

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report was to examine the essential factors that govern the compatibility between development projects and their existing urban fabric. To achieve this objective a literature review helped to define the term "contextual compatibility," examined different design approaches and identified the most commonly preferred contextual design strategy. According to the literature, most of the ordinary people prefer a design approach that embodies a moderate to high degree replication of the surface elements of the existing buildings. In addition, the research suggests that the design of the facade of buildings is more crucial than other physical attributes such as massing, and site organization in establishing a coherent visual and physical relationship.

Likewise, the literature review identified contextual characteristics such as *architectural character, massing, site organization, linkage systems* and *urban spaces* as the salient features that should be retained and extended into new developments. These attributes were used to formulate a set of design guidelines for design compatibility that follows:

1. The design of new buildings should reflect the architectural character of the surrounding context.
2. The massing of new buildings should be consistent with the massing of the buildings around the site.
3. New developments should be organized so that they are consistent with the existing pattern of site organizations.
4. New developments should respect the pattern of blocks and linear open spaces and offer the opportunity to extend the existing vehicular and pedestrian linkage systems.
5. The physical structure of new developments should be designed to provide a hierarchy of spaces that are clearly defined, functionally appropriate and respect the existing pattern of private, semi-public, and public spaces.

To expand our knowledge of the concept and find out about additional factors that dictate compatibility, a case study of St. Lawrence neighbourhood was conducted. This development was chosen because it was purposely designed to be reintegrated into the older fabric of the city.

The analysis was carried out in two segments. In the first part, data was collected for the

neighbourhood's surrounding context that included the area known as the Old Town of York. Next, similar information was collected for the St. Lawrence project. Categories of data collected include: architectural character, massing, site organization, linkage systems and urban spaces. Common qualitative measurement techniques such as recording on-site observations, taking photographs and archival review of maps and documents were used during the data collection. Finally, comparison was made between the two sets of data using the design guidelines as the framework for the evaluation. It was found that despite all the attempts made to integrate this development into the old fabric of the city, the project is only successful in achieving a coherent relationship of *site organization, linkage systems* and *urban spaces*. However, attributes such as *architectural character* and *massing* did not fully correspond to those of the buildings around the site. It was argued that for the Housing Department the issue of design quality was a low priority compared to the desire for providing a large number of assisted housing. Similarly, the problems with the massing were related to the Housing Department's conflict of objectives. In particular, the decisions to maintain a low-rise form and the use of high densities to achieve social housing targets were mentioned as the main causes of these shortcomings. Two additional factors that played a crucial role in the way this neighbourhood was designed were identified as environmental constraints such as the noise coming from the south and the lack of ingenuity on the part of some of the architects.

Several conclusions were made that can be employed in future developments. First, clear goals for design compatibility should be set at the initial stages of the project. Next, to avoid the conflict of interests, objectives of the project should not be contradictory in nature. Finally, politicians and planners should take a stronger position with respect to the aesthetic qualities of the built form and open spaces.