EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an evaluation of the design review processes at the National Capital Commission (NCC) and City of Ottawa (City). Design review is a process whereby development applications are subject to expert criticism on design aesthetics and usability through sponsorship of local government agency(ies). The primary source of evaluation criteria stems from Dr. John Punter's article *Urban Design as Public Policy: Best Practice Principles for Design Review and Development Management* (2007).

All twelve of Punter's principles were evaluated individually against the NCC and City's design review process. For each principle, the design review criteria and principle objectives were evaluated based on the following four point scale:

○	Does not meet objective
⊙	Partially meets objective
◉	Almost meets ojbective
●	Fully meets objective

The twelve principles were categorized into four main themes, which included community vision, integrating design into planning and zoning, developing broad substantive design principles, and due process.

"Community Vision" emphasized the importance of efficiency and consistency in the review process and aims to encourage public involvement. Both the NCC and City have numerous documents to consult that discuss design, but their level of public participation resulted in different evaluations. The NCC includes the public in plan developments such as the *Core Area Sector Plan*, but the City seems to have a more active public role by hosting workshops and offering the public a stronger voice in identifying design issues and community goals. Also, the City is more open to the public by allowing applications to be reviewed on-line and exposing them to design review development proposals.

"Integrating Design into Planning and Zoning" focuses on enhancing the public realm and utilizing design review to create vibrant urban places. The NCC has a range of guidelines that are used for various parts of the City, but it is unclear how well these are addressed in the review process. In comparison, the City has empowered themselves through Bill 51 and the *Planning Act* in order to impose design control. Also, the array of design guidelines are constantly addressed during the review process and applicants are encouraged to explain their

planning rationale for development in relation to the appropriate guidelines. Both the NCC and City showed strong support for social inclusion through planning principles, and expressed an interest in developments that benefit private and public users. Lastly, differences regarding zoning limitations were apparent whereby the City is willing to be flexible in exchange for enhanced public spaces, but the NCC has to be more firm in some cases because of concerns such as protecting the views of Parliament.

For "Developing Broad, Substantive Design Principles" the NCC and City were evaluated fairly similar in comparison to Punter's principles. Both agencies use expert panels in their review process to gain insight on how a project is going to affect the local area, as well as provide planning principles dealing with creativity and sustainability. However, the NCC proved to be clearer in separating the regulations that are mandatory and advisory. Design review is a fairly new process at the City and several adjustments must be made in order to make the submission requirements clear for proponents. Where spontaneity and innovation are concerned, both agencies hold design competitions for major developments encouraging unique urban spaces that harmonize with the surroundings.

"Due Process" dealt with the rules of design intervention and efficiency and effectiveness. Several differences were noticed when comparing the NCC and City in this section of the principle evaluations. Some major differences that have an effect on the design review process included pre-consultations and panel minutes. The City has made pre-consultations mandatory and panel minutes are available for the public to review on-line. On the contrary, pre-consultations at the NCC are not mandatory – which could slow the process – and panel minutes are confidential, which are not to be released for public viewing. However, both agencies evaluated well for having the expert panel members available to comment on applications required to go through design review. Both panels (ACPRD & Design Review Panel (City)) have a professional mix of design expertise and "value-adding" members.

The design review processes at the NCC and City of Ottawa have their similarities and differences, but both seem appropriate for the intended purpose of project review. Several strengths and weaknesses were identified in the analysis, and Figure 4-6 illustrates the full evaluation of the twelve principles. The NCC's design review process showed strengths dealing with social inclusion, evaluating projects beyond aesthetics, and having a review panel composed of expert professionals. The City's strengths included ample public participation, utilizing a

range of planning tools, proper design review administration and expert panel advice. For weaknesses, the NCC could use improvement on efficiency within ACPDR, and the City of Ottawa needs to make adjustments in distinguishing between mandatory regulations and design guidance.

Figure 4-6: Design Review Comparison Chart

Design Review Comparison: National Capital Commission & City of Ottawa vs Punter's Principles		
Best Practice Principles for Design Review	**National Capital Commission**	**City of Ottawa**
Community Vision		
1 - Coordinated Vision	◉	●
2 - Community and Industry Support	◉	●
Design, Planning, and Zoning		
3 - Harnessing the Broadest Range of Actors	⊙	●
4 - Mitigating Exclusionary Effects	●	●
5 - Addressing Limitations of Zoning	○	⊙
Broad, Substantive Design Principles		
6 - Community, Vitality, Accessibility, and Sustainability	●	●
7 - Mandatory Requirments and Design Guidance	◉	⊙
8 - Accommodating Spontaneity, Innovation and Pluralsim	◉	◉
Due Process		
9 - Clear Rules	⊙	◉
10 - Proper Administrative System	◉	●
11 - Efficient, Constructive and Effective Permitting Process	⊙	●
12 - Providing Appropriate Design Skills and Expertise	●	●

Legend		
	○	Does not meet objective
	⊙	Partially meets objective
	◉	Almost meets ojbective
	●	Fully meets objective

In addition to the process evaluations, three sample projects were selected for evaluation and include an NCC project (Canada Aviation Museum), City project (The Mondrian), and a combined NCC/City project (Rideau Centre Red Garage). These highlight how the design review panels assessed the projects to develop advancements that added more value.

The project samples were used to showcase the type of recommendations that the respective design review panels typically suggest. Each project is unique in itself, and often has a fairly good design to begin with, but the role of the panel is to provide their expert advice on ways in which development projects could be improved. Small changes such as lighting or materials used can have a large impact on the aesthetics and usability of a building. Furthermore, recommendations are often tailored to benefit both private and public users, such as alterations in canopy designs or alternative designs to hide street-level views of parking.

Upon analyzing the respective processes, several conclusions and recommendations were established. Design review has proven to be beneficial for adding value to a variety of development projects, as well as utilizing local design guidelines and initiatives that have not been adequately addressed in the past. Punter's best practice principles are an excellent guide for any planning body looking to formulate design review. However, the principles are not directly transferrable and minor modifications may need to be explored to best suit the area being developed. The NCC and City has their similarities and differences, but both witnessed some areas where improvements could be made, and therefore recommendations were made to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency and consistency of their design review processes.

Three recommendations were made for the NCC, which suggests providing detailed guidance on the application process, making adjustments to have greater public accessibility and alleviate time-delays, as well as the need to establish a set of design guidelines pertaining to the federal land of downtown Ottawa. Two recommendations were made for the City based on the future of design review. At the time of this report, the City was in transition from pilot phase to formalizing design review, and therefore recommendations included improving the administrative process and panel composition, as well as expanding the area in which design review is required.

NCC Recommendations	City of Ottawa Recommendations
1- Information for proponents 2- Design Review Adjustments 3- Design Guidelines	1- Formalizing Design Review 2- Expand Design Review

The purpose of design review is to improve the quality of life by developing vibrant urban spaces that are compatible and sustainable, and this report aims to showcase this planning tool as an upcoming strategy to build and enhance the private and public realm.