

# PR1

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## CIVIC SPACES

These guidelines provides general direction, at the concept or schematic design stage, on civic spaces – plazas, courtyards and other predominantly hard surfaced areas within an urban setting.

The guidelines should be applied to both private development (including common and public amenity areas as regulated in the *Zoning Bylaw*) as well as publicly-owned civic spaces. These guidelines can also be applied to other open spaces and natural areas, and in particular, the planning and design of gathering areas, focal points and similar spaces and elements.

These guidelines does not address the location or configuration of civic spaces. Refer to *US2 Site Design* for more information.

These guidelines do not address detailed civic space design or the selection of finishes, furnishings, lighting, landscaping, etc.

**The planning of healthy, vibrant, walkable and inclusive civic spaces in all seasons requires articulating a clear vision of the use, function and identity of the space. This includes carefully considering user comfort, accessibility, safety, and other factors, while exploring opportunities to improve environmental health and ecological function, and increasing recreational, economic and community activities.**

### ESTABLISHING A VISION

- A civic space should have a clear vision regarding its design (Figures 1,2).
  - This vision should reflect the needs of local residents and the larger community, identified through engagement opportunities that are inclusive and diverse for all potential users of these spaces.
  - It may be appropriate to consider the themes of celebration, wellness and ecology as identified in *Breathe* (see pages 44-72).
  - This vision should also reflect the careful identification and analysis of site opportunities and constraints, including (but not limited to):
    - Current and/or historical use of the site;
    - Adjacent land uses;
    - Access and circulation;
    - Existing trees, topography and natural features; and
    - Microclimate
  - The vision of a civic space should reflect the proposed uses of the specific location over the course of the day and evening, in all seasons, and encourage the use of forgotten or neglected spaces in our city.
    - Civic spaces should consider a range of uses including places to sit and relax as well as places to play and interact with others. There should be a balance of soft and hard surface areas, allowing access and safe use for people of all ages and abilities (Figures 3,4).
    - Large unprogrammed areas with extensive hard landscaping are discouraged, unless they are intended for particular uses such as

large community gatherings, outdoor performances or community events, farmers' markets, or seasonal uses such as mini-skating rinks, winter festivals, etc.

- Performance stages and similar fixed elements should be avoided unless an agreement is in place with a community group, business improvement area, etc, to ensure the regular use of the amenity. In other cases, temporary stages may provide an acceptable alternative and should be planned for accordingly.
- It is important to identify all of the needs and amenities that should be considered to support a particular civic space program. These needs and amenities could include power and water service, temporary or portable washrooms, and / or firepits and heaters for winter use.
  - Consider incorporating additional features such as communal cooking and eating areas (including shelters), water fill stations, washrooms, etc.
- Depending on size, civic spaces should be able to accommodate a number of functions simultaneously to attract a diversity of users.
- Civic spaces should be planned to be multi-functional and be adaptable over time as needs change and new recreation and leisure trends emerge.
- Civic spaces can be designed as shared spaces, allowing pedestrian, cycling and/or emergency access. If vehicular access is required, the integrated design of pedestrian and vehicular circulation shall be considered to ensure functional requirements and pedestrian safety measures are addressed.
- At the conceptual or schematic level, the vision of a civic space should begin to consider its identity and expression.
  - The vision should inform a consistent design language or theme expressed in design patterns, surface pavement colour and materiality, planting and amenity features (including lighting, seating, waste disposal, wayfinding and bicycle racks) (Figure 5).
  - Materials and street furniture must be selected to enable cost effective and practical maintenance. Custom furniture for a scheme should ideally be avoided as this delays the replacement of the particular item and can

significantly increase future maintenance costs.

- Maintenance considerations (including winter maintenance) should be reflected in the proposed design.
- Considerations of public art should occur early in the planning process to explore opportunities to integrate art rather than including it as an afterthought. Public art could take the form of indigenous art or other cultural works that are deemed appropriate for the local context and contribute to the sense of place.

