Streetcar Strip to Neighbourhood Centre: The Characteristics of Good Neighbourhood Shopping Streets Examined in the Context of Commercial Drive and West 41st Avenue

by

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ABSTRACT

Good neighbourhood shopping streets have long been significant in their ability to provide goods and services within walking distance of neighbourhood residents, to create a rich public realm, and to foster a sense of community. Far removed from their past as streetcar strips, the neighbourhood shopping street is once again being looked at as an important element of the urban environment. The purpose of this thesis is to determine the characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping streets and to examine these characteristics in the context of two Vancouver case studies—Commercial Drive and West 41st Avenue.

Based on a review of planning, urban design, and landscape architecture literature, the fundamental principles of good neighbourhood shopping streets are revealed. Specifically, a good neighbourhood shopping street is accessible, comfortable, sociable, a place, adaptable, beautiful, and diverse. Flowing from these principles, and the means to them, are the characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping streets—buildings that relate to the street, good walking facilities, pedestrian amenities, traffic management, street activity, neighbourhood goods and services, maintenance, supportive neighbourhood context, and supportive government.

The research suggests that real-life neighbourhood shopping streets rarely have all the characteristics that the literature holds as ideal. Rather, some characteristics—buildings that relate to the street, street activity, neighbourhood goods and services, a supportive neighbourhood context, and supportive government—appear as fundamental to good neighbourhood shopping streets but are exhibited to varying degrees. More specifically, the case studies help illustrate what particular elements are either essential or helpful, creating a checklist that other streets can benefit from.
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1.1 Introduction

It has been said that “the freedom with which a person can walk about and look around is a very useful guide to the civilized quality of an urban area” (Buchanan 1963, p. 40). This is particularly true of neighbourhood shopping streets—the commercial strips on urban arterial streets that form the core of neighbourhood goods and services. As the focus of neighbourhood public life, such streets should be “good,” providing neighbourhood goods and services in a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere. But what exactly does “good” mean? The two general questions this thesis seeks to answer are: what are the specific characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping streets, and do popular neighbourhood shopping streets have these characteristics?

1.2 Context and Purpose

These questions are significant because many planners are stressing the importance of lively and walkable neighbourhood commercial streets. Such streets are significant in their ability to provide goods and services within walking distance of neighbourhood residents, to provide transit connections to other urban areas, and to create a rich public realm in contrast to surrounding residential streets. They are also democratic in their ability to integrate a variety of transportation modes and diverse land uses. Furthermore, as the focus of neighbourhood public life, they can help create a sense of community and neighbourhood pride.

In Vancouver, planners are recognizing the importance of such streets to a
sustainable and vital urban environment. Neighbourhood centres are described in *CityPlan: Directions for Vancouver* as places where “people will find shops, jobs, neighbourhood-based services, public places that are safe and inviting, and a place to meet with neighbours and join in community life” (City of Vancouver 1995, p. 10). In Vancouver and other North American cities, neighbourhood centres often take the form of commercial strips on busy arterial streets. As neighbourhood shopping streets, their role as a public place is frequently at odds with their role as a thoroughfare.

Recognizing both this potential conflict and the need to decrease automobile use, *CityPlan* also calls for the prioritization of walking, cycling, and transit to decrease traffic congestion, improve the environment, and increase neighbourhood livability. Other municipal documents also reflect the ability of good neighbourhood shopping streets to contribute to sustainability. In 1990, City Council adopted *Clouds of Change* (Task Force on Atmospheric Change 1990), a report which recommends walking and cycling as viable alternatives to automobile use and land use planning which decreases transportation demand. More recently, Council adopted the City’s *Transportation Plan* (City of Vancouver 1997a) which contains numerous references to pedestrian-friendly commercial streets.

Regionally, the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) has also drafted policy which is relevant to good neighbourhood shopping streets. The *Livable Region Strategic Plan*, adopted in principle by the GVRD in 1994 and endorsed by Vancouver City Council, contains initiatives that “place a priority on walking, cycling, public transit, goods movement, and then the automobile” (GVRD 1994, p. 3). For example, it recommends enhancing or retrofitting local streets and infrastructure to favour transit, bicycle and pedestrian uses and encourages Transportation Demand
Management (TDM). Flowing from its objective of minimizing the impact of transportation on quality of life, the GVRD’s *Transport 2021* report advocates a “shift from the automobile as the primary and most important user of road space to ... the automobile ... as one of many components required to satisfy the complete travel needs of the neighbourhood” (GVRD 1993, p. 21).

In addition to professional planning interest in good neighbourhood shopping streets, citizens appear increasingly interested in reclaiming their commercial streets as public space in which they can safely walk, conveniently shop, and sincerely participate in their community. Indeed, many North American cities are experiencing a street “retail renaissance” (Applebe 1996), with cafés such as Starbucks extending the activity of shopping streets past regular business hours and stores that normally exist in a mall environment acquiring street locations. Furthermore, citizens are increasingly expressing their support for neighbourhood shopping streets with more than their pocketbooks. In Vancouver for example, recent surveys in the Kensington-Cedar Cottage neighbourhood expressed strong support for the improvement of existing neighbourhood shopping areas (City of Vancouver 1998), the closing of neighbourhood supermarkets has sparked neighbourhood outrage and controversy, and both residents and merchants have pressured the City to maintain on-street parking in front of neighbourhood businesses.

But if North American cities want to create or strengthen their neighbourhood shopping streets (and as a result, their neighbourhood centres), it would be helpful to know what characteristics help foster such streets. While there has been much academic literature produced on the public life of streets, pedestrian-friendly urban design, and the importance of the neighbourhood in a sustainable city, there has been little written specifically on what makes a good neighbourhood shopping street. This

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1 TDM aims to reduce the demand for transportation via disincentives for single-occupancy vehicle use and incentives for walking, cycling, and transit use.
thesis strives to determine the characteristics that might be applicable to such streets by conducting a literature review. These characteristics are then looked at in the context of two case studies—two popular Vancouver neighbourhood shopping streets—to see if the necessary characteristics are present and to discover what other characteristics might exist.

1.3 Scope

Because of the particular problems of North American cities and the Canadian context of the case studies, the scope of the thesis' research is generally limited to literature that is relevant to North American cities. However, literature from other places is occasionally consulted when particularly relevant.

Though much of the thesis could pertain to streets in general, streets which provide a retail function are of primary interest—being both important places of neighbourhood public space and significant generators of pedestrian traffic. In addition, because the research interest is primarily focussed on the neighbourhood shopping street as a good public space, there is a large emphasis on the street’s physical characteristics. But given that physical characteristics do not exist in a vacuum, the influence of socioeconomic characteristics is also considered.

With regards to the case studies, the scope is most often limited to those blocks of the shopping streets which are most active. However, this narrow scope is occasionally expanded—for example when considering commercial activity beyond the study area, the street's neighbourhood context, and its role as an arterial street. Finally, while the implications of the thesis findings may be generally applicable, the research itself is limited to Vancouver neighbourhood shopping streets.
1.4 Methodology

Information for this thesis was derived through both a review of relevant literature and case study research. A literature review was conducted to examine the history and role of neighbourhood shopping streets and to derive a set of principles and characteristics that could be applied to good neighbourhood shopping streets. Sources of information included various planning, urban design, and landscape architecture literature.

When determining which Vancouver shopping streets would serve as case studies, it was first decided that those streets which serve an entire neighbourhood would be considered. A commercial zoning map of the city was therefore observed to determine which neighbourhood shopping streets have traditionally served as district centres—commercial centres which offer a large variety of goods and services to a residential district with a population of 25,000 to 50,000 people (City of Vancouver 1971). More than a dozen shopping streets in Vancouver meet this criteria, and while any of them could potentially be an example of a good neighbourhood shopping street, West 41st Avenue and Commercial Drive, as seen in Figure 1.1, were ultimately chosen. This is partly due to personal observation that these are two of the most distinct and busy shopping streets in Vancouver, partly due to a desire to have case studies from the politically and economically distinct east and west sides of Vancouver, and partly due to the City's own recognition that both streets' neighbourhoods “already have ... some of the features of neighbourhood centres” (City of Vancouver 1995, p. 10).

2 These streets are: West 10th Avenue, West Broadway, Dunbar Street, Denman Street, West 41st Avenue and East and West Boulevard in Kerrisdale, Granville Street south of Broadway and in Marpole, Main Street at Broadway, Kingsway Avenue at both Knight Street and Joyce Street, Commercial Drive, Victoria Drive, and East Hastings Street.
Having chosen which Vancouver shopping streets to study, the streets themselves were then delimited to determine which section—of a length not exceeding three blocks due to time limitations—was most vital. This was based on personal observation of elements such as pedestrian traffic and store occupancy. In addition, secondary sources such as planning documents were studied to determine what constituted the "core." For example, the City of Vancouver defines Commercial Drive's traditional shopping core as the six blocks between Charles Street and Third Avenue (1982). Similarly, Rhone and Iredale Architects describes the block on West 41st Avenue between West Boulevard and Yew Street as the "critical core of the shopping district" (1969, p. 7).

After defining the study area, each neighbourhood shopping street was then studied with respect to the characteristics identified in the literature. Primary field research
involved observation, pedestrian counts, inventory of pedestrian amenities, and interviews with area stakeholders. A review of relevant government documents provided an institutional framework and statistical information, while various community information (e.g. community surveys, media documents, and newsletters) provided additional secondary data.

1.5 Thesis Overview

This introductory chapter has briefly outlined the concept of neighbourhood shopping streets, their importance to urban vitality, and the thesis' research framework. Chapter Two reviews the literature pertaining to streets as public space and pedestrian-friendly urban design, resulting in a description of the principles and characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping streets. Chapters Three and Four present the context and research findings of the two Vancouver neighbourhood shopping streets that serve as case studies. Chapter Five discusses the research findings and conclusions, examines their planning implications, and suggests areas for further research.
CHAPTER TWO:
A LITERATURE REVIEW OF GOOD
NEIGHBOURHOOD SHOPPING STREETS

2.1 Introduction

The “central value of urban life is that of publicness, of people from different
groups meeting each other and of people acting in concert, albeit with debate”
(Jacobs and Appleyard 1987, p. 119). Since civilization began, streets have been the
public places where people could walk, shop, play, and meet, and as the largest and
most universal public element of cities, streets have always been of interest to urban
planners and designers. This chapter of the thesis examines this interest as it pertains
to neighbourhood shopping streets. After discussing the literature on streets as public
space and pedestrian-friendly urban design, the principles of good neighbourhood
shopping streets are outlined and their characteristics are described.

2.2 Neighbourhood Shopping Streets and the City

2.2.1 History

Neighbourhood shopping streets have always been an important element of
the urban environment, with many developing along streetcar lines to serve the
residents who lived a short walk away. Given their linear orientation, they were
sometimes overly long and were filled with temporary, one-storey structures known
as “taxpayers.” Because walking and transit were primary modes of transportation,
neighbourhood shopping streets were inherently pedestrian-friendly, with “wide

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3 As Ford (1994, p. 232) notes, “taxpayers” are small, one-storey buildings which were
“intended to generate enough income to pay the property taxes until demand for space
increased and proper downtown-type buildings could be constructed.” As such a demand
was rarely realized on the streetcar strip, many “taxpayers” still exist.
sidewalks, awnings for rain or sun protection, on-street parking to shield pedestrians from traffic, and narrow-fronted shops with attractive window displays oriented to shoppers” (Untermann 1990a, p. 172). So-called “Main Streets”—whether the focal point of a city or a neighbourhood—were the “home not only of stores and offices, but also of imposing churches, theatres, banks, hotels, ... war memorials, libraries, and other banners of community well-being. The corridor formed by these varied structures jammed tight along both of the sidewalks, becoming the ideal setting for speeches, parades, and celebrations” (Liebs 1995, p. 8).

However, as the automobile became more prevalent, planners and urban designers began to treat the street more as a transportation corridor and less as a public space. Garden City proponents such as Clarence Stein and Ebenezer Howard proposed developments with houses turned from the street, pedestrians separated from automobiles, and roads created solely for automobile traffic (see for example Schaffer 1982). Even more destructive to the public realm were Modernists such as Le Corbusier. Believing that streets were mere “traffic machines,” the French architect boldly proclaimed that the “present idea of the street must be abolished: DEATH OF THE STREET! DEATH OF THE STREET! DEATH OF THE STREET!” (1929, p. 124).

Modernism permeated the design professions and streets were no longer the focus of city building. Many neighbourhood shopping streets which also served as arterial streets became the domain of traffic engineers who—primarily concerned with vehicular capacity—widened streets, narrowed sidewalks, and prohibited on-street parking. Planners became increasingly obsessed with efficiency and adopted zoning as a way to “rationalize” the city. Land uses were increasingly separated from one another at the same time that automobiles were negating the need for compact, walkable, and transit-friendly communities. Parking space for cars became of prime
concern and shopping was increasingly separated from the street by parking lots. Furthermore, as the scale of retailing began to change—supermarkets, for example, have simultaneously increased in size and decreased in number (Handy 1993)—neighbourhood shopping streets have lost many important businesses and area residents have been forced to shop outside the neighbourhood. But despite the fact that many neighbourhood shopping streets in North America have declined (see for example Loukaitou-Sideris 1997), other streets are successfully providing overflow space for downtown, are upscale, specialized shopping areas, or have been revitalized as community focal points (Ford 1994).

2.2.2 Streets As Public Space

Whether thriving or blighted, the street’s role as “both path and place” continues to provide challenges (Moughtin 1992, p. 133). Writers such as Jacobs (1961), Rudofsky (1969), and Whyte (1988) have long highlighted the need to address the negative consequences of Modernist planning on vital urban streets. They and others—for example the recent proponents of New Urbanism—aim to reclaim the street as both public space and primary urban element.

Good streets are seen as “communal living rooms” (Mackin and Krieger 1989, p. 32), where both mundane and extraordinary civic activities occur (see also Langdon 1994; Bacon 1971; Gehl 1987). Shopping streets in particular are seen to play an “important social role as community centres for the city’s neighbourhoods and provide an alternative living environment which supplements the purely residential character of the surrounding neighbourhoods” (City of Toronto 1982, p. 1). Oldenburg (1989, 4) has also advocated pedestrian-friendly streets and accessible neighbourhood goods and services in the hopes of creating sustainable communities.
p. 16) feels they are a potential "third place"—a sociable "core setting of informal public life" that exists apart from the domestic place (home) and the productive place (work).

The public role of the street however, is often thought to have an impact beyond the street itself. Jacobs (1993, p. 6), for example, feels that if we "develop and design streets so that they are wonderful, fulfilling places to be, community building places, attractive public places for all people of cities and neighbourhoods, then we will have successfully designed about one-third of the city directly and will have made an immense impact on the rest." Shopping streets in particular are "archetypal public places" (Southworth and Lynch 1974, p. 9), neighbourhood gateways which subtly affect a street's context physically, socially, and economically (Greenberg 1995).

More specific than the literature on streets is that which examines the role of the pedestrian in cities. Walking, in addition to being a good form of exercise, and a non-polluting form of transportation, "invites human contact that automobile transport precludes" and enables "people [to] get to know their merchants and their neighbours" (Oldenburg 1989, p. 288). Good pedestrian environments are necessary not only to provide a safe and comfortable environment for those who already do walk, but to encourage more people to walk. Indeed, small-scale built environment variables such as sidewalks or crosswalks have been shown to influence automobile use and are more easily changed than socioeconomic or land use variables (1000 Friends of Oregon 1993).

Pedestrian-friendly urban design, though implicit in many of the works on streets as public space, is more specific in its scope. Fruin (1971) and Pushkarev and Zupan (1975) are early examples of writers who concentrate on the importance of pedestrian circulation and the design of good walking environments. More recently, Untermann
(1984, 1990) and Hass-Klau (1991, 1994) have been influential, the former from a North American context and the latter from a European one.

Given their suggestion that good streets can make good neighbourhoods, some of the above proponents of streets as public space and pedestrian-friendly urban design have been accused of environmental determinism—the “view that the physical environment determines human behaviour” (Rapoport 1977, p. 2). For example, Audirac and Shermyen (1994, p. 162) question the “deterministic attitude [that] pervades many of these [New Urbanist] design strategies, particularly as it relates to their socioeconomic objectives and claims.” However, as Rapoport (1977) notes, the view today is more likely to be that the built environment, as a setting for human activities, can inhibit or facilitate certain activities. For example, an ugly street may inhibit neighbourhood pride but will not necessarily deter it. Similarly, a good pedestrian environment may facilitate walking trips but will not necessarily generate them. Given our need for more sustainable communities, the importance of such facilitation cannot be underestimated.

2.3 Principles of Good Neighbourhood Shopping Streets

Within the literature on streets specifically and good urban design in general, a number of principles emerge as fundamental to good neighbourhood shopping streets. They represent goals that the street should aspire to and are synonymous with it. Specifically, a good neighbourhood shopping street is accessible, comfortable, sociable, a place, adaptable, beautiful, and diverse. These principles—represented as accessibility, comfort, sociability, sense of place, adaptability, beauty, and diversity—are both overlapping and interdependent.
2.3.1 Accessibility

A good neighbourhood shopping street is accessible: a diverse range of people using a variety of transportation modes must have access to the street in order to participate in it (Hillman and Whalley 1979; Antupit et al 1996; Southworth and Lynch 1974; Langdon 1994; Francis 1987). And while the accessibility of vehicles often predominates at the expense of accessibility for non-motorists, banning vehicular traffic from all neighbourhood shopping streets is not necessarily desired. Rather, there must be a “successful balancing and partial accommodation of a number of needs simultaneously, allowing cars and pedestrians to share public space in appropriate combinations and with clearly defined roles” (Greenberg 1990, p. 325).

To be accessible, the good neighbourhood shopping street must be within walking distance of neighbourhood residents, particularly those who lack other transportation options (Untermann 1984; Greenberg 1995; Durning 1996). But mere proximity may not be sufficient. Therefore the neighbourhood shopping street must, as part of a network, have interesting and direct connections to other streets (Langdon 1994; Whyte 1988; Loukaitou-Sideris 1996; Durning 1996; Fruin 1974; Gehl 1987; Kunstler 1996; Handy 1996; Untermann and Moudon 1990). On the shopping street itself, accessibility continues with the integration of pedestrians, cyclists, transit vehicles, and cars.

Finally, accessibility also refers to the degree of publicness on the street. For example, as streets are developed with inwardly-oriented shopping centres, activity is taken away from the street and into a more private sphere. Francis (1987, p. 29) therefore suggests planners use “accessibility criteria” to determine if new projects will add to or subtract from the public landscape.
2.3.2 Comfort

A good neighbourhood shopping street, to be used as a place rather than a thoroughfare, is also a comfortable place in which to be (Antupit et al 1996; Gehl 1987; Loukaitou-Sideris 1997; Greenberg 1995; Jacobs 1993). For the street to function as a public space, the scale of the street—and its component buildings, lights, signs, sidewalks, and amenities—should be geared towards the comfort and safety of people, not vehicles (Bacon 1974; Tibbalds 1988). In an abstract sense, because humans “like to feel sheltered and protected” (Kunstler 1996, p. 137), the street should be defined as a space. More specifically, ease of movement and pedestrian amenities such as benches and washrooms contribute to a comfortable street space.

