Low-Rise Commercial & Mixed-Use Buildings
Low-rise commercial and mixed-use buildings are important to the vitality, health and economic activity of Kitchener. They are a significant and persistent part of the daily life of most people and occupy substantial portions of the urban fabric. High quality commercial and mixed-use buildings help maintain and promote prosperous and vibrant communities.

It is important that low-rise buildings reflect the human experience; to be designed for pedestrians, cyclists and transit users in addition to motorists; to offer appealing, inviting spaces that are highly connected, universally accessible and sensitive to the broad range of user needs; and to be sustainable and inclusive, attractive and engaging.

A low-rise commercial building is defined as a building between 1 and 4 storeys in height that provides one or more commercial uses.

A low-rise mixed-use building is defined as a building between 1 and 4 storeys in height that provides a mix of non-residential (commercial, retail, institutional) and residential.

Low-rise commercial and mixed-use buildings can often act as neighbourhood centres for activity. When integrated well with the community, they can become community gathering spaces and provide local retail, commercial and service options.

Low-rise commercial and mixed-use buildings help build out and reinforce neighbourhood character. They often help to transition from areas of intensification to low-rise neighbourhoods, and should be designed with the same sensitivity and care given to larger, more prominent buildings.

This conceptual rendering demonstrates many of the design objectives for low-rise commercial & mixed-use buildings.
To ensure appropriate transitions, the roof of the proposed low-rise commercial/mixed-use must respect the relationships of the adjacent roof forms in the existing streetscape.

Ensure the building is compatible with the existing or planned context and provide appropriate transitions to neighbouring properties.

Avoid blank walls and provide, through materials, details, massing and glazing, rhythms that are compatible with surrounding areas even on the rear and side of buildings.
### Facade Design

Provide glazing, clearly defined entrances and architectural articulation on all building facades.

Provide highly visible, easily accessible building entrances with a high percentage of glazing on all street or public realm facing elevations.

Integrate all circulation and accessibility elements, including steps and ramps, into the architectural and landscape design of the site.

Differentiate between units, while maintaining a cohesive design, through the use of colour, different materials, projections/recesses and architectural features.

Where blank walls are unavoidable, reduce their visual impact through material variety and articulation as well as other architectural techniques.

Design commercial units to allow for a range of uses to preserve for future market flexibility.

Design elevations with both vertical and horizontal architectural elements that create a human scaled environment and prevent flat and/or featureless facades.

Provide ground floors with enough height (4.5m or more) to accommodate a variety of uses over time. Design storefronts and other facade elements to create an animated street front.

Include awnings, arcades or other forms of pedestrian shelter to add depth to the facade.

### Materials

Utilize high quality, durable and sustainable materials. No single material should form the overwhelming majority of a building facade, particularly those visible from the public realm.

Materials and details are only appropriate for achieving a ‘traditional’ or historical architectural style if they are demonstrated to be a significant, existing part of the historical neighbourhood character. Regardless of the building systems or construction methods used, provide a balanced approach to material texture, colour, style, rhythm and articulation.

Employ colours, creative architectural details, and enhanced articulation to create unique, engaging and visually interesting environments for users.

### Entry & Access

Articulate primary building entrances with architectural treatments such as increased glazing, canopies, awnings or double height entry features.

Integrate signage and architectural features to define and accentuate all user/customer entries.

Locate primary building entrances on the front of the building facing the highest-order public street and ensure that they are clearly visible and directly connected to the public sidewalk.

Ensure that there is barrier free access at the ground level of all buildings.

### Signage

Create a coordinated program of signage that is consistent but not identical.

Integrate retail signage into the design, it should not overwhelm or clash with the architectural expression of the building.

Avoid the use of back-lit sign boxes, billboards, freestanding signs and roof signs.

### Focal Points & Gateways

Create focal points and gateways in appropriate locations. Larger scale sites with multiple buildings may have multiple focal points and/or gateways into the site.

Consider views and sightlines, particularly for pedestrians, when choosing the location and nature of focal points.

Focal points on commercial sites may be built-form elements, outdoor amenity spaces, landscape features, public art installations or a combination thereof.

Design buildings in corner locations with unique and expressive architectural elements and enhanced landscapes to highlight key intersections or gateway locations.

### Wayfinding

Appropriate wayfinding is critical to the safe and convenient functionality of low-rise commercial and mixed-use buildings. Integrate wayfinding design into the project in the overall.
### Site Design

#### Inclusive Design

| **Safety** | Design low-rise commercial and mixed-use buildings using CPTED design principles. A CPTED Report may be required. Design the site layout, building placement and orientation, landscape design, lighting design and pedestrian pathways/shared spaces to maximize user comfort and safety. |
| **Universal Design** | Provide equivalent means for all users to encounter, navigate and experience the site, particularly when accessing building entrances and utilizing outdoor shared spaces. |
| **Age & Family Friendly Design** | Prioritize the safety of children and older users when designing site circulation, driveways and parking areas. Ensure good visibility for people at all eye levels, including mobility aide users and the very young. |
| **Social Infrastructure** | Avoid hostile design, or any design approaches intended to exclude or inhibit use by vulnerable members of our community. Integrate community services where appropriate. |
| **Arts & Culture** | Art installations and cultural programs are not often associated with low-rise commercial and mixed use building. However, they often act as community focal points and therefore represent excellent opportunities to integrate local arts and culture initiatives and can help prevent arts & culture deserts from forming in our neighbourhoods. |

#### Sustainability

| **Health & Well Being** | Design sites for the convenient and comfortable use of pedestrians and cyclists. For larger sites, provide pedestrian/cyclist options that encourage walking/cycling between destinations, rather than returning to a car after each stop and parking elsewhere on site. |
| **Design for Climate Change** | Low-rise commercial and mixed-use buildings are not an effectively sustainable typology by default and all opportunities should be explored to incorporate sustainable design features which lessen their environmental impacts. Implement sustainable materials, construction practices and energy-efficient designs. Provide high-albedo or green roof design for all flat roof surfaces. Green roofs are particularly encouraged on larger roofs such as those associated with large format retail. |

#### Design for Outdoor Comfort

| **Microclimates** | Provide pedestrian shelter at or near primary building entrances and in amenity spaces to protect against wind, rain and snow while providing a mixture of direct sunlight and shade. Mitigate against high winds by creating substantive vegetative buffers where appropriate. Avoid building designs with long, flat walls which can accelerate winds. |
| **Four Season & Winter City Design** | Preserve access to sunlight during winter conditions, particularly along pedestrian circulation routes, in shared spaces and in front of primary building entrances. Use light and colour to create warmth and vibrancy during the winter months. |
### SHARED SPACES

#### Outdoor Amenity
Locate outdoor shared spaces to maximize their accessibility and utility to users, especially pedestrians and cyclists. Locate in areas of high pedestrian traffic, near primary building entrances, and close to the public realm.

Design open spaces to include a combination of hard and soft landscaping, pedestrian lighting, seating options and other amenities.

Integrate a variety of open spaces with buildings throughout the site to function as focal points/gathering places.

Provide accessible seating and bicycle parking that is conveniently located near building entrances.

Preserve and integrate healthy existing mature trees into the design of public open space.

Consider providing pedestrian plazas at the corners of public street intersections which includes landscaping, a variety of hard surface materials, textures and colours, seating, resting, leisure and recreational opportunities, integrated signage and public art.

#### Landscaping
Use landscape buffers to screen parking, loading and servicing from adjacent uses and public views.

Create tree-lined streets with a full, continuous canopy, where possible.

Plant trees wherever possible within on-site landscaped areas, including landscape boulevards.

Provide hard and soft landscaping between the built form and public right of way to create a more pedestrian-friendly urban condition.

Use landscaping to accentuate, unify and complement different areas of the site.

#### Pedestrians & Cyclists
Design sites to provide multiple clear and connected pedestrian and cycling connections to different units, parking areas and open spaces.

Maximize sidewalk width along storefronts and public streets.

Provide mid-block pedestrian connections through parking lots and between buildings.

Define pedestrian routes with landscaping, trees, street furniture, and surface materials. Where pedestrian crossings exist over drive aisles, they are to be of a contrasting material.

Provide publicly accessible bicycle parking in close proximity to primary building entrances.

#### Public Art
Pursue opportunities to integrate public art into low-rise commercial and mixed-use buildings.

Associate public art with the public realm and outdoor amenity spaces.

Locate public art to be accessible to pedestrians, avoiding traffic islands or parking boulevards.
SITE FUNCTION

Vehicular Access & Parking

Locate surface and structured parking away from public street frontage, preferably at the rear of the buildings and internal to sites. If a parking structure must front onto a public street or open space, ensure that it contains active at-grade uses that animate the streetscape and enhance the pedestrian experience.

Minimize the number of driveway accesses into a site and design to mitigate potential conflicts with pedestrians and cyclists. Do not access sites from residential streets unless unavoidable.

Ensure that barrier free parking spaces have direct access to building entrances and are not placed across a drive aisle. Where unavoidable, maximize accessibility and safety with enhanced crossing design.

Locate bicycle public and user bicycle parking in secure and highly visible areas.

Ensure parking areas are connected to the building entrance via a pedestrian walkway.

Screen any surface parking area that is visible from the street through the landscape design.

Break up large parking areas through the use of different paving materials for pedestrian routes and landscaped islands. Avoid large, uninterrupted parking areas.

Diagram_ Le, a drive-through site layout that provides direct access from the sidewalk to the building, screens the driveways with landscaping on all sides, and balances the circulation patterns of pedestrians, motorists, and drive-through users.

Diagram_ Right, a drive-through site layout that puts pedestrians, motorists and drive-through users into conflict with one another, is not accessible from the public sidewalk, and features little vegetation or screening.

Servicing & Utilities

Locate loading and service areas away from street frontages or anywhere that might conflict with the public realm or pedestrian/cycling movement.

Service, loading and waste storage areas are to avoid negative impacts on the public realm, including visual, noise, and odour impacts.

Store goods within buildings and dedicated outdoor locations (such as garden centres) that do not conflict with pedestrian and cyclist circulation.

Locate transformers away from public views.

Screen rooftop mechanical elements, HVAC and utility meters from public view.

Drive-Through Facilities

Design drive-through facilities to be compatible with the desired urban form of the area and the public realm.

Ensure that no part of a drive-through facility is located between the building and street.

Design drive-through facilities to a high CPTED standard.

Minimize possible conflicts with pedestrians, cyclists and other motorists.