

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Design Standard Review is intended to guide the standards for the future design and construction of residential communities in the City of Vaughan. The Design Standards Review Study was initiated in response to Council resolution on September 11, 2000 regarding issues relating to residential building activity since the approval of OPA 400. The issues identified relate predominantly to small lot residential including single detached, semi-detached and townhouse residential building forms. The Design Standards Review examines elements within the public and private rights-of-way and the interface between the two.

1.1 Why the Design Standard Review Was Developed

A significant amount of development in the City of Vaughan will continue to be in the form of new residential development. The quality of these new areas will have a profound impact on the character of the City. This impact is not only related to the quality of new neighbourhood design, but the manner in which residential subdivisions 'fit into' their surrounding context including urban areas, open space and rural landscapes.

City of Vaughan has been committed to an ongoing improvement of community and neighbourhood design through standards developed for the public realm including streets and open space areas and for the private realm including built form and site design. The policies adopted in OPA 400 (1994), the revisions to Bylaw 1-88 (August 25, 1997) and the amendments to the Urban Design Guidelines of OPA 400 have contributed to the development of many highly desirable new residential communities in the City. A significant amount of these new communities contain smaller lots in keeping with a desire to maximize the use of land and reduce the cost of housing and associated services.

As the objectives of more compact residential form have been applied in conjunction reduced zoning standards, generally a larger house in proportion to the lot has been permitted. The application of reduced zoning standards within the public and private right-of-way has created concerns about the future of residential development when applied to small lot development (generally 12.0 metres and less). **(Figures 1 & 2)**

The Design Standards Review process identified the following primary issues:

- Proportion of dwelling to lot size
- Lot drainage
- Front, side and rear yard encroachments: front porches, steps, decks, and utilities
- Above grade utility locations
- Boulevard and sidewalk locations
- Parking treatments including garage and driveway design
- Stormwater management pond design