How the street deals with natural elements such as weather and topography is also crucial to a street’s comfort. In particular, adequate sunlight, shade, and protection from rain, wind, and cold are necessary to create a comfortable microclimate—an important feature of our perception of a place (Southworth and Lynch 1974; Fruin 1974; Gehl 1987: 180; Untermann 1984; Lynch 1971; Francis 1987).

Comfort is also dependent on how safe pedestrians feel when using the street space (Untermann and Moudon 1990; Gehl 1987). In one sense this refers to how the negative effects of automobile traffic—including noise and air pollution—are mitigated (Southworth and Lynch 1974). For example, Gehl (1987) notes that it is difficult for people to have a conversation when the background noise of a street exceeds 60 decibels, a common level on streets with mixed traffic. Conflict with traffic accounts for most pedestrian safety concerns and is one of the most commonly cited reasons for not walking (Goldsmith 1992; Untermann 1984). Therefore, a “symbiotic relationship between drivers and pedestrians is necessary for a safe and lively street. Drivers must be able to see pedestrians and to establish eye-contact with them. This
contact is naturally easier on a narrow street ... [and] ... at vehicular speeds of less than 25 mph” (Untermann and Moudon 1990, p. 10).

In another sense, safety from crime (both real and perceived) is a determinant of a street’s comfort and has a tangible impact on people’s use of the street (Untermann 1984; Francis 1987). For example, if people believe an area is dangerous, they use the area less, there is less street activity, crime increases and the original perception becomes a reality (Painter 1996; Gehl 1987; Engwicht 1993). To counteract this, “eyes on the street” (Jacobs 1961, p. 35)—natural proprietors (residents, shop-keepers, etc.) who watch the street as they live and work on it—are advocated.

2.3.3 Sociability

Because “primary public places should be socially functional” (Whyte 1988, p. 150), good neighbourhood shopping streets (as part of the public realm) are sociable. Indeed, given the grid system’s lack of a central focus, good streets often act as a type of public square (Ford 1994) and can foster social contacts. Even when superficial, “the sum of such casual, public contact at a local level—most of it fortuitous, most of it associated with errands, all of it metered by the person concerned and not thrust upon him by anyone—is a feeling for the public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal or neighbourhood need” (Jacobs 1961, p. 56). Furthermore, these modest social contacts may lead to more substantial social contacts (Gehl 1987). While some question the market for sociable streets when people increasingly go outside the neighbourhood to work, shop, and socialize (Audirac and Shermyen 1994), studies show increased life satisfaction for those who participate in their neighbourhood (Ahlbrandt 1984).
2.3.4 Sense of Place

"Primary public places ... should reinforce one's sense of place" (Whyte 1988, p. 150)—another important principle of good neighbourhood shopping streets. Streets with a sense of place have meaning, incorporate links to other spaces, and are legible in that they communicate function, time, and place to their users (Loukaitou-Sideris 1996; Tibbalds 1988; Gehl 1987; Southworth and Lynch 1974; Jacobs and Appleyard 1987; Wiedenhoeft 1981; Greenberg 1995; Engwicht 1993). For example, urban elements such as clocks, bulletin boards, and maps can act as landmarks while reflecting a neighbourhood's identity (Lynch 1960; Jacobs 1961; Sucher 1995).

Streets with a sense of place have an identity for which people can be proud of, loyal to, and involved in (Wiedenhoeft 1981; Francis 1987; Langdon 1994). Such streets become an extension of the home environment and are more likely to be maintained and loved (Francis 1987; Oldenburg 1989). Good neighbourhood shopping streets, and people's use of them, are also correlated to a sense of community (Nasar and Julian 1995; Ahlbrandt 1984). And as mentioned earlier, those who use neighbourhood facilities are found to be happier and more satisfied than those who do not (Ahlbrandt 1984). Finally, studies have also shown that both perceived service quality and neighbourhood satisfaction are determinants of neighbourhood retail use, implying that a sense of community is necessary to help create successful neighbourhood shopping streets (O'Brien and Ayidiya 1991).

2.3.5 Adaptability

"Streets are as mutable as life itself and are subject to constant alterations through design or use" (Celik et al 1994, p. 1). A good neighbourhood shopping street must therefore be adaptable, responding to changing needs over time by developing
organically and incrementally—a “mending of the edges” (Tibbalds 1988, p. 14)—rather than comprehensively (Greenberg 1995). For example, former gas station sites present a good opportunity to infill a neighbourhood shopping street on a modest scale, often on prominent corner sites (Greenberg 1990). In addition, smaller buildings and lot sizes, are particularly amenable to change (Tibbalds 1988).

Adaptable streets also have a sense of “chronological connectivity” (Kunstler 1996, p. 88) in that they pay homage to history in their design and to the future in their ability to last (Bacon 1974; Wiedenhoeft 1981; Engwicht 1993). The retention of old buildings is therefore particularly valued (Lennard and Lennard 1987; Jacobs 1961). Though change is inevitable, what is good in a street should be retained, added to and enhanced (Tibbalds 1988; Jacobs 1993). But ideas transplanted from other successful streets onto contextually different areas rarely work (Celik et al 1994). Rather, the street must be allowed to evolve and emerge in a way that “makes sense to us here and now” (Greenberg 1990, p. 324). Finally, it is important to monitor the change that will inevitably occur, “to find out what has been working and what has not been” (Whyte 1988, p. 253).

2.3.6 Beauty

Because “streets provide the principal visual scenes in cities” (Jacobs 1961, p. 378), good neighbourhood shopping streets are beautiful as well as adaptable. In particular, public spaces must be attractive to be used and loved (Langdon 1994; Gehl 1987; Untermann 1984; Wiedenhoeft 1981; Fruin 1971). However, civic art “is not merely a bit of aestheticism ... tying tidies on poles and putting doilies on the crosswalks” (Robinson 1903, p. 28), but is the “integration of sculpture, landscape design, and architecture in the creation of civic spaces that uplift society and transmit the highest values” (Southworth and Ben-Joseph 1997, p. 48).
In terms of visual interest, streets “need animation and detail; too many of our streets look tired, dull, and uninviting ... the texture, detail and animation so satisfying to pedestrians compromise driver safety, it is argued, so it is eliminated” (Untermann 1990b, p. 56). The problem of urban design is therefore to “deal simultaneously with the different speeds of movement and different rates of perception, to create forms which are as satisfying to those in an automobile as they are to those who travel on foot” (Bacon 1974, p. 35). One way to achieve this is harmony (Moughtin 1992; Robinson 1903). For example, a physical continuous edge along the street may create a “harmonious whole,” but “to motivate pedestrians to continue exploring their surroundings after the initial burst of discovery has faded, a place must offer variety” (Langdon 1994, p. 95). Indeed, the street is not a shopping centre and the inherent diversity of its design elements adds to the visual interest of the street (Untermann 1984; Rapoport 1977). Furthermore, an “overemphasis on aesthetic appearance can lead to a neglect of the dynamic interrelationship between buildings and context” (Loukaitou-Sideris 1996, p. 101).

2.3.7 Diversity

Good neighbourhood shopping streets are also diverse in their activities and users—a principle that has been alluded to previously. Streets that are mixed-use zoned, for example, help attract a variety of people and encourage a variety of activities (Untermann 1984; Wiedenhoeft 1981; Gehl 1987; Jacobs 1961). In addition, a variety of uses will lead to a more sustained use of the street, with people working, socializing, and living on the street, not merely shopping on it. It is a civil space that “allows diverse behaviours, cultures, opinions, classes, and tastes to coexist” (Greenberg 1995, p. 67). Diverse streets are also more adaptable than homogeneous ones, with “diversity provide[ing] the pool of ideas and chaos the chance for them to meet”
Finally, as mentioned above with regards to beauty, the pedestrian experience is very dependent on diverse visual images. Because of their slower speed, pedestrians can perceive many differences in urban form and activity, a “complexity [that] depends on the number of changes or noticeable differences per unit time—changes of any uniform, or uniformly varying, attribute—whether rate, direction, slope, curvature, colour, enclosure, smell, sound, light, or whatever” (Rapoport 1977, pp. 240-241).

2.4 Characteristics of Good Neighbourhood Shopping Streets

From both the conceptual literature on streets and that which is specifically related to pedestrian-friendly urban design, the characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping streets emerge. These characteristics are different from principles in that they are tangible things which the street has as opposed to things the street is. For example, a good neighbourhood shopping street has the principles of accessibility and comfort and is accessible and comfortable. The characteristics are a means to the principles. For example, good walking facilities help make a street accessible and comfortable. Like the principles, the characteristics discussed below—buildings that relate to the street, good walking facilities, pedestrian amenities, traffic management, street activity, maintenance, neighbourhood goods and services, supportive neighbourhood, and supportive government—are overlapping and interdependent.

2.4.1 Buildings that Relate to the Street

Good streets encourage people to move about and interact with the built environment. Because buildings are major elements of a city’s streetscape, how they relate to the street is important (Tibbalds 1988; Kunstler 1996; Bacon 1971; Gehl 1987; Francis 1987). In particular, their ability to create both a comfortable space and visual
interest for pedestrians is crucial because people are willing to walk further when there are interesting things to see (Langdon 1994). These characteristics are especially important with regards to civic buildings, which, in addition to being potential landmarks, can serve as models for other buildings (Kunstler 1996).

Firstly then, “buildings should be arranged in such a way as to define and even enclose public space rather than sit in space” (Jacobs and Appleyard 1987, p. 119). Because humans desire a sense of enclosure, the street should have the quality of an outdoor room (Langdon 1994; Moughtin 1992; Wiedenhoeft 1981; Rudofsky 1969; Jacobs 1993). This requires a consistent street wall, and in some cases may require infill of vacant space (Whyte 1988). In addition, height variation between buildings should be kept within one-half to two storeys to create a more harmonious street wall (Moughtin 1992).

Building setback—how far the building is set back from its lot line—is important in this respect (Langdon 1994; Handy 1997; Whyte 1988). In general, a large setback separates (both physically and psychologically) the building from the street, while a smaller setback connects the building to the street and helps define the street space. This is particularly true when the facades create a continuous street wall (Langdon 1991; Untermann 1984). Similarly, upper-storey setbacks can also affect how well the building relates to the street (Kunstler 1996). Nevertheless, the occasional modest street-level setback (e.g. 1 metre or 3 feet) can be viewed as an opportunity to allow more room for pedestrian amenities and wider sidewalks (Untermann 1984).

Another determinant of the quality of an outdoor room is the building height to street width ratio. While Da Vinci’s stated rule that “the street should be as wide as the...
height of the houses” (Selberg 1996, p. 166) is sometimes referred to, a more commonly recommended building height to street width ratio is between 1:2 (as seen in Figure 2.1) and 1:3. Proportions greater than 1:6 are generally thought to be too open (Lynch 1971; Jacobs 1993).

Figure 2.1 A 1:2 Building Height to Street Width Ratio
(Source: Kunstler 1996, p. 139)

Furthermore, buildings should not be identical, but complementary, relating to each other as well as to the street in order to create a consistent street wall and the sense of an outdoor room. To create harmony amongst varying styles, there needs to be a fundamental agreement, “a strong motif at ground level ... that pulls the buildings into alignment” (Kunstler 1996, p. 137). While the public realm can help create this consistency—for example through the use of street trees or setback lines—the private use of common materials or architectural elements can also be beneficial (Moughtin 1992; Jacobs 1961; Langdon 1994).

In addition to being close to it, buildings should be oriented to the street. And because stores in interior malls or above and below-grade draw away potential street activity and dilute the streetscape, retail—the most interactive building type—should
front the street at-grade (Whyte 1988; Selberg 1996; Wiedenhoeft 1981; Barnett 1982; Gehl 1987). Therefore, when buildings are more than one storey high, less interactive uses such as offices or apartments should be above-grade (Untermann 1984; City and County of San Francisco 1984). Even these upper-storeys, however, have the opportunity to relate to the street in terms of their visual interest, diverse activity and proximity to the sidewalk. Upper-storey uses such as dance studios, music halls, or apartments can contribute to a lively streetscape in what Whyte (1988, p. 81) refers to as “second storiness.”

Because the building facade is the “face” of a building, doors and windows on good shopping streets should front the sidewalk to help create a transparent and inviting atmosphere for pedestrians (Kunstler 1996; Selberg 1996; Southworth and Lynch 1974; Jacobs 1993; Lennard and Lennard 1987; Gehl 1987). Entrances, for example, should be broad and open, facilitating easy pedestrian access and creating interest for what is inside (Whyte 1988). Windows also contribute to transparency and are vastly preferable to blank walls. Window displays in particular are valuable because they provide visual interest to pedestrians and a competitive edge to the store (Achimore 1993; Pelham and Macintosh 1985). Even better though are sidewalk displays—the “merchandise that is out front, on the street, where you can pick it up, feel it” (Whyte 1988, p. 85). Sidewalk displays, along with devices such as canopies and landscaping, “play a role in softening the visual and psychological hard edges of the world” and act as a zone of transition between the public realm of the sidewalk and the more private realm of the store (Kunstler 1996, p. 139).

In terms of scale, it is again important that the buildings relate to the street. To create a certain density as well as the sense of an outdoor room, New Urbanists, for example, feel that buildings should be at least two storeys high or more, with additional benefits of apartments and offices above the stores. And though large buildings can often be
imposing in size, a human-scaled urban environment “does not necessarily preclude high buildings—what is important is what is perceived close to eye level” (Tibbalds 1988, p. 14). Others disagree, feeling that low buildings are more “in harmony with the way in which people move about and the way in which the senses function” (Gehl 1987, p. 100). Jacobs (1993), for example, found that buildings lining many of the world’s best streets are generally not greater than eight to nine storeys (30 metres or 100 feet) tall.

“Many, many, separate, distinct buildings with complex arrangements and relationships” are also desirable (Jacobs and Appleyard 1987, p. 117), reflecting a pedestrian scale and providing the fine urban grain that makes walking interesting (Gehl 1987, Jacobs 1993; Rapoport 1977). Similarly, small frontages are generally favoured over large ones (Durning 1996; Untermann 1984; Gehl 1987), and projects on large lots should accommodate or reflect the size of small individual storefronts. In Toronto, for example, 1800 square metres (6000 square feet) has been determined as the limit for “as of right” privileges on traditional shopping streets (City of Toronto 1982). Also contributing to a more interesting streetscape are buildings of various ages and conditions (Jacobs 1961), with older buildings in particular contributing a “wealth of craftsmanship, materials, and a variety of details that are not to be duplicated today” (Wiedenhoef 1981, p. 87).

Buildings must also relate to the street in a way that creates a positive microclimate. Most importantly, buildings should provide protection from rain with canopies and should not exacerbate wind effects or create permanently shady areas (Whyte 1988). In addition to sheltering pedestrians from the elements, canopies also benefit the store by reducing overhead glare and keeping the interiors cool on hot and sunny days (Greenberg 1995). Building materials can also affect the microclimate. For example, porous surfaces such as brick or limestone break up the sun’s rays and
diffuse them, creating an evenly reflected light that is easier to look at than the harsh light of reflected glass (Whyte 1988). In addition, natural building materials such as brick and stucco weather gradually over time, creating a patina that highlights the "beautifying effects of age" (Lennard and Lennard 1987, p. 21).

Finally, buildings should be decorated to "honour and embellish" not only the owners and stakeholders, but also the street, those who walk in it, and the city as a whole (Kunstler 1996, p. 39). Older buildings are particularly valuable in their ability to beautify the street, and "every effort should be made to retain some sense of continuity with the past and every opportunity taken to use aesthetic contributions of earlier generations" (Wiedenhoefl 1981, p. 153).

2.4.2 Good Walking Facilities

Good walking facilities are a second characteristic of good neighbourhood shopping streets and are made up of good sidewalks, safe crossings, and a fine street network. Because "sidewalks are the capillaries of communities, even the embodiment of community" (Greenberg 1995, p. 75), good sidewalks are an important characteristic of good neighbourhood shopping streets. Indeed, their design is "degree zero of urban planning" (Greenberg 1995, p. 75), with good sidewalks imparting a sense of quality to the street and inviting people to use it as a space rather than simply pass through it (Handy 1997; Gehl 1987).

Good sidewalks must be wide enough to comfortably accommodate both pedestrians and sidewalk objects such as street trees, sidewalk displays, and seating, but not so wide as to eliminate the "hustle and bustle" that makes for a lively streetscape (Whyte 1988). In terms of absolute width, Whyte (1988, p. 78) notes that "the most celebrated of the ancient walkways" fall within a range of 3.6 to 5.5 metres (12 to 18
feet). For neighbourhood shopping streets however, a width of 3 to 3.6 metres (10 to 12 feet) is generally considered sufficient (Loukaitou-Sideris 1997; Untermann 1984). However, another way to consider sidewalk width is to divide the space into the three zones—curb zone, pedestrian zone, and building zone—seen in Figure 2.2 (Untermann 1984; Pushkarev and Zupan 1975; Project for Public Spaces 1982; City and County of San Francisco 1995).

![Figure 2.2 Sidewalk Zones](Source: City and County of San Francisco 1995, p. 36)

The curb zone should be at least 0.5 metres wide (1.5 feet) and is not generally used by pedestrians due to its proximity to the roadway and the presence of street furniture, utilities, and trees. The building zone should also be at least 0.5 metres wide (1.5 feet), allowing space for window shoppers, sidewalk displays and seating. When building entrances and windows are set back somewhat, this space is effectively increased without detracting from a sense of enclosure. Finally, the pedestrian zone is the *effective* sidewalk width—i.e. that space that can be easily used for pedestrian travel—and should be dimensioned in relation to flow. The Project for Public Spaces (1982) for example, feels that at least 2.5 metres (8 feet) are required in the pedestrian zone. More specifically, the "upper limit for an acceptable density in streets and on sidewalks with two-way pedestrian traffic appears to be around 10 to 15 pedestrians per minute per meter (3.5 feet) of street width" (Gehl 1987, p. 136).
Because pedestrians are very sensitive to pavement and surface conditions (Gehl 1987), sidewalks must be of good quality (Goldsmith 1992; Province of Ontario 1980). The sidewalks of good neighbourhood shopping streets should therefore be differentiated from other sidewalks and from the road surface with the use of special pavers, imprints, or design (Greenberg 1995). Paving materials and patterns also help unify the streetscape, provide a sense of continuity between different areas, and can differentiate between sidewalk zones (Gibbons and Oberholzer 1991; Jacobs 1961).

Rather than emphasizing the curb zone with detailing, Untermann suggests using special pavement “on places where people walk, and where there is little likelihood of it being removed to service underground utilities (1984, p. 125). This is especially important given that two thirds of the pedestrian’s visual cone is oriented towards the ground (Untermann 1984).

