Design that takes plans off the shelf and into the public.

BY AARON LAO
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Planning Visually is about using visual design to better engage the public on planning topics. The report includes six Key Considerations for designers:

Part 1: Planning

Designers must first decide what they want to convey by thinking through a communications plan.

MESSAGE
- Have a clear hierarchy of messages you want to convey
- Identify the main message, key points, and supporting details; edit out everything else
- Frame content as messages with a perspective and conclusion, not simply as topics

AUDIENCE
- Readers have different levels of engagement: they may skim, absorb, or analyze the content
- Frame the content in relation to the public’s everyday lives and avoid jargon
- To meet the diverse preferences of different readers, use a variety of document types

MEDIUM
- People interact with different media in different ways: tailor your design to a specific medium
- Consider the characteristics of each medium: level of detail, reading environment, etc.
- Create a communications plan that encompasses your message, audience, and medium.

PERCEPTION
- Use how people perceive to help convey your message
- Highlight key elements using contrast, so they stand out
- Group related elements using similarity or proximity
- Build reader expectations to facilitate quicker understanding
- Break up content into chunks to make a page easier to process

LAYOUT
- The layout should form a visual hierarchy that reinforces your hierarchy of messages
- The main message should be big and bold, the first thing you see
- Key points should be easily scanable, and supporting details should recede
- Blank space can be used to draw focus to the main point

REPRESENTATION
- Certain types of visuals are best suited for certain types of information
- More abstract visuals can bring focus to a specific idea
- More realistic visuals are busier, but are easier to understand and resemble how we perceive
- A combination of representation types may be necessary

Part 2: Visuals

Designers then go through the design process to craft the visuals that will best communicate their message.

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Introduction

How can planners use visual design to better engage the public?
Engaging with the public is a core part of planning. This requires two-way communication: presenting ideas, listening to feedback, and sharing what was heard. While planners strive to engage the public, the material they produce often fails to do so. Plans become jargon-filled walls of text that stay sitting on the shelf, when they should be shared.

Visual design is one of the best tools planners have to communicate better. Visual design is the process of crafting how a document looks, including text, images, layout, colour, and more.

Planning Visually explores the basics of visual design, and how it can be used to create more engaging material. It is intended for planners that are new to design, but recognize its importance.

How to Read This Report: Planning Visually is divided into six sections, one for each of the six Key Considerations for design. Part One: Planning discusses the thinking that must happen before designing can begin, and includes three Key Considerations: Message, Audience, and Medium. Part Two: Visuals includes three Key Considerations for making graphics: Perception, Layout, and Representation.

In each section, readers will find an explanation of how each Key Consideration contributes to more effective communication. Each section also contains Takeaways that summarize the main point, Case Studies from real plans, and How-To pages that provide specific instructions. Link icons found throughout the report allow the reader to find out more about a topic or example.
Is visual design about beauty and aesthetics?

No. At least, not entirely. A document may look beautiful, but might not convey its message clearly. Aesthetics matter to visual design insofar as it helps to attract the reader, and support the communication of the main message. Designers often make the mistake of sacrificing clear communication to create a document that may look better, but ends up meaning less.

Is visual design about following a set of rules?

No. There is not a magic set of design rules that will make your design effective. Planners must experiment over and over again to find something that works for each unique project.

Good visual design is tailored to communicate a specific message, through a specific medium, to a specific audience. That being said, there are some general considerations that can apply to every design, which this report begins to explore.

Is visual design about using more pictures?

No. While visuals are definitely underused in traditional planning material, that doesn’t mean that planners should just place images into documents for the sake of it.

Good visual design is about having images, text, and even blank space interact to form a unified product. Planners have to consider how each element might enhance or detract from the intended message.
Ecosystem conditions comparison

The Puget Sound Regional Council’s Vision 2040 document effectively uses three similar illustrations, allowing readers to quickly compare three distinct types of ecosystems.

- Ways to Improve Ecosystem Conditions
  Source: John Owen, MAKERS Architecture and Urban Design

- Natural Ecosystem Conditions
  Source: John Owen, MAKERS Architecture and Urban Design

Takeaway: VISUAL DESIGN IS ABOUT EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION.

The goal of visual design is to ensure the recipient accurately understands the intended message. The content of this entire report is based on this principle. This report contains six Key Considerations planners should make when designing, divided into two parts. The two parts reflect the steps designers must take to communicate well: designers must first plan what they want to communicate (Part One), and then craft the visuals to best convey that (Part Two).

Part One: Planning

MESSAGE: the information
AUDIENCE: the intended receiver
MEDIUM: the chosen formats

PERCEPTION: how visual information is processed
LAYOUT: how elements on a page are arranged
REPRESENTATION: how information is displayed

Part Two: Visuals

PERCEPTION: how visual information is processed
LAYOUT: how elements on a page are arranged
REPRESENTATION: how information is displayed
Part One: Planning
What are your main message, key points, and supporting details?

To communicate effectively, you first need to know exactly what it is you want to say. Your content should form a hierarchy of messages.

- **Main Message**
  This is the key takeaway for your reader. Every part of the design should reinforce the main message.

- **Key Points**
  These sub-sections support the main message. Each chapter of a plan may have its own key points.

- **Supporting Details**
  Deep analysis for readers who have expressed interest in knowing more. Casual readers may skip this content.

- **Non-Essential Content**
  Remove anything not essential to the main message; more content does not always mean greater understanding.

- **Appendices**
  Related but non-essential information can always be placed in an appendix, or a separate reference document.
Your main message should not simply be a topic. A **topic** just introduces a subject area, taking a neutral stance.

A **message** takes a perspective and clarifies exactly what you want to say about the topic. It leads to a conclusion.

**Takeaway:**

**Know your hierarchy of messages, because it focuses your content and changes your design.**

Having a clear sense of the main message focuses your content, allowing you to remove any material that does not reinforce the main message. The resulting content should be brief and clear, easy for readers to consume. When the hierarchy of messages is unclear, documents become wordy, unfocused, and difficult to read.

Knowing the message also changes the design of your visuals. As explored further in Part Two: Visuals, the type of representation you choose depends directly on what you want to communicate. The map below and the case study on page 22 show how the design of a map can change dramatically due to the main message.

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**Message**

- Walking, cycling and transit will be preferred transportation options.
- Bus rapid transit connects locals to new economic opportunities.
- Character areas define the type of development allowed in different parts of the West End.
- Section 37 is an essential tool for building healthier neighbourhoods.

