

**TOWN OF AJAX**

**URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR  
MOTOR VEHICLE GAS BARS / SERVICE CENTRES**

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PLANNING &  
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to provide applicants with a clear understanding of the urban design criteria to be incorporated within proposals for gas bars / service stations and associated uses, such as car washes, restaurants, convenience stores and drive-thru facilities. Implementation of these design criteria will ensure that gas bars/service stations (and other ancillary uses associated with them) develop in a manner which achieves the intent of the urban design objectives contained in the Town of Ajax Official Plan. In making these criteria available as a design reference, several benefits are derived:

- (i) applicants can develop suitable designs/lay-outs prior to the submission of a formal development application;
- (ii) Town staff can review new site plan applications in a consistent manner, using a standard set of design references;
- (iii) landowners and residents have the assurance that the appearance, layout and design of these types of uses will appropriately address the surrounding land use context.

This guideline document contains urban design criteria to be applied to new gas bar/service station (re)developments within the Town. Urban design refers to the location, configuration and relationship of the component parts of gas bar / service station sites, both internally (i.e., within the site itself) as well as in relation to the surrounding area. The component parts of gas bar / service station sites include such elements as buildings, pump islands, canopies, service areas, parking, driveways, and landscaping. The intent of these guidelines is to realize the development of gas bars/service stations and associated uses in a manner which is compatible with the surrounding area while recognizing the needs of gasoline retailers for visibility and corporate identity. Equally important, the design principles are intended to create an attractive and pedestrian friendly form of development which has a strong street presence and built form definition.

The guidelines have been written in an action-oriented manner, rather than passive terms such as “may” or “should” consider. As such, they project a strong, affirmative message emphasizing the importance of effective actions for achieving the desired built form where gas bars and service stations occupy high exposure locations along arterial and collector roads. It is acknowledged that the guidelines are not the only means of achieving the type of built form envisaged for sites featuring gas bars or service stations, but achieving the end result - sites that have an attractive and pedestrian friendly interface with the public realm, where built form and massing defines street edges and corners, and where sites are designed in a manner that is sensitive to the planned character of surrounding land uses - remains paramount. The applicability of various guidelines may be influenced by local conditions, requirements and constraints, and in such instances, guidelines can be adapted to innovatively achieve the key principles based on professional judgement.

## 1.2 Organization of the Guidelines

These guidelines are organized to identify both general, guiding *principles* for achieving the vision for sites featuring gas bars / service stations, as well as provide detailed, specific *practices* to guide all aspects of the arrangement and design of site components. The guidelines are organized under the following set of issues:

- Site and Building Organization
- Vehicular and Pedestrian Access
- Built Form and Design
- Pedestrian Amenity
- Landscaping and Tree Preservation
- Lighting
- Signage
- Safety

Through the site plan approval process, proposals for gas bars / service stations (and other uses associated with them) will be reviewed according to the above noted issues. This will ensure that the various urban design principles relating to these issues are satisfactorily addressed through the implementation of appropriate design practices.

## 1.3 Policy Context

The Town of Ajax Official Plan contains urban design policies whose goal is to improve the livability and aesthetic quality of the Town through the enhancement of the layout and attractiveness of public and private spaces and buildings. The Official Plan establishes policies that apply desired functional and aesthetic parameters to the design of the built form and landscape of the Town.

Policies of the Official Plan that are relevant to the development of gas bars and service stations, and which form the framework of the detailed urban design guidelines contained in this document, include the following:

- Foster a sense of civic identity and pride through a high standard of urban design in all future development that considers:
  - the appropriate integration of the design of public and private spaces;
  - a high degree of visual diversity, interest and aesthetic quality;
  - a well-defined public realm;
  - the sensitive integration of new development with existing development; and,
  - a transit-supportive and pedestrian oriented development pattern.
- Design development such that it is compatible with its surrounding context.
- Consider all relevant built form issues in the review of development applications, including:
  - the impact of the proposed development on adjacent existing and approved land uses with respect to public safety, privacy, noise, shadow, light, traffic, access and parking;

- the compatibility of the proposed development with adjacent existing development in terms of height, density, scale, massing and character;
  - the need for an orderly and appropriate transition to adjacent lands; and,
  - the protection of significant man made or natural scenic vistas.
- Install appropriate lighting to help enhance public safety and security and to define the aesthetic and functional quality of public spaces such as promenades and sidewalks;
  - Screen on-site parking by appropriate fencing or landscaping from surrounding roads and properties.
  - Integrate signage with the architecture and landscape, not only to identify and inform, but also to complement and enliven the streetscape.
  - Locate utilities underground where practical. Screen, design, and maintain transformers and other structures ancillary to the delivery of utilities and infrastructure in harmony with surrounding land uses, and place them in accessible locations.
  - Incorporate landscaping, including vegetative plantings, with buildings and structures on untreed sites in order to enhance the site, the streetscape and the surrounding area.
  - In general, limit service stations and associated ancillary uses to 500 square metres of gross floor area and a height of 1 storey.
  - Utilize fencing, landscaping, berming or a combination of these features to ensure that there is adequate screening between service stations and an existing or planned residential use that abuts or is in proximity to the proposed service station.