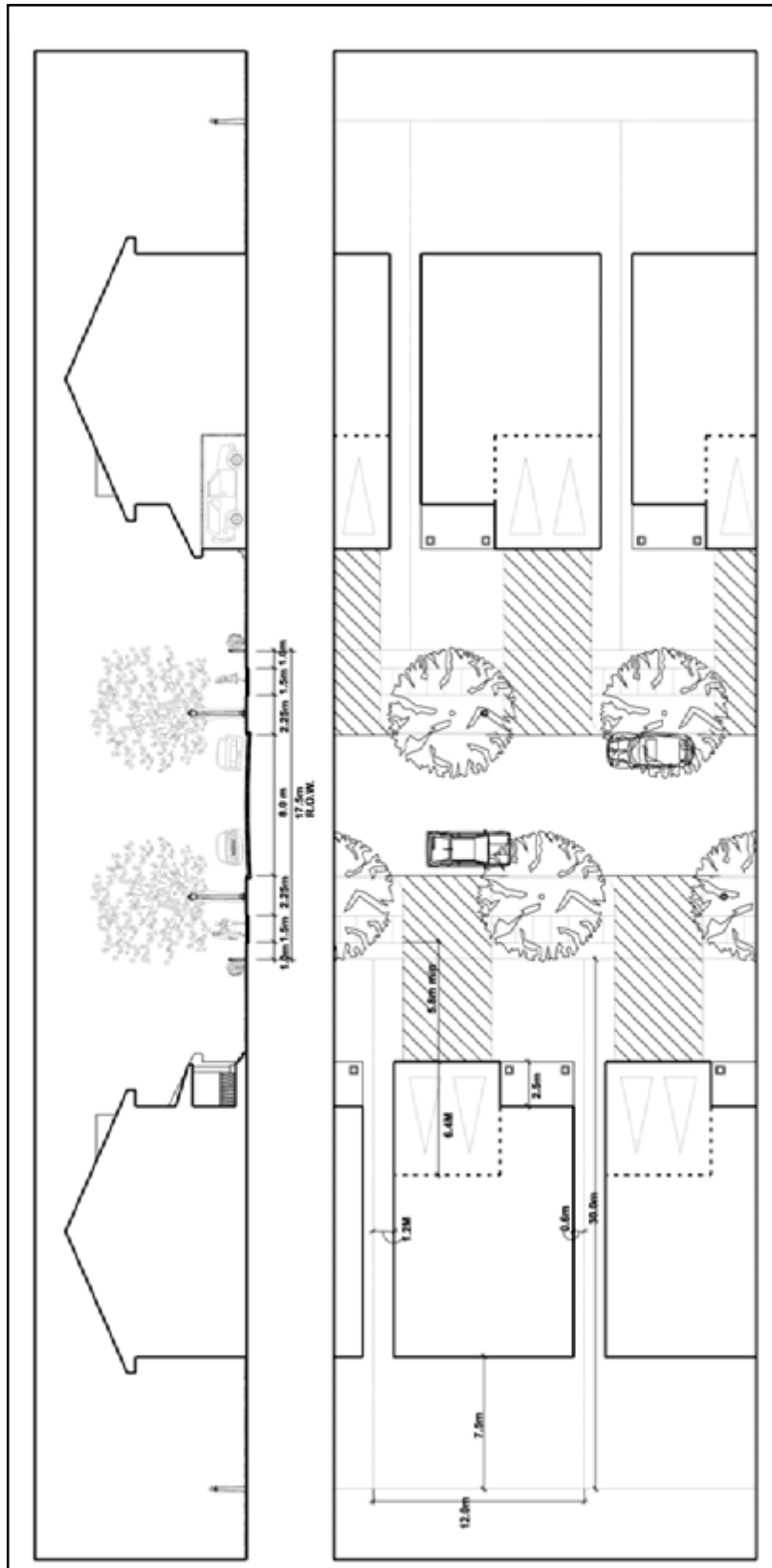


Figure 2 Wide shallow lot

1.2 The Initiation of the Design Standards Review

In response to the evolving issues regarding recent residential development, Council adopted the City of Vaughan Design Standards Review Study, OPA 400/600 Terms of Reference on October 10, 2000. The City retained Brook McIlroy Inc. and Totten Sims Hubicki Associates to undertake the urban design and engineering components of the Study and to work with the Design Standards Review Committee comprised of senior management members of the Community Planning, Urban Design, Growth Management, Engineering, Building Standards, Forestry, Legal Services and Fire Departments. The objectives the Study were identified to:

- Enhance quality of life and overall residential design aesthetics, while minimizing operational requirements;
- Review the City's current urban design guidelines, road right-of-way standards, operational procedures and policies and make recommendations for changes as appropriate;
- Obtain input from the public and stakeholders, special interest groups and the development and building industry;
- Integrate the design solutions of each department/discipline into a comprehensive set of "corporate" design standards;
- Have regard for operational procedures and requirements such as snow clearance, garbage removal, site services and boulevard and tree maintenance.
- Have regard for the public safety and coordinating design standards of CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles;
- Have regard for accessibility issues.

Decisions to revise existing standards have evolved throughout the process of the study and through committee, public and stakeholder input. At the outset of the Design Standards Review a list of design standard issues was compiled. The topics listed for review included:

Right-of-way Design Standards (Public Realm)

- Boulevard and sidewalk design
- Tree locations
- Above and below grade utility locations
- On-street parking
- Community feature locations
- Entrance feature locations
- Greenway Designs
- Community Mailboxes
- Stormwater management design

Lot Design Standards (Private Realm)

- Minimum building setbacks including location of porches, air conditioners and meters.
- Wide shallow lot designs
- Townhouses units permitted in a row
- Corner lot designs
- Garage and driveway dimensions and locations
- Lot grading and drainage

Design Standards Implementation

- Coordination between departments
- Purchaser's information (e.g. sales pavilions)
- Urban Design Guidelines and Zoning Regulations
- Block Plan and Site Plan Approval Process

1.2.1 The Design Standards Review: A Collaborative Process

1.2.1.1 Committee Meetings

Regular committee meetings were held with the Commissioner of Planning and Urban Design and Committee representatives comprised of Department Directors and Managers from the Community Planning, Urban Design, Engineering, Building Standards, Growth Management, Forestry, Fire and Legal Services Departments. The Committee and sub-groups of the Committee met on a regular (often weekly) basis to collectively discuss the issues and propose recommendations for standards improvement. Based on the comprehensive list of residential design issues, a Design Standards List was formulated to create a working document that could be used as a tool for input and discussion throughout the design standards review process. The Design Issues and Standards List continued to be a valuable source of input during the public consultation process.

1.2.1.2 Department Interviews

Within the first month of the Standards Review, individual interviews were held with department representatives to discuss the topics outlined in the Design Issues and Design Standards List.

1.2.1.3 New Community Development Bus Tour

Following the department interviews, a half-day bus tour was organized for members of the Standards Review Committee to visit a series of new residential communities in the Town of Markham and the Town of Oakville.

(Photos 1 & 2) Representatives of the Town of Markham conducted tours of the Cornell and Legacy communities, and a representative of the Town of Oakville conducted a tour of Morrison Common and Oak Park (Uptown Core), including the first residential phases of development. These new communities contained elements of residential and community design that served as valuable points of comparison to the City of Vaughan. The key issues discussed during the bus tour included.