**Topic**

- Green Transportation in Vancouver
- Bus Rapid Transit and the Economy
- West End Character Areas
- Section 37 of Ontario’s Planning Act

This map includes unconventional coloured wedges under each street. The main message here is that certain roads in Queenstown are quite steep, so the design of the map is distorted to show this.
Case Study: GREENEST CITY 2020 ACTION PLAN
This multi-part plan for the City of Vancouver sets ambitious goals for sustainability. The use of clear messages provides a focus to the policies the City will pursue to meet its sustainability goals.

Main Message
Vancouver will become the greenest city in the world by the year 2020.

Key Point
Pursuing a green economy can allow for continued prosperity while combating climate change.

Key Point
City policies will prioritize walking, cycling, and transit, so they become the preferred transportation options.

Key Point
Vancouver will lead in the construction of energy-efficient green buildings.

Supporting Details
Definition of green jobs and an inventory of local green industries.

Supporting Details
Analysis of existing pedestrian and cycling road network.

Supporting Details
Discussion of financing tools and incentives for green buildings.

Appendices
Statistical table with metrics on progress toward targets.

Case Study: COASTAL CONNECTIONS
This proposal for bus rapid transit (BRT) in Malindi, Kenya was created by students at the School of Community & Regional Planning as part of an international urban design competition through UN HABITAT. The main message emphasizes the effectiveness of the proposed solution in reaching Malindi’s goals.

Main Message
Bus rapid transit presents the best opportunity for Malindi to reach its development goals.

Key Point
BRT connects important sites along Malindi’s coast.

Key Point
BRT creates economic opportunities for locals, including informal settlers.

Key Point
BRT can be implemented at a low cost, compared to other forms of transit.

Supporting Details
Map of key tourist attractions, markets, public spaces, resorts, etc.

Supporting Details
Diagram of accessibility for residents of informal settlements.

Supporting Details
List of potential revenue sources and other funding options.

Non-Essential Content
Tourist destinations and sites not serviced by proposed BRT line.
Case Study: LONDON UNDERGROUND MAP

The London Underground map, redesigned in 1933 by Harry Beck, shows how understanding the main message behind a project can significantly change the design.

The map is meant to be used within the subway system, primarily to find the quickest way to connect from your current station to your destination station. Details such as the exact distance between station or the path of the tunnel underground are irrelevant.

The underground map should focus on clearly showing the order of stations on each line. A conventional street map, in contrast, would show the geographic location of station, along with other aboveground landmarks.

With this intent in mind, Beck greatly simplified the depiction of the London Underground system, prioritizing the reader’s ability to scan the map quickly. This is just one iteration in a long history of Underground maps.

Previous design (1919)
- Reflects the real geography, showing actual path of tunnels and streets around each station
- Clutters busy downtown area, while spread out suburban area occupies most of map
- Maintains winding paths, making it difficult to quickly scan the series of stations along each line

Revised design by Harry Beck (1933)
- Distorts geography and removes excess street information; simplified river is only landmark
- Expands the busy downtown area, while compressing sparse suburban areas
- Straightens out and simplifies paths; horizontal, vertical, and 45-degree lines allow for quick scanning
Planning is just one of many topics competing for attention in people’s busy lives. Planners must consider the audience’s level of engagement.

Do people want to skim, absorb, or analyze the document?

**SKIM**
Reading superficially to get an overall sense of the document

**ABSORB**
Reading receptively to understand the document

**ANALYZE**
Reading critically to evaluate the document

**Reader Profile:** busy, only aware of major planning projects if seen on the news, is easily bored by policy

**Content:** main takeaways only, lots of images and minimal text

**Level of Detail:** very few details, but information on where to learn more

**Example:** “The Future of Vancouver’s Viaducts” brochure

**Reader Profile:** curious about their neighbourhood, open to learning about policies that affect them

**Content:** focused on issues affecting the public, images, easy-to-read text

**Level of Detail:** main message and key points, with some supporting details

**Example:** Downtown Eastside Plan Community Newsletter

**Reader Profile:** engaged in civic affairs and planning, seeks to influence policy

**Content:** may contain more text, technical data, and more details

**Level of Detail:** evidence, reasoning, and process behind policy decisions

**Example:** West End Community Plan

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**AUDIENCE**

How will you engage your intended audiences, given their preferences?
People care about planning when they see how it affects them day-to-day. Policy-makers must be aware of this. Public-facing planning documents must clearly address issues of importance to community members.

**Community Member**

- Will this development impact the views from my window?
- Where is the nearest daycare, community centre, and library?
- How will the proposed building look once it is complete?
- Will my friends be able to find street parking when they visit?
- Is a tower this high right for my neighbourhood?

**Policy-Maker**

- Does this development adhere to view cone restrictions?
- Does this neighbourhood meet the required population ratio for community amenities?
- Does the proposed building conform to the building code and urban design principles?
- What is the right parking ratio? How can the City support active transportation options?
- How can any land lift be captured to fund City priorities like affordable housing?
A planning process must reach out to many different types of people: from the highly engaged activist, to the casual participant with just ten minutes to spare, from the resident at their local corner store, to the policy-maker considering the region’s long-term strategic plan. There is no one document that can effectively communicate to all these groups.

Instead, planners must consider all the relevant stakeholders, consider their level of engagement and issues of importance, and then design a series of materials based on these audiences’ needs.

▲ Brochures
Readers could quickly skim this brochure to gain a broad introduction to the planning process. It folds out into a blank map, inviting people to envision their own plan for the Flats.

Case Study:
FALSE CREEK FLATS PLANNING PROCESS

The False Creek Flats process used a communications plan that identified multiple methods the planners could use to reach stakeholders with different interests and levels of engagement.

These diverse elements of the process were tied together by cohesive branding, which gave a clear identity to the Flats, and built familiarity with the public.

▲ 'I Wish My Flats’ ideas stickers
Open house attendees could write a simple one-liner of feedback on these stickers, providing an easy form of engagement for those with little time.

Takeaway:
USE A VARIETY OF DOCUMENTS, EACH DESIGNED TO ADDRESS THE LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT AND INTERESTS OF YOUR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES.
THE FLATS
Area Profile: An Overview of Your False Creek Flats

'Favourites' and 'Challenges' map
Locals familiar with the Flats shared their personal experience by identifying locations as ‘Favourite Flats’ or ‘Big Flats Challenges’.

Online feedback tool
Members of the public not at an event could write their thoughts and identify their favourites and challenges via an online tool.