Sidewalks must also be well-maintained—clean, free of pavement cracks, and with few obstructions that detract from walking with comfort and continuity (Untermann 1984; Southworth and Lynch 1974; Greenberg 1995; Fruin 1971). In this latter sense, good sidewalks are not too cluttered and are not interrupted by driveways. In addition, curb ramps should be placed at all street crossings to allow easy access for wheelchairs, strollers, and shopping carts. As seen in Figure 2.3, two curb ramps per corner provide a more direct continuation of the sidewalk and define the street corner more sharply than a single curb ramp does. Finally, sidewalk buffers—whether bollards, trees, planters, or parked cars—help to enhance sidewalk comfort and define sidewalk space.
Figure 2.3 Curb Ramps
(Source: Untermann 1984, p. 48)

Because pedestrians are inclined to take the most direct route, convenient and safe crossings are required on good neighbourhood shopping streets (Untermann 1984; Goldsmith 1992; Rowe 1996). There are generally two types of pedestrian crossings: uncontrolled crossings (i.e. crosswalks) and controlled crossings (i.e. pedestrian-controlled or fully signalized crossings). On well-used pedestrian streets, crossings should be available every 30 to 60 metres (100 to 200 feet). While most crossings are placed at intersections, in some cases there may be sufficient pedestrian demand for a midblock crossing (Southworth and Lynch 1974; Untermann and Moudon 1990).

When controlled crossings are necessary, crossing cycles must be sensitive to pedestrian movement. Firstly, there must be sufficient time for slower pedestrians to cross—for example, extending the “walk” signal by one-half second per one metre

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6 Grade-separated crossings (i.e. overpasses and underpasses) are a third type of crossing. They are generally not recommended because “pedestrians are efficient agents in requiring that streets be pleasant and should not be removed from this advocacy position” (Untermann 1984, p. 84).
(3.3 feet) of roadway width gives pedestrians more time to safely cross the street (Untermann 1984). Secondly, at pedestrian-controlled crossings, pedestrians should not have to wait longer than 60 seconds to cross the street (Untermann and Moudon 1990). Thirdly, at fully signalized intersections, pedestrians should not be required to push a button to safely cross the street. Finally, audible signals on signalized crossings are helpful to pedestrians with visual impairments.

Whether uncontrolled or controlled, all pedestrian crossings should have crosswalks. As extensions of the sidewalk, their presence should be clearly marked with paint or special paving. Corner widening, as seen in Figure 2.4, also helps to prioritize pedestrian space by physically extending the sidewalk into the road and decreasing the crossing distance (Untermann 1984; Project for Public Spaces 1982). Finally, raised crosswalks—crosswalks built level to the height of sidewalks—are a more radical crosswalk design which requires vehicles, not pedestrians, to change elevation at intersections (Untermann 1984).

![Figure 2.4 "Before and After" Corner Widening](Source: Untermann 1984, p. 35).
Sidewalks must also be considered as part of a network of streets. When this network is a fine grid made up of relatively short blocks, there is increased route choice, accessibility, and continuity (Loukaitou-Sideris 1996; Greenberg 1995; Jacobs 1961). In addition, a fine grid creates many street corners—those “100% locations” well-used by pedestrians and coveted by shopkeepers who desire a prominent location (Whyte 1988). Beyond the grid, the pedestrian network can be made even more fine with the existence of lanes and shortcuts through blocks (Untermann 1984). This larger street network must also be supportive of pedestrian travel (Untermann and Moudon 1990).

Finally, the angle of the grid system has a bearing on microclimate. For example, it has been observed that in the absence of a strong attractor, pedestrians tend to walk on the sunny side of the street (City of Vancouver 1991). Therefore a grid orientation that allows both sides of the street to be sunny for at least part of the day would be beneficial.

2.4.3 Pedestrian Amenities

To be pleasant and comfortable, good neighbourhood shopping streets have pedestrian amenities such as street furniture, public art, and greenery. Though often providing modest improvements to the physical quality of the street, studies show an increase in the provision of pedestrian amenities results in increased street use (Gehl 1987). And while “most amenities are unintended. Why not intend them?” (Whyte 1988, p. 104). However, many pedestrian amenities are “the special seasonings of a great street” (Jacobs 1993, p. 301), and care must be taken not to overuse them.

Street furniture, when used effectively, not only directly enhances pedestrian comfort but helps define the street as a space (Southworth and Lynch 1974). Pedestrian-
scaled lighting, for example, increases the comfort and safety of the sidewalk (Untermann 1984, Southworth and Lynch 1974; Province of Ontario 1980; Barnett 1982; Fruin 1971; Gehl 1987) and has been shown to have a positive effect on street use ( Painter 1996). “Warm and friendly” lighting (Gehl 1987, p. 167) should be used when possible. For example, incandescent lighting tends to look more natural than energy-efficient lighting such as mercury vapour, sodium vapour, or metal halide (Gibbons and Oberholzer 1991).

Because “resting is an essential part of walking” (Untermann 1984, p. 28), seating is an important type of street furniture. It should be well-sited—oriented for people-watching, placed at the edges of open spaces, and arranged for sociability (Gehl 1987; Whyte 1988; Wiedenhoef 1981; Project for Public Spaces 1982; Southworth and Lynch 1974). Public seating should also be comfortable, with wood being a preferred material to stone or concrete, particularly in hot or cold weather ( Wiedenhoef 1981; Project for Public Spaces 1982; Province of Ontario 1980). There should also be a variety of seating, with chairs, benches, planter ledges, and stairways all providing potential resting spots (Lennard and Lennard 1987). Finally, there should be sufficient seating placed at regular intervals (Gehl 1987).

Garbage containers, though often poorly designed and sited, are vital street furniture on good neighbourhood shopping streets because “[when a place] is tidy, people are tidy” ( Whyte 1988, p. 91). Containers should therefore be visible and convenient without being obtrusive, sited at 30 metre (100 feet) intervals, or at least every block (Gibbons and Oberholzer 1991; Southworth and Lynch 1974). They must also be emptied regularly to be of any benefit and should be used in conjunction with a recycling program to decrease waste.

Other street furniture which provides valuable pedestrian amenity includes clocks,
telephones, mailboxes, drinking fountains, bike racks, and newspaper boxes, all of which should be situated outside of regular pedestrian traffic (Gibbons and Oberholzer 1991; Province of Ontario 1980). Because transit users are also pedestrians, bus stops are another important pedestrian amenity. They should be conveniently sited and “inherently congenial”—providing shelter, information, seating, and safety (Whyte 1988; Southworth and Lynch 1974; Project for Public Spaces 1982). The most lacking of public amenities in North America—the public restroom—should also be considered (Whyte 1988; Rudofsky 1969). Signs are another miscellaneous pedestrian amenity, providing information to pedestrians and increasing area legibility (Southworth and Lynch 1974). Street signs are particularly important and should be readily apparent to both pedestrians and drivers (Robinson 1903). Private signs can also add visual interest to the street as a whole while benefiting the particular business (Stewart 1985).

Public art is an appreciated amenity on shopping streets, entertaining us, defining space, and “contribute[ing] to the art of place-making” (Sucher 1995, p. 157). In Portland, for example, ornate drinking fountains donated by a philanthropist provide both refreshment and beauty on downtown streets (Whyte 1988), while in Seattle, bronze dance steps embedded in the sidewalk invite direct interaction with the street (Sucher 1995).

Greenery is an important pedestrian amenity, softening the edges of the built environment, helping to define space, hiding unattractive and impermeable facades, providing a more comfortable microclimate, and buffering pedestrians from traffic (Antupit et al 1996; Handy 1997; Untermann 1984; Loukaitou-Sideris 1997; Lennard and Lennard 1987; Wiedenhoef 1981; Province of Ontario 1980; Robinson 1903; Jacobs 1993). Street trees, in their ability to psychologically narrow the street and thereby help slow traffic, are especially valued. Indeed, Jacobs (1993, p. 293) notes
that, "given a limited budget, the most effective expenditure of funds to improve a street would probably be on trees." While the City of San Francisco (1984) suggests they be planted at 6 metre (20 feet) intervals, "if there is a rule of thumb ... it would be that closer is better" (Jacobs 1993, p. 294). Regardless, trees are better planted in the ground than in planters, with tree grids surrounding the tree base to help protect and ventilate root systems and tree guards to help protect young trees in busy areas (Gibbons and Oberholzer 1991). However, some feel that street trees are not always appropriate for shopping streets due to their potential to block the views of stores (Sitte 1965). Similarly, the use of planters is discouraged unless they are regularly maintained and are placed outside of the sidewalk's pedestrian zone (Untermann 1984).

2.4.4 Traffic Management

Vehicular traffic per se is not problematic, but its volume and speed must be controlled and it must not dominate the street at the expense of other modes or the street itself (Untermann and Moudon 1990; Greenberg 1995; Francis 1987; Engwicht 1993). Street design can help mitigate the negative impacts of vehicular traffic by decreasing both conflict between modes and traffic speed (Antupit et al 1996; Selberg 1996; Appleyard 1981). And the "slower the vehicular traffic, the easier it is for the pedestrian to assert himself" (Whyte 1988, p. 63). Though neighbourhood shopping streets may be difficult to redesign due to their current role as traffic movers, calming them is possible (see for example Hass-Klau 1990; Devon County Council 1991).

A fine street network—a grid made up of short blocks (e.g. 60 to 90 metres or 200 to 300 feet long)—is important for traffic management because it allows for freedom in pedestrian and cyclist route choice while providing relatively direct links between places (Handy 1997; Gehl 1987; Fruin 1974; Langdon 1994; Untermann 1984).
In addition, because traffic can be distributed in a variety of ways, arterial streets, though bearing the brunt of volume, need not be overburdened. When crosstown streets occur frequently enough (for example, every 0.6 km or 1 mile), they are able to serve as a traffic arterial without cutting neighbourhoods in two; “they bring people together from neighbourhoods on each side” (Langdon 1994, p. 144).

Good neighbourhood shopping streets, though often serving as traffic routes, are not overly wide (Handy 1997). Relatively narrow streets discourage high traffic speed and volume while helping to manage traffic in indirect ways. To illustrate, in a study of major Seattle streets, “more jaywalking, easier navigation along and across the roadway, more elderly people and those with mobility limitations, more bicycles, more people with pets, and more strolling rather than walking” was observed on narrow streets than on wide streets (Untermann and Moudon 1990, p. 9).

As mentioned earlier, street width can be considered relative to building height, a ratio that determines whether a street has the quality of an outdoor room. In terms of absolute street width, however, a 20 metre (66 foot) right of way is considered to be relatively narrow for major streets, providing two travelling lanes, two parking lanes, and two sidewalks. Lane width is also important for traffic management, with 3 metre (10 feet) lanes recommended over the speed-enhancing 3.5 to 4 metre (12 to 14 feet) lanes favoured by engineers (Untermann 1990b).

The scale of the street is important in other respects and should reflect a diversity of transportation modes. Intersections, for example, should be less hostile to non-motorized modes by having smaller curb radii, as illustrated in Figure 2.5 (Greenberg 1995; Sucher 1995; Untermann 1984). The “sharper” sidewalk corners that result from a smaller radii slow turning vehicles and make it easier to cross the street.
Good neighbourhood shopping streets should also be transit-friendly—having sufficient density to support frequent service, buildings that are oriented to the street and not to parking lots, decent bus stops, and, as seen in Figure 2.6, bus bulges—sidewalk extensions which enable buses to pick up and drop off passengers without having to merge in and out of traffic (Untermann 1984). Electric technology should also be considered, with trolley buses and streetcars providing relatively quiet and street-friendly transit. Finally, bicycle travel should also be encouraged with the provision of bike racks, bike lanes, and a continuous system of bike routes (Wiedenhoeft 1981; Untermann 1984).
Parking is another important element of traffic management, providing access for drivers and—when not free—revenue for street improvements and incentives for the use of alternative transportation modes (Durning 1996). On-street parking is preferred because a buffer is created for pedestrians, shoppers have convenient access to stores, and vehicular traffic is calmed (Langdon 1994; Kunstler 1996; Untermann 1984; Greenberg 1995; Jacobs 1993). When further parking is needed, shared lots, either behind storefronts or in a covered structure, can accommodate motorists without inconveniencing pedestrians or breaking up the street wall. Nevertheless, because established neighbourhood shopping streets often cannot create such lots, the street’s ability to attract people on foot, by bicycle, and by transit becomes particularly important (Untermann 1984). Furthermore, “when it comes to finding a parking place in urban environments, the usual motto is ‘enough will not suffice’ ” (Wiedenhoeft 1981, p. 55).

2.4.5 Street activity

Regardless of its physical condition, people tend to be attracted to places where other people are (Whyte 1988; Southworth and Lynch 1974; Lynch 1971; Gehl 1987; Jacobs 1961; Untermann 1984; Wiedenhoeft 1981). A good neighbourhood shopping street therefore has a certain level of street activity, of “people actively interchanging goods, services, information and impressions” (Wiedenhoeft 1981, p. 73). Untermann and Moudon (1990, p. 9), for example, note that a total of at least 380 pedestrians per hour (on both sides of the street) yields a healthy, solid, pedestrian environment. Furthermore, research has shown that “there is a high degree of compatibility between strong retail and a lively street life” (Whyte 1988, p. 35). Because the surrounding neighbourhood is the street’s most important market, its density is a significant factor for street activity.
Another important component of street activity and good urban design in general is a diversity in activities: “living, working, trading, shopping and playing all gain from being linked, as opposed to being zoned and separated” (Tibbalds 1988, p. 13). In addition to creating a more consistently lively street space, more efficient use is made of amenities such as parking and a more diverse population exists (Francis 1987; Gehl 1987; Langdon 1994; Antupit et al 1996; Handy 1996; Oldenburg 1989; Wiedenhoeft 1981; Greenberg 1995; Jacobs 1961).

Street activity centred around special events is also valuable. As Robinson stated in 1903 (p. 373), “it is no secret that a beautiful celebration is good business.” Neighbourhood shopping streets, as the focus of a neighbourhood, are particularly well-suited to such special events. Whether big or small, spontaneous or planned, such events can facilitate triangulation—the “process by which some external stimulus provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk to each other as if they were not” (Whyte 1988, p. 154).

Safety is both a determinant of street activity and a consequence of it. In the former case, a street’s safety has a tangible impact on people’s use of the street while in the latter case, lively areas are largely self-policing because the mere presence of people will discourage undesirable activity (Whyte 1988; Greenberg 1995; Jacobs 1961). Cities however, are struggling to deal with the increasingly visible consequences of urban poverty—for example, panhandling and unsolicited “squeegeeing” of car windshields. Society’s tolerance is being tested, with some people seeing such activity as a threat to their safety and the enjoyment of the street as a public space. In Victoria, for example, a “code of conduct” by-law was recently adopted to reclaim its downtown streets from street kids and New Westminster and Vancouver have both enacted by-laws which limit panhandling activity.
2.4.6 Neighbourhood Goods and Services

Another characteristic of a good neighbourhood shopping street is its relevance to the surrounding neighbourhood. Regardless of how “good” the street is, surveys have shown that “residents perceive the strip as an important spine of their neighbourhood” (Loukaitou-Sideris 1997, p. 19). Consequently, good neighbourhood shopping streets should relate to its local context by having neighbourhood-oriented goods and services (i.e. not merely auto-oriented ones) and land uses that are compatible with residential areas (City and County of San Francisco 1984; Greenberg 1995; Schumacher 1978). The street should also reflect the neighbourhood’s demographics, work patterns, societal values, and time availability (Holl 1996).

An appropriate retail mix is important. For example, to provide diverse goods and services, a good neighbourhood shopping street should include restaurants, banks, grocery stores, offices, drug stores, hardware stores, bakeries, coffee shops, and dollar stores (Langdon 1994; Von Eckardt 1978; Greenberg 1995; Pelham and Macintosh 1985). Street vendors also provide variety to the retail mix, increasing both visual diversity and street activity (Untermann 1984; Project for Public Spaces 1982; Rudofsky 1969). Without a good mix of goods and services, residents may have to travel to another neighbourhood, increasing traffic and decreasing convenience (Untermann 1984). Retail variety is also important in the case of non-interactive businesses. Too many banks, for example, are problematic due to their relatively large size, their frequent inability to interact with the street, and their occasional unattractiveness (Kalman 1985; Gehl 1987). To counteract the deadening effect of too many banks, the City and County of San Francisco (1984) prefers that they not be located within 100 metres (300 feet) of each other.

Good neighbourhood shopping streets also benefit from the variety provided by
numerous, small business owners (Kunstler 1996; Whyte 1988; Sucher 1995; Langdon 1994). Indeed, the neighbourhood shopping street is where small businesses can thrive best (Greenberg 1995). And when these small businesses are owned by people who live in the area, the businesses are able to respond more readily to local needs. Chain stores on the other hand, benefit from increased buying power and are able to undersell local businesses. In addition, the concentration and centralization of buying power may ignore local needs. Chain stores can also hurt the appearance of shopping streets with their standardized outlets and conspicuous signs (Kalman 1985).

Convenience is another important factor of neighbourhood goods and services. In one sense, convenience represents the ease with which neighbourhood residents can walk to goods and services, an issue which is discussed with respect to a supportive neighbourhood context. In another sense, convenience refers to the businesses’ relative distance from each other. Specifically, convenience is enhanced and stores thrive best when they are concentrated in a relatively small area (Whyte 1988; Gehl 1987; Greenberg 1995).

2.4.7 Maintenance

According to Greenberg (1995, p. 23), the “urban variant of the second law of thermodynamics [is that] without constant vigilance and intervention, disorder—of both the material and behaviour kinds—tends to increase.” Therefore maintenance is an important characteristic of neighbourhood shopping streets, with a well-maintained street indicating economic vitality and concern about appearances (Jacobs 1993). On a smaller scale, quality materials that are easy to maintain are important, and individual businesses, whether in partnership with government or on their own initiative, can take responsibility for simple things like street cleaning (Rowe 1996).
On a larger scale, the maintenance of good neighbourhood shopping streets requires organizations and individuals who take a long-term interest in the well-being of the street. In terms of formal organizations, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) can initiate street improvements, solicit appropriate tenants and help ensure that vacant sites and buildings are promptly leased (Whyte 1988; Rowe 1996). Merchant associations can also provide a similar forum for community retail. In the absence of such an organization, Greenberg (1995) suggests that municipal government play the mall manager. Regardless, one initiative that could be used by neighbourhood shopping streets is a “shop locally and save the world” marketing campaign which would explain the economic, social, and environmental benefits of shopping in the neighbourhood (Engwicht 1993, p. 141).

2.4.8 Supportive Neighbourhood Context

A supportive neighbourhood context is an important characteristic of good neighbourhood shopping streets. In terms of size, a good neighbourhood is often described as having a range of facilities and destinations within a 400 to 800 metre (0.25 to 0.5 mile) radius (Moughtin 1992; Kunstler 1996; Von Eckardt 1978; City and County of San Francisco 1984; Greenberg 1995). This represents a 5 to 10 minute walk and has been demonstrated as the furthest distance people are willing to walk (Hillman and Whalley 1979). However, the more interesting, comfortable, and safe a route is, the further people are willing to walk (Untermann 1984; Wiedenhoeft 1981).

Sufficient neighbourhood density is another important contextual factor for a good neighbourhood shopping street (Antupit et al 1996; Langdon 1994; Jacobs 1961). This is because, as density increases, the potential market for neighbourhood goods and

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7 Suggested density figures vary. For example, while Jane Jacobs (1961) feels that at least 100 dwellings per acre are necessary to produce diversity, Allan Jacobs (1993) feels only 15 dwellings per acre are necessary to achieve active urban communities.
services increases (City of Toronto 1982). Furthermore, research shows that as density increases, walking trips increase (Handy 1997). Density has also been shown to be related to the range of facilities within walking distance (Hillman and Whalley 1979).