Photo 1: Morrison Common Townhouses facing the Village Green



Photo 2: Legacy, Markham: single family corner lot

Variety of built form: The variety of housing forms were considered to be a positive aspect of the community, in contrast to community examples where the same dwelling type is repeated consistently with only minor variations in roof lines or elevation details.

Pedestrian oriented streets: The lane based neighbourhoods resulted in more pedestrian oriented streetscapes where a stronger connection between the front of the house and the public sidewalk was provided through front porches, highly landscaped front yards, and house forms that orient principal rooms to the street. **(Photo 4)**

Front Yard Garages: Where garages were attached to the house in the front yard, the preferred relationship was when the garage was recessed behind the front wall of the house. **(Photo 5)**

Landscape treatments: Streets consistently lined with street trees were considered to contribute to a strong sense of quality to the overall image of the street.

Rear Laneways: Concern for lane-based communities was generally expressed with respect to emergency access, maintenance, cost, and servicing and safety issues. **(Photo 6)**

Stormwater Management: The stormwater management pond at the Legacy community in Markham was seen as a positive example of how ponds can be integrated into communities and neighbourhoods. The pond at Legacy has a significant amount of direct frontage through a single loaded road on the perimeter of the pond. The variety of pond edge conditions allows for overlook opportunities on the steeper embankments and direct pond access where the pond slope is gradual and shallow. A walking/recreational trail is included along the top of the pond embankment, and fronts directly on to the pond.

1.2.1.4 City of Vaughan Neighbourhoods Tour

Several tours of recently constructed neighbourhoods in the City of Vaughan were visited including Block 17, Block 32 West, Block 39 and the Woodbridge Expansion Area. The tour provided the opportunity to examine the residential community issues within a series of recently built and occupied communities. The following images illustrate some of the issues that would be reviewed during the Design Standards Review process. **(Photos 7-9)** A series of additional images illustrate the positive image of many of the City's new residential communities. **(Photos 10- 12)**



Photo 3: Morrison Common, Oakville: Front porches and tree-lined sidewalks contribute to a strong relationship between the street and house.



Photo 4: The Orchard, Burlington. A strong relationship between the house and garage is recessed behind the front wall of the house.



Photo 5: Access, safety and maintenance issues



Photo 6: The design standards address the placement of the garage, driveway and above-grade utilities.



Photo 7: Encroachment into minimum standard side yards. Visibility of above-grade utilities.



Photo 8: Small rear yards limiting drainage and amenities (ie. decking, landscaping)

1.2.1.5 Municipal Standards Review

A review of the following Municipalities regarding current design standards was undertaken.

- Richmond Hill
- Markham
- Mississauga
- Oakville
- Kitchener
- Niagara-on-the-Lake

The common issues identified throughout the municipal review included:

- The visual dominance of the street-facing garage due to the projection of the garage and its proportion to the principle building façade.
- The lack of habitable living space at the front of dwellings.
- The dominance of driveways within the front yard and at the street edge, minimizing opportunities to landscape the front yard, plant street trees, locate above grade utilities and street furniture and provide on-street parking.
- Laneways and their problems relating to emergency access, personal safety, adequacy of width, servicing and maintenance.
- Stormwater Management Ponds as community amenity areas and issues related to public use, access, safety and maintenance.

1.2.1.6 Stakeholders and Development Industry Workshop

A workshop for community stakeholders and members of the development industry was held on December 5th, 2000 to provide an opportunity for comment and input into the direction of the Design Standards Review.

(Figures 3 & 4) Following a presentation by the consultant, a workshop was held in which groups of approximately ten people answered a questionnaire and participated in a design exercise. The design exercise included residential plans of single, semi-detached and townhouse dwellings. The participants were asked to identify design issues and comment on any deficiencies in the residential layouts.

1.2.1.7 Council Working Session

A Council Working session was held on January 30th to present the current direction of the Design Standards Review and to obtain input and direction from Council. Council supported the general direction of the Design Standards Review. Council recommended that the Committee and consultants continue work on developing and refining the Design Standards recommendations. Council further recommended that the use of laneways and wide shallow lot development should not be permitted unless deemed necessary under specific circumstances.

Photo 9: City of Vaughan. Well designed corner houses contribute to the overall impression of the street and neighbourhood.



Photo 10: City of Vaughan. A variety of house forms with attached garages facing the street can create an attractive streetscape image.



Photo 11: City of Vaughan. Where the house proportion is well balanced with the garage, opportunities to plant street trees and landscape the front yard are increased.