The Flats Area Profile
Planners produced the visually-rich Area Profile to introduce and frame the site. Curious people reading the document receptively could get an overview of the Flats.
The Flats launch event open house boards (May 2015)
The boards for the Launch Event are quite general, meant as an introduction to the Flats for people who may be unfamiliar with the site. The boards posed 12 conversation-starting key questions, which readers could skim to get an overall sense of the key issues for the site.

The Flats emerging directions open house boards (February 2016)
A follow-up open house introduced emerging directions for the plan, based on initial feedback. The boards have more detail than at the Launch Event, as attendees are likely open to deeper engagement, and were reading to absorb information about potential policies.

Prior/Venables replacement open house boards (March 2016)
This open house focused specifically on options to replace the current thoroughfare on Prior and Venables Streets. The material presents policy in greater detail, as attendees were expected to read critically and analyze the two options, not just skim or absorb it.

The Flats Phase 1 Update: Summary of Public Input
This summary of public input not only reflects the feedback received during public consultation, but also captures the interest of casual readers by including the hand-written notes and Instagram photos from real Vancouverites.
How do people interact with the types of media you are using?

Planners must be aware of how people interact with different media, and make design decisions accordingly. Consider how somebody might interact with five common media:

- **Planning Reports**: Read individually and quietly at a desk.
- **Open House Boards**: Seen over others’ shoulders at a crowded event.
- **Presentations**: Viewed while listening to a long presentation.
- **Brochures**: Skimmed quickly, and perhaps distractedly.
- **Web Graphics**: Noticed while casually browsing social media.
The way people take in information from various media can be quite different. Designers need to design specifically for each medium. This table lists some of the considerations to make for five common media, and the takeaways for design.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>PLANNING REPORT</th>
<th>OPEN HOUSE BOARD</th>
<th>PRESENTATION</th>
<th>BROCHURE</th>
<th>WEB GRAPHIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To detail and explain a plan, from general vision to policy details</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To provide detailed information on a specific topic</td>
<td>To introduce a topic or idea to the general public.</td>
<td>To introduce a topic or idea to a wide online audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>READING ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>Usually in a quiet, private space, sitting down</td>
<td>Standing in a loud, public space, reading over other's shoulders</td>
<td>Quiet, public, sitting in an audience, listening</td>
<td>Bustling, may not be the main focus of reader's attention</td>
<td>On a small screen, while scrolling through social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAFF PRESENCE</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL OF DETAIL</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</td>
<td>Appendix, technical report</td>
<td>Handout, resource binder</td>
<td>Links to resources</td>
<td>Link to webpage</td>
<td>Link to webpage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>READER ENGAGEMENT</td>
<td>Medium-High (absorb, analyze)</td>
<td>Medium (absorb)</td>
<td>Medium (absorb)</td>
<td>Low (skim)</td>
<td>Low (skim)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTENDED READER ACTION</td>
<td>To understand the plan and its context</td>
<td>To provide feedback on specific aspects of a planning process</td>
<td>To understand a specific topic and potentially engage further</td>
<td>To become aware of a topic and want to learn more</td>
<td>To understand a single, simple idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAKEAWAY FOR DESIGN</td>
<td>Provide a clear structure, make text easy to read, highlight key messages</td>
<td>Keep graphics large and clearly legible, so people can refer to them when speaking</td>
<td>Use simple, supporting visuals to enhance, not compete with, the verbal presentation</td>
<td>Ensure your main message is clear, eye-catching, and compels the reader to find out more</td>
<td>Create graphics that are legible at small sizes, eye-catching, and easy to share</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The table above is a simplified representation of the considerations for design across different media. Each medium has unique characteristics that impact how information is presented and received.
The West End Community Profile is a planning report that provides detailed information for policy-makers, but is also accessible to the general public. Each page uses an image to explain the key message, as opposed to just blocks of text. Any resident interested in their neighbourhood could easily flip through the profile.

**Evolution of Built Form in the West End**

This timeline combines the West End’s policy history with easy-to-understand illustrations of building types in the area, and photos of local examples. This graphic format effectively explains policy trends in a way that is easier to comprehend than text.

**Housing types infographic**

This graph succinctly shows that smaller, high-rise apartment units are prevalent in the West End.

**Population density infographic**

The graph—the page’s focal point—clearly shows the main message, and is not subservient to the text.

**Mini-Parks**

Photos are not just placed alongside text, but are integrated with text to explain the elements of a mini-park.

**Housing**

**Demographics**

**Introduction & Context**

**Table of Contents**

**Introduction**

**Neighbourhood Character**

**Heritage**

**Transportation**

**Local Economy**

**Population density infographic**

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Case Study: FOUR CORNERS OPEN HOUSE BOARDS

The Bathurst and Bloor intersection is a prominent site in Toronto. The open house consultation for the area needed to engage people and effectively frame the conversation to garner good feedback.

- **Existing site and study scope**
  The first board in the open house introduces the site. A large map allows staff to point and refer to key landmarks if necessary, while the list of topics for the study helps frame participant expectations for the planning process.

- **4 Corners emerging principles**
  As a way to frame the open house, a simple board clearly stating the general principles for the site help frame the conversation for participants. This gives the public an idea of what to assess the emerging policies against, and focuses the feedback the City receives.

**Bathurst - Bloor 4 Corners**

**Emerging Principles**

Bathurst-Bloor is a diverse, historic and walkable hub of activity. The fine grain, small-scale character creates a sense of place and opportunities for the spontaneous and casual interactions which support public life. It is a central gathering place located at the heart of four neighbourhoods where people can meet while shopping, running errands or on the way to a park, event, or cultural activity.

- Continue the tradition of small scale, pedestrian-friendly streets and blocks
- Transition development downwards in scale towards Neighbourhoods to be compatible with low-rise housing
- Maintain the character, scale and format of existing buildings
- Locate any increase in height or density at the intersection of Bloor-Bathurst
- Reduce any increase in height or density of the intersection of Bloor-Bathurst
- Public realm improvements
- Pedestrian and cycling connections
- Heritage conservation
- Open space & parks
- Relationship of transit stations with surroundings
- Built form
- Range of residential unit sizes & affordability
- Land use

Use the dots provided to indicate your opinion:

- Agree
- Disagree
- Not Sure

Use the Post-It notes provided to write additional comments below

Feedback on proposed policy

The design of these boards facilitate participation by members of the public in different ways. Images and bullet points illustrate a policy proposal, and people can use a sticker to indicate their reaction, or provide a more detailed written response on a sticky note.
Case Study: ‘UNAPOLOGETICALLY URBAN’ PRESENTATION

This presentation by Jennifer Keesmaat, the City of Toronto’s Chief Planner, emphasizes Toronto’s urban future, and then introduces the many planning initiatives underway in the city.

