URBAN DESIGN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STEP 1: BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Final Report August 2016
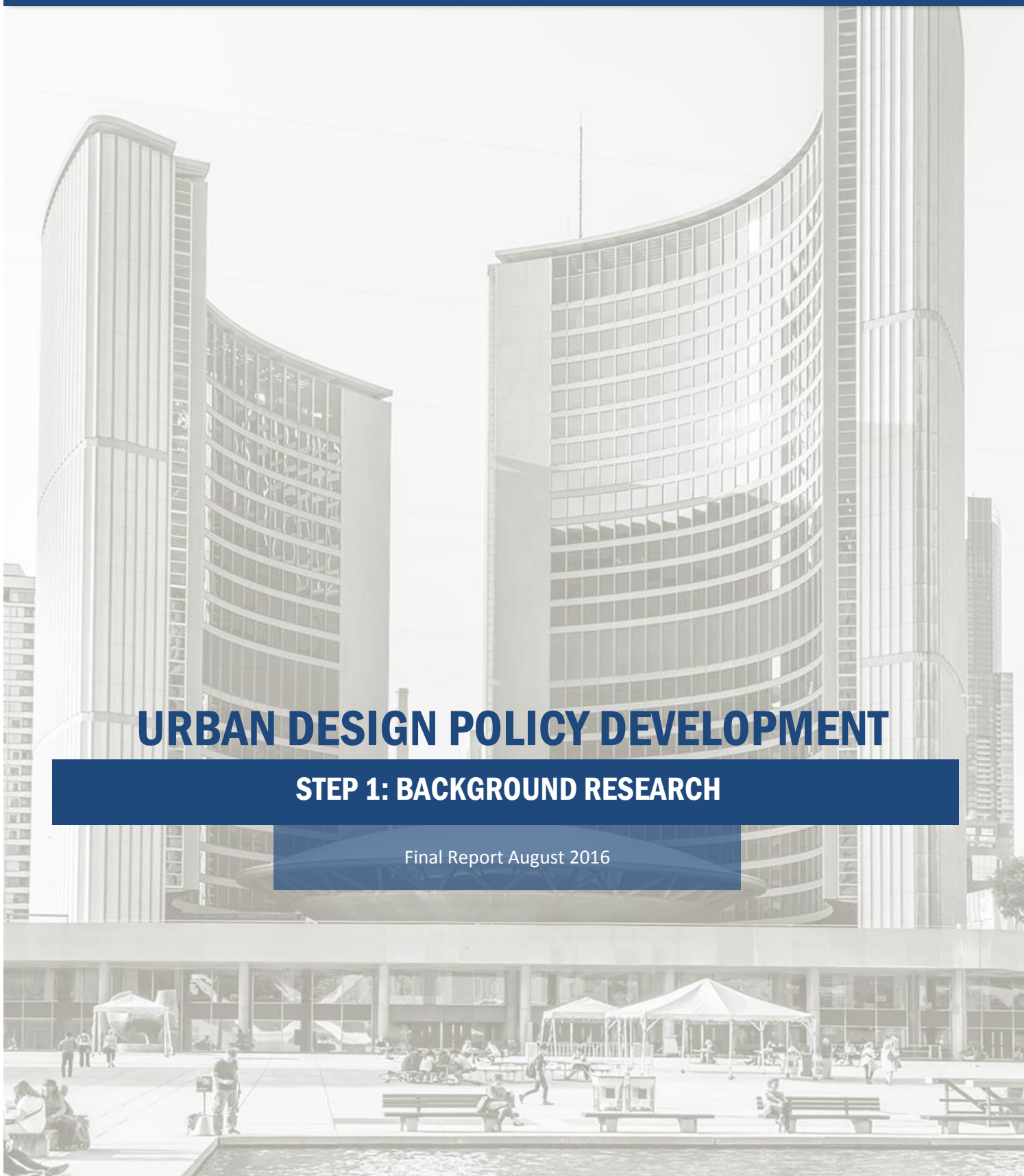
A. OVERVIEW, METHODOLOGY & ENGAGEMENT

The City of Toronto's Urban Design Policy Development Background Research consisted of five separate research components designed to gather feedback on the current Urban Design Official Plan policies and to solicit ideas about what needs to be clarified, added, removed or strengthened in the new policies. The components are as follows:

1. Jurisdictional Review

A jurisdictional review of twelve cities around the world was conducted to examine and understand their urban design policies, primarily through Official Plans (or outside of Ontario, other plans that perform a similar comprehensive, high level planning function). Cities were selected to provide some comparisons within the same statutory context in Ontario as well as to cover a cross-section of locations, geographies, municipal size and to ensure that winter cities are included in the analysis. The following cities (in alphabetical order) were selected by the City of Toronto project team and the list was refined based on suggestions by the consultant project team:

