Restitching the Urban Fabric of Beechwood Avenue

Fostering a Dynamic Public Realm in the Nation's Capital



Ottawa

Queen's University

Restitching the Urban Fabric of Beechwood Avenue

Fostering a dynamic public realm in the Nation's Capital

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School of Urban and Regional Planning
Department of Geography and Planning
Queen's University
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City Of Ottawa





Executive Summary

Project Overview

In September 2023, the City of Ottawa partnered with students from the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Queen's University to conduct an urban design study of Beechwood Avenue in Ottawa, Ontario.

Objective

The objective of this urban design study is to provide design interventions and strategic recommendations that improve the connectivity and public realm along Beechwood Avenue and its surrounding areas. Through both tactical design interventions and long-term recommendations, the intent is to transform Beechwood Avenue into a quality destination within the Nation's capital. In particular, the outlined design interventions and recommendations aspire to improve pedestrian connectivity along Beechwood Avenue and establish a dynamic and resilient public realm through the creation of new open spaces and community programming opportunities.

Guiding Vision

Following exhaustive site analysis and precedent research, the project team established four guiding principles to direct the overall vision of Beechwood Avenue:

1. **Inclusive:** Create a dynamic main street for people of all ages and abilities.
2. **Health and Sustainability:** Support Ottawa's vision for 15-Minute Neighbourhoods.
3. **Making Place:** Give a distinct sense of destination to Beechwood Avenue.
4. **Reunification:** Transition and integration with surrounding land uses should be at the forefront of all design interventions.

Project Outline

To begin the project, a site visit was conducted in early September, where the project team collected data and photographs of existing site conditions. Along with the site visit, the project team met with and interviewed various City staff and community stakeholders.



Figure 1 - Existing Mural on Beechwood Avenue (SURP, 2023)

Following the visit to Ottawa, the project team began an in-depth site analysis. The first step of the site analysis was to analyze and assess the existing built form and land uses, connectivity, and public realm conditions along Beechwood Avenue. Second, a policy analysis was conducted, comparing municipal planning policies relevant to the site, and their existing implementation along Beechwood Avenue. The outlined policy comparison was the result of reviewing several municipal, provincial, and federal planning documents, along with corresponding planning policies. Furthermore, an analysis of Beechwood Avenue's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) was produced. The condensed SWOT analysis table can be seen below (Figure 2).

Stakeholder mapping was used to identify and categorize both individuals and groups interested in and/or affected by the redesign of Beechwood Avenue. Stakeholder mapping will assist in ensuring the project is presented and delivered to stakeholders based on their individual needs.

The final section of the site analysis was precedent research. Research focused on finding precedent case studies based in North America that were reflective of Beechwood Avenue. In the end, 18 case studies were selected and then organized into three overarching themes: 15-Minute Neighbourhoods, Streetscape Redesign, and Placemaking/Activation.

Following the site analysis, the project team organized a design charrette. Participants of the design charrette included planning professionals from both Ottawa and Kingston who generating design recommendations for Beechwood Avenue.

Strengths

1. Intersection of four neighbourhoods
2. Winding street
3. St. Charles Church
4. Chrichton to MacKay section
5. Adjacent to the riverfront, National Cemetery, Heritage neighbourhood

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Weaknesses

1. No overall unified identity (streetlamps, signs, wayfinding, gateways, land use, sidewalks)
2. Insufficient space for transport needs and connectivity
3. Inappropriate pedestrian infrastructure: unsafe sidewalks and frequent street crossings
4. Absent vibrant public realm: lack of seating and public space, lack of shade coverage and street landscaping, non-representative public art, and lack of programable space

Opportunities

1. Vacant and underutilized land
2. Cultural Diversity
3. Increasing population density
4. Foundations of the 15-minute neighbourhood

Threats

1. Potential for gentrification and displacement
2. Gated Embassy
3. High cost of investment
4. Lack of strong business association for Beechwood Avenue

Figure 2 SWOT Analysis

Design Concept

To achieve the stated project objective, the team assembled an overall design concept for Beechwood Avenue, involving a streetscaping masterplan and two building massing demonstration sites. Throughout the entirety of the design process, the team ensured the guiding principles and design interventions aligned with both municipal and provincial policies. Moreover, several urban design guidelines from the City of Ottawa were considered when reimagining Beechwood Avenue.

Streetscaping is at the forefront of the Beechwood Avenue Masterplan. Improving active transportation linkages and strengthening the public realm along Beechwood Avenue are two key areas of focus, outlined in this report. The streetscaping design concept involves both short-term and long-term design interventions including:

- Removing the cycling network along Beechwood, and relocating cycling lanes to Barrette Street as an alternative interim route;
- The expansion and activation of the right-of-way.
- Activation of underutilized spaces (unnecessary intersections, surface parking lots and laneways);
- An overall increase in programmable space; and
- The introduction of street furniture, urban landscaping, and greenspace throughout the corridor.