## **2.0 SITE AND BUILDING ORGANIZATION**

### **Principles**

- Ensure proper siting of gas bars / service stations within the existing context.
- Maximize compatibility with surrounding existing buildings and street character.

### **Guidelines**

- Site and orient gas bars / service stations in a manner which is compatible with the existing built form context, including appropriate distance separation (i.e., 15 metres minimum) of ancillary drive-through facilities from adjacent existing or planned residential areas.
- Site and organize gas bars / service stations such that outdoor automobile service areas (e.g., pump filling areas, vacuum station, air hose station, propane-dispensing station, drive-through windows and drive-through queuing lanes) are located as far away as possible from the street line, in a manner which minimizes the visual impact of these elements from adjacent roads (e.g, by using building(s) to screen views).

- Where sites abut existing or proposed commercial development, organize gas bars / service stations in such a manner that the development appears and functions as an integrated extension of the adjacent retail development. Where sites abut existing or planned residential development, minimize the built form impact on abutting residential areas by siting the principal building close to the corner of the road intersection.
- Where an ancillary store, restaurant and/or banking facility (including ATMs) forms a component of the principal building, the building is to be located directly adjacent to the public boulevard/sidewalk (without any intervening driveway accesses, driveway aisles, drive-through queuing lanes, parking or service areas) and, where the timing of development permits, form an integrated part of any adjacent retail development.
- Accommodate direct pedestrian access from the public sidewalk (existing or future) where a convenience store, banking facility (including ATMs) and/or restaurant is present as an ancillary use, with a pedestrian entrance(s) located on a building elevation facing a street.
- Locate the street wall in a way that anticipates future adjacent lot development along the same build-to line.
- Accommodate all garbage and waste disposal areas, including recycling, within part of the principal building.
- Ensure that drive-through windows do not directly face adjacent roads and that queuing lanes are not located between buildings and abutting streets.
- Provide an appropriate landscaped buffer between the gas bar/service station and the public realm, sufficiently sized to accommodate tree plantings in a mature state and a mix of hard of soft landscaping.
- Link building elements together to maximize massing of the built form.
- Wherever possible, locate utilities underground, or within a building; ensure that electrical transformers or other unsightly hardware are not located between the building(s) and the intersection / street line, but rather placed in accessible locations and screened using hard and/or soft landscaping.
- Ensure that the on-site movements of tanker trucks are safely accommodated and do not obstruct pedestrian routes, parking areas, or site access locations while re-filling underground storage tanks.
- Locate on-site parking spaces away from lot edges abutting the public realm.
- Where Open Space areas or residential lands abut a gas bar/service station development, provide a landscape buffer having a minimum width of 4.5 metres within the gas bar/service station site where it abuts the open space and/or residential lands.
- Provide a solid masonry wall 2.0 metres in height where gas bar/service station sites abut residential zones.

### **3.0 VEHICULAR AND PEDESTRIAN ACCESS**

#### **Principles**

- Minimize impact on the streetscape and public realm, while providing safe, controlled access and egress points.
- Minimize the area of pedestrian/vehicular conflict where pedestrian and vehicular movements cross the sidewalk and public realm.
- Assist in achieving a pedestrian-friendly environment by providing for direct, separate pedestrian access from the sidewalk.

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## **Guidelines**

- Ensure that gas bar/service station developments are easily accessible to vehicles (understanding that works within the right-of-way of adjacent roads, such as centre medians, are paramount for safety), and that traffic movements for the purpose of site egress/ingress and on-site queuing do not disrupt the existing traffic flow on adjacent roads.
- Limit curb cuts to access locations only, to minimize disruptions to the public realm.
- Minimize the number and width of vehicular access locations in order to lessen the impact and disruption on the streetscape, limit the area of pedestrian/vehicular conflict, and maximize perimeter landscaping along the streetscape.
- Vehicular entrances and exits should be located as far as possible from road intersections to prevent traffic conflicts.
- Direct, separate pedestrian access from the public realm (e.g., sidewalks) into buildings containing stores, restaurants and/or banking facilities in conjunction with gas bars/service stations is essential.