### **GENERAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

- The edges of civic spaces and the transitions with adjacent land uses should be carefully considered.
  - Civic spaces should be planned as an extension of adjacent streets or other spaces to communicate the public nature of the amenity (Figure 6).
  - Where appropriate, civic spaces should be integrated with, effectively becoming an extension of, the frontage zones of adjacent buildings.
  - In other cases, it may be appropriate to delineate and /or separate a civic space from adjacent land uses, roadways, etc., through landscaping and other means.
- Thoughtful seating is a critical element of a successful civic space. Consideration should be given to providing a range of seating types and arrangements, including permanent and movable seating (if appropriate) which promote social interaction (Figures 4,5,7).
- In locating uses, consider environmental and micro-climatic impacts such as access to sky-views and sunlight (e.g. for environmental comfort and / or urban agriculture), shade and wind conditions (Figure 8).
- Landscaping (e.g. shrub and tree planting) can provide definition and scale to seating spaces, delineate uses and provide privacy, and improve micro-climates (e.g. shade and shelter from the wind).

### **ACCESSIBILITY**

- Civic spaces must be universally accessible to users of all ages and abilities. At the concept or schematic design phase there are important accessibility considerations that can be addressed:
  - Accesses into and through at-grade civic spaces will generally follow

*Complete Street Design and Construction Standards*, the *Access Design Guide* and reflect the specific site context and intended function.

- Pedestrian access should align with 'through zones' (1.8 – 3.0m).
- Shared pedestrian and cyclist access should ideally be avoided where possible however, where required, these installations should align with 'shared pathway' (3.0 – 6.0m).
- Emergency vehicle access minimum 4.0m to 6.0m.
- Ramps should be well integrated into the proposed circulation of civic spaces and not be out of the way or inconvenient to use. All ramps should be designed separately from stairs (i.e. avoid 'stramps') to provide a safe and fully accessible design for all users, particularly those with visual impairments (Figure 9).
- Larger and complex civic spaces should be designed to be easy to understand, to use and to navigate. Wayfinding signage should be provided to invite and regulate public use of the amenity.
- For more detailed information refer to the *Access Design Guide*.

### **SAFETY**

- Civic spaces must be designed to be safe, using the principles of CPTED in accordance with the *City's Design Guide for a Safer City*. At the concept or schematic design phase, the following principles provide some important safety considerations that address the following:
  - Access: Safe movement and connections – example – pathways should be designed to allow visibility and avoid creating potential hiding places. Physical elements such as continuous solid fences, blank walls or planting beside pathways that impede sightlines and reduce opportunities for surveillance should be avoided (Figure 10).
  - Surveillance and sightlines: See and be seen – example – lighting can be used to ensure safety and wayfinding and to enhance the aesthetic value of open spaces (Figure 11). Any lighting provided should follow these principles:
    - No more illumination should be provided than is necessary for security and to provide a safe attractive night time environment.
    - Avoid over-lighting the space and its surroundings and adhere to dark sky principles to help reduce light spill.

- Decorative lighting must consider safety and environmental concerns described above.
- If the safety of a civic space cannot be reasonably assured due to factors that cannot be mitigated (eg. land use adjacencies or lack of sightlines), then it may not be appropriate to provide lighting.
- Layout: Clear and logical orientation – example – enable people to find site entrances and exits as well as other services within such as public toilets, playgrounds, information and more.
- Activity mix: Eyes on the street – example – civic spaces should incorporate or anticipate a mix of activities that will ensure use day and night, year-round. Creating a strong integration with adjacent land uses (particularly those with active edges) can make a significant contribution to this activity mix.
- Sense of ownership: Showing a space is cared for – example – employ some common design techniques and elements to delineate ownership boundaries (that most people respond to) which could include: landscaping, changes in level, and different ground surface treatments.
- Quality environments: Well-designed, managed and maintained environments – example – encourage public/private partnerships such as main street programmes and the like to promote the importance of creating places that are safe and vibrant.
- Physical protection: Using active security measures – example – making perimeter fences look attractive by allowing visibility through fences, including simple designs or combining them with a hedge or other landscaping treatments. Architectural elements and details should be considered which contribute to a walkable, human scaled streetscape.

### **CLIMATE RESILIENCE**

- Preserve mature trees and natural areas, including wetlands, wherever possible.
- Consider integrating Low Impact Development (LID) features, including bioretention, soil cells, bio swales, box planters (Figure 12). Refer to *Epcor's LID Design Guide* for more information.
- Consider incorporating community gardens into civic spaces. Ensure the appropriate provision of power and potable water to support this type of amenity.

