

**THE REVITALIZATION OF TRADITIONAL MAINSTREETS THROUGH DESIGN:
NOTRE-DAME STREET, LACHINE QC**

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Executive Summary

The decline of traditional mainstreets became a common trend throughout the latter half of the 20th Century. Once the economic and social backbone of cities and neighbourhoods, in many cases, they now represent a shadow of their former selves. In response to this, and in recognition of the dwindling social importance that traditional mainstreets were capable of providing, many municipalities have taken steps towards the revitalization of the streetscape through design.

Notre-Dame Street in the Borough of Lachine in the City of Montreal is a prime example of one such traditional mainstreet that has fallen into decline. With a history dating back as far as the 1870's, the street has played an important

economic and social role in the community since then. Today, however, the street is showing signs of economic downturn in the form of boarded up windows, crumbling infrastructure, and questionable development patterns such as an abundance of off-street parking lots and large setbacks. In spite of this, the street has managed to retain a number of community assets such as the public market and several historically significant buildings.

This study will focus on the portion of Notre-Dame Street between 19th Ave. and the eastern end of the street, just passed 6th Ave. It will attempt to investigate how design can help improve the built environment.











Study Area: Notre-Dame St., Lachine, QC

The approach that was taken in order to achieve this was heavily based on the methods of the urban design firm Urban Design Associates (UDA), as is detailed in their book *The Urban Design Handbook* (2003). UDA recommends taking a three-phase approach to the design process: 1) The understanding phase, in which the study area's frameworks and development patterns are systematically identified at various scales in order to become familiar with the area; 2) The exploring phase, where public consultation typically would lead to the development of design principles; and 3) The deciding-what-to-do phase, where the design principles in the previous section are translated into tangible design recommendations.

In lieu of the public consultation portion of the exploring phase, an evaluative criteria based on Allan Jacobs' findings in his book *Great Streets* (1993) was developed. This method served to identify the elements of the street worth retaining and those in which it is lacking, similar to that which would have been achieved through public consultation.

The evaluative criteria were composed of the eight requirements for great streets and the 12 contributing

qualities identified by Jacobs. Each criterion was applied individually to Notre-Dame St. and was given a score on a scale of five. The results in terms of the eight requirements can be seen in the following table:

REQUIREMENTS FOR GREAT STREETS	RATING
<i>Walkability</i>	
<i>Physical Comfort</i>	
<i>Definition</i>	
<i>Qualities that Engage the Eyes</i>	
<i>Transparency</i>	
<i>Complementarity</i>	
<i>Maintenance</i>	
<i>Quality of Construction and Design</i>	

The evaluative criteria yielded a wide array of results, identifying both the strengths and the weaknesses of Notre-

Dame Street. In terms of certain criteria, such as *transparency*, *physical comfort*, and *walkability*, the street scored highly. However, it also proved to be lacking in criteria such as *definition*, *quality of construction and design*, and most remarkably, in levels of *maintenance*.

Similarly, the criteria which addressed the qualities that contribute to great streets scored highly on criteria such as *special design features*, *many buildings/diverse*, and *density*, but also showed that improvements were needed in terms of *accessibility*, *places*, and *beginnings and endings*.

Based on the findings of the evaluation, six design principles were established to guide specific interventions:

1. Foster the Lachine Market's importance as a key institution and gateway in the community.
2. Fix dilapidated infrastructure and buildings.
3. Maintain and build upon the pedestrian experience.
4. Improve connectivity by car, bike, and transit.
5. Address issue of placelessness at the east end of the street.
6. Reinforce Notre-Dame's unique history and culture.

Bearing these in mind, specific interventions were devised to achieve each principle. A total of 19 recommendations were made, ranging both in cost and level of disruption to the current urban form.

As a final step, to be sure that the proposed interventions would have a positive effect on the study area, the evaluative criteria were reapplied to the street, presuming that all proposed changes had been made. Based on the ratings of the re-evaluation, the study concludes that the proposed interventions would grant significant improvements to Notre-Dame Street in almost all categories. At worst, some of the ratings have remain unchanged, but none have decreased.