

# **A Diamond in the Rough:**

## **A Land Use and Design Concept Plan for the Princess and Division Streets Area, City of Kingston, Ontario**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In the latter part of 2001 the City of Kingston began work on a design concept for the downtown area. This was an opportunity to undertake a civic beautification design program for the above ground infrastructure of the downtown. The Hub is one of the most significant areas of the downtown as an important gateway to both downtown Kingston and Queen's University. The Hub has become a focal point for goods, services and entertainment for university students.

The purpose of this report is to develop recommendations and a conceptual plan for the Hub that will act as a resource document for the City of Kingston's upcoming *Downtown Action Plan*. The goal of this plan is to create an entertainment and student district for the area that acts as gateway to downtown Kingston and Queen's University from other areas of the city.

The case study method is used to develop the recommendations and concept plan. It consists of a precedents review, interviews, analysis, synthesis, and development of a concept plan. The precedents review involved a study of post-secondary student district plans. The findings from the precedents review were used to construct a questionnaire for student interviews to collect data about the study area. The analysis included a *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats* (SWOT) assessment based on the interview data and an urban design analysis. The analytic results were then synthesised into a design framework, which became the basis for the concept plan.

The review of precedent plans provides information on other student district developments. Four precedents were examined for this report:

- *South Side*, near the University of California at Berkeley in Berkeley, California;
- *State Street*, near the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Wisconsin;
- *Central Square*, near to Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts; and,
- *UniverCity*, adjacent to Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia.

Two main groups were interviewed to collect information on the Hub: students and key informants. Queen's University students were the main information source for the Hub.

Interviewing students was necessary to explore what students think of the Hub as a place and what type of place they would like it to become. 50 students were interviewed with each interview taking approximately 30 minutes. Key informants were interviewed in order to complement the student interviews and gain a comprehensive understanding of the Hub as a place. They were selected for their unique association with the Hub and its student use. They included representatives from the:

- *Downtown Kingston! Business Improvement Area;*
- *Hub Group;*
- *City of Kingston Police Department;* and,
- *Queen's University Campus Planning and Development.*

A SWOT analysis provides a framework for identifying the development potential of the Hub and was used to assess the responses from the student interviews. Strong student response rates, emphatic responses, or unique viewpoints that were thought to merit consideration were criteria used to identify the key points for the SWOT.

The method of urban design analysis was adapted from Trancik's (1986) urban design approach incorporating three design methods: figure-ground analysis, linkage analysis, and place analysis. This method provides an integrated approach to urban design, combining the spatial definition of figure-ground analysis, the connective qualities of the linkage analysis and the social responsiveness of the place analysis.

The figure-ground method identifies lost space through a visual two-dimensional analysis of building siting and coverage supplemented by student interview results and field observations. Identified lost spaces are evaluated to determine what can be done to correct these problems. The linkage analysis identifies spatial datums through a two-dimensional analysis of the Hub supplemented by the student interview results and field observations. Development along spatial datums should consider connections between the Hub and other districts. The place analysis assesses the character of the Hub through the student interview results and field observations to identify the *place* that currently exists and the *place* that could be created. Identifying the current and potential place characteristics informed what features needed to be reinforced and what features needed to be changed.

The design framework synthesises the analyses from the SWOT and urban design elements into recommendations that guide the concept plan for the Hub. The design framework is divided into two sections: design themes and design features. The design themes for the Hub are:

- 1) An identity as an entertainment and student district.
- 2) A gateway to downtown Kingston and Queen's University.
- 3) A unique social atmosphere in Kingston.
- 4) A mix of uses to maintain a life beyond the nightclubs, bars, and fast food.
- 5) A pedestrian-orientated environment.

The design features are more specific recommendations that implement the design themes in the Hub. Eight design features flow out of the design themes: activities and land use, private realm, gateways, open space, streetscape, traffic circulation, parking, and public safety. The recommendations are as follows:

#### **Activities and Land Use**

- Increase the mix of nightclub, bar, and restaurant formats.
- Increase the mix of commercial services.
- Encourage more uniform and seamless retail and entertainment uses and prohibit incompatible uses at the street level (e.g. residential and office uses).
- Use weekend street closures for special events, festivals, outdoor public markets, cultural events, and public recreational opportunities.
- Incorporate the Princess Street area west of Division Street into the downtown area as defined by the City of Kingston.
- Encourage and promote redevelopment along Princess Street west of Division Street by incorporating this area into a BIA.
- Encourage more residential use above the first floor of buildings to increase personal safety.