- Chicago
- Edmonton
- London, UK
- Markham, Ontario
- Melbourne
- Mississauga
- New York City
- Ottawa
- San Francisco
- Singapore
- Vancouver
- Vaughan

Each jurisdiction was examined using a common framework that focused on eight key urban design policy directions.

   i. Providing the purpose and intent of urban design guidelines
   ii. Promoting a walkable city
   iii. Clarifying the Role of the Public Realm
   iv. Clarifying the Need for New Public Streets
   v. Defining Built Form Typologies
   vi. Policies for Built Form Typologies (Low-Rise, Mid-Rise, Tall Buildings)
   vii. Promoting Public Squares
   viii. Promoting and Expanding Privately Owned Publicly-Accessible Spaces (POPS)

Research Products:
- Jurisdictional Review Memo
- Relevant images from Jurisdictional Review
- Jurisdictional Review Summary – Excel spreadsheet with policy excerpts organized by eight policy directions

The study team also reviewed the results of the jurisdictional scan for conformity with the
- Provincial Policy Statement, 2014,
- the Proposed Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe 2016, and the
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2015.

Each was reviewed to ensure that any new language for urban design policies and guidelines in the Official Plan would be consistent with, and conform to, these documents.

CANADIAN **URBAN INSTITUTE**

2. Focused Interviews with Municipal Staff

The Canadian Urban Institute undertook 10 interviews with 20 City of Toronto staff between February 4 and February 11, 2016. City staff included representatives from Planning, Urban Design and Legal Services. A standard set of questions was asked to interviewees with adjustments to reflect their area of specialization or the location in which they work.

Research Products:
- Summary Report of Interview Findings
- List of interviewees
- List of interview questions
- Record of each meeting
- List of OMB cases and decisions cited during interviews

3. Urban Design Reference Group Meeting 1

On March 1, 2016, the Canadian Urban Institute and City Planning convened an urban design reference group to help inform the Official Plan review of urban design policies. Eighteen participants representing as many organizations were in attendance. The Urban Design Reference Group includes urban design professionals, architects, representatives from the development industry, residents associations, the business community, professional associations, academia, advocates and other city-building stakeholders. The reference group acted as a sounding board and source of expert advice during the policy review process.

The discussion focussed on the following questions:

i. *Based on your experience, what are the key issues that need to be addressed in the Official Plan urban design policy review?*
ii. *How would you improve the policies?*

Research Products:
- Detailed Meeting Notes
- Additional notes prepared and submitted by several participants
- Meeting agenda

4. Interdivisional Reference Group Workshop

On April 15, 2016, the Canadian Urban Institute and City Planning convened a meeting of City of Toronto representatives from a range of divisions to help inform the Official Plan review of urban design policies. Nineteen participants representing twelve City Divisions participated. The purpose of this meeting was to identify areas of common ground and shared priorities for the public realm across Divisions.

The discussion focussed on the following questions:

i. *What key words and ideas reflect what matters to your division with respect to creating good streets, good parks, and good public spaces?*
ii. *What challenges or support does the OP provide to the work you do involving streets, parks or other public spaces?*

Research Products:
- Workshop Agenda and Discussion Guide
- Detailed notes from the plenary
- Detailed notes from discussion guides
- List of documents that guide the work of City Divisions

5. Urban Design Reference Group Meeting 2

On May 10, 2016, the Canadian Urban Institute and City Planning convened the second meeting of the Urban Design Reference Group to help inform the Official Plan review of urban design policies. Fifteen participants representing as many organizations participated.

The discussion focussed on the following questions:
   i. *What would you say is the intent of urban design policies and guidelines?*
   ii. *What are the key phrases or words that describe the <u>public realm</u> outcomes you would like to see included in the Official Plan?*
   iii. *What are the key phrases or words that describe the <u>built form</u> outcomes you would like to see included in the Official Plan?*

Research Products:
- Detailed meeting notes
- Additional notes submitted by one participant
- Meeting Agenda and Discussion Guide

B. FINDINGS

The following findings are a synthesis of the advice that emerged through the research and discussions described in Section A.