Mixed use, like density, also results in an increase in walking trips and is therefore another important factor of a supportive neighbourhood context. (Cervero and Radisch 1995). Similarly, a diverse population will also help create a good neighbourhood shopping street by supporting diverse businesses. A mix in housing styles and types helps support residents of varying incomes, lifestyles, and family size (Langdon 1994; Loukaitou-Sideris 1997).

It is also important that the neighbourhood can be defined as a cohesive unit. When people know its name, its approximate boundaries, and feel an attachment to it, a neighbourhood is more likely to have a sense of place (Engwicht 1993). A supportive neighbourhood context also requires that there is an opportunity for citizens to be involved in their neighbourhood shopping streets. (Mackin and Krieger 1989; Rowe 1996; Barnett 1982; Francis 1987). Some even argue that residents should have direct control over their neighbourhood destinies (see for example Von Eckardt 1978). Regardless, participation is necessary because it responds to the diverse needs and expectations of actual street users and—if participation is active rather than reactive—eliminates potential conflicts (Loukaitou-Sideris 1996; Gurstein 1995).

Neighbourhood associations, particularly in the absence of a formal business organization, are a valuable resource for getting citizens involved in neighbourhood issues and for lobbying on behalf of the street. Individual involvement is also important. For example, Jacobs (1961, p. 68) feels “the social structure of sidewalk life hangs partly on what can be called self-appointed public characters ... anyone
who is in frequent contact with a wide circle of people and who is sufficiently interested to call himself a public character.”

2.4.9 Supportive Government

Because the “building block of community is the neighbourhood,” governments need to improve their attempts at creating balanced, satisfying neighbourhoods (Langdon 1994). A supportive local government therefore plays a role in good neighbourhood shopping streets. To begin with there should be Official Community Plans which articulate a desired goal. From there, government’s most obvious influence lies in its zoning and building codes and parking regulations. In Vancouver, the Zoning and Development By-law is a powerful regulatory tool. With respect to neighbourhood shopping streets, its most relevant regulatory elements are seen in Table 2.1. For example, frontage requirements can help increase commercial diversity and visual interest, height requirements can help create a human-scaled streetscape, and minimal front yard setback requirements prohibit pedestrian-hostile environments such as strip malls. Though resistance to such regulations may occasionally occur, Whyte (1988, p. 249) notes that “developers are a pragmatic lot. Once a requirement is on the books they will comply with it.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulation</th>
<th>Effect on Neighbourhood Shopping Streets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>land use</td>
<td>what type of use may exist (retail, service, office, dwelling, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frontage</td>
<td>how wide the maximum frontage of a commercial use may be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>height</td>
<td>how tall a building may be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>setback</td>
<td>how far a building must be setback from its lot line (front, rear, and side)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>floor space ratio</td>
<td>how much floor space may be built as a proportion of lot size</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1 Zoning Elements and Their Effect on Neighbourhood Shopping Streets
(Source: City of Vancouver 1996b)
Beyond the technicalities, municipalities should also make a long term commitment to their neighbourhood shopping streets. The City of Toronto, for example, has recognized certain areas as "traditional shopping streets" and is committed to retaining and improving their vitality by encouraging more housing development in and around the strips, encouraging new retail development on them, and supporting their ability to attract customers and provide good service (City of Toronto 1982).

In addition, walking, cycling, and public transportation issues must be incorporated into all planning and transportation processes of government. For example, pedestrian standards and rights should be enforced, the allocation of transportation resources made more equitable, parking requirements decreased, development proposals evaluated for their effect on pedestrian convenience and comfort, and buildings exempted from property tax in order to encourage development of valuable vacant or underutilized sites (Kunstler 1996; Durning 1996; Rowe 1996).

Local government can also work with various individuals and groups to help create and maintain good neighbourhood shopping streets. For example, businesses, crime prevention offices, transit, neighbourhood organizations, and other levels of government are all potential partners who should be recognized as allies in the making of good neighbourhood shopping streets (Loukaitou-Sideris 1997).

Beyond municipal government, there are other government departments which are relevant to neighbourhood shopping streets. Provincially, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is concerned with planning issues such as beautification, land use, and development, while the Ministry of Small Business, Tourism, and Culture is interested in heritage and small business. For example, from 1981 to 1985, the Heritage Area Revitalization Program (HARP) helped street-level merchants respond to competition from shopping malls.
Federally, the Neighbourhood Improvement Program (NIP) in the 1970s and the Main Street program funded by Heritage Canada in the 1980s helped subsidize many street improvements in Canadian cities. In the United States, the National Trust for Historic Preservation continues to provide inspiration. Since the 1980s, its Main Street Program has used a four-pronged approach of design, organization, promotion, and economic restructuring to help revitalize 1,300 “main streets” (National Main Street Centre’s website 1998).

2.5 Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to discuss the nature of the neighbourhood shopping street and its bearing on public space and urban design literature. Many elements conspire to make a good neighbourhood shopping street, but they must first be based on a number of fundamental principles. Specifically, a good neighbourhood shopping street is accessible, comfortable, sociable, a place, adaptable, beautiful, and diverse. Flowing from these principles are the characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping streets, the means by which the principles can be attained. The following two chapters look at these characteristics—buildings that relate to the street, good walking facilities, pedestrian amenities, traffic management, street activity, neighbourhood goods and services, maintenance, supportive neighbourhood context, and supportive government—as they pertain to the Vancouver case studies of Commercial Drive and West 41st Avenue.
CHAPTER THREE:
COMMERCIAL DRIVE CASE STUDY

3.1. Introduction to the Case Study

This chapter looks at Commercial Drive—specifically, the three blocks between 1st Avenue and Kitchener Avenue—as an example of a good neighbourhood shopping street. The case study begins by looking at the relevant aspects of the street’s neighbourhood context\(^8\)—its urban context, history, people, land use, and transportation. Following this background information, the characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping streets as identified in the literature review are examined.

3.2 Neighbourhood Context

3.2.1 Urban Context

Commercial Drive is a popular shopping street located in the centre of Grandview-Woodland,\(^9\) an inner-city neighbourhood located on the east side of Vancouver (see Figure 3.1). To the neighbourhood’s east lie Strathcona and the Downtown Eastside, to the south Kensington-Cedar Cottage, to the north Burrard Inlet, and to the east Hastings-Sunrise. With the exception of the northern boundary, the edges of Grandview are somewhat indistinct, blurring with neighbouring areas. Located on a slight rise in the topography, Grandview is aptly named, with views of Vancouver’s downtown, the mountains, and Burnaby available from various neighbourhood locations.

\(^8\) Unless otherwise indicated, the neighbourhood information for both case studies is derived from the City of Vancouver’s *Community Profiles* (City of Vancouver 1994a-d) which are largely based on 1991 Statistics Canada census data. More recent census data was not available at the time that research was conducted.

\(^9\) While Grandview-Woodland is the City’s official name for this neighbourhood, it is more commonly referred to as simply “Grandview.”
3.2.2 History

The path that would later become Commercial Drive was originally a skid road, used to drag logs from the timber stand that was Grandview. In 1891, the Vancouver-New Westminster interurban railway was established. Running down the old skid road—now named Park Drive—every hour, the railway and subsequent local streetcar service spurred the development of Grandview. The area developed quickly, with commercial businesses setting up on Park Drive to serve the new residents, many of whom were moving into attractive and substantial homes. Indeed, the area was originally promoted as a prestigious alternative to the developed West End. In 1912, Park Drive was renamed by “optimistic merchants [who] decided that a change of name to Commercial Drive would create a busy thoroughfare with teeming sidewalks” (Applebe 1990, p. 10).
Following WWI and the Canadian Pacific Railway's promotion of Shaughnessy as an exclusive Vancouver neighbourhood, Grandview became a more modest, working class area. The primarily Anglo-Saxon neighbourhood also became more multicultural, with the arrival of Italian, Chinese, and Eastern European immigrants. The period following WWII brought a second, larger wave of Italian residents to the neighbourhood, reviving Commercial Drive (which had not yet lived up to its expectations) with new grocery stores, cafés, and other businesses. In the 1950s and 1960s, more Chinese residents moved to the area, and the subsequent arrival of the area’s first East Indian residents further added to Grandview’s increasing diversity.

### 3.2.3 People

In 1991, the population of Grandview was 27,460, an increase of almost 7% since 1986 and reflective of overall population growth in Vancouver. Grandview’s average household size in 1991 was 2.2 people per dwelling unit, only slightly less than the Vancouver average of 2.3 people per dwelling unit. Of significant interest demographically is the relatively young profile of the neighbourhood in 1991, with more residents under 40 years of age than in the city as a whole (63% versus 58%).

Grandview is still a very multicultural community, with 17% of 1991 residents listing Chinese as their mother tongue, an increase from 14% in 1971. In 1991, however, only 4% of residents listed Italian as their mother tongue, a decrease from 13% in 1971. Other languages listed in the 1991 census include French, German, Portuguese, and Indo-Pakistani. In addition, more than 15% of respondents fit into the “other” language category. Given this continuing diversity, it is not surprising that MOSAIC (Multilingual Orientation Service Association for Immigrant Communities)—a local non-profit service for new residents—has been kept busy for the last 26 years in its prominent location on Commercial Drive.
In 1991, Grandview had a larger proportion of low-income persons than the city as a whole (38% versus 25%). There was also a larger proportion of assisted housing for low to moderate income households—16% of the area’s housing units or 58 projects were non-market. Furthermore, in 1991, there were significantly more renters in Grandview than in the city as a whole (73% versus 59%). Finally, the population of Grandview in 1991 was also more mobile than the city as a whole, with 62% of people (versus 58% of Vancouver residents) reporting that they had changed their place of residence in the past five years.

Grandview residents have always been active in their community, organizing to improve their streets and fighting highway plans through their neighbourhood. In 1964, the Grandview-Woodland’s Area Council (GWAC) was formed out of growing frustration with a lack of community facilities. Consisting of 15 elected members, GWAC continues to help area residents and interest groups voice their concerns to City Hall. In the late 1960s, the Britannia Community Services Centre, located just off Commercial Drive on Napier Street, was planned by both citizens and the City as a “supermarket of community services” (Staley 1980). Today, its library, recreation centre, schools, and daycare continue as a joint operation by the community and the municipality. Community activism also continues with Our Own Backyard, a community development project that is helping Grandview residents get involved in neighbourhood planning issues.
Figure 3.2 Land Use in Grandview
(Source: City of Vancouver 1994b, p. 5)
3.2.4 Land Use

As seen in Figure 3.2, Grandview is primarily a residential neighbourhood. However, there is a variety of housing types—including single family detached homes, detached homes with suites, duplexes, townhomes, and apartment buildings. In 1991 there were 12,665 dwelling units, an increase in dwelling units of 44% since 1971. Grandview is a relatively dense Vancouver neighbourhood, with 28.8 dwelling units per hectare in 1991 (the city average was 17.7 dwelling units per hectare).

Industry plays a large role in Grandview’s land use. Located in the north and northeast end of the neighbourhood, the industrial land here represents 40% of the City’s total industrial land base. To the north, much of the activity is port-related, while to the northeast are manufacturing activities such as the garment industry, printing, and food processing.

Commercial land use primarily exists along Broadway, East Hastings Street between Victoria and Renfrew, and along Commercial Drive. Commercial Drive has more than 20 short blocks of commercial uses, with buildings generally ranging from one to three storeys high and of varying vintages. Newer buildings tend to be both wider (often taking up half of a block or more) and taller (often four storeys high) than their older neighbours. Regardless of age, multi-storey buildings are frequently mixed use, with condominiums or apartments occupying their upper storeys. Numerous street-level vacancies are seen outside of the core commercial area.

There are 10.35 hectares of park land throughout Grandview, distributed amongst 12 neighbourhood parks. Commercial Drive’s Grandview Park is one of the area’s most prominent parks and is home to the Grandview Cenotaph—a landscape resource on the Vancouver Heritage Register (City of Vancouver 1998b). There is a relative lack of
green space in Grandview—only 0.4 hectares of park per 1000 people (the city average is 1.12 hectares). This lack of public realm may account for the popularity of the study area’s two nearby parks and the use of the street itself for socializing and recreation.

3.2.5 Transportation

Transportation, the catalyst to the neighbourhood’s development, continues to influence Grandview. Today, due to its location between the eastern suburbs and downtown, and between the port and south Vancouver, traffic plays a large role. Major east/west streets include East 1st Avenue, a residential street whose four lanes carry about 50,000 vehicles per day (City of Vancouver 1997b), Hastings Street, and Broadway. Clark Drive is one of the city’s grittiest streets—a major truck route carrying six busy lanes of traffic. Victoria Drive and Commercial Drive are less busy north/south streets. Given the existence of a fine street grid, traffic is fairly well-distributed amongst the major streets, located approximately one kilometre apart. However, rat-running—the short-cutting of vehicular traffic through residential streets—is common throughout the neighbourhood (City of Vancouver 1982).

Transit is very important to the neighbourhood. In 1952, local streetcar service was replaced by trolley buses in BC Electric’s “rail to rubber” campaign. Today, under the auspices of BC Transit, the trolley buses continue with the #10 on Hastings Street, the #20 on Commercial Drive, and the #9 on Broadway. In addition, the #22 bus runs on diesel down Clark Drive, and the #99 B-Line supplements the #9 service with an express, articulated diesel bus. Improvements to service, however, have been lacking. For example, busy East 1st Avenue has long been cited as a potential bus route but continues to be the sole domain of vehicular traffic (City of Vancouver 1982). In the 1980s, Skytrain—an elevated rail system that primarily serves regional transit
needs—was added to BC Transit's repertoire despite the objections of City Council and area residents. The controversy continues with the recent announcement that the neighbourhood will soon be home to another Skytrain line—and not an anticipated, at-grade, light-rail transit line.

In terms of bicycle travel, Grandview is home to one of the City's oldest and best-used bike routes—the Union/Adanac Bike Route. In addition, plans are currently underway for the creation of a greenway on Woodland Drive, a quiet residential street two blocks west of Commercial Drive.

### 3.3 Evaluation of Characteristics

The characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping streets—buildings that relate to the street, comfortable walking facilities, pedestrian amenities, traffic management, street activity, neighbourhood goods and services, maintenance, supportive neighbourhood context, and supportive government—are examined in the context of Commercial Drive. As seen in Figure 3.3, the specific study area is the three blocks on Commercial Drive between 1st Avenue and Kitchener Street.

![Figure 3.3 Commercial Drive Study Area](image-url)
3.3.1 Buildings that Relate to the Street

An Outdoor Room

Commercial Drive has the quality of an outdoor room. This is due to a fairly consistent street wall, little height variation between buildings, and a close setback of most buildings. Furthermore, there is no loss of continuity due to parking lots or vacant lots, and the narrow gap that exists between two older buildings between Grant Street and Kitchener Street is visually bridged by a fence. One narrow alley interrupts the sidewalk for 20 feet but is not too disruptive. Nevertheless, the Commercial Drive Area Plan suggests that such alleys eventually be removed in order to increase the continuity of the streetscape (City of Vancouver 1982).

![Diagram of Commercial Drive buildings](image)

**Figure 3.4 Buildings on Commercial Drive**

Height variation between buildings on Commercial Drive is kept within one-half to two storeys, as seen in Figure 3.4. No buildings are greater than three storeys high.
and within blocks there is generally consistency. Sometimes though, the street wall is saw-toothed in appearance—for example, in the eastern block between 1st Avenue and Graveley Street—but most of the one-storey buildings are fairly tall, stretching to ease the transition to adjacent higher buildings.

Minimal building setback also helps create the quality of an outdoor room. On Commercial Drive, though there are frequently recessed entrances—often accommodating sidewalk displays or seating—most buildings have no setback. When there is a setback, it is generally less than 2.5 metres (8 feet) deep. In two such instances—in front of the MOSAIC building and Norman’s Fruit and Salad—the extra space is occupied with positive amenities such as telephones, street musicians, outdoor seating, and sidewalk displays. However, the setback at CIBC is underutilized and exacerbates the bank’s poor relation to the street.

Above street-level, there are two instances of upper-storey setbacks which create a bit of a gap in the street wall. However, as these occur in the middle of two large complexes (Il Mercato and the MOSAIC building) rather than at the end of their respective blocks, the setbacks are less distractive than they might otherwise be.

Buildings should also relate to each other as well as to the street in order to create the sense of an outdoor room. In this sense, there is not much architectural unity among building styles along Commercial Drive—Edwardian two- and three-storey brick buildings, one-storey “taxpayers” with false fronts, one- and two-storey modern buildings from the 1950s and 1960s, and Postmodern buildings of the 1980s. Though the building styles do not have harmony in their materials or architectural elements, the street’s common setback lines and relatively consistent building height help create unity in the streetscape.
The ratio of building height to road width is also an important determinant of the quality of an outdoor room. Given that Commercial Drive's right-of-way is 20 metres (65 feet) wide in the northern two blocks and the buildings are one to three storeys (5.5 to 11.5 metres or 18 to 38 feet) tall, the ratio ranges from 1:1.7 to 1:3.6. For example, the two-storey buildings between Grant Street and Kitchener Street create a human-scaled building height to street width ratio of 1:2.2. Even in the southern block, where the road widens to 23 metres (76 feet), the ratio is only 1:2.6.

Interaction with the Street

Commercial Drive benefits from having buildings that, in addition to being close to the street, interact with the street. Retail fronts most of the street, creating a large amount of pedestrian traffic in and out of stores and making the businesses accessible and convenient to pedestrians. With the exception of four medical offices, two banks, an insurance broker, and a travel agency, all at-grade uses are street-oriented retail. As a mall, Il Mercato is also inherently not street-oriented. Most of its retail is within the mall environment and most of its exterior frontage includes the non-interactive uses mentioned above—specifically, a bank, a dental office, a medical clinic, and an insurance business. Such an arrangement is unfortunate for both the street and the interior mall merchants—the former is degraded by the loss of street retail and the latter does not benefit from the significant pedestrian traffic outside the mall.

Upper-storeys on Commercial Drive, when evident, are occupied primarily by apartments. In this sense there is often an element of second storiness along Commercial Drive. The apartments are not set back from the street below, and, in some cases, their bay windows extend into it. Someone can be heard practising the saxophone, plants are seen in balconies, and at night the lights of the apartments liven the street. Sometimes—particularly in newer buildings—upper-storeys are occupied
by offices or other uses that need not be at street-level. Most provide some visual interest in terms of window or banner signs, but they otherwise lend little to the street below. In particular, there is little second storiness in the MOSAIC building given its tinted windows, blinds, and partial upper-storey setback.

Doors and windows on good shopping streets should front the sidewalk for maximum interaction with the street. Commercial Drive’s doors always front the street. An exception is again seen in Il Mercato, where retail stores in the mall are accessed through the mall itself. Even an optical store which flanks the mall entrance cannot be directly accessed from the street. In addition, two businesses elsewhere on Commercial Drive occupy multiple storefronts with multiple doors, yet patrons are directed to use only one of them. All other businesses, with the exception of a few second-storey offices, have doors directly facing the street. These doors are frequently left open during business hours, providing easy access and sensory stimulation for pedestrians.