## **4.0 BUILT FORM AND DESIGN**

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### **Principles**

- Maximize compatibility with the existing surrounding built form context.
- At 'gateway' locations, require an enhanced level of building treatment and architectural design to reflect the gateway function.
- Ensure that gas bars/service stations are designed and constructed with the same planning and architectural considerations as would be accorded other buildings in the same location.
- Properly consider issues of design, massing, scale, setbacks, facades and land uses as a means of developing sites that are sensitive to the planned character of surrounding land uses, have an attractive and pedestrian friendly interface with the public realm, and where built form and massing defines street edges and corners.

### **Guidelines**

- Design the built form components of the gas bar/service station to reflect or otherwise complement the character of the surrounding land use context.
- Where a landmark or gateway level of treatment is warranted as a result of the site being located in the vicinity of a Highway 401 interchange, within or adjacent to a designated Central Area, and/or located on a corner of an arterial road, incorporate an enhanced level of architectural treatment, including increased building height and wall extensions, to create a sense of prominence at the corner / street edge.
- Where building elevations face adjacent roads, create a "frontal" facade expression through the appropriate detailing of pedestrian entrances, windows and architectural elements of the built form.
- Maximize the frontal expression of the built form toward the street/intersection by setting the principal building as close the front and/or exterior side lot lines as possible.

- Maximize the transparent glazing percentage of walls facing the streets. Typical exposures along arterial and collector roads should have at least 30% of the entire wall plane as glazing. The incorporation of a high proportion of window and glass frontage for the main building pavilion, facing all adjacent streets and on-site service areas, is essential to providing clear, unobstructed sightlines into and out of the building.
- Incorporate a high proportion of wall fenestration for ancillary car wash facilities, particularly on walls visible from the public realm.
- Create a streetwall that supports, extends and reinforces the continuous public realm. Give special attention to the height, scale, form and design of buildings - and to street-facing walls in particular - to ensure that the massing/architecture of buildings lends attractive built form definition to the streetwall, and appropriately anchors prominent corners and gateway locations (i.e., sites located in the vicinity of a Highway 401 interchange, within or adjacent to a designated Central Area, and/or located on a corner of an arterial road).
- Use vertical piers matching the main building material to support the canopy rather than standard, unclad metal columns.
- Minimize the height of canopies so as to reduce the impact on abutting properties; in no instances shall the height of the canopy above the pumps exceed 6.3 metres.
- Animate/articulate wall surfaces (through design, materials, texturing and colouring) to avoid 'blank' wall surfaces
- Materials and finishings used for gas bars/service stations should be of the highest quality and complementary to the character of the surrounding area.
- Completely screen all roof-top mechanical units from view, using materials complementary in design and colour to the parent building; parapet extensions may be used as an alternate means of screening.

## **5.0 PEDESTRIAN AMENITY**

### **Principles**

- Improve pedestrian amenity on-site and within the public realm adjacent to gas bar / service station sites.
- Animate the streetscape to enhance pedestrian comfort and promote pedestrian activity.
- Reduce the impact of the auto-oriented character of gas bars / service stations on the public realm to as great a degree as possible.

### **Guidelines**

- Provide raised walkways around the perimeter of all buildings where they abut driveway aisles, parking areas, and service areas, except at overhead or loading doors or where a queuing lane for a drive-through facility abuts the same side wall as where the drive through service area is located. Ramps and curb depressions shall be provided in appropriate locations to allow for wheelchair access to buildings.

- Place outdoor vending machines and ice chests in a roofed enclosure or niche inset within the wall of a building, with only the machine fronts exposed, and face machines onto a pedestrian walkway.
- Provide covered trash receptacles/containers alongside fuel pumps, in proximity to main building entrances, and alongside pedestrian sitting areas.
- Ensure that public phones, if located in an outdoor area, are protected from the elements, either enclosed by a booth or, if mounted to a wall, protected by an overhead awning/canopy.
- Provide a rack or posts for bicycle parking for any gas bar/service station developed in association with an ancillary store, banking facility and/or restaurant (to be located in an area which does not conflict with on-site vehicular movements or parking).
- Organize the streetscape in a manner which aids the pedestrian. Design and locate bus stop locations, seating, newspaper stands, flag poles, planters, trash containers, public phone booths and other street furniture in a manner which enhances the public realm and pedestrian-friendly street image but does not interfere with the vehicular traffic produced by gas bars/ service stations.

## **6.0 LANDSCAPING AND TREE PRESERVATION**

### **Principles**

- Ensure proper landscaping and continuity between the public and private realm.
- Use landscaping as a supplementary means of screening for areas not already screened from public view by buildings.