1. Strengthen Urban Design Policies by Stating Clear Outcomes in the Official Plan
- A set of core principles should guide urban design in Toronto.
- Urban design policies/guidelines should be written as a way to achieve clearly articulated Official Plan policy outcomes.
- Improve clarity and consistency of language by refraining from use of generic and overly subtle language such as *appropriate, adequately limit, have regard for, relate to, minimize, at good proportion, green,* and *context.*
- Balance the need to have "a number in a guideline" to ensure quality urban design in all circumstances with "a principle" that allows creative solutions to urban design outcomes.
- Remove or strengthen the weakest policies from the OP that are weak due to lack of clarity and ability to enforce. Examples mentioned include:
   o Massing (OP 3.1.1, 3.1.2)
   o Shadow (OP Chapters 3 & 4)
   o Context (OP 3.1.2, 3.1.3)
   o Sky view (OP 3.1.2, 4.1, 4.2)
- Transition important guidelines that have significant impact on quality of life to policy to limit uncertainty and ensure consistent application. Suggested guidelines include
   o Tall Buildings definition (taller than width of adjacent street)

CANADIAN
URBAN
INSTITUTE

- o   Base Building Height (TBDG 3.1.1)
- o   Base Building – Side Setbacks (new)
- o   Tower Separation Distances (TBDG 3.2.3)
- o   Transitions in scale (TBDG 1.3) – specific reference should be made to which transition tool should be used in which situation
- o   Mid-rise Building Height & Front Facade Angular Plane (Performance Standard 4A).
- o   Mid-rise Definition: 1:1 ratio (Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study 2.2)
- Consider that numbers should be in the zoning by-law with an enabling clause in the OP – (e.g. the importance of tower separation, angular plane, etc. is such and such and shall be determined in the zoning by-law). This approach is taken in the proposed Official Plan Amendment and Zoning By-law Amendments Updating Tall Building Setbacks in the Downtown.

2.   Prioritize Public Realm in the Official Plan
- OP urban design policies should privilege and prioritize open space and public realm.
- OP urban design policies should state that buildings must be built to create extraordinary public space and light on the street and in parks.
- The City should be a leader in the area of public realm and all public works should conform to the Official Plan.
    - o   Urban design policies and guidelines need to support the "urbanizing" city by defining high quality public realm and prioritizing opportunities for public space, walkability and reduced parking standards.
    - o   There should be policies to support free and clear sidewalks. Utilities take up significant space in the public realm and clutter the sidewalks.
    - o   The OP should ensure consistent and reliable application of urban design policies and guidelines and ensure that other City divisions adhere to policy intentions and not work at cross purposes in the public realm.
    - o   Wording in the OP should be included that requires the maintenance of open spaces as the City is often left to undertake these tasks but City Divisions may not have the operating capacity or the expertise to do so.

3.   Prioritize Walkability and Human Scale
- The OP should include policies that emphasize the importance of human scale. Design consideration should focus on the street level and structures designed to accommodate human scale activity as much as possible, including walking and active and passive recreation.
- Walkability is a primary priority for all of the jurisdictions examined. For many, it is tied to the notion of complete streets and includes safety considerations as well as the role of urban design and active transportation. All use a qualitative approach to enforce walkability and one jurisdiction, Singapore, has some quantitative measures to support it.
- This is consistent with and conforms to both the Provincial Policy Statement and Growth Plan.

4.   Address Local Issues and Context
- A one-size-fits-all approach may not work for all of Toronto.

- Require applicants to do block plans/master plans in certain contexts, especially for application proposals on large and deep lots or for sites that include tall buildings. This could trigger the need to think comprehensively and require a development plan for the entire block that addresses urban design performance standards in an area-wide context. Applicants would show how they have regard for and reflect local character.
- Establish policies that enable density to be built into the suburbs and take densification pressure off the central city
- Establish downtown-specific policies that introduce some language around special character areas in the downtown.
- Address deep lots in suburban locations (such as former plaza sites) to prevent buildings being built behind buildings. These lots might require streets, blocks and open space to be defined before built form. (See Markham OP Section 6.3 for use of guidelines in conjunction with planning tools to achieve well designed new communities).

5. **Address Safety and Physical Accessibility**
- Integrate safety and physical accessibility into OP urban design policies. Allow people to feel safer by addressing women's and mother's issues, safety for visible or gendered minorities, lighting, entrapment areas, parks, parking lots, and the AODA standards.
- In the design of community hubs it was suggested that parking (lot) requirements ought not take away from pedestrian access or create conditions that are unsafe for pedestrians entering or leaving the building.
- The Accessibility Standard for the Design of Public Spaces is part of the AODA's Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, which regulates the design of newly constructed or redeveloped spaces used by the public. Elements covered by the Standard include exterior spaces such as sidewalks and other pedestrian walkways, parking lots, outdoor public use eating areas, beach access routes, recreational trails and playgrounds[1].
- The standards also provide specific technical requirements for elements of the built environment.

---

[1] Accessed at http://gaates.org/DOPS/section_1_4_0.php

CANADIAN
**URBAN
INSTITUTE**