

Evaluating the Walkability of Traditional Main Streets

A Comparative Analysis of Downtown Brockville, Cornwall and Kingston, Ontario

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Executive Summary

Overview

Downtowns represent the heart and soul of most small and medium sized cities in North America. They often make up the Central Business District of these communities and their streets and streetscapes have evolved to cater to the predominant transportation modes of each generation. Main streets are usually easy to recognize in the CBD by the buildings that line them, making up a street wall of elaborately detailed and distinctive styles that were developed through time. In response, cities have implemented a variety of strategies in order to revitalize their downtowns, which include heritage building preservation and adaptive reuse, waterfront redevelopment and, most notably, this repedestrianization can be measured by an index of walkability, the focus of my research reported below.

Methods

This research used the Maryland Inventory of Urban Design Qualities walkability audit protocol to evaluate the walkability of three traditional main streets in mid-sized, Eastern Ontario municipalities: Brockville (King Street), Cornwall (Pitt Street) and Kingston (Princess Street). The results from this audit were then used to inform a series of design interventions recommended for the improvement of the pedestrian realm along the three corridors.

Findings and Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Increase the number of outdoor dining options and other active pedestrian uses.

Design principles: Imageability, human scale.

Cities: Brockville, Cornwall.

Recommendation 2:

Encourage infill along corridor to close gaps in street wall.

Design principles: Enclosure, human scale.

Cities: Brockville, Cornwall.

Recommendation 3:

Encourage variety in the articulation, materials and colours of new infill development.

Design principles: Imageability, human scale, complexity.

Cities: Brockville, Cornwall, Kingston.

Recommendation 4:

Replace mismatched street furniture, plantings and lighting using a consistent, enhanced theme along the corridor.

Design principles: Imageability, complexity.

Cities: Cornwall

Recommendation 5:

Enhance streetscape by strategically locating public art in the pedestrian realm.

Design principles: Human scale, complexity.

Cities: Brockville, Kingston.

Overall, the walkability of Brockville, Cornwall and Kingston's traditional main streets remains high. The evolution of the downtown streetscape character and recent policy adoption has refocused on the pedestrian, designing the right-of-way to accommodate a range of users at the human scale. Although there was no clear, overall winner in terms of the Maryland Inventory of Urban Design Qualities walkability audit, Kingston's Princess Street redevelopment stood out as an excellent example of pedestrian-focused design. Brockville's King Street and Cornwall's Pitt Street corridors also displayed pedestrian-oriented streetscape design features, however, their

storefront vacancies and breaks in the street wall ranked them lower on the scale of the walkability audit. The recommendations provided in this report seek to improve the overall pedestrian environment along these important traditional main streets.