The use of bold, compelling images shows how presentation slides should be used to advance your main message in coordination with the verbal presentation. While words may not effectively convey the transformation that is possible for the space under the Gardiner Highway, the rendering on the opposite page does so immediately and powerfully.

”Toronto is becoming unapologetically urban”

Bold graphics succinctly reinforce the main message that Toronto is urbanizing quickly, including a graph of downtown’s growing population and a model of the densifying skyline.

Comparison with other cities

Consistent title page slides break the presentation into clear sections that together advance the main narrative. Slides with comparable statistics show the opportunity for Toronto to urbanize further.

Ongoing planning initiatives

Finally, the narrative pivots to ongoing planning initiatives, and the ambitious urban spaces that are possible as Toronto becomes even more unapologetically urban.

Full-screen images provide vivid imagery for each of the planning initiatives being introduced verbally. The use of renderings provides an aspirational vision of what can be achieved with each project.
Introduction to the process
A timeline and brief text provide enough context for somebody unfamiliar with the process.

The Future of Vancouver’s Viaducts

The Technical Findings

The Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts act as a barrier, cutting off neighbourhoods from the False Creek waterfront and each other.

City staff are recommending a replacement road network with a new Pacific Boulevard and Georgia Street Ramp.

The following infographics illustrate the technical lessons learned over the past two years.

Technical Findings

Viaducts Process Timeline

Positive Public Response

More Resilient Infrastructure

Reduced Maintenance Costs

Bigger, Better Park

VIADUCTS

Technical Findings

Vancouver.ca/viaducts

The Future of Vancouver’s Viaducts

Positive Public Response

69% of people agreed with the proposal to replace the viaducts in 2013.

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Case Study: WEB GRAPHICS

Web graphics present an opportunity to reach many people with a simple message. These examples show how planners can use the unique features of different types of web graphics to communicate simple, powerful ideas that people can learn more about and share on social media.

▲ Animation of the growth of Copenhagen’s public space network

This animated gif by Cities for People creates a looping mini slideshow showing the growth of Copenhagen’s public space network over 50 years. Animated gifs play automatically, and quickly grab a reader’s attention.

▲ Support for a safe cycling network in Toronto

This graphic presents a single, compelling statistic to raise awareness of and make the case for cycling infrastructure in Toronto.

▲ Comparison of transit, cycling, and private motor vehicles

The Cycling Promotion Fund re-created this popular set of photos comparing transportation modes. The thought-provoking image spurs interest, succinctly proves a point, and demands to be shared.
How Highways Wrecked American Cities’ video

Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook automatically play videos on mute. Media outlets have taken advantage of this by producing videos with compelling imagery and large captions (so it can be understood on mute), so viewers are forced to view the content.

Content like videos and animated gifs are valuable communications tools that only work electronically. This presents an opportunity not available to print media.

The public cost of suburban vs urban households

This graphic introduces a thought-provoking perspective on public costs that people may not have considered. The graphic does not explain how the values were derived, but provides a link so readers can learn more.

Photo albums

Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook allow users to easily browse through collections of photos. Planners can use this to display a set of infographics, photos, or even written statements.

- How Highways Wrecked American Cities’ video
- The public cost of suburban vs urban households
- Photo albums
Takeaway:

DESIGN FOR THE SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS OF EACH PARTICULAR MEDIUM.

The design for a brochure is necessarily very different from the design for open house boards on the same topic. Planners must consider every aspect of a chosen medium when making design decisions.

Note that this report only discusses media where visual design is involved. Planners should consider using formats such as radio, podcasts, phones, television, and more to fully engage the public.

How To:
CREATE A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

The three Key Considerations discussed thus far—Message, Audience, and Medium—represent all the planning that must occur before the visual design even begins. These considerations must interact and come together to create a holistic communications plan.

A communications plan summarizes this thinking, and lists the various messages, audiences, and media required to communicate a particular planning initiative.

For the planning initiative overall, determine:
- the purpose of the engagement
- the main message overall
- why somebody would be interested in this
- the timeframe of the engagement
- target audiences and their engagement level
- prior knowledge about the topic

Decide what products are required, such as:
- planning report
- brochures
- information sheets
- open house boards
- presentations
- statistical/reference document
- web site and social media outreach
- surveys or questionnaires

For each product, determine:
- the purpose of the document
- the main message of the document
- why somebody would be interested in this
- intended outcomes or reader actions
- level of reader engagement
- features and limitations of the medium
- length of document and level of detail
- amount of text vs images
Part Two: Visuals
PERCEPTION

How can the way people perceive be used to group, highlight, and simplify elements?

Designers must first understand how people perceive, if they are to create material that is easy to understand.

The brain can rapidly process basic visual information like general forms and shades, but detailed visual information is brought into focus and processed at a much slower rate.

Retina: The back part of the eye containing photoreceptor cells (rods and cones) that sense light and colour.
Fovea: A small group of sensors that allow for a limited field of sharp, focused vision. The eye must constantly move around to see different parts of an image in focus.
Optical Nerve: Carries sensory information to the brain.
LGN (Lateral Geniculate Nucleus): Relays sensory information to the visual cortex, and also begins processing shades of light and dark.
Visual Cortex: Processes visual information in stages, beginning with basic forms and increasing in complexity.
Prefrontal Cortex: Responsible for high-order processing and creates expectations that guide what we perceive.
The biology of how humans process visual information leads to three phenomena that designers can take advantage of to create clear, understandable documents.

１．Pre-attentive Processing

The brain constantly filters and interprets visual information subconsciously. It creates meaning before our conscious mind can even focus and interpret the image. Readers can draw meaning from a design without even having to consciously read the content.

The two forms of pre-attentive processing—bottom-up and top-down—are explained here.

**BOTTOM-UP PROCESSING**

In bottom-up processing, the brain makes meaning out of the low-detail forms the brain perceives before the content can be brought into focus. Since the fovea—which allows the eye to focus—is so small, much more information is perceived in this low-detail form than as a focused image.

In bottom-up processing, elements that are similar and close together appear grouped, while elements that with high contrast are highlighted.

How can designers use this?

