



June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015

City of London  
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Attention: Planning and Environment Committee,

Thank you for seeking the Child Care Advisory Committee's feedback regarding the Urban Design Manual and the Downtown Design Manual. It is obvious that much hard work and countless hours have gone into these guidelines. The following feedback is intended to provoke thought and assist you as you move towards finalizing these manuals. In taking a "people first" design philosophy, planning needs to consider the perspective of all Londoners, including children and their families.

The importance of "Child Friendly Cities" is often lost when planning the foundations of great cities. UNICEF highlights this importance to municipalities world-wide with their document, *Building Child Friendly Cities: A Framework for Action*." This document reminds us that there are huge costs to society if city leaders do not address the needs of children (UNICEF, p. 5). Surrey, British Columbia is an example of a city that has embraced this framework and has created their own unique strategy. Surrey's vision of a child and youth friendly city includes, amongst other visions, "a community that promotes social connectedness, where children and youth feel safe, have freedom of movement, green space and opportunities for play and imagination" (City of Surrey, p. 3).

It is not necessary to have a separate manual of guidelines for creating a child friendly city if other manuals make special considerations. Although children are only specifically mentioned three times within the Urban Design Manual (pages 31, 32, and 51), many of the guidelines mentioned benefit this age group. The following points highlight key recommendations to making the Urban Design Manual more child, youth and family friendly:

- Site organization should include priority parking for young families (often with strollers and multiple children) to increase accessibility and promote safety
- Initiatives are currently underway to promote active transportation in childhood. All of these initiatives, including "walking school buses," rely on enhancing the connectivity within our city. Emphasis should be given to ensure direct and safe routes to schools. This includes strategically placed crosswalks, speed barriers and buffers between sidewalks and all roads

- As newer subdivisions are planned and created, parks and parkettes will help to create family friendly environments. Consideration into recreational equipment needs to go beyond the traditional metal jungle-gyms to include natural elements created out of tree trunks, rocks and ropes (this concept has proven to be popular at some London schools and child care centres). Current research supports the value of natural play spaces. Some of this research has been highlighted by the Toronto District School Boards document, *Landscape and Child Development: A Design Guide for Early Years-Kindergarten Play-Learning Environments*. Again, child safety is a key factor to consider with all parks, including barriers to block children from traffic

The Downtown Design manual has no specific mention of children or families. Much effort is being taken to attract young, working professionals to our city's core. As these young adults move on to the next stage in their lives and marry and have children, they may look elsewhere in the city to raise their families. There are many benefits to increasing the number of families living downtown. Some of these benefits, as highlighted by International Making Cities Livable (2015), include supporting local businesses and providing a unique market to attract new businesses downtown and reducing the ecological footprint of families. In order to keep families downtown, it needs to be an attractive place for children. There are currently few licenced child care centres and recreation facilities catering to families in this area. At a recent literacy conference held in London, Dr. Kathy Hirsch-Pasek, a psychologist from Temple University in Philadelphia, introduced the notion of making cities more interactive for children. Things as simple as interesting architecture and building design can fuel a child's imagination and create opportunities for conversation. Her other ideas include interactive puzzles on bus shelters, street lighting that illuminates pictures onto the sidewalks and permanent sidewalk games like hopscotch. This is similar to the notions of "clever cities" or "responsive cities" to increase accessibility.

The Child Care Advisory Committee recognizes that we are but one of the many groups that you are consulting on these manuals. We ask that you consider the feedback we've made as you move forward and hope that you recognize the necessity for these manuals to support children and families. Below are links for the documents we have referenced along with others that support our thoughts:

<http://childfriendlycities.org/>

<http://www.surrey.ca/community/3191.aspx>

<http://www.livablecities.org/articles/why-it-important-have-children-living-downtown>

<http://www.evergreen.ca/downloads/pdfs/Landscape-Child-Development.pdf>

<http://www.earthscapeplay.ca/>

<http://rethinkingchildhood.com/>

Sincerely,

Child Care Advisory Committee