- Consider integrating landscaping (eg. perennials, shrubs and trees) to maximize health and environmental benefits.
  - Landscaping can mitigate air pollution, support urban biodiversity, and reduce the urban heat island effect (Figures 2,4,5).
  - Landscaping and other natural elements (e.g. water features) provide access to nature which provide biophilic benefits to users.
  - Tree planting within civic spaces requires appropriate soil volumes
    - refer to the *City of Edmonton Design and Construction Standards Volume 5: Landscaping (2021)*.
  - Special consideration should be given to tree species that are adapted to the changing climate - refer to the *Guide to Urban Forest Management in a Changing Climate*.
  - Tree setbacks in relation to other infrastructure elements are described in the *Complete Streets Design and Construction Standards*.

### OTHER REQUIREMENTS

- Applicants may be requested to provide a design narrative including an overview of the vision of the civic space, a summary of the site analysis, and a description of the intended users and proposed functions.
- Applicants may have to provide a wind impact assessment to document existing site conditions and proposed mitigation measures to ensure environmental comfort within proposed civic spaces.

#### Summary of key civic space design considerations

Range of uses and landscape treatments; e.g. active, programmable spaces (A) and quiet seating areas (B).

Strong edge integration; e.g. shared space (C) and extended frontage zone (D).

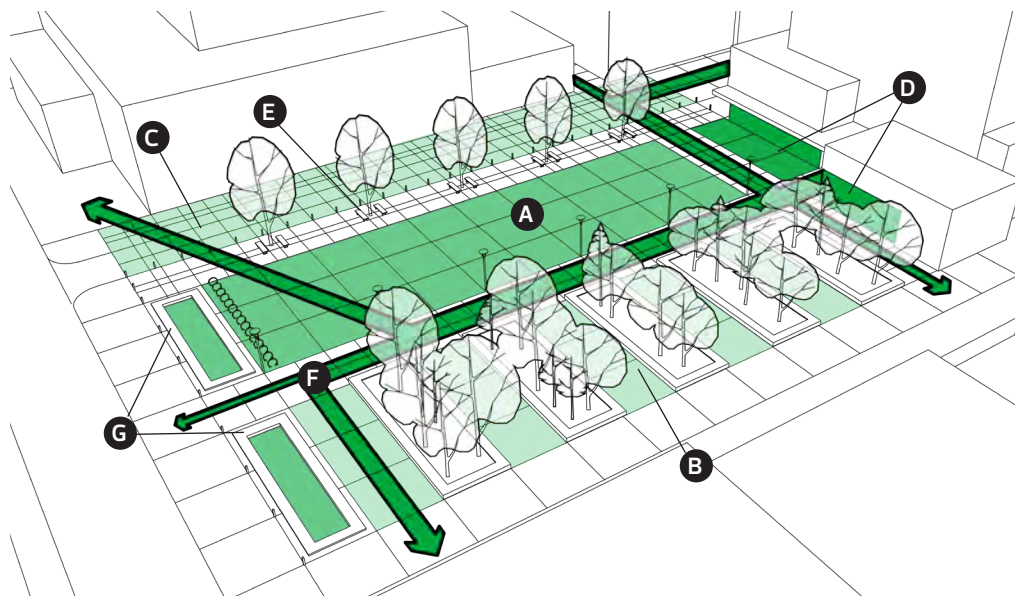
Range of seating options (E, B).

Environmental comfort through both sunny (D) and shady (B) spaces.

Easily accessible with a legible layout and clear sightlines (F).

Opportunities for Low-Impact Development (G).

Generous tree planting to mitigate heat island effect (B).





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## CIVIC SPACES

- 1,2** Two different visions of civic space, Montreal – one active and one passive.
- 3** Children’s play area for all ages and abilities.
- 4** Passive seating area and connections to adjacent streets and land uses, Toronto.
- 5** Themed selection of finishes and furnishings to enhance overall character, Montreal.
- 6** Integration with and adjacent shared space, Montreal.
- 7** Civic space with casual seating around fountain, North York.
- 8** Civic space designed to facilitate winter use (City of Edmonton).
- 9** Separate design of stair and ramp for greater functionality, Nanaimo (Stephen Hunter).
- 10** Walkway with clear sightlines and limited entrapment spots, Toronto.
- 11** Appropriate lighting to activate a civic space for nighttime use.
- 12** Low Impact Development (LID) features integrated into a park design.