Bottom-up processing means that designers can use basic form (colour, size, shape) to group or highlight elements. For example, even without reading the text, it is clear that the content of this page is grouped into three sections.

**TOP-DOWN PROCESSING**

In top-down processing, the brain uses prior knowledge and expectations to form conclusions before consciously processing the image.

For example, looking at a map, people know that the blue area is water, the box to the side is a legend, and up is north, before ever actually reading any of the labels on the map.

How can designers use this?

Designers should anticipate the reader’s expectations, and follow convention if possible. (e.g. place the main title at the top of the page.)

Designers can also create their own expectations within a document. If each chapter of a plan is a different colour, the reader knows there is a new topic when the colour changes.

**WORKING MEMORY**

Because the fovea only allows us to focus on a small area at a time, we have to temporarily hold information in our working memory.

Working memory can only hold 5-7 pieces of information at a time. The amount of effort and working memory needed to process something is known as Cognitive Load.

How can designers use this?

Designers should design material to reduce the cognitive load on the reader. This might mean only including one point per page in your document.

Designers can also reduce cognitive load by breaking up content into sections—to reduce the amount to take in at one time—and then guide the eye through a logical sequence.
Case Study: ENGAGED CITY TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT

This page from Vancouver’s Engaged City Task Force has been modified to show how graphics can send messages about the content before the reader even has a chance to process it. It reflects how the brain progressively processes visual information, starting from general shapes and colours, and then going into more detail.

**BOTTOM-UP PROCESSING**

The eye is drawn to the two big blocks of bright red, highlighting the title and section header. The space gap between the top and bottom parts of the page indicate there are two sections. The black lines in bottom section separate the elements into three distinct groups. However, the reader knows they are related, because of the repeated forms.

**TOP-DOWN PROCESSING**

In a Western context, content in the top-left of a page is expected to be most important. Without having read through this page, a reader can assume immediately that the text at the top is a title, at the top of the hierarchy.

The reader might also expect that the repeated yellow forms in the lower half page are related, sequential elements that form a list.

**WORKING MEMORY**

While there is a lot of content on this page, it is broken up clearly so that the reader can process one bit at a time and not be overwhelmed. This reduces the cognitive load and the working memory required to read the page.

The segments of the page are clearly sequenced, with introductory text at the top of the page, and a list of three distinct items afterward.

**Takeaway:**

**EFFECTIVE DESIGN WORKS WITH PEOPLE’S PERCEPTION TO MAKE THE MESSAGE EASIER TO UNDERSTAND.**
Gestalt Principles were developed from an early 20th-century German movement in psychology. Gestalt psychologists studied how humans perceive, especially how we come to understand individual elements as an organized whole. This is helpful for visual designers, who must lay out individual elements on a page into a meaningful, attractive whole.

To explore how Gestalt Principles can work with bottom-up processing, consider this set of 16 plain dots. The simple shapes simulate the general forms perceived during pre-attentive processing.

In the image above, everything is uniform. It is the pictorial equivalent of a plain-text document, where nothing stands out. How can Gestalt Principles be applied to help highlight and group particular dots?

Highlighting is used to emphasize the most important parts of the design, like a title stating the big take-away. The key to making elements pop is contrast, which can be achieved with:

- Colour
- Size
- Shape

The more different an element is from those around it, the more it will stand out. Designers sometimes make the mistake of trying to make every element stand out, resulting in a page where nothing stands out.

Instead, make only the main message pop, and let the details recede.
Plano Diretor Estratégico do Município de São Paulo

This spread in São Paulo's strategic plan is incredibly busy, with an edge-to-edge illustration of the city showing everything from bike racks to café tables. This particular graphic highlights features of transit-oriented development in the city.

To focus the reader's attention, the selective use of colour creates a strong contrast that highlights specific parts of the picture. The most important elements are highlighted with the strongest red, while less important elements are in a faded pink, and background buildings are in white.
Grouping helps readers connect related elements, like the answer to a frequently asked question. In these diagrams, 16 plain dots are instinctively formed into groups:

▲ This image is interpreted as four columns of four dots each, not four rows of dots, because each dot is closest to the others in its column.

▲ This set of dots is seen as four rows, because the dots in each row are the same colour. This also works using similarity in shape, size, etc.

▲ Even though these black dots are evenly spaced, the box and connecting line clearly identify two groupings.

▲ Musqueam Comprehensive Community Plan timeline

This timeline of the planning process undertaken by the Musqueam First Nation uses grouping to show three types of milestones: engagements, outputs, and key decisions.

The use of similarity (distinct graphics for each section), connection (arrow showing time), enclosure (dotted dividing lines) all reinforce the idea that there were three simultaneous aspects of the planning process.

1.0 INTRODUCTION
Similar graphic elements and a strong connecting feature—the Eglinton corridor itself—groups a page full of busy visuals into the three concepts that make up the public realm plan: connections, destinations, and edges.

The use of proximity links the legends with the appropriate diagrams, so they do not look like a separate sidebar.
TOP-DOWN PROCESSING

Use the reader’s expectations to create understanding.

Expectations can come from convention (page numbers are in the corner), or be built throughout the document via repetition (quick-reference boxes are in the left column). Repetition can also give the document a sense of unity.

This image shows a page from the West End Community Profile with the elements blurred out, simulating the pre-attentive processing that takes place before the fovea can bring the image into focus.

From convention, the reader expects the text at the top is a title for the map, while the group of elements to the right is a legend. Blue is water, and green is park space. A reader whose expectations have been built through reading the document knows that north is actually toward the top-left corner of the page, but a reader new to the document might assume that north is at the top.
Good Solutions Guide for Apartments

These spreads show how patterns can be used within documents to take advantage of top-down processing.

Three different page types are apparent without looking at the pages in detail. Each section’s title page has a very distinct, bold style, with large, minimal text. Special yellow pages have technical diagrams and minimal text. The white pages list policy details, illustrated with photos showing precedents. The reader has an idea of what to expect in the content just by taking in the colour of the page.
WORKING MEMORY

Break up content into small sections and guide the eye through the page.

Working memory can only hold 5-7 items. Busy layouts crammed with content can be overwhelming, as the eye tries to process too much at once.

Instead, break your content into chunks. Smaller, bite-sized elements are easier to process. This layout reduces the cognitive load.

Arrange the chunks in a logical order and guide the reader through a clear path, so they do not have to search for meaning.
What is a rezoning?

Every piece of land in the city has a zoning designation. But zoning can change. When it does, it’s called a rezoning.

You can propose a rezoning of your neighborhood, and so can the city, or a developer.