Windows also front the street on Commercial Drive, dominating the at-grade street wall and creating interest for what is inside the buildings. In the case of a few cafés and a produce store, the windows are thrown wide open to the adjacent sidewalk. There is even a restaurant with a pedestrian-level take-out window. In a few cases, however—the chain-link fence addition to Home Hardware, the entrance to MOSAIC (which vandals have used as a blank canvas for graffiti), much of the Liquor Store frontage, and half of the VanCity frontage—windows are absent and the pedestrian is faced with a blank wall. In addition, there are some instances where the windows—covered with blinds, posters, or paint—become de facto blank walls. Despite these exceptions, as seen in Figure 3.5, the majority of the frontage on Commercial Drive is fairly transparent.
Furthering its visual interest, many businesses on Commercial Drive orient at least part of their trade to the street via window displays (see Appendix A). Travel brochures, bakery goods, clothing, and testimonials (for example, one business' window display includes a letter from a happy customer) all attract the attention of passerby, but the most popular window display is the wall of clients' pet photos at Vancouver Photo and Hobby. Restaurants and cafés, in addition to having the "display" of their patrons, frequently attach reviews or menus to their windows.

Sidewalk displays on Commercial Drive occur less frequently than window displays (see Appendix A) but are even more striking in their ability to attract pedestrian attention (see Figure 3.6). In addition, sidewalk displays are exciting because, unlike most window displays, they are ever-changing. On Commercial Drive, fresh fruit and vegetables, housewares, newspapers, cold drinks, and more are on display, sometimes being so extensive as to negate the need for a window display.
Sandwich boards, like sidewalk displays, add visual interest while creating a transition from the public realm of the sidewalk to the semi-private realm of the business. Most stores, particularly those which do not have sidewalk displays, use sandwich boards. As seen in Figure 3.7, skinny sandwich boards can decrease pedestrian conflict while still being highly visible. Restaurants also sometimes have menu boards that are either free standing or are posted to the wall.
Finally, devices such as canopies, seating, and landscaping also help buildings interact with the street. As seen in Appendix A, canopies are present on most buildings on Commercial Drive. Where they are not present, for example on character buildings, the street benefits from an unobstructed view of striking facades and signs. On other buildings however, the lack of a canopy is unfortunate. For example, a canopy on the CIBC building would not only ameliorate the microclimate of a busy street corner but would distract the eye from an otherwise blank facade. In terms of seating, almost all restaurants and cafés have sidewalk seating either within the building’s setback or recessed entrance, on the sidewalk, or on a side street. However, landscaping between the building and the sidewalk on Commercial Drive is rare. The only instance in the study area was seen at Bukowski’s—a new restaurant whose door is attractively flanked by two large planters and two narrow planting boxes.
Pedestrian Scale

In terms of scale, it is again important that the buildings relate to the street. As seen in Appendix A, 83% of businesses on Commercial Drive have frontages that are less than 10 metres (33 feet) wide. Furthermore, 53% of businesses have frontages that are less than 5 metres (16.5 feet) wide. These narrow frontages provide for a number of different business opportunities, diverse activity, and pedestrian interest. However, many of the large storefronts occur in a single block—between Graveley Street and Kitchener Street on the east side of the street. Here, the Liquor Store's 18 metre (59 feet) wide storefront has little visual interest and dominates almost half the block, while Kalena Shoes occupies three storefronts to be 15 metres (48 feet) wide, further decreasing the diversity of businesses and providing few working entrances. Fortunately, newer buildings built on large lots tend to reflect a pedestrian scale with 5 metre (16.5 feet) wide storefronts.

Buildings on Commercial Drive also, in general, help create a positive microclimate. As mentioned above, most buildings have canopies that protect pedestrians from rain and provide some shade. The buildings on this street are also sufficiently low in height that all areas can be sunny at some point during the day. In addition, the recessed upper-storeys of Il Mercato and the MOSAIC building, though somewhat detrimental to the quality of an outdoor room, help sun fall to the street below. Finally, the frequent use of porous materials such as brick and stucco in both older and newer structures helps diffuse the rays of the sun.

Beauty

Finally, the buildings of Commercial Drive are mostly, despite their combined eccentricity, quite attractive. The City of Vancouver has recognized some of the
area's character by placing three buildings within the study area—the Belmont Block, Odlin Block, and the Cozy Apartments—on the *Vancouver Heritage Register*. Most buildings, particularly the older ones, meet the sky with a cornice line which is sometimes quite ornate. Even some of the newer buildings on the street complement their neighbours' roof-top details.

Perhaps due to their age, most buildings on Commercial Drive (22 of 31) are decorated to some extent. For example, the Belmont Block has a beautiful cornice line, an entrance detailed with small, patterned tiles, and its name cast into the façade. In addition, a smaller building between Grant Street and Kitchener Street on the eastern side of the street has a cornice line which is accentuated by both Spanish roof tiles and large square tiles. In terms of signs, most are unremarkable—placed on canopies or painted above storefronts. A neon and metal sign for the WaaZuBee Café, however, is worth noting for its beauty.

Finally, in the literature review, the importance of quality and siting of civic buildings in the creation of beauty on the street was noted. On Commercial Drive, the Vancouver Health Department has a prominent corner location in the upper-storeys of the pink-stucco, Il Mercato building. However, its relation to the street at-grade is poor. And though not exactly a civic structure, the government-run liquor store in the MOSAIC building also poorly relates to the street.

3.3.2 Good Walking Facilities

Sufficiently Wide Sidewalks

The sidewalks on Commercial Drive range from 3 to 3.5 metres (9.5 to 11 feet) wide. This is very close to the minimum recommended width of 3 to 3.6 metres (10 to 12
feet) (Loukaitou-Sideris 1997; Untermann 1984). However, it was observed that in some areas additional width would be helpful. For example, when the effective sidewalk width is considered (i.e. the actual sidewalk width minus the curb zone, building zone, and various sidewalk obstructions), the area available for walking is sometimes narrowed to 1.5 metres (5 feet). At such locations, pedestrian traffic occasionally becomes significantly congested and people must walk in the curb zone or on the roadway.

**Attractive and Comfortable Sidewalks**

The sidewalks in the core area of Commercial Drive, as a result of a Neighbourhood Improvement Program in the 1970s, have been differentiated from other sidewalks on the street by the use of a 0.6 metre (2 feet) wide brick buffer area. This helps create a visual transition from the pedestrian path to the road and reflects the use of brick in the buildings, but does little to create an actual buffer. As mentioned above, people often are forced to walk on this outer strip due to pedestrian congestion.

The sidewalks, however, are relatively free of cracks and are themselves of good quality. But litter seems to be a problem. This is most likely a result of insufficient garbage containers and lack of maintenance by the city. In addition, there are numerous obstructions to pedestrian traffic, not all of which are pedestrian amenities. For example, there are frequent posts which note parking restrictions although such information is also noted on the parking meters. There are also instances where objects are placed in a way that unnecessarily narrows the sidewalk. Finally, pedestrians themselves sometimes create an obstruction.

The sidewalks on Commercial Drive are allowed to continue fairly safely and seamlessly. They are not interrupted by driveways and there is only one instance
of an alley. In addition, there are curb ramps at all corners to allow easy access for wheelchairs, strollers, and shopping carts. These curb ramps, however, are often oriented in ways that do not allow for direct pedestrian travel.

Apart from the visual buffer that is provided by the brick inlay, there are a few other buffers along Commercial Drive between the sidewalk and the roadway. There are no planters or bollards, but trees, light standards, and parking meters all provide some buffer effect. The curb lane that accommodates parked cars is also a vital sidewalk component, creating a buffer between pedestrians and moving traffic while slowing traffic speed. However, parking is prohibited in these lanes during peak vehicular volumes and irrespective of pedestrian traffic volumes.

Convenient and Safe Crossings

Crossing Commercial Drive as a pedestrian is not easy. As seen in Figure 3.8, of the four intersections in the study area, only two provide safe crossing opportunities. This creates a distance of 180 metres (600 feet) between safe crossing opportunities, two to three times the distance recommended in the literature. Because of the lack of crosswalks and pedestrian signs, pedestrians crossing Commercial Drive at Graveley Street and Kitchener Street are either aggressive or must wait for a break in traffic. Furthermore, at Grant Street, the pedestrian-controlled signal is not particularly sensitive to pedestrian movement, often taking more than 70 seconds to change. The crossing cycle itself is quite short, allowing only 12 seconds for people to cross the street. Consequently, frequent disregard of the light by pedestrians was observed. In addition, at 1st Avenue, pedestrians using the east crosswalk must often wait for turning vehicles before crossing the street. Jaywalking was observed throughout Commercial Drive, particularly between Grant Street and Kitchener Street where the traffic is somewhat lighter. However, given the relatively short blocks (60 to 90
metres or 200 to 300 feet), most people opt to cross at the intersections (controlled or otherwise).

![Figure 3.8 Pedestrian Crossings on Commercial Drive](image)

**Figure 3.8 Pedestrian Crossings on Commercial Drive**

**Fine Street Network**

Sidewalks are part of a network of streets. The street network here is a fine grid made up of relatively short blocks, one of which is made finer by the addition of an alley. In its 270 metres (900 feet) of street, the study area has 12 street corners. In addition, the larger street network is fairly pedestrian-friendly, with continuous sidewalks and occasional boulevards. Finally, it is worth noting that the north/south orientation of Commercial Drive allows both sidewalks to receive sun for at least part of the day.
3.3.3 Pedestrian Amenities

Street Furniture

Commercial Drive has a good supply of pedestrian amenities, as seen in Figure 3.9. In terms of street furniture, Commercial Drive has pedestrian-scaled lighting, a thoughtful and often lacking amenity on Vancouver streets. They average about four lights per block (two per side), or every 18 metres (60 feet). The pedestrian-level light is attached about 4 metres (12 feet) above the sidewalk on poles which also accommodate trolley wires and regular street lights. The decorative lamps help add some beauty to an otherwise unsightly post. The light source for both the sidewalk and road lighting is high-pressure sodium vapour, an orange light that provides more light with less wattage, but is somewhat unnatural.

![Figure 3.9 Pedestrian Amenities on Commercial Drive](image-url)
On Commercial Drive there is a lack of quality public seating and a wealth of private seating. Though there are some benches around the corner from Commercial Drive, the only benches directly on the Drive are bus stop benches (at three out of four bus stops), two of which are unattractive. People were observed sitting on these benches whether or not they were waiting for the bus, illustrating a potential latent demand for public seating. Despite the lack of public seating, there are many people sitting on Commercial Drive. One person was observed sitting on the curb talking on a cellular phone and panhandlers are frequently seen sitting on the sidewalk.

But by far the most outdoor sitting occurs at private restaurants and cafés—seven groupings exist on the more sunny eastern side of the street and three groupings exist on the less sunny western side. Most seating is situated directly on Commercial Drive, and is oriented towards the sidewalk. On warm sunny days most seats are full. However, the seats, being private, are not well-distributed—two blocks have no sidewalk seating and one block has four groupings.

Figure 3.10 Overflowing Garbage Container
Garbage containers, like public seating, are also lacking on Commercial Drive. There are five in the study area (almost one per block), but they are neither well-distributed nor adequately maintained (see Figure 3.10). Two blocks completely lack garbage containers, including the eastern block between 1st Avenue and Graveley Street which has the most heavy pedestrian traffic, three groups of sidewalk restaurant seating, and a bus stop. On this block, an overflowing, plastic garbage container was seen temporarily set up in front of CIBC. Furthermore, the public containers are unattractive concrete cylinders which are promptly filled because they are not easily compacted. The Britannia Community Police Office (CPO) has been lobbying City Hall for more containers, so far to no avail (McLaren 1998).

In terms of other street furniture in the area, two public telephones are located in the setback of the Liquor Store and newspaper boxes—though sometimes poorly placed—are frequently present. There are no mailboxes or clocks in the study area, but there is one drinking fountain around the corner from Commercial Drive. Bike racks on Commercial Drive are numerous, very well-used and, as seen in Figure 3.11, are occasionally public art.

![Bike Rack on Commercial Drive](image)

**Figure 3.11** Bike Rack on Commercial Drive

66
Bus stops are another important pedestrian amenity and should be hospitable (Whyte 1988). On Commercial Drive, however, they provide neither shelter nor information, and the seating (as previously mentioned) is most often of poor quality or non-existent. Public restrooms are available in Il Mercato and in nearby Grandview Park.

Public Art

There are few examples of typical public art on Commercial Drive. On a smaller scale, however, a school art project has seen the installation of individually illustrated tiles onto various buildings (see Figure 3.12), a mural has been painted on the corner of Commercial Drive and 1st Avenue, and banners are occasionally hung from the light posts. The aforementioned WaaZuBee Café sign and the unique bike rack are also examples of private creativity which add to the public realm.

Figure 3.12 Community Art at Home Hardware
Greenery

In terms of greenery, street trees are the dominant natural element on Commercial Drive. They appear to be sufficiently large and hardy to withstand the harsh street environment, but their shape and height vary within and between blocks and their bases are often surrounded by weeds. Planted flush to the sidewalk, the trees are fairly evenly distributed, occurring on average every 14 metres (45 feet) of street frontage (see Figure 3.9). There are, however, more trees on the eastern side of the street, a fortunate occurrence as this is more often the sunny side of the street.

Apart from the “greenery” at the base of the trees, other public plantings are rare. There are two instances of bushes on the street. Both occur on the west side of the street and seem designed to obscure fire hydrants. Around the corner from Commercial Drive there is one instance of a boulevard with bushes and four instances of grass boulevards. There is only one example in the study area of private planting, the aforementioned planters at Bukowski’s.

3.3.4 Traffic Management

Manageable Traffic Volume and Speed

Commercial Drive carries almost 20,000 vehicles per day (City of Vancouver 1997b). It is four lanes wide in the northern two blocks, and five lanes wide in the southern block, with on-street parking reducing vehicle capacity to two lanes in non-peak hours. The speed limit on Commercial Drive is 50 km/h, a speed which seems to be observed due to the visual narrowness of the street, the large amount of sidewalk activity, and the presence of parked cars. Given its building to street width ratio, as discussed previously, the street is generally pedestrian-scaled. Curb radii on
Commercial Drive are fairly small, slowing traffic and easing pedestrian crossing.

The grid system here is fairly tightly knit, with blocks only 60 to 90 metres (200 to 300 feet) long allowing greater pedestrian and cyclist route choice and providing relatively direct links between places in the neighbourhood. In addition, because crosstown streets in Vancouver occur every five to eight blocks, traffic is distributed amongst other arterial streets.

In terms of pedestrian/vehicle conflicts, over the past six years there have been numerous accidents. As seen in Figure 3.14, almost half occurred at the busy intersection of 1st Avenue and Commercial. In addition, many accidents occurred at the intersections which show no pedestrian priority.

![Figure 3.13 Pedestrian/Vehicle Accidents on Commercial Drive: 1990-1996](Source: City of Vancouver 1996)

**Transit and Bicycle Accommodation**

In terms of transit, Commercial Drive is on a busy bus route and is quite transit-friendly. The density is sufficient to support frequent service of the #20 trolley bus
(six to seven minute headway during the day), and buildings are oriented close to bus stops. The bus stops however, are uninviting and lack both shelter and transit information. In addition, as in much of Vancouver, BC Transit vehicles are frequently overcrowded and it is not uncommon for potential passengers to be passed by full trolley buses. Furthermore, the east/west connections lie almost ten blocks away from either side of the study area, highlighting the need for a bus route on East 1st Avenue.

Bike racks, as mentioned in the discussion of street furniture, are abundant on Commercial Drive. They also appear to be very well-used. In terms of other bicycle facilities, there are no bike lanes on Commercial Drive but the study area is bounded by two east/west bicycle routes. The proposed north/south Woodland Greenway is sorely needed as the traffic volumes on Commercial Drive, combined with its parked cars and transit vehicles, create a rather hostile cycling environment.

Parking Facilities

Parking has always been an issue to Commercial Drive merchants and the residents of adjacent side streets. This is attributable to the many buildings which predate existing parking regulations and to the lack of a complete lane system (City of Vancouver 1982). In addition to the on-street metered parking directly on Commercial Drive (one dollar for 80 minutes), free two-hour parking is available on short sections of the perpendicular side streets. This on-street parking is very well-used, often to the extent that there is illegal parking near crosswalks and bus stops. Off-street, Il Mercato has a large underground parkade and other businesses have some parking in the alley, but such parking is intended for customers only. There is no shared public lot.
3.3.5 Street Activity

Density

One important component of street activity is pedestrian density. As seen in Figure 3.15 there is a significant level of pedestrian traffic on Commercial Drive, particularly in the eastern 1600 block. In addition, neighbourhood density is important, and in Grandview the density is significant (28.8 dwelling units per hectare). This figure is perhaps even greater in the immediate vicinity of Commercial Drive—where many of the area’s apartments and multi-tenanted houses exist—and on the street itself—where many mixed-use buildings exist. The mix in housing type also contributes to the diversity of residents.

![Figure 3.14 Pedestrian Density: Number of Pedestrians per Block per Hour (12 noon)](image)

Diversity

There is also diversity in uses along Commercial Drive, with restaurants, retail, offices, street vendors, and government services. Some stores, such as bakeries and cafés, open early, while others, such as restaurants and corner stores, operate late into the night. These varied uses, combined with the many apartments above street-level, ensure there is a diversity of user groups and activities at various times of the day.
Special events, planned or otherwise, also play an important role in enhanced street activity. For example, the recent World Cup series prompted cafés to decorate the sidewalks, sparked impromptu parades, and facilitated triangulation. Other events, such as “Reclaim the Street” parties and the Fringe Festival, also help the street fulfil its role as a meaningful public place.

Safety

Commercial Drive is fairly safe in terms of crime. Many stores are well-fortified, police officers were frequently observed, and numerous stores display notices for the Britannia CPO. However, illicit drug use beyond the immediate study area is increasingly open, graffiti is a problem, and many residents of this relatively tolerant community have expressed their frustration with aggressive panhandlers and “squeegee people” (Mosca and Spicer 1997). The community’s CPO—located close to the study area in the Britannia Community Centre—recently released a survey that highlighted community issues and is working to “deter those activities that create concerns and fear and threaten to destroy the climate of tolerance that the Commercial Drive community values” (Mosca and Spicer 1997, p. i).

3.2.6 Neighbourhood Goods and Services

Community-oriented Retail Mix

Though the goods and services along Commercial Drive are diverse and community-oriented, the area’s bohemian atmosphere draws people from throughout the region. Services in the study area generally reflect the area and are compatible with residential land use. For example, in a reflection of the area’s Italian heritage, the ATM at VanCity can communicate in Italian, and the neighbourhood Home
Hardware store prominently displays *bocce* balls for an Italian version of lawn bowling.

As seen in Appendix A, within the study area there are more than 60 businesses which cater to most of the neighbourhood's basic needs—restaurants and cafes, a pub, a liquor store, banks, a drug store, hardware and housewares, bakeries, produce stores, a dry cleaner, photo processing labs, a butcher, clothing and shoe stores, barber shops and hair salons, a travel agency, insurance brokers, realtors, doctors, and dentists. There are also occasional street vendors, a regular street musician at the Liquor Store, and a shoe-shine lady. Outside of the immediate study area, goods and services include supermarkets, antique stores, and dollar stores.

**Small and Locally-owned Businesses**

The businesses in the study area are almost all small and independently owned. Only seven are large chains—Home Hardware, Busy Bee Cleaners, Bagel Street Café, the Liquor Store, Allied Insurance, Care Point Medical Centre, and CIBC. Outside of the immediate area, McDonald’s, Subway, and Starbucks also exist, despite initial opposition from residents. While some merchants live in the Grandview area, there are fewer merchants living in the neighbourhood than before. And though there are many new stores on the street, businesses such as Norman’s Fruit and Salad, the Caffé Roma, and the Bluebird Beauty Salon are neighbourhood institutions that have been on the street for at least 20 years.

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10 Personal communication, Alan Ross (long time area resident), 25 July 1998.
Convenience

The businesses of Commercial Drive are convenient to each other, existing side by side and, with the exception of Il Mercato, being accessible from the same sidewalk. Within three blocks there are 67 businesses and no street-level vacancies. Despite this strong concentration of goods and services, the existence of numerous stores outside the immediate study area decreases the definability of the core commercial area and disperses its activity.

3.3.7 Maintenance

Physical Upkeep

The physical maintenance of Commercial Drive is somewhat lacking. Perhaps due to the absence of a formal business organization, there are insufficient garbage containers, the street is frequently littered, and utility poles are covered with poster remnants. This summer, a provincially-funded “Spruce the Drive” campaign worked to reverse the trend by painting graffiti-marked buildings and picking up garbage (McLaren 1998).

The shops themselves are generally very well-maintained, with individual businesses seeming to take responsibility for keeping the street tidy. For example, for the past 11 years, many stores along Commercial Drive have contracted an entrepreneurial man to clean their windows weekly. In addition, shopkeepers were frequently observed sweeping the sidewalk outside their businesses. One of the least well-maintained buildings is the one which houses the government-run Liquor Store—the MOSAIC building.
“Management”

Apart from the City of Vancouver, no formal organization or individual takes responsibility for the long-term viability of Commercial Drive. While there have been various incarnations of business associations in the area for the past 80 years, their existence has been inconsistent. Today, the Grandview Merchants Association is inactive. The Britannia CPO recently attempted to initiate the formation of a BIA but there was insufficient merchant interest. Consequently, the CPO has become the sounding board for many business and resident concerns. Nevertheless, merchants work with community groups to help make Commercial Drive a “community-based” street (Usinger 1990), and though street amenities are somewhat lacking, Commercial Drive’s core shopping area seems to be successful.

3.3.8 Supportive Neighbourhood Context

Density and Diversity

The Grandview neighbourhood is quite large, covering 440 hectares and having a radius of about 1 kilometre. Many residents are therefore within an easy walk of Commercial Drive. Grandview is also a rather dense neighbourhood, and is becoming more dense as single-family homes are replaced with condominiums and multi-suite townhomes. Given the increasing lack of private open space for residents, the need for a good public realm is evident.

Diversity in the neighbourhood is also important to successful neighbourhood shopping streets, and in Grandview, there is a large mix of housing types that helps accommodate diverse household types and incomes. Grandview’s diverse cultures also contribute to a supportive neighbourhood context, facilitating a variety of
businesses and a cosmopolitan atmosphere. And though there is a relatively larger proportion of low-income people in the neighbourhood than in the city as a whole, Grandview is gentrifying.

**Sense of Pride**

The community seems to like its neighbourhood and has pride in its shopping street, with 79% of respondents to the CPO survey saying that they enjoyed living in Grandview. One person noted: “I like our little neighbourhood, we’ve got a lot of freaks here, but this is our neighbourhood and most of us are good people, gentle people” (Mosca and Spicer 1997, p. 36).

**3.3.9 Supportive Government**

In 1980, a plan for Commercial Drive was approved by City Council, establishing a case for the retention and enhancement of the street’s pedestrian orientation and affirming the street’s role as a commercial centre serving neighbourhood residents (City of Vancouver 1982). As a result of the plan, the core shopping area of Commercial Drive is now zoned a C-2C Commercial District, the intent of which is to “provide for a wide range of goods and services, to maintain commercial activities and personal services that require central locations to serve larger neighbourhoods, districts or communities, and to encourage the creation of a pedestrian-oriented district shopping area by increasing the residential component and limiting the amount of office use” (City of Vancouver 1996b). Of particular relevance to the street’s character is the C-2C zoning’s conditional approval of office uses, its maximum allowable commercial frontage (15.3 metres or 46 feet wide), its prohibition of a front setback except where it benefits pedestrians, and the dedication of land for lane purposes where lanes do not already exist.
However, other than its support of the BIA program, Vancouver has not made a long-term commitment to its neighbourhood shopping streets, and this neglect is evident in Commercial Drive’s lack of amenities such as garbage containers, bus shelters, and continuous on-street parking. Presumably, there will soon be a Community Visioning process for the Grandview neighbourhood which will articulate the street’s role in the context of CityPlan.

3.4 Summary

This chapter has looked at the case study of Commercial Drive as an example of a good neighbourhood shopping street. Commercial Drive is located in the heart of Grandview, a diverse and active neighbourhood in Vancouver’s east side. Formed as a result of the interurban railway, this neighbourhood shopping street has become one of the city’s most popular and cosmopolitan commercial areas. With its working-class roots, multicultural population, and dense neighbourhood context, Commercial Drive is an eclectic mix of cafés, produce stores, and basic neighbourhood services. It has been undergoing gentrification and increasing densification for some time.

When examined with respect to the characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping streets as identified in the literature review, it is evident why the street may be successful. It has buildings that relate to the street, ample street activity, neighbourhood goods and services, and a supportive neighbourhood context. Other characteristics, however, are less evident. In particular, Commercial Drive’s walking facilities, though somewhat adequate, could be improved with respect to sidewalk width, maintenance, comfort, and crossings. Furthermore, its pedestrian amenities are in need of updating, the street’s traffic role often dominates, and better maintenance is needed.
CHAPTER FOUR:
WEST 41ST AVENUE CASE STUDY

4.1. Introduction to the Case Study

This chapter looks at West 41st Avenue—specifically, the block between West Boulevard and Yew Street on the south side of West 41st Avenue—as an example of a good neighbourhood shopping street. The case study begins by looking at the attributes of the street’s context that are relevant to the issues of a neighbourhood shopping street—neighbourhood context, history, people, land use, and transportation. Following this background information, the characteristics of a good neighbourhood shopping street as identified in the literature review are examined with respect to West 41st Avenue.

4.2 Neighbourhood Context

4.2.1 Urban Context

As seen in Figure 4.1, West 41st Avenue is the heart of the popular Kerrisdale shopping area located at the nexus of three neighbourhoods—the Kerrisdale neighbourhood itself, Arbutus Ridge, and Shaughnessy.\(^{11}\) To the neighbourhood’s east lies the neighbourhood of Dunbar, to the south the Fraser River, to the north Kitsilano, and to the east Oakridge. With the exception of the southern boundary, the edges of the shopping street’s neighbourhood context are indistinct, blurring with its neighbouring areas.

\(^{11}\) Though the city has divided the neighbourhood context into these three distinct geographical areas, for simplicity the thesis will refer to the neighbourhood collectively as "Kerrisdale." Information has therefore been combined from all three neighbourhoods to provide a rough, but statistically inaccurate (given different populations and areas), overview of area characteristics.
4.2.2 History

Like Grandview, Kerrisdale grew up around an interurban railway stop. In 1905, a stop for the “Sockeye Special”—running from Vancouver to the canneries in Steveston—was established at Wilson Road (later to become West 41st Avenue) and the still-existing rail tracks. Originally part of the district of South Vancouver, in 1908, Kerrisdale became the political centre of the Municipality of Point Grey and a municipal hall was established at the corner of 42nd Avenue and West Boulevard (now the site of the Kerrisdale Community Centre).

Spurred by the introduction of local streetcar service in 1912, the area experienced a postwar building boom. In 1922, the municipality enacted what became the first Canadian zoning by-law, “with controls that differentiated between residential and commercial areas” (Kalman et al 1993, p. 165). Large single-family homes on relatively large lots were developed and a concentrated retail district was established, centred
around West 41st Avenue between West Boulevard and Yew Street. In 1927, Point Grey, along with South Vancouver, became part of the City of Vancouver. Following the depression years, Kerrisdale was established as one of Vancouver's most prominent residential and commercial districts.

4.2.3 People

In 1991, the combined population of the three neighbourhoods was 34,320. Average household size was 2.6 people per dwelling unit, a number slightly more than that seen in the city as a whole (2.3 people per dwelling unit) and indicative of the area's role as a desirable family area. In addition, it is interesting to note that the area's 1991 population was generally older than the city as a whole, with 50-56% of the population being over the age of 40, and 16-27% being over the age of 65.

The Kerrisdale community has always been a fairly homogeneous one, with most residents being from Anglo-Saxon backgrounds. However, paralleling trends seen in the city as a whole, the community is becoming more diverse. Most notable is the increasing presence of Chinese-Canadians—in 1991, 14% of residents listed Chinese as their mother tongue, a 12% increase since 1971. Other languages listed in the 1991 census were French, German, and Greek.

The Kerrisdale community has traditionally been a relatively affluent one. In 1991, for example, 7-15% of the population was classified as low-income (the city average is 25%). There was also a smaller proportion of assisted housing for low to moderate income households—with only three non-market housing projects in the area in 1991. Furthermore, in 1991, there were significantly more owners than renters (59-76% versus the city rate of 41%). This ratio is partly attributable to rapid condominium development in the late 1980s which saw the demolition of many older rental
apartment buildings surrounding the commercial core (and the subsequent dispersal of a well-established senior citizens' community). The community's population in 1991 was relatively stable, with 40-50% of residents reporting that they had changed their place of residence in the past five years (the city average is 58%).

Kerrisdale residents have always been very proud of their community. Indeed, it is often referred to as "the village" for both its sense of community and its quaintness. A fairly conservative area, community associations include four homeowners' associations. In addition, Concerned Citizens for Affordable Housing was formed to respond to the loss of affordable housing, while the Society of Pioneers exists to track change in the neighbourhood. Finally, the Kerrisdale Community Centre is an important social hub of the area, housing a seniors centre, library, and recreation centre.

4.2.4 Land Use

As seen in Figure 4.2, the neighbourhood's land use is primarily residential. And while the majority of residences are single-family detached homes, the housing surrounding the commercial core is considerably more diverse, consisting of low- and high-rise apartment buildings, duplexes, and townhomes. In 1991 there were 13,455 dwelling units, an increase of 2-10% since 1971. It is interesting to note that this is only about 800 more dwelling units than in Grandview, an area a third of the size of the combined neighbourhoods of Kerrisdale, Arbutus Ridge, and Shaughnessy. It is therefore not surprising that the area is much less dense, ranging from 6.4 dwelling units per hectare in Shaughnessy, to 14 dwelling units per hectare in Arbutus-Ridge (the city average is 17.7 dwelling units per hectare).
Figure 4.2 Land Use in Neighbourhood Context
(Source: City of Vancouver 1994a,c,d)
While there is no industrial land use in the area, the southern edge is zoned to allow for limited agriculture as well as residential. Commercial land use in the immediate area primarily exists along four long blocks of West 41st Avenue, and on 11 shorter blocks on West and East Boulevard. In 1974, the Kerrisdale Beautification Project was completed, giving the core commercial area new sidewalks, a redesigned intersection at West 41st and the Boulevards, and a plan for a consistent streetscape. Buildings along the two commercial strips are generally between one to three storeys high, with many buildings from the 1910s and 1920s. As on Commercial Drive, newer buildings tend to be larger in both width and height (up to six storeys in some cases) than their older neighbours. On East and West Boulevard south of West 41st Avenue, retail continuity is frequently lost. Street-level vacancies are seen outside of the core commercial area, particularly on the Boulevards where both vehicular and pedestrian traffic is significantly less than on West 41st Avenue.

There is much parkland distributed throughout the area, with a total of 17 parks and two golf courses. Kerrisdale Centennial Park, home of the Kerrisdale Community Centre, and Kerrisdale Park are the closest recreational spaces to the West 41st Avenue study area. Elm Park is also an important park, with fields for soccer and baseball and home to the Kerrisdale Lawn Bowling Club. Green space per person varies throughout, from 0.74 hectares/1000 people in Shaughnessy (where many residents have large lots) to 1.69 hectares/1000 people in Arbutus Ridge (the city average is 1.12).

4.2.5 Transportation

The major east/west street in Kerrisdale is West 41st Avenue, a six-lane arterial that narrows to five lanes between West Boulevard and Yew. Other major streets include
West 49th and West 33rd, two four lane east/west streets that serve as secondary arterial streets. Parking is generally not restricted on these streets. Arbutus Street (which turns into West and East Boulevard) and Granville Street are busy north/south streets in the area, with the latter having frequent on-street parking restrictions. Given the existence of a fine street grid, traffic is fairly well-distributed amongst these streets which are located approximately 1 kilometre apart.

Transit has always been important to the neighbourhood. As in Grandview, 1952 saw the replacement of streetcars by trolley buses. Today, trolley service continues with the #16 Arbutus bus, a north/south route that heads downtown, and the #8 Granville bus. In addition, the #41 runs down West 41st Avenue from east Vancouver to UBC, and though trolley wires exist, most buses on this route are diesel. Other diesel bus routes in the area are the #49 and the #22, running east/west along 49th Avenue and north/south along MacDonald Street respectively. The #8 trolley service will soon be supplemented by the Richmond to Vancouver Rapid Bus, an express bus service operating with articulated diesel buses. Finally, there is often speculation concerning the use of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) right-of-way for a rapid transit line.

In terms of bicycle travel, there are two bike routes in the area—the nearby 37th Avenue and Cypress Street Greenways. The CPR right-of-way has also been proposed as a possible greenway site.

4.3 Evaluation of Characteristics

The characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping streets—buildings that relate to the street, comfortable walking facilities, pedestrian amenities, traffic management, street activity, neighbourhood goods and services, maintenance, supportive neighbourhood context, and supportive government—are examined in the context
of West 41st Avenue. As seen in Figure 4.3, the specific study area is the one and one-half blocks of West 41st Avenue between West Boulevard and Yew Street.

![Figure 4.3 West 41st Avenue Study Area](image)

### 4.3.1 Buildings that Relate to the Street

**An Outdoor Room**

West 41st Avenue has the quality of an outdoor room. Firstly there is a consistent street wall, with only one break due to a narrow, 6 metre (20 feet) alley which is bounded by two buildings. As seen in Figure 4.4, West 41st Avenue also has fairly consistent building height, with variation between buildings kept within one-half to two storeys. No buildings are greater than three storeys, and within blocks there is consistency. For example, the south side is mostly two storeys high while the north side is generally one storey high. Furthermore, many of the one-storey buildings are rather tall, easing the way to the two-storey buildings and creating a fairly even skyline. West of Yew Street on the north side there is a bit more of a saw-toothed pattern, with the only three-storey buildings in the study area adjacent to one-storey buildings.
Minimal building setback also helps create an outdoor room. On West 41st Avenue, though there are frequently recessed entrances—often accommodating sidewalk displays or seating—most buildings have no setback. Only three buildings have a significant setback from the sidewalk, but in each instance seating and landscaping help make the space a *place*. Two of these setbacks—at Canada Trust and the Scotiabank building—are sited at the busy corner of Yew Street and West 41st Avenue and are well-used on a daily basis and for special events.

Above street-level, there are two instances of upper-storey setbacks which could potentially create a bit of a gap in the streetscape. These occur west of the Masonic Hall building on the south side of West 41st, but given the context of two-storey buildings to the east and one-storey buildings the west, their effect is more transitional than disruptive.
Buildings should also relate to each other to create a consistent street wall and the sense of an outdoor room. Though there is a wide range of architectural styles among the buildings of West 41st Avenue, within blocks there is usually some consistency. For example, the south side of West 41st Avenue is mostly older two-storey brick buildings to the east and one-storey “taxpayer” buildings to the east. And as seen in Figure 4.5, where a plain building is sandwiched between two brick buildings, a mural mimics the neighbouring buildings’ architectural details—an effect that would be more striking if the building was not setback somewhat from its neighbours. On the north side of the street, there is a preponderance of one-storey “taxpayers” with canopies. However, west of Yew Street on the north side of West 41st Avenue there is more architectural variety and the result is somewhat jarring.

![Figure 4.5 Architectural Consistency Created by Trompe l'oeil Mural](image)

Finally, the ratio of building height to street width is another important determinant of the quality of an outdoor room. Given that the buildings along West 41st Avenue east of Yew Street range from 5.5 to 9 metres (18 to 30 feet) in height, and the street itself, including sidewalks, is 20 to 27 metres (66 to 90 feet) wide, the ratio ranges 1:3.6 to 1:2.2. This proportion is fairly human-scaled.
Interaction with the Street

In addition to being close to the street, all buildings in the study area face the street, and retail—the most interactive building type—fronts most of the street at-grade. However, the area’s seven banks provide a relatively non-interactive street-level use. Apart from the banks, the only other questionably interactive business is a travel agency. In this case, though, a narrow frontage and an interesting window display are compensatory.

Less interactive uses such as apartments and offices are otherwise above-grade. There is not, however, much sense of second storiness. The Bowser Block—the large brick building at the southwest corner of West Boulevard and West 41st Avenue—contains offices above-grade. Some of these have signs in their windows but are otherwise non-interactive. Further east on the same side of the street, the upper-storeys contain offices and a Masonic Hall. The former are sometimes too far set back to create interest at street-level, and the latter has opaque windows. There is, however, one instance of a second-storey office with a street-level window display, which, along with a simple banner, helps direct attention above. On the north side of the street, the upper-storeys include apartments above the produce stores and offices behind the tinted glass of the Scotiabank building. Neither contributes significantly to the street below.

Doors on good neighbourhood shopping streets should front the sidewalk. On West 41st Avenue, with the exception of the upper-storeys of the Bowser Block (accessed via West Boulevard) and the corner entrances to the Scotiabank and TD Bank, all doors open directly onto West 41st Avenue. Furthermore, most doors are open during warm weather, encouraging easy access for pedestrians and creating interest
for what is inside. An exception here is seen with respect to the banks, which do not keep their doors open.

Windows dominate the street-level on West 41st Avenue, with exceptions however seen in the predominantly blank walls of some banks. In addition, most bank windows and those for Shoppers Drug Mart are tinted or covered with blinds and posters. Otherwise, the windows of West 41st Avenue are numerous, and in some cases are completely open to the sidewalk. For example, the large sliding windows of the Bagel Garden and Bean Brothers are completely open on warm days, contributing to the fairly transparent streetscape seen in Figure 4.6.

![Figure 4.6 Transparency of At-grade Frontage on West 41st Avenue](image)

Window displays are common in the study area (see Appendix B) and are often quite beautiful. For example, the spring display for Hill's of Kerrisdale included Chinese parasols and pottery in reference to the city's Dragon Boat Festival. Other displays include the wall of cameras at Kerrisdale Cameras and the produce in the window of JB Hoy. Though less common than window displays, sidewalk displays are also present on West 41st Avenue (see Appendix B) and include clothing, shoes, produce,
plants, and flowers. As on Commercial Drive, the produce displays tend to generate the most sidewalk activity and the most colourful visual interest.

Sandwich boards are another interactive device that is commonly used on West 41st Avenue, particularly for those businesses that lack sidewalk displays. The storefront for the Kerrisdale Market even has three sandwich boards to reflect the businesses within. Menu boards for restaurants are also seen along West 41st Avenue but are more often posted on the wall than on a free-standing structure.

Finally, devices such as seating, canopies, and landscaping also help the buildings on West 41st Avenue interact with the street by creating a transition between the public and semi-private realm (see Appendix B). Seating is present in most of the area’s cafés and bakeries and is well-used regardless of which side of the street it is on. Even the seating at Starbucks, placed around the corner from West 41st Avenue, is well-used. Only seven businesses do not have canopies, and in many of these cases, a canopy might detract from the building’s architectural interest. Landscaping is also abundant in this study area. In addition to the planters which are distributed throughout, a number of businesses have greened their storefronts with their own planters.

**Pedestrian Scale**

In terms of scale, it is again important that the buildings relate to the street. As seen in Appendix B, 81% of West 41st Avenue businesses occupy frontages that are less than 10 metres (33 feet) wide. However, six businesses have frontages that are greater than 15 metres (50 feet) wide. Three of these are banks with uninteresting storefronts and two of them—Shoppers Drug Mart and Scotiabank—occupy one building. In this latter case, not only is there no simulation of individual storefronts, but the facade is
so monotonous that it is difficult to tell where one business ends and the other begins. Only one case of a large frontage—Hill’s of Kerrisdale—simulates a smaller storefront by using both of its available entrances.

In terms of micro-climatic effects, many buildings on West 41st Avenue help provide protection from the rain and sun with awnings or canopies. The buildings are also not so tall that they exacerbate shady areas. However upper-storey setbacks on the south side of West 41st Avenue do little to increase sun on an already shady side of the street. There is frequent use of porous surfaces such as brick and stucco, breaking up the sun’s rays to create an evenly reflected light that is easier to look at than the harsh light of reflected glass.

**Beauty**

The buildings on West 41st Avenue are generally quite attractive, and the City of Vancouver has recognized some of the street’s character by placing three buildings on the *Heritage Register*—the Masonic Hall, Hobbs Florist, and the Shoestring building. In addition, many of the buildings in the West 41st Avenue study area (17 of 29) are decorated to some extent. For example, many buildings, including the one-storey ones, exhibit a cornice line. The buildings are well-maintained and the signs, as seen in Figure 4.7, are sometimes interesting. In addition, the previously mentioned mural on the S. Lampman/Moore’s Bakery building enlivens what would otherwise be a blank wall. Many newer buildings, however, are unattractive and do little to celebrate the public realm. An exception here is the small three-storey brick building at the eastern end of the study area whose architectural details—long skinny windows, gabled rooftop, and tiny balconies—add visual interest to the street.
4.3.2 Good Walking Facilities

Sufficiently Wide Sidewalks

The sidewalks of West 41st Avenue range from 3 to 3.2 metres (10 to 10.5 feet) wide east of Yew street. This is very close to the minimum recommended width of 3 to 3.6 metres (10 to 12 feet) (Loukaitou-Sideris 1997; Untermann 1984). Though much of this sidewalk space is taken up with planters, sidewalk displays, and seating, there is generally sufficient room for the large amount of pedestrians. However, there are instances where pedestrians are somewhat crowded due to a combination of sidewalk furniture and displays.
Attractive and Comfortable Sidewalks

The sidewalks on West 41st Avenue, as a result of the Kerrisdale Beautification Project, are differentiated from other sidewalks in the area by the use of brick paving over the entire surface. This helps demarcate the sidewalk as a special space and reflects the use of brick in the adjacent businesses. West 41st Avenue’s sidewalks are also very well-maintained. Shopkeepers were frequently observed sweeping the pavement outside their businesses and the street’s many garbage containers help keep the sidewalk free of litter.

In terms of accessibility, there are few obstructions that detract from pedestrian comfort. For example, a fire hydrant, rather than taking up sidewalk space, is unobtrusively set into the wall of a building. In addition, the sidewalks are allowed to continue safely and seamlessly and are interrupted only by the alley on the south side. The sidewalks also have curb ramps at all corners to allow access for wheelchairs, strollers, and shopping carts—all of which are very common on this street.

A few buffers exist along West 41st Avenue between the sidewalk and the roadway. Though there are are no actual bollards on the street, planters, trees, light standards, and parking meters all provide some buffer effect. The curb lane that accommodates parked cars is also a vital sidewalk component, creating a buffer between pedestrians and moving traffic while slowing traffic speed. Fortunately, other than for bus stops, there are no parking restrictions on West 41st Avenue.
Convenient and Safe Crossings

As seen in Figure 4.8, there are safe crossing opportunities at all the intersections along West 41st Avenue, with the intersection at West Boulevard having a fully signalized light, the intersection on the north side of Yew having a pedestrian-controlled signal, and the intersection at the south side of Yew having a crosswalk complete with pedestrian signs. In the former two cases, the crosswalks, as extensions of the sidewalk, are paved with the same bricks that make up the sidewalk (see Figure 4.9). Where there is an uncontrolled crosswalk, it was observed that cars often fail to yield to pedestrians. Where traffic signals are necessary, the crossing cycles are somewhat sensitive to pedestrian movement. For example, the pedestrian-controlled signal at Yew Street rarely takes more than one minute to change but only 15 seconds are available to cross the street. Perhaps because of the long distance between crossing opportunities, jaywalking was frequently observed. Two of the most common spots were in front of the alley and between the alley and the crossing at Yew Street.

12 In addition to my personal observation, a security patrol person revealed that he witnesses about a dozen “close calls” every day (personal communication).
Sidewalks are part of a network of streets. But due to the orientation of Vancouver’s grid, the blocks on West 41st Avenue are long—240 metres (800 feet) long on the south side and more than 180 metres (600 feet) long on the north side. There are only five street corners in the study area and relatively limited pedestrian route choice. However, the existence of an alley parallel to West 41st Avenue is important to note due to its accommodation of delivery vehicles. In addition, the larger street network is quite pedestrian-friendly, with continuous sidewalks, boulevards, and street trees. It is also worth noting that the angle of the grid is such that the north side of the street receives almost continual sun during the day and the south side receives almost no sun.
4.3.3 Pedestrian Amenities

![Diagram of West 41st Avenue]

Figure 4.10 Pedestrian Amenities on West 41st Avenue

Street Furniture

As seen in Figure 4.10, West 41st Avenue has numerous pedestrian amenities. In particular, there is a large amount of street furniture, not the least of which is seating. The West 41st Avenue study area has numerous public benches. Some are donated by individuals—for example, in memory of a loved one or an area personality—or by adjacent businesses. These well-used benches, made of teak and advertisement-free, are comfortable, well-distributed, and are generally oriented to what people like to see—other people. The best benches are those placed at the two bus stops on the south side. Flush against the building, people can sit with their back protected and have a clear view of the sidewalk in front of them, the other side of the street, and approaching buses. The bus stop on the north side however, lacks a bench. Consequently, transit users at this very busy stop stand or—as teenagers were observed doing—sit on the sidewalk. Furthermore, the bus stops on West 41st Avenue, like many other Vancouver bus stops, provide no shelter other than that provided by adjacent building canopies and no information.
Garbage containers on West 41st Avenue are both abundant and, as seen in Figure 4.11, well-designed. Due to a BIA initiative that allows individuals and businesses to sponsor garbage containers, a total of ten containers ensure that litter is put in its place and decrease the chance of overflow. Other street furniture which provides valuable pedestrian amenity includes telephones, mailboxes, and newspaper boxes. There are also two clocks in the study area. Unfortunately they are within 30 metres (100 feet) of each other and on the same side of the street. There are no water fountains or public restrooms in the study area, though the nearby Kerrisdale Community Centre has both. Only two bike racks exist in the study area and they are in very close proximity to each other. As a result, bikes were sometimes seen attached to poles and parking meters. Unlike on Commercial Drive, there is no pedestrian-scaled lighting on West 41st Avenue.

Figure 4.11 Garbage Container on West 41st Avenue
Public Art

In terms of public art, the most obvious element in the study area is the clock that is located in front of the Scotiabank building. Banners are also hung from the light standards twice a year and, as seen in Figure 4.12, are an attractive way to identify the shopping area. Private elements that add to the beauty of the public realm include the aforementioned sign on the Avenue Grill restaurant and the mural on the S. Lampman/Moore's Bakery building.

Figure 4.12 Kerrisdale Shopping Area Banners
Greenery

Street trees are present on West 41st and are particularly attractive east of Yew Street to West Boulevard. They appear to be sufficiently large and hardy to withstand the harsh street environment, though one smaller tree was in need of support. Most are "thornless honey locusts" whose delicate leaves create dappled sunlight rather than dense shade. There is also one flowering fruit tree on the street and an exotic, donated Ginkgo tree. All trees are fairly well-distributed—occurring approximately every 15 metres (50 feet) of street frontage—and are planted flush to the sidewalk.

Planters are also a prominent feature in the area's public realm, placed outside starting each spring and filled with spruce trees during the winter holidays. In addition, each light standard is equipped with ornate holders for hanging baskets. Such greenery is maintained by the BIA and is distributed to provide a sense of consistency throughout the street. Individual planters and planting beds are also maintained by many area businesses and are often quite attractive.

4.3.4 Traffic Management

Manageable Traffic Volume and Speed

The speed limit on West 41st Avenue is 50 km/hr and appears to be fairly well-observed in the study area, perhaps due to the on-street parking, close setback of buildings, and significant sidewalk activity. The street's five narrow lanes carry approximately 20,000 vehicles per day (City of Vancouver). Nevertheless, because there are other east/west crosstown streets within eight blocks, West 41st is able to serve as a traffic arterial without dividing the community in two.
Both traffic speed and volume are somewhat dependent on the scale of the street. West 41st Avenue's roadway, not including the sidewalk, is 14 to 18 metres wide (46 to 60 feet). As mentioned with respect to the building height to street width ratio, this is fairly human-scaled. In addition, the curb radii on West 41st Avenue are generally small, creating relatively sharp corners at intersections that slow turning traffic.

In terms of pedestrian/vehicle conflicts, over the past six years there have been numerous accidents. As seen in Figure 4.13, most of these occur in the vicinity of Yew Street and West 41st Avenue.

![Figure 4.13 Pedestrian/Vehicle Accidents on West 41st Avenue: 1990-1996](Source: City of Vancouver 1996)

Transit and Bicycle Accommodation

West 41st Avenue is fairly transit-friendly. Neighbourhood density is sufficient to support frequent service of the #41 (6-8 minute headway) and the #16 (7-10 minute headway), buildings are oriented to the street, and the bus stops—though lacking in
amenity—are conveniently sited. In addition, the #22 bus provides nearby north/south service, and the existence of the CPR right-of-way provides a potential rapid transit route.

The street is somewhat less bicycle-friendly. Like Commercial Drive, West 41st Avenue lacks a bike lane. However, the nearby 37th Avenue Greenway provides an alternative—if more hilly—east/west bike route, and the Arbutus corridor is a proposed north/south bike route. As mentioned with regards to street furniture, there is an apparent lack of bike racks.

Parking Facilities

Finally, parking is an important element of traffic management. Metered on-street parking is available on both West 41st Avenue and its adjacent side streets. There are no rush hour restrictions for such parking and it is very well-utilized. Kerrisdale also benefits from an abundance of free off-street parking. This is available adjacent to the rail corridor on West Boulevard and in a BIA-sponsored parkade on Yew Street.

4.3.5 Street Activity

Density

Figure 4.14 Pedestrian Density: Number of Pedestrians per Block per Hour (12 noon)
One important component of street activity is pedestrian density. As seen in Figure 4.14 there is a significant level of pedestrian traffic on West 41st Avenue. Neighbourhood density is also important. Though the overall density of the street’s neighbourhood context and the street itself is quite low, the area immediately surrounding West 41st Avenue is relatively dense. Many area residents are within easy walking distance of the shopping street.

**Diversity**

There is also diversity in the area's land use, with apartments, shopping, offices, and recreation all in close proximity to one another. Though the uses on the street itself are not so diverse, there is nevertheless a fairly sustained use of the street after the stores have closed. For example, people going for a walk, window shoppers, or people going to the drug store all occupy the street at night. Nevertheless, more diverse street activity—for example, the existence of a supermarket, a video store, or even a convenience store—would help create even more street activity.

Special events are often planned for West 41st Avenue and contribute much to its level of street activity. For example, the annual “Kerrisdale Days” festival uses musicians, sidewalk sales, and a birthday celebration to help create a lively atmosphere. On a smaller scale, the “Kerrisdale Presents” program involves musicians performing outdoors every Saturday afternoon. Such events attract the attention of passerby and make good use of public space.

**Safety**

West 41st Avenue appears to be a safe street in terms of property crime and personal safety. However, there is much evidence of crime prevention. Bars were observed on
many shop windows and a bicycle police person was frequently seen. Furthermore, a BIA-sponsored security patrol has been particularly successful in decreasing the number of break-and-enters and in limiting panhandling activity.

4.3.6 Neighbourhood Goods and Services

Community-oriented Retail Mix

The goods and services in the West 41st study area are somewhat community-oriented in that they are compatible with the nearby residential area. But given the area’s upscale nature, along with its destination stores such as Hill’s of Kerrisdale and its numerous cafés, the area draws people from throughout the city. Furthermore, the BIA promotes Kerrisdale as a shopping area for tourists with brochures on BC Ferries and in cruise ship terminals. The study area’s goods and services, due to its popularity as an upscale shopping area as well as an increase in property values, are becoming less neighbourhood-oriented. The Society of Pioneers is tracking this trend and feels the neighbourhood is becoming “more bottom line and less livable” (Todd 1994, p. E20)

Within the study area of West 41st Avenue are restaurants, cafés, offices, a drug store, bakeries, produce stores, gift and jewellery stores, a book store, a photo lab, clothing stores, and shoe stores. However, in the study area itself and its larger commercial context, there is a disproportionate number of banks and clothing stores. Though the area has always been home to many banks, a once eclectic retail mix is becoming less so. Many businesses seems marketed to higher income customers and there is an increasing lack of stores which cater to people’s basic needs. Outside of the immediate study area there is more diverse commercial activity, including video stores, beauty shops, and a liquor store. However, Kerrisdale’s only remaining
supermarket recently closed, apparently because it was no longer economically viable (Applebe 1998, p. 11).

Small and Locally-owned Businesses

While many of the businesses on West 41st Avenue are small and independently operated, an increasing number of large, chain stores and banks are decreasing the diversity of the street’s goods and services (Kluckner 1991). For example, the recent arrival of a Gap Kids and Planet Superstar—two chains that traditionally have mall locations—are reflective of a changing retail environment. Due to increasing rent and changing demographics, many older stores are being replaced. For example, Vanity Fair, a longtime lingerie store serving a senior clientele, closed as a consequence of the area’s changing demographics and is now home to Starbucks. Furthermore, new shopping patterns are hurting established businesses. As the owner of JB Hoy Produce noted, “the new Asians don’t shop here. They’re like a lot of other people. They go to the big sucking stores that take all the business away” (Todd 1994, p. E6).

Despite this, there are many businesses which have been in the area for a very long time. For example, Moore’s Bakery has been on West 41st Avenue since 1931, JB Hoy has been there since 1925, and Kerrisdale Cameras has been there since 1949. To some extent, these old-time businesses are still around because they own their buildings and do not have to pay rent (Todd 1994). Other businesses, such as Forster’s Cheese, are able to stay open because they have sympathetic landlords who would rather have local businesses in the area than give more space to the neighbouring bank.13

13 Personal communication, shopkeeper, 22 August 1998.
Convenience

Stores on West 41st Avenue are relatively convenient to one another and are well-concentrated. Specifically, there are 55 businesses in one long block. However, the numerous stores beyond the study area decrease the definability of the shopping street and disperse its activity, making it less convenient for shoppers who are looking for a variety of goods and services. The vacant stores that exist beyond the study area further decrease the street's convenience and suggest a surplus of commercial space.

4.3.7 Maintenance

Physical Upkeep

In terms of physical upkeep, the study area is very well-maintained, with individual owners taking responsibility for the upkeep of their storefronts and adjacent sidewalks. Shopkeepers were frequently observed sweeping the sidewalk. Window washers have also been hired by various businesses to clean windows along the street, and a "street ambassador" has been hired by the BIA to help maintain the street during the summer months. Furthermore, there is a bi-annual cleanup day throughout the commercial core, organized by the BIA and sponsored by various merchants (Kerrisdale Business Association 1998).

"Management"

Kerrisdale has a BIA whose mandate is to "foster goodwill in the community, promote the business area, contribute to a safe, well-planned, attractive and friendly environment and to increase the public awareness of Kerrisdale" (Kerrisdale Business Association 1998). West 41st Avenue seems to benefit
from this formal organization, with a very attractive public realm and a well-maintained street. In addition, they are able to help the neighbourhood create a sense of place through the organization of special events.

4.3.8 Supportive Neighbourhood Context

Density and Diversity

As mentioned in the introduction to the case study, West 41st Avenue’s context is a combination of at least three city neighbourhoods. Though many residents are spread out over a large area, many live within a short walk of the core shopping area and many more are within a short transit ride. Furthermore, the variety of housing types provides for a diverse population. However, given the area’s loss of rental housing in the late 1980s and the consequent loss of many senior residents, the area may be becoming less diverse. On the other hand, the area’s increasingly multicultural population is creating a market for new goods and services, such as Asian restaurants and gift stores.

Sense of Pride

Kerrisdale community members seem to have pride in their neighbourhood and are particularly protective of their shopping street. Amongst the businesses, there is also a sense of community, with seven businesses in the study area alone including “Kerrisdale” in their name. In addition, Kerrisdale’s numerous neighbourhood organizations are evident of a sense of community.
4.3.9 Supportive Government

Perhaps due to the strength of the area’s BIA, the City’s support is somewhat evident on West 41st Avenue. Specifically, public amenities such as garbage containers and benches, good crosswalks, and unrestricted on-street parking are all elements that contribute to West 41st Avenue’s success. Furthermore, a Community Visioning process will presumably be undertaken shortly to articulate West 41st Avenue’s role in the context of CityPlan.

In terms of zoning, the study area exists in a C-2 Commercial District, the intent of which is to “provide for a wide range of goods and services, to maintain commercial activities and personal services that require central locations to serve large neighbourhoods, and to provide for dwelling uses designed compatibly with commercial uses” (City of Vancouver 1996b). But unlike the C-2C zoning of Commercial Drive, West 41st Avenue’s C-2 zoning does not explicitly intend to encourage the creation of a pedestrian-oriented shopping area. Indeed, though C-2 zoning—like C-2C zoning—prohibits a front setback except where it benefits pedestrians, its inclusion of offices (including financial institutions) as an approved use and its lack of a maximum allowable commercial frontage run counter to the characteristics of a good neighbourhood shopping street.

4.4 Summary

This chapter has looked at the case study of West 41st Avenue as an example of a good neighbourhood shopping street. West 41st Avenue is located in the centre of three west side Vancouver neighbourhoods. Like Commercial Drive, this neighbourhood shopping street developed as a result of the interurban railway and has a popular Vancouver commercial centre. However, its character is quite
different from that of Commercial Drive. With a BIA and a relatively conservative
neighbourhood context, West 41st Avenue is an upscale shopping street dominated
by clothing stores, banks, and cafés. Currently undergoing a demographic shift to a
more multicultural and affluent population, West 41st Avenue is changing.

When examined with respect to the characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping
streets as identified in the literature review, West 41st Avenue is seen to exhibit many
characteristics. Like Commercial Drive, West 41st Avenue has buildings that relate
to the street, street activity, and a supportive neighbourhood context. It is also well-
maintained and has good pedestrian amenities. However, its neighbourhood goods
and services are increasingly less community-oriented and its walking facilities could
be improved with respect to sidewalk width and convenient crossings.
CHAPTER FIVE:
DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis has been to determine the characteristics of good
eighbourhood shopping streets and to examine those characteristics with respect
to two "real-life" neighbourhood shopping streets. Following a summary of the case
study findings, thesis conclusions and planning implications are discussed. The thesis
concludes with suggestions for future research.

5.2 Summary of Findings: The Case Studies and the Characteristics

Table 5.1 provides a summary of the extent to which the case studies exhibit the
characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping streets. Characteristics which were
clearly evident in the case study are marked "yes," characteristics which were clearly
not evident were marked "no," and characteristics which were neither evident nor
absent are marked "somewhat." While the table has been constructed as objectively
as possible, given its qualitative nature the classifications are not exact. The following
discussion examines each characteristic in detail.
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Table 5.1 Summary of Research Findings: How Evident are the Characteristics?
5.2.1 Buildings that Relate to the Street

As seen in Table 5.1, both case studies clearly exhibit the first characteristic of good neighbourhood shopping streets—buildings that relate to the street. Specifically, both streets have the sense of an outdoor room. This is a result of a consistent street wall, minimal height variation, close setbacks, harmony among varied building types and architectural styles, and a human-scaled building to street width ratio. Many of these qualities are attributable to the case studies' history as commercial centres of Vancouver streetcar neighbourhoods. Street trees, landscaping, and even trolley wires—their parallel lines running above the street—also help buildings relate to the street by defining the space of the street.

Newer buildings in the case studies tend to exhibit characteristics that could erode the sense of an outdoor room. For example, the upper-storey setbacks of some newer, taller buildings detract from a consistent street wall. But as exceptions to the rule, they are not too distracting, and in some cases, the upper-storey setbacks help sunlight reach the sidewalk. Similarly, the setback of newer buildings is not always flush to the sidewalk. While some instances of large setback are helpful when they are well-defined as a public space, overly large or underutilized setbacks detract from the comfort and interest of the street.

The buildings in the case studies generally interact well with the street. Retail predominantly fronts the street and doors and windows face the sidewalk. In addition, elements such as window and sidewalk displays, sandwich boards, seating, and canopies all help create a transition from the public realm of the sidewalk to the semi-private realm of the building. These transitional elements are present to varying degrees amongst businesses. For example, sidewalk seating at one business, a window
display and sandwich board at another, and a sidewalk display and canopy at a third create varied yet sustained visual interest.

The use of transitional devices is particularly valuable for non-interactive street uses such as doctors’ offices and banks which would otherwise create a gap in street activity. For example, the benches in front of Canada Trust on West 41st Avenue are comfortably and conveniently sited and are used by pedestrians who enliven an otherwise disengaging street frontage. Even without such devices, however, it is possible for some gaps in the streetscape to be used. For example, the CIBC bank on Commercial Drive does not interact well with the street. However, given its prominent location on the corner of Commercial Drive and 1st Avenue and a setback, the area in front of the bank is frequently occupied by Hare Krishnas selling books, socialists distributing flyers, or pedestrians simply waiting to cross the street.

The buildings in the case studies also relate to the street because they are pedestrian-scaled. Most businesses have small storefronts and the buildings on large lots are often divided into smaller storefronts. This helps create more continued visual interest for pedestrians who are able to see a new store every few paces. The buildings in the case studies are also pedestrian-scaled with respect to their impact on the street’s microclimate. Most have canopies and are made of materials which diffuse sunlight. However, some of the newer buildings tend to rely on glass windows which have dark tints, reflecting sunlight harshly and creating a gloomy streetscape. For example, the new Scotiabank building on West 41st Avenue has dark glass windows which make it difficult to differentiate between stores and decrease the potential for second storiness.

Finally, the buildings in the case studies also relate to the street in terms of beauty. Both streets have registered heritage buildings which provide both visual interest and
chronological connectivity. Other older buildings also exist on the street and though not listed on the registry, also provide a connection to the past. For example, the low scale “taxpayer” buildings with false fronts and ornate roof-lines add much to the streetscape of both streets in terms of their size and age. As seen in each case study, newer buildings can also either add to or detract from the beauty of a street, depending on their respect for the context.

The buildings in both case studies also tend to decorate the street. They often have ornate cornice lines and other architectural details that provide visual interest. This is particularly true of the older buildings. Regardless of age, the interest created can be as modest as tiles marking a foyer, or as striking as a wall mural.

Civic buildings were once structures that set a standard for quality and beauty, and on neighbourhood shopping streets they have the potential to enhance rather than detract from a good shopping street. Neither case study has civic buildings in its immediate study area, but two civic uses do exist on Commercial Drive. Though sited prominently to provide additional street activity and presence, neither is particularly engaging to the street.

5.2.2 Comfortable Walking Facilities

To some extent, each case study exhibits the second characteristic of good neighbourhood shopping streets—comfortable walking facilities. Firstly, the streets studied both have sidewalks that are about 3 metres (10 feet) wide. Though considered adequate to accommodate sidewalk structures and pedestrians comfortably, this is on the narrow side for busy commercial streets. In both case studies there are instances where pedestrians are unduly crowded due to sidewalk furniture combined with sidewalk displays or sidewalk seating.
Both streets have attractive sidewalks that are distinct from the surrounding streets and that echo the architectural details of the streets' older buildings. These sidewalk markings help denote the areas' special status as a commercial core. However, the aesthetics of pavement are inconsequential when they are poorly maintained, and in this sense, the case studies are divergent: though both pavements are of similar age, Commercial Drive's pavements appears less well-maintained than those on West 41st Avenue.

The sidewalks of both case studies are somewhat accessible. Both streets have a large amount of various sidewalk furniture and though its distribution is sometimes a deterrent to pedestrian movement, its existence also helps make the street visually interesting and accentuates the street activity. In another sense of accessibility, both case studies have continuous sidewalks. There are no interruptions for driveways and the breaks that allow for alleys are relatively narrow. The sidewalks also have curb ramps at all corners which provide easy travel for strollers, shopping carts, scooters, and wheelchairs. However, it should be noted that the predominance of single curb ramps in both case studies diminishes the continuity of the sidewalk for wheeled users.

Buffers are recognized as an important element of comfortable walking facilities and are somewhat reflected in the case studies. Visual buffers are present as a result of special sidewalk paving but do little to physically protect pedestrians from moving traffic. A physical buffer is often created as a consequence of street trees and street furniture. Given the narrowness of the case studies' sidewalks, a larger buffer area would increase pedestrian comfort. Finally, the existence of on-street parking provides a valuable physical buffer in both case studies. On Commercial Drive however, restrictions on peak period parking often eliminate this buffer. While it was difficult to determine if the lack of a buffer resulted in decreased sidewalk
activity, it was observed that the side of the street with afternoon or all-day parking restrictions was less lively than the side with early morning parking restrictions.

Convenient and safe crossings are another element of comfortable walking facilities somewhat evident in both case studies. Commercial Drive has four fairly frequent crossing opportunities (i.e. intersections)—two of which lack crosswalks or other elements of pedestrian priority—while West 41st Avenue has three crossing opportunities—two of which are wide apart but all of which have crosswalks or other evidence of pedestrian priority. Because pedestrians create their own crossing opportunities when a gap occurs between safe and convenient crossings, frequent jaywalking was observed in both case studies.

Finally, comfortable walking facilities are contingent on the existence of a fine street network. The case studies exhibit this characteristic to varying degrees. Though both exist within the same grid system, they are oriented differently. Because Commercial Drive is oriented north/south on the shorter ends of the grid and West 41st Avenue is oriented east/west on the longer ends, Commercial Drive has more street corners, crossing opportunities, and pedestrian route choices. West 41st Avenue, however, benefits from the presence of an alley parallel to the shopping street, increasing pedestrian route choice and decreasing conflicts with delivery vehicles.

5.2.3 Pedestrian Amenities

As seen in Table 5.1, pedestrian amenities—a third characteristic of good neighbourhood shopping streets—are evident to varying degrees in both case studies. Street furniture is present on each street but is more prevalent on West 41st Avenue. For example, Commercial Drive has pedestrian-scaled street lighting, a drinking fountain, and many bike racks, but lacks the ample public seating and garbage
containers of West 41st Avenue. Each street would benefit from having the other’s amenities (in addition to their own), but the relative importance of the furniture is important to consider.

The quality of street furniture, like its presence, varies between the two case studies. On Commercial Drive, street improvements done twenty years ago are rather dated and inadequate while West 41st Avenue has benefited from more frequent street improvements. In both cases however, the siting of street furniture is sometimes problematic.

Good bus stops are another important pedestrian amenity for good neighbourhood shopping streets. While both case studies have bus stops, they are not particularly good ones. They lack shelter (a painfully obvious oversight when adjacent to buildings without canopies), display no information, and often lack decent seating.

Public art is a fairly evident pedestrian amenity in both case studies. There are some examples of functional yet beautiful public elements—for example, ornate light standards on Commercial Drive and banners in Kerrisdale. There are also examples of less functional art that add interest to the street—for example, the tiles on Commercial Drive and the mural on West 41st Avenue. Finally, private elements such as signs and window displays can also act as art while enhancing business. Though these are modest examples, their cumulative effect on the area can be quite significant.

Meanwhile, greenery is a pedestrian amenity that is exhibited in each case study but is more maintained and integral to West 41st Avenue. Street trees exist in both cases, helping define the street as an outdoor room and unifying the streetscape. Other greenery, however, is more widespread on West 41st Avenue, with private and
public planters softening the built environment. Many of the private planters are particularly attractive and are most often placed within a building’s setback, beautifying the street without impeding pedestrian traffic.

5.2.4 Traffic Management

The management of traffic is a fourth characteristic of good neighbourhood shopping streets. Like the previous characteristic, it is somewhat evident in the case studies. Both are major arterial streets and as such carry large amounts of traffic each day (15,000 to 25,000 vehicles/day). And like other arterial streets in the city, the volume of traffic is increasing yearly. However, because both exist within a grid system where major arterial streets run every five to eight blocks, the traffic burden is shared. The speed of traffic on these streets, does not appear excessive, probably due to the physical and visual narrowness of the street and the large volume of vehicles and other street activity. Nevertheless, during peak hours on Commercial Drive, the removal of on-street parking results in a significant increase in traffic speed and volume due to the increased traffic capacity and easier vehicular movement.

Both case studies are pedestrian-scaled, with a building height to street width ratio of 1:2 to 1:4. Though this ratio is not always ideal, it is within the range of what the literature says helps create an outdoor room. In addition, the scale of the intersections is relatively small, and its street corners are fairly sharp, slowing the speed of turning cars and making it easier for pedestrians to cross the street.

Meanwhile, the case studies are only somewhat bicycle-friendly. Commercial Drive has sufficient bike racks, but neither case study has a bike lane nor adequate integration into nearby bicycle routes and greenways. Both cases are also somewhat transit-friendly, with buildings facing the street and neighbourhood density that is
transit-supportive. Both streets are on bus routes and have fairly frequent, but uninviting bus stops. Neither street has bus priority measures such as bus bulges—sidewalk extensions which enable buses to pick up and drop off passengers without having to merge in and out of traffic—but the City of Vancouver’s Transportation Plan identifies both as “major transit corridors,” implying perhaps that such priority measures are possible in the future. However, another priority measure could entail the creation of bus lanes in the curb lane. This would require the removal of on-street parking and the consequent loss of a buffer for pedestrians. A recent proposal by BC Transit to create bus lanes on Granville Street sparked outrage amongst area residents and merchants and would be similarly controversial elsewhere.

Finally, parking is an important element of traffic management that is present to varying degrees in both case studies. Both have well-used on-street metered parking and some side street parking. Commercial Drive however, experiences parking restrictions at peak periods which often coincide with peak shopping times. Illegal parking was frequently observed on both streets—in bus zones, near crosswalks, and in commercial loading areas—creating safety problems for pedestrians and vehicles alike. And though municipal parking officers were frequently observed, enforcement seemingly lags behind abuse. In addition, the increasing presence of parked sport utility vehicles, particularly in the Kerrisdale area, detracts somewhat from a positive street environment by making it difficult for pedestrians to see across the street.

Off-street parking, whether behind buildings, underground, or in shared lots can help ease parking demand. Here again, Commercial Drive is at a disadvantage. Whereas Kerrisdale has parking spaces adjacent to the train tracks, and a shared free lot that is heavily promoted by merchants and the BIA, Commercial Drive’s largest off-street lot (an underground lot at Il Mercato) is intended for mall patrons only.
5.2.5 Street Activity

Street activity—a fifth characteristic of good neighbourhood shopping streets—is exhibited in each case study. This is due to both significant local neighbourhood use and citywide patronage. In terms of local neighbourhood use, density is significant in both case studies but is distributed differently. On Commercial Drive, housing exists both on the street itself and in the neighbourhood's multi-suite houses and apartment buildings. On West 41st Avenue, there is little housing on the shopping street itself but there is a tight core of medium density apartment buildings surrounding the commercial area.

Diversity is another important element of street activity and is evident to varying degrees in the case studies. Commercial Drive for example, has a greater variety of activities than Kerrisdale in terms of businesses and land use. This diversity may account for its higher pedestrian activity and more sustained all-day activity. Similarly, the variety appears to attract a wider variety of patrons. However, both streets have a fairly sustained level of activity over the day. The continued use of West 41st Avenue after stores have closed (for example, by window shoppers and dog walkers), suggests that a good public realm and a few cafés can generate street activity. In addition, it also suggests that the existence of diverse uses within a street's context, and not necessarily on the street itself, may be a sufficient generator of street activity.

Special events, planned or otherwise, are significant in their ability to contribute to street activity and are evident in each case study. While the events of Commercial Drive are generally more spontaneous in nature (e.g. World Cup “parades”) than ones on West 41st Avenue, both streets benefit greatly from them. In fact, the streets seem so much more exciting during these times that it is tempting to want them to be
like that always. But such is the nature of special events that if they were continual they would lose their “specialness.”

Finally, safety is an element of street activity exhibited by each case study. Specifically, both streets have “eyes on the street” due to the large number of people living and working in the immediate vicinity of the street. Police officers on the beat were observed on both streets—whether in vehicles, on bikes, or walking. In addition, Commercial Drive has a Community Police Office that is directly involved in the health of the street, while Kerrisdale’s BIA has organized a security patrol.

5.2.6 Neighbourhood Goods and Services

Neighbourhood goods and services—a sixth characteristic of good neighbourhood shopping streets—are evident on Commercial Drive and somewhat evident on West 41st Avenue. Specifically, both streets have businesses which are compatible with residential areas, and both streets also have destination stores which are illustrative of the neighbourhood’s character—for example the Caffe Roma on Commercial Drive and Hill’s of Kerrisdale on West 41st Avenue. However, while Commercial Drive has a good variety of stores which serve daily necessities, West 41st Avenue is a more upscale retail shopping street and has fewer stores that are targeted to neighbourhood needs. One long-time resident remarked that the street had changed for the worse and is now only “banks, clothes, and coffee-shops.” And though the area’s commercial activities as a whole are more diverse, the recent closing of Kerrisdale’s supermarket is concerning.

Small and locally-owned businesses are also important to the neighbourhood goods and services of a shopping street. In each case study, such stores dominate. They add a sense of place to the street, create continuity with the past, and often have fiercely
loyal customers. However, the small, local nature of the stores is changing, particularly in Kerrisdale, where chain stores and banks are increasingly evident and are able to afford higher rents than independent businesses (Kluckner 1991).

Finally, the businesses in both case studies are convenient to each other, with more than four dozen businesses within a 180 to 240 metre (600 to 800 feet) area and no vacancies. However, in each case study, the street's definition is somewhat diluted by the presence of retail beyond the core. In addition, shopping on West 41st Avenue is somewhat inconvenient due to its less diverse retail mix.

5.2.7 Maintenance

Maintenance is a seventh characteristic of good neighbourhood shopping streets. It is somewhat evident on Commercial Drive and fully evident on West 41st Avenue. In terms of physical upkeep, both case studies exhibit some form of street maintenance, with most individual businesses taking pride in their shops' appearance. In addition, both streets benefit from clean-up campaigns, whether organized by the government or the BIA. However, street maintenance is to some extent dependent on facilities such as garbage receptacles, and the lack of these on Commercial Drive decreases the area's ability to stay tidy.

In terms of groups or individuals who take a long term interest in the street, only one case study has a formal organization. The Kerrisdale BIA works to coordinate street improvements, distributes a newsletter and organizes various events. Commercial Drive lacks such an organization and the relevant businesses currently seem uninterested in forming one. However, the City of Vancouver, in an effort to increase involvement, has decreased the elements required for BIA formation (Applebe 1998).
5.2.8 Supportive Neighbourhood Context

A supportive neighbourhood context—an eighth characteristic of good neighbourhood shopping streets—is evidenced by both case studies. Both are surrounded by sufficient neighbourhood density to support their commercial districts. In particular, the presence of residents on or near the street (i.e. a short walk away) is very much evident. Diversity amongst the residents helps ensure that a variety of stores are feasible. The streets are an integral part of their respective neighbourhoods, with residents seemingly proud of their streets, claiming them as their own, and trying to defend them from unwanted change.

5.2.9 Supportive Government

The ninth characteristic of good neighbourhood shopping streets—supportive government—is somewhat evident in each case study. Specifically, each street has had projects and plans that have positively influenced the street, and further plans are likely forthcoming with CityPlan’s Community Visioning process. However, with respect to the City’s regulatory powers, the C-2C zoning of Commercial Drive is more reflective of the characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping streets than the C-2 zoning of West 41st Avenue.

The City of Vancouver has made some commitment to neighbourhood shopping streets through its support of BIAs. But as neighbourhoods become increasingly dense and more people seek neighbourhood goods and services, the need for more commitment is particularly acute. Furthermore, the City’s stated priority for pedestrians is yet to be fully realized, and there must be a finer balance of neighbourhood needs to regional transportation needs.
5.3 Conclusions

5.3.1 Relative Importance of the Characteristics

In general, each case study exhibits some of the characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping streets identified in the literature. Specifically, each street has three characteristics that could be described as fundamental: buildings that relate to the street; a supportive neighbourhood context; and street activity. It is important to note that the two former characteristics are dependent on elements of the urban environment that are not easily changed—land use and population density—and that they in turn determine street activity. While supportive government is only somewhat evident in each case study, it is nevertheless a fourth fundamental characteristic due to its influence on the other characteristics. Finally, a fifth fundamental characteristic—neighbourhood goods and services—is fully evident only on Commercial Drive. And while West 41st Avenue exhibits a better maintained street, it could be argued that maintenance—along with characteristics such as comfortable walking facilities, pedestrian amenities, and traffic management—is a relatively less important characteristic than neighbourhood goods and services.

Indeed, neighbourhood goods and services are what distinguishes a good neighbourhood shopping street from simply a pedestrian-friendly shopping street. In Figure 5.1, the case studies' business types are illustrated. Though there are some similarities seen between Commercial Drive and West 41st Avenue—for example, the streets have similar proportions of specialty food stores, small grocery stores, specialty shops, drug stores, home and hardware stores, book and stationery