, Toronto, ON)
8. The Stock Midtown (Retail Insider, Toronto, ON)
9. 5162-68 Yonge St (Realtor CA, Toronto, ON)
10. City of Richmond Hill
11. The Well Residences (Toronto, ON)
12. Google Maps (Markham, ON)
13. DUKE (TAS Impact, Toronto, ON)
14. Google Maps (Markham, ON)
15. Google Maps (9 Soho St, Toronto, ON)
16. City of Richmond Hill
17. City of Richmond Hill
18. Google Maps (Markham, ON)
19. Google Maps (Markham, ON)
20. Google Maps (Markham, ON)
21. City of Richmond Hill
22. Canon Jackson Townhouses (Daniels Homes, Toronto, ON)

23. City of Richmond Hill
24. Google Maps (120 Longbranch Ave, Toronto, ON)
25. Bianca Condominiums (TeepleArch, Toronto, ON)
26. Google Maps (Vaughan, ON)
27. The Well (Tridel, Toronto, ON)
28. City of Richmond Hill
29. Shops at Don Mills (WZMH, Toronto, ON)
30. 441 Jane St (Tact Architecture Inc., Toronto, ON)
31. Quad At York (Toronto, ON)

This document is prepared by:
Heritage and Urban Design

RichmondHill.ca/UrbanDesign