People sometimes refer to a particular rezoning as an “upzoning” if it increases the FAR or allowable building area in a neighborhood. A “downzoning” is a rezoning that decreases the FAR or allowable building area.

With clear sequencing, the reader does not have to search the entire page and process everything in order to understand the content. The reader knows that if they follow the sequence of bite-sized pieces of information, they will come to a full understanding.

↓ What is a rezoning?

These pages break down the complex topic of rezoning into small chunks that are easy to understand. The layout guides the reader on a logical path, from a general definition to more specific concepts.
How To: WORK WITH LARGE BLOCKS OF TEXT

Condensing: reduce the amount of text by editing out content, shortening sentences, and removing unnecessary words.

Chunking: break up the text into smaller sections and order them into a logical sequence.

Cueing: use headers to introduce the main point of each section and put space between the sections, making the text scannable.

Categorizing: differentiate between information types using repeated elements (block quotes, headers, bulleted lists, call-out boxes, etc.)

It may seem difficult to reduce the amount of text in a planning document, especially when describing complex policy details. Certainly, not everything can be displayed using graphics alone.

The following steps can help mitigate overwhelming walls of text, using the strategies described in this chapter. However, challenge yourself to show your content using visuals—blocks of text should be a last resort!
How can your visual hierarchy reinforce your hierarchy of messages?

Well-designed layouts support the effective communication of a message. Therefore, your layout should form a **visual hierarchy** that reinforces your hierarchy of messages (main message, key points, and supporting details).

Layout applies rules of perception to better communicate your message.

The rules from the last chapter can be used to highlight the main message and group content into key points. Breaking up the supporting details ensure they are organized and clear.
The visual hierarchy for a layout is like an inverted pyramid, with the visual weight of each item corresponding to its place in the hierarchy of messages. The **main message** should carry the most visual weight on a page, seizing the reader’s attention with the biggest elements and the greatest contrast.

The **key points** should be easy to find, but not fighting for attention. Readers should get an idea of your overall message by skimming the key points.

Supporting details cannot compete for attention. Layouts are often improved by toning down items that pull focus away from the main message.

**BIG & BOLD**

THE FIRST THING YOU SEE

Distinct and skimmable, but not the focus.

Does not pull the focus. Recedes.

---

**Main Message**

---

**Key Points**

---

**Supporting Details**
Takeaway:
USE A VISUAL HIERARCHY TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THE MOST IMPORTANT PARTS OF YOUR MESSAGE.

▲ No visual hierarchy
A page of text is the ultimate example of a layout with no visual hierarchy. This layout relies solely on the text to communicate; the reader’s ability to quickly perceive visual information from the layout is not taken advantage of at all. As a result, nothing on the page stands out. The main takeaway looks the same as a side-note.

▲ Strong visual hierarchy
It is clear which elements the designer is trying to emphasize in the layout above. The image and main title immediately grab the reader’s attention and state the main message. In the body of the layout, certain elements in blue stand out and guide the reader through the structure of the content. The supporting details remain in plain black text.
Case Study: FOUR DIFFERENT WAYS TO CREATE VISUAL HIERARCHY

These planning documents from Toronto and Vancouver have a similar layout, but emphasize different aspects of their content using hierarchy. Planners should always consider what ideas they wish to prioritize in their layouts. In each spread, the page’s main topic carries the most visual weight on the page. The large, colourful titles are paired with evocative, full-page photographs so that the subject of each page is very clear.

- **Section headers** (Chief Planner Roundtable, Volume 1)
  This page is designed to emphasize the different aspects of resiliency for the City of Toronto. The section headers use arrows and capitalized, bold text—easily visible, but not competing with the title for the reader’s attention.

- **Block quotes** (Chief Planner Roundtable, Volume 2)
  This page uses bright orange text to highlight two quotes from participants at the City of Toronto’s second set of roundtables with Chief Planner Jennifer Kleemaa. The quotes summarize two key points that advance the main narrative.

- **Images** (City of Toronto 2013 City Planning Annual Report)
  The key points for this report are the different planning initiatives taken on by the City of Toronto. A key image clearly defines each planning initiative, along with the bold subtitle text.

- **Highlighted summary statement** (Greenest City Action Plan)
  Here, bold text succinctly states the intent behind the city’s goal for clean air. The hierarchy of messages is reflected visually: the general topic—“Clean Air”—in the main title, the specific target in bold text, and finally the supporting details in small body text.
Case Study: WEST END CHARACTER AREAS

To illustrate how visual hierarchy can be applied to a layout, consider the following re-design of an open house board for the West End Community Plan. The board outlines three character areas for the neighbourhood guide development. How can the visual hierarchy be improved to make the message even clearer?

**BEFORE**

Strengths
- Effective grouping and colour-coding clearly shows three distinct areas
- Content is focused and accessible, with links readers can learn more
- Photos effectively convey the experience of each character area
- The map is simple and uncluttered, and large enough for interaction

Challenges
- Messaging on how the character areas guide development gets lost in the body text
- Large, bright purple bars are visually heavy, distracting from the content
- Two titles of equal rank in the hierarchy compete for attention
- Map legend has non-essential items

**AFTER**

- The title has been changed to include the idea that the character areas influence development. The bright purple is now used to draw the eye directly to the main message. The ‘West End Community Plan’ title has been moved. At an open house, another board would introduce the plan, giving context to this board.
- The change to a portrait orientation allows for a bigger map, as less room is taken up by the header and footer bars. A larger map is easier to interact with at an open house.
- A shortened legend focuses the content and allows for bigger text.
- A framing question helps put the main message of the board in terms that may resonate with the public. Blank space helps draw the eye to this text, and breaks up the board.
- Skimmable subtitles for each character area succinctly explain and emphasise the types of development.
- Bullets allow for less text.
- This smaller footer bar does not compete for attention.

vancouver.ca/westendplan
How To:
USE BLANK SPACE

Gestalt principles tell us that contrast causes elements to stand out. For something to attract the reader’s eye, it must be bigger and bolder than the elements around it. This is where blank space is invaluable.

Blank space does not compete for attention—it sits at the bottom of a visual hierarchy. Any element will look bigger and bolder than the blank space that surrounds it. The reader’s eye will immediately be drawn by the contrast.