Figure 3 Master Plan of Beechwood Avenue

The second design concept outlined in the Beechwood Avenue Masterplan is an overview of two building massing demonstration sites. Both demonstration sites selected by the project team front onto Beechwood Avenue and have great development potential. The Metro grocery store on Beechwood Avenue is the first demonstration site. The second demonstration site is the Beechwood Mews – a low-density strip mall located on the corner of Marier Avenue. The team integrated similar themes within the redesign of both sites, such as:

- Increased height and density – 8 to 10 storeys
- Mixed-use development;
- A continuous and well-articulated street wall along Beechwood Avenue;
- Activation of the adjacent public realm; and
- Sustainable urban landscaping (greenspace).

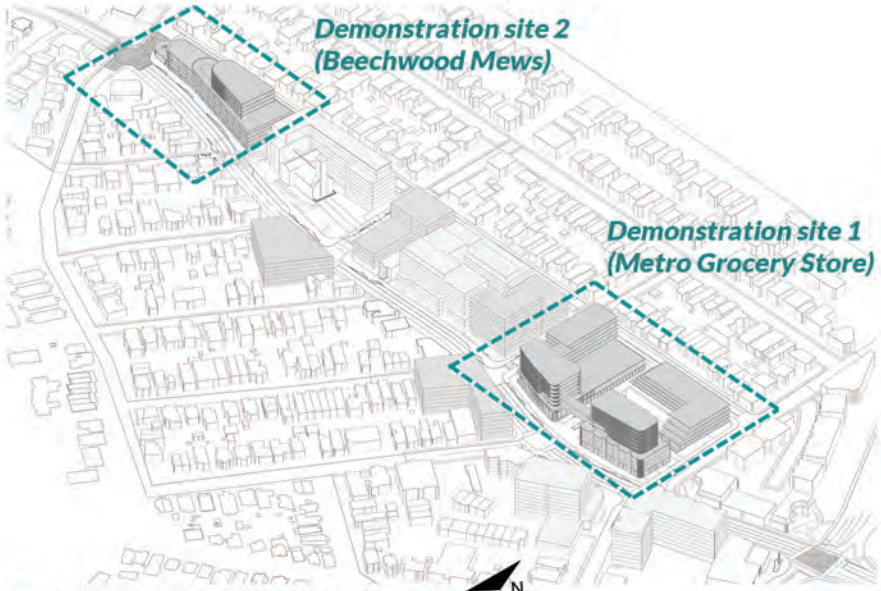


Figure 4 Demonstration Sites Overview



Figure 5 Master View



Figure 6 Streetscape View of the Grocery Store on the Ground Floor From Beechwood Avenue and Springfield Road

Key Recommendations

In correlation with the project's four guiding vision principles, municipal and provincial policies and guidelines, the project team has generated a total of twenty (20) design interventions and recommendations, containing 10 short-term, tactical design interventions and 10 long-term design recommendations.

Tactical Design Interventions	Long-term Recommendations
Improve the pedestrian amenity space along Beechwood Avenue with temporary street furniture, surface treatments, and vegetation.	Utilize continuous sidewalks and invest in permanent street furniture, lighting, and public art.
Activate underutilized spaces to improve the pedestrian environment.	Increase programmable space within the Beechwood Community.
Temporarily pedestrianize minor intersections through the placement of tactical urban landscaping and street furniture.	Fully pedestrianize minor intersections with raised sidewalks, bollards, and landscaping features
Address deferred maintenance on existing pedestrian sidewalks.	Reduce the right-of-way for vehicles and expand sidewalks to a minimum of 2.5 metres
Implement a pilot cycling network along Barrette Street.	Invest in a dedicated cycling route on Barrette Street and remove the north street parking lane.
Experiment with parklets.	Incorporate sustainable landscape features such as bioswales and pervious strips.
Create bump-outs and reduce corner radius of key intersections along Beechwood Avenue.	Complete a full streetscape redesign.
Experiment with the temporary restriction of the Quickie parking lot as an access onto Beechwood Avenue.	Transform Loyer Street and St. Charles Street into flexible spaces such as woonerfs.
Experiment with gateway and wayfinding design elements.	Promote the development of high-density, mixed-use buildings at key nodes.
Initiate a pilot project to reduce the speed limit to 30km/h along Beechwood Avenue.	Invest in traffic calming measures at key junctions by implementing raised intersections, additional street crossing, and curb extensions.