#### **Gateway**

- The Princess and Division intersection should be enhanced. Strong design features such as civic monuments and open space may be used here.
- The City should take the lead in planning for a downtown and University gateway at the Princess and Division Streets intersection.
- The parking lots of *Central City Automotive*, *Domino's Pizza*, and *Rhea's* should be developed to reinforce the intersection corners as a gateway and anchor development along Princess Street.

- Residential uses on the corners of Division & Brock should be redeveloped with the recommended commercial services and should draw the pedestrian's attention away from the Princess Court parking lot and the Princess Towers building.

### **Open Space**

- Include open space within the liveliest and busiest part of the Hub, such as the parking lots at *A&P* and *Shopper's Drug Mart*.
- Include open space within the primary gateway, such as the *Shopper's Drug Mart* parking lot, to identify the importance of the intersection.
- Open space elements, such as the centrepiece, public seating, patio seating, and pavers should reflect the entertainment and student nature of the Hub.

### **Private Realm**

- New buildings should respect the scale and proportion of the existing buildings.
- Utilise Princess Towers to display the uniqueness of the area and/or Kingston.
- Maintain continuous zero front setbacks at the ground floor except to provide recessed storefront entrances, or usable open space such as outdoor dining.
- Ensure that multiple storefronts within the same building are visually compatible in terms of scale, alignment and general storefront design.
- The size of signs, awnings, and lettering on signs or awnings should be in scale and proportion to the space in which they are located.
- Encourage outdoor seating and patios where possible and appropriate.
- Developing the interior block space located near the northeast corner of Division and Princess Streets into a patio or courtyard with dining and recreational space.
- Protect pedestrians from inclement weather by including architectural features such as awnings, canopies, and recessed entries.
- Prohibit future parking lots in the front setback.
- Redevelop the Shoppers Drug Mart and Pizza Pizza parking lots. The City should purchase the *Shopper's Drug Mart* parking lot to be redeveloped into open space as previously recommended. The *Pizza Pizza* parking lot should be redeveloped with a building that defines the corner and sight line termination point from Garrett Street.
- Develop the *A&P* site into an open space that can be used for festivals or other events, parking (structure and/or underground) both for the site and the area in general, and a mix of uses as previously recommended.

### **Streetscape**

- Sidewalks should be widened from 1.5 - 3.0 metres to 4.0 – 5.0 metres along Princess Street west of Division Street and along Division Street to help encourage pedestrian-oriented development.
- Sidewalks at intersections and mid-street crosswalks should bulge into the street to reduce pedestrian walking distance.

- Use the full width of the sidewalks, particularly on the north side of Princess Street between Division and Barrie Streets; currently only half of the sidewalk is usable.
- Increase pedestrian safety by providing buffers on sidewalks between the street and the pedestrians.
- Enhance the awareness and use of the crosswalk on Princess Street between Division and Barrie Streets by installing an in-pavement flasher crosswalk system.
- Use lamppost lighting for festive events and seasonal periods.
- Include more trees and vegetation throughout the Hub, particularly those that reflect the urban environment, the seasonal climate of the area, and the feasibility of maintenance.
- Surround trees with planters to provide for outdoor seating and protect the trees.
- Utilise climbing vines to cover large blank walls and buildings that have similar exterior features to Queen's campus halls.
- Include signs showing the direction of downtown Kingston and Queen's University.
- Display a mix of flags from the City of Kingston, downtown, and Queen's University throughout the year.
- Include banners throughout the year.
- Institute a maintenance program that includes but is not limited to sidewalks, trees, vegetation, awnings, signage, open space, patios, and facades.

#### **Traffic Circulation**

- Change Princess Street to a two-way street east of Division Street.
- Implement features and regulations, such as mid-street crosswalk bulges and lower maximum speed limits (e.g. 30 km/h).

#### **Parking**

- Private lots that are used only during the day should be able to provide for public parking during non-business hours.
- If the *A&P* site is not developed then it should allow for non *A&P* customer parking use.

#### **Public Safety**

- Encourage above ground residences and extra police presence during busy nights.
- Minimize dark and concealed areas, such as the walkway adjacent to the *Burger King* drive-thru.

The concept plan was created from the design framework recommendations. Design features that could be presented within the scale of the plan were included in the concept plan. As a concept plan, this plan is a conceptual interpretation of recommendations from the design framework; the recommendations can manifest in many different ways.