### **Guidelines**

- Gas bar/service station sites are to meet the same landscaping standards as required of all other commercial land uses and will continue and improve the existing landscaped public street edge.
- Where a landmark or gateway level of treatment is required (i.e., for sites located in the vicinity of a Highway 401 interchange, within or adjacent to a designated Central Area, and/or on a corner of an arterial road), provide an enhanced level of landscaping (e.g., masonry-lined planting beds, articulated trellis structures, masonry walls, wrought-iron fencing, special paving) where the site abuts the public realm, with a particular emphasis at intersection corners.
- Provide landscaping and pedestrian furniture to articulate pedestrian entrances facing adjacent streets and to define edges of walkways linking public sidewalks to entrances.
- where there are no buildings to serve as a visual barrier or frame the street edge, use landscaping (both hard and elements) to continue the street wall and screen outdoor automobile service areas (e.g., pump filling areas, vacuum station, air hose station, propane-dispensing station, drive-through windows and queuing lanes) from view from adjacent roads; ensure that perimeter screening treatment is a minimum 1.0 metre in height in order to appropriately screen vehicles when viewed from adjacent roads.
- Minimize the extent of surface parking and asphalt areas by dividing paved areas through the use of raised landscaping, walkway islands, and low walls.

- Protect all existing perimeter trees worthy of preservation, with minimal grade changes to the area beneath the drip-line.
- Locate all underground structures such as fuel tanks and utilities so as not to encroach within the drip-line of trees to be preserved (this minimizes disruption to the root system).
- Provide tree planting in all landscaped areas, in a manner that is harmonious and consistent with the surrounding tree pattern; tree plantings along landscaped strips abutting roads are to complement the existing character of the streetscape (in terms of placement and species)
- Diversification in planting schemes is desirable; accordingly, trees planted in clusters as well as in broken or unbroken lines will be considered, where appropriate.
- Organize plantings such that they do not obstruct sightlines or pedestrian walkways, either at the time of development or once the plant material reaches a mature state.
- Select plant materials to suit growing conditions at the planting location and match anticipated maintenance levels.
- Screen all above-ground utilities not enclosed in a building.
- For all gas bar / service station proposals, provide a comprehensive landscape plan which details the treatment of all street frontages using a mix of hard and soft landscape elements. Such elements should include (but are not limited to) plant materials, decorative fencing, low street walls, special paving, outdoor screens, trellises, grates, canopy structures, lighting, ornamental architectural treatments, and planters.

## **7.0 LIGHTING**

### **Principles**

- Provide a clearly-illuminated, safe environment for pedestrians, employees and motorists.
- Ensure that lighting does not interfere with adjacent properties or uses.

### **Guidelines**

- Provide pedestrian-scale lighting along all pedestrian routes (e.g., illuminated bollards), at building entrances (including exterior washroom entrances), at public phones, at vending machines, at bicycle racks and at walkway access points into and out of gas bar/service station sites.
- Completely recess all lights located on the underside of a canopy structure or breezeway.
- Orient/design all lighting such that there is no spillover affecting abutting properties.
- Arrange lighting in a manner that enables users to easily identify routes through the site.
- Use lighting to outline safe pathways for travel, including pedestrian walkways leading from the sidewalk to building entrances facing the street.
- Use lighting as an architectural element to enhance the night streetscape appearance of the development from abutting roads (e.g., lighting to illuminate landscaping, architectural features, building walls, etc.).

## **8.0 SIGNAGE**

### **Principles**

- Implement a comprehensive sign package which is an integral part of the overall site design.

### **Guidelines**

- Ensure that ancillary service areas (air pumps, vacuum stations, propane dispensing) are clearly signed and associated parking areas clearly demarcated on asphalt surfaces.
- Ensure that signage clearly demarcates queuing lanes and routes of travel through the site (including ingress/egress).
- Design, locate and orient signs in a manner that mitigates the potential negative impact of poor or unsightly signs on adjacent streets and surrounding residential areas.
- All signage will be reviewed and regulated in accordance with the sign by-law.

## **9.0 SAFETY**

### **Principles**

- Minimize the opportunity for crime, accidents and vandalism through the proper design of gas bars / service stations.
- Maximize the level of personal safety for both users and employees.

### **Guidelines**

- Design gas bar/service station developments in accordance with CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles, to minimize crime, eliminate blind corners, and be unattractive to vandals.
- Locate public washrooms, telephones, and vending machines in a highly visible area.
- Provide clear views and sightlines into and from gas bar kiosks/pavilions from adjacent roads and automobile service areas; where appropriate, use mirrors to broaden sightlines and eliminate blind corners.
- Ensure that safety and directional signage is highly visible and appropriately located.
- Ensure that access to propane filling areas is secure, and storage tanks are protected from vehicles.