Focus

To draw focus to your main point, don’t just make it bigger and bolder: Surround it with blank space.

\[\text{Focus with bold elements}\]
Above, the word ‘Focus’ is in all-caps, 30 pt, bold, bright red font.
Despite the fact that the central text is louder than all the arrows and leading lines around it, everything ends up competing for attention.

\[\text{Focus with blank space}\]
In contrast, this layout uses simple black text at half the size, 15 pt.
This layout firmly directs the reader’s attention to the centre of the page; there is nothing else to look at.
**How To:**

**MAKE AND BREAK THE GRID**

One of the best ways to create a professional-looking, cohesive document, is to use an underlying grid for your layout. Using a consistent grid to align all your page elements provides a sense of unity to the document.

### The six-column grid

Different documents use different underlying grids. This report uses the same grid throughout: six columns, with a half-inch margin.

### Flexible layouts

This particular grid gives flexibility while still maintaining unity. The author can choose either a two- or three-column layout for a page, or a combination, based on the content. Despite having many different layout styles, the document looks cohesive because of the underlying grid.

### Making the grid

Two-column layouts fit larger items (a big graphic or headline), while three-column layouts fit more items (multiple small diagrams, captions). It might be a combination of the two that works best for your content.

### Breaking the grid

If a grid has been clearly established, breaking it can be visually powerful. Consider using an unexpected layout to draw attention to a key point.
What types of representation best support your message?

There are many ways to represent the same content, but each type of representation conveys something different. Designers need to choose the right type of representation for what they want to communicate.
More abstract forms of representation aren’t bound by how people normally perceive. For example, the floor plan of a house—looking from a bird’s-eye view through the ceiling at all the rooms in the house—is something that people just cannot do. Abstract forms of representation distort the perspective to convey a specific idea, like the horizontal relationships between the rooms of a house. Abstract forms of representation can effectively communicate a particular concept in a focused way, since all the noise and extra information we would normally perceive can be removed. However, these graphics may be difficult for people to interpret, since they introduce such unfamiliar perspectives.

In contrast, more realistic forms of representation closely resemble how people normally perceive. These images are colourful and in 3D, and look like real life. These images can effectively convey the experience and feel of a space. To convey how cozy your living room feels, you would probably use a photo, not show a floor plan diagram.

However, more realistic representations can be ineffective at explaining a single, specific concept. The layout of a house is hard to capture using photos, for example. Another risk of realistic renderings is that they may seem like a final product. Draft concepts in an area plan, for example, should not have hard lines and too much detail, or the public may think the plan is complete.

Representation types range from the abstract to the realistic. The choice of which representation style to use depends on the type of information you want to communicate.

**MORE ABSTRACT**
Can effectively convey a specific concept, but may be difficult to interpret

▲ Abstract concept sketch
This sketch does not show any real buildings (there is no part of the West End that this sketch is actually based on), but it still clearly conveys the idea that new buildings must step down to the scale of the neighbourhood.

▲ Plan view diagram
This diagram removes unnecessary elements (roof structures, parked cars, street trees) to focus on only the essential elements: the dimensions of the lot and the building. An aerial photo would have been too cluttered.

▲ Section diagram
This diagram effectively shows the dimensions of a laneway structure by highlighting the building using yellow. A photo of the lane could not have directed the reader’s attention as effectively.

▲ 3D sketch diagram
This 3D sketch conveys the sense of space on a lot with infill structures. The sketch-like quality of the image suggests that this is just an exploration of how the buildings can look, not a final product for the neighbourhood.

**MORE REALISTIC**
Most closely resembles people’s everyday experience of the world, but message may get lost.

▲ 3D model
This 3D model shows how the West End might look fully developed under the West End Community Plan. Some observers might interpret this as how the West End will look (not how it might look) because of the realistic imagery.

▲ Rendering
This rendering conveys the full experience of being in a proposed plaza. The diagram does not need to be focused like the section diagram, because the image is meant to convey the overall feeling of being in a vibrant public space.
The type of representation you choose should also match the type of information on display:

- **Quantitative information**: Graph, chart
- **Geographical information**: Map, site plan
- **Temporal information**: Timeline, time series of images
- **Vertical relationships (exterior)**: Elevation diagram
- **Vertical relationships (interior)**: Section diagram
- **Horizontal relationships**: Plan diagram
- **Experiential information**: Renderings, illustration, photo
- **Process information**: Flow chart, influence diagram
- **Ordered set of information**: Searchable table
- **3D relationships**: Axonometric diagram, 3D model

Designers often use multiple forms of representation within a single document to show different aspects of the same subject. These graphics work in combination to give the reader a full understanding of the topic.
Lack of self-esteem

Using reserve as

REPRESENTATION

does the job more clearly and simply.

School in paragraphs of text, but an influence diagram

It is possible to explain, say, the impacts of Residential

use visuals instead of describing the content with text.

In all of these cases, the authors chose intentionally to

ways to visualize a diverse range of information types.

The examples on the following pages show creative

SUPPORT YOUR MESSAGE.

REPRESENTATION THAT BEST

CHOOSE THE MODES OF

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

For this diagram are provided in the

and sleep during the day. Credits

challenges who may stay up all night

after 8 pm. This is a problem for

pm, and 5-6 pm), it is very scarce

food. While food is most available

Downtown Eastside have access to

This diagram uses a circle to show

Daily food access diagram

This diagram uses a circle to show

the times of day that residents of the

Downtown Eastside have access to

food. While food is most available

during the day (at 9-8 am , 12-1

pm, and 5-6 pm), it is very scarce

after 8 pm. This is a problem for

residents with addictions and other

challenges who may stay up all night

and sleep during the day. Credits

for this diagram are provided in the

acknowledgements.

Residential school influence diagram

While relatively simple, this diagram contains complex information about how Musqueam is impacted by Residential Schools, and how they are responding to these impacts.

The colours effectively distinguish the three types of content in the diagram. The identification of the “central issue facing Musqueam today” highlights a focused main message.

Takeaway:

CHOICE THE MODES OF

REPRESENTATION THAT BEST

SUPPORT YOUR MESSAGE.

The examples on the following pages show creative

ways to visualize a diverse range of information types.

In all of these cases, the authors chose intentionally to

use visuals instead of describing the content with text.

It is possible to explain, say, the impacts of Residential

School in paragraphs of text, but an influence diagram

does the job more clearly and simply.
Case Study:  
GROUND-ORIENTED HOUSING IDEAS BOOK

This document was created by the City of Vancouver to spur discussion with the public. For each housing option, multiple forms of representation each contribute something different to the reader’s understanding.

Statistics  
A bulleted list provides basic statistics on courtyard rowhouses, allowing for comparison to other housing types.

- Courtyard rowhouses are multi-level, single-household strata units with ground-level lock-off rental units with private entries from outside and shared interior walls.
- A lock-off rental unit could be provided for a portion of street units.
- Each unit has private outdoor space.
- Total potential units: 4 or more, depending on lot size.
- Typical unit size: 1,300 ft² rowhouse; 300 ft² lock-off rental unit.
- Typical height: up to 2 1/2 storeys (31-35’).
- Parking spaces are underground.

Elevation illustration  
This elevation shows the vertical relationship of courtyard rowhouses might have with adjacent homes. It allows the reader to better picture how it might feel in the space.

Axonometric illustration  
This 3D illustration gives a sense of how courtyard rowhouses might fit together on a lot. All other details are removed to focus on this one point.

Plan diagram  
This very simple plan diagram is designed to communicate how the units fit together on a lot. All other details are removed to focus on this one point.

Precedent photos  
Photos of successful courtyard rowhouses show the experience of being around one of these homes. It can be green and leafy, sleek and modern, or more traditional-looking.
Conclusion

GOOD VISUAL DESIGN CAN HELP PLANNERS BETTER ENGAGE THE PUBLIC.
Designers must first decide what they want to convey by thinking through a communications plan.

They then go through the design process to craft the visuals that will best communicate their message.
Case Study: SECTION 37 BROCHURE

A final case study shows how the six Key Considerations in this report come together into a single product. The City of Toronto’s Section 37 brochure explains how the city collects public benefits from development.

The brochure takes complex policy and explains in simple terms how it affects people’s everyday lives, using real examples. The physical brochure folds out to reveal four 8” square panels per side.

THE ROLE OF SECTION 37 IN TORONTO

As Toronto grows and increases its city density, the city government has to ensure that new developments contribute to the health and well-being of the community. Section 37 of Ontario’s Planning Act is one of the key planning tools available to the City of Toronto to help ensure new development is accompanied by the necessary investment to enhance our high quality of life.

An Essential Tool for Building Healthier Neighbourhoods

The purpose of this brochure is to improve understanding of how Section 37 benefits to your community, explaining the process by which community benefits are funded, and how Section 37 benefits to have a reasonable address the needs created by the proposed development.

The contrasting light-blue boxes with words would have been less easy to understand.

FABRICATING COMMUNITY BENEFITS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The eight examples and descriptions are effectively grouped together using the Gestalt principle of proximity. The contrasting light-blue boxes with large, black text draws the eye to the header of each example.

Tangible, and responsive to local community needs.

Perception

The choice of examples helps to make the policy tangible and relatable to the intended audience; these are things the public is interested in. The八 examples and descriptions are effectively grouped together using the Gestalt principle of proximity. The contrasting light-blue boxes with large, black text draws the eye to the header of each example.

Audience

Photos show concrete examples of benefits achieved through Section 37, complementing the sketch graphics elsewhere in the brochure that convey an open-ended sense of the possibilities of Section 37.
SETTING PRIORITIES FOR SECTION 37 BENEFITS

Every community in Toronto is faced with unique local challenges and opportunities. To maximize the impact of Section 37 benefits and equitably address these varying needs, local priorities should be established.

City staff and Ward Councillors are encouraged to work in collaboration with the community to prepare an assessment of potential Section 37 community benefits for various neighbourhoods within each ward, to be updated every term of Council.

Inputs from City Planning and other Divisions help support these conversations, including providing advice and expertise on community needs based on guiding policies, local experience, and applicable Community Services and Facilities studies.

Once established, this list of local priorities provides a transparent method for determining appropriate Section 37 benefits during negotiations with development applicants.

WARD COUNCILLOR INPUT
CITY STAFF INPUT
LOCAL COMMUNITY INPUT

SETTING PRIORITIES

IN-KIND OR CASH-IN-LIEU?

Section 37 benefits are secured by the City through two different methods, in-kind and cash-in-lieu.

In-kind contributions occur where a development applicant agrees to directly provide the negotiated benefit, such as dedicating physical space within a building for use by non-profit groups.

Alternatively, a development applicant can provide cash-in-lieu of the negotiated benefit, transferring responsibility for implementation to the City. Cash-in-lieu can occur either as a single contribution towards a community benefit, or be saved for future use in cases where the City is pooling funds to achieve a major investment, or a number of identified benefits.

Over the past five years, the City of Toronto has secured approximately 850 Section 37 benefits, 55% of which were in-kind, and 45% of which were cash-in-lieu contributions valued at over $200 million.

This educational brochure aims to provide the reader with a basic understanding of Section 37 of the Planning Act. As the brochure deals in summarized fashion with complex matters and reflects legislation, policies and practices that are subject to change, it should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialized legal or professional advice. The information contained herein should be read in conjunction with Toronto’s Official Plan policies.

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108 CONCLUSION

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Understanding these six Key Considerations is just the first step to creating effective designs.

The real work lies in building your design skills, and persevering through the design process.

Final thoughts

As a wrap-up to this report, this page includes reflections on the design process from planning professionals interviewed as part of this project. These words of advice will hopefully be helpful as you begin your own adventures in planning visually.

Becoming comfortable with design takes lots of practice. The best way to improve is to just keep finding new projects and opportunities to practice design.

Don’t be afraid to take risks! Experiment, try new things, break the rules... and then edit, edit, edit.

“Good artists copy. Great artists steal.”
- Aaron Lao

Seek inspiration everywhere, especially from outside of planning.

There will be many times you feel completely stuck on a project. That’s totally normal.

Design is iterative. Try out different ideas, even if they’re not perfect, and revise them over and over and over again.

Ask for feedback from a fresh set of eyes.

...when it happens, just take a break from the project all together, and return to it later.

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...when it happens, just take a break from the project all together, and return to it later.
Williams provides an introduction to visual design for absolute beginners. Four basic principles are presented: contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity.

Hilligoss breaks down the process of visual communication in great detail, with an academic perspective. This guide also includes a thorough analysis of various media formats.

Wurman contends that more data leads to information anxiety, not more understanding. Offering key insights for planners, he explores ways to make content meaningful.

Malamed begins with an explanation of how humans perceive, and then presents pages and pages of excellent examples that illustrate her six principles for good design.


METHODS

The diagrams on page 81-83 were adapted from Hale Jones-Cox. The diagram on page 98 was provided by Priyanka Chakrabarti, and was created as part of the ARCH 573D Regenerative Design course at the UBC School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (Fall 2011).