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Brandon, Manitoba must plan a livable, connected, healthy, and social downtown within an age-friendly lens. A close focus on streets, in particular, the design of downtown sidewalks, will make Brandon a better place for older adults.

A broad focus on precedence research that draws from a variety of resources will inform and help develop a proposal for making Downtown Brandon more age-friendly.

NACTO, Urban Street Design Guide

“Designs that create a high-quality experience at street level will enhance the economic strength of commercial districts and the quality of life of neighbourhoods.”
(p. 40)¹

The sidewalks subsection under NACTO’s *Urban Street Design Guide* addresses the important role sidewalks play for people in cities. The guide elaborates on **four zones of the sidewalk**:

- Frontage Zone: The section of the sidewalk that functions as an extension of the building.
- Pedestrian Through Zone: The primary, accessible pathway that runs parallel to the street.
- Street Furniture/Curb Zone: The through zone in which street furniture and amenities, such as lighting, benches, newspaper kiosks, utility poles, tree pits, and bicycle parking are provided (Fig. 1).
- Enhancement/Buffer Zone: The space immediately next to the sidewalk that may consist of curb extensions, parklets, stormwater management features, parking, bike racks, bike share stations, and curbside bike lanes or cycle tracks. (p. 38-39)²



Figure 1. Design Recommendation: Two feet should be added to the absolute minimum clear path width to ensure that there is sufficient space for roadside hardware and snow storage

City of Edmonton, Ped Connections

A Strategy for Sidewalk Infrastructure in Edmonton Summary Report (City of Edmonton/Stantec) states sidewalks as animating society, from transportation and accessibility to community cohesiveness and viability. The everyday functions experienced in Edmonton communities involve walking, much of which takes place on sidewalks. The objectives of Ped Connections:

- Set a direction for the city’s sidewalk system toward improvements in walkability and active transportation.
- **Identify deficiencies in the sidewalk system and develop an approach to prioritization and funding.** (p. 2)³



Photo Credit: Ross Atkin Associates

Figure 2. Sight Line: Participant testing tactile and high contrast guarding equipment



Photo Credit: Ross Atkin Associates

Figure 3. Responsive Street Furniture: Loci Intelligent Bollard gives audible information on current location

Ross Atkin Associates, The Clever City

A designer and engineer based in London, England, Ross Atkin is interested in older adults, digital technology, and public space. His projects **intersect assistive technology, accessibility, and the clever city**:

- Elevator Info System: A mobile app that allows people to check the status of the London tube elevator to plan their journey with confidence.
- Sight Line for Sidewalk Construction (**Fig. 2**): People with visual impairments rely on predictability in their environment to navigate. Sight Line adds layers of tactile, high contrast visual information on signs and guarding equipment to help people identify changes to the street environment.
- Responsive Street Furniture (**Fig. 3**): Using digital technology to make streets work better for people with mobility issues, the collection of intelligent furniture includes the Loci Intelligent Bollard and Intelligent Monolith plus the I-Jumbo Smart Litter Bin. (Ross Atkins)⁵

“When a device or application can adapt, it will meet the needs of an individual more completely, rather than trying to be the best compromise between everyone.” (Ross Atkins)⁴

City of Melbourne, Outdoor Café Guide

The comprehensive document outlines design guidelines (**Fig. 4**) and requirements for establishing and managing outdoor cafes in the public environment, defined by the City of Melbourne as the common ground where all people can access and enjoy cultural, social, and recreational activities.

Two key principles of the Outdoor Café Guide are Access and Design, plus Design and Heritage:

- Connected and accessible to prioritize pedestrian access networks and linkages.
- Inclusive and engaging to improve the design, amenity, safety and quality of the city’s public environment for all.
- Café furniture in and nearby cultural/heritage institutions should be unobtrusive and contemporary in style, appearance, materials, finishes and colours. (p. 4)⁶

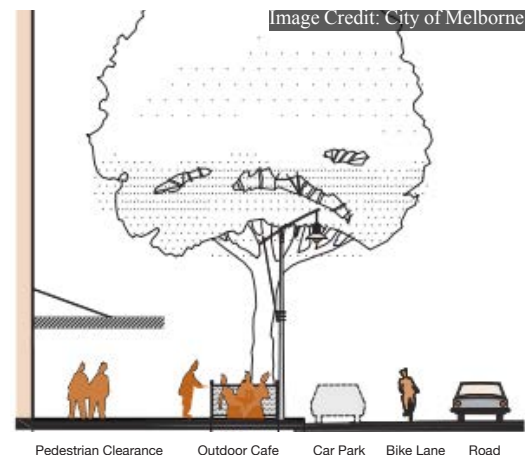


Figure 4. Outdoor Café Positioning in Streetscape



Image Credit: Center for Active Design

Figure 5. Seven Senses: How pedestrians experience the sidewalk?

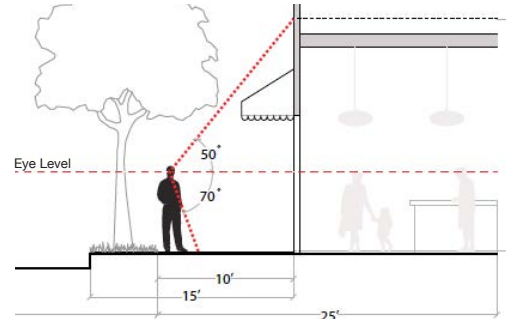


Image Credit: Center for Active Design

Figure 6. Human Scale: People experience the lower portion of the building facade, the tree, and the treatment of the closest lane of the road most intimately

Center for Active Design, Shaping the Sidewalk Experience

“By requiring sidewalks, asking for sidewalks, and carefully considering their design, those who shape the built environment can positively impact the health of communities.”
(p. 109)⁷

Active Design Supplement: Shaping the Sidewalk Experience specifies methods to guide policy makers, designers, and citizens in advocating for the pedestrian experience, for sidewalks that promote active design and healthy lifestyles. Shaping the Sidewalk Experience is broken down into three essential chapters to highlight methods of affecting the form of the sidewalk:

- The Experience: Key factors that contribute to an active sidewalk are sustainability and resilience, safety, human scale and complexity, continuous variety, connectivity, and accessibility (Fig. 5 and 6).
- The Physical Space: The pedestrian experience occurs within the “sidewalk room” and its four planes; the ground plane, the roadside plane; the canopy, and the building side plane (Fig. 7).
- The Policies: The physical elements that define sidewalks are regulated by codes and policies. Zoning By-Laws specifically offer a strong influence on the outcome of shaping the sidewalk experience.(p. 12)⁸

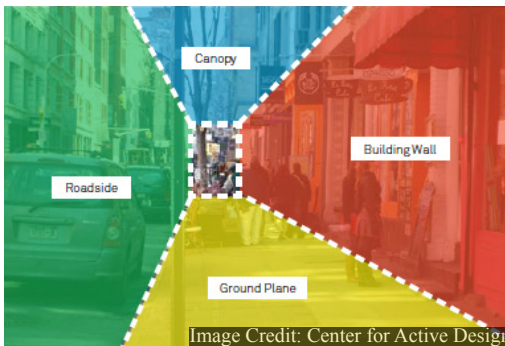


Image Credit: Center for Active Design

Figure 7. The Sidewalk Room: Conceptualizing the sidewalk as a room with four planes. The complex interaction of players, policies, and physical elements shape the pedestrian experience of the sidewalk

Final Thoughts

There are collaborations, civic governments, and citizens around the globe leading a charge in shaping our downtowns for people by (re)thinking, (re)connecting, and re(designing) our **sidewalks for people**.

Downtowns must design high quality sidewalk experiences to create viable downtown economies; prioritize and fund strategies and projects to improve walkability in cities; integrate flexible and adaptable technology into the urban fabric, adhere to design guidelines that enhance and respect the common ground, and shape the sidewalk experience that in turn shapes the physical space that in turn shapes planning policies.

As a beginning, a downtown sidewalk analysis provides a lasting model of our cities, one that responds to the questions: How and Where people want to live? Why people need connected environments? How people will be (more) healthy and active? And How and Where people will be (more) social within the pedestrian realm?

#Sidewalks4People

Sources

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7. Ibid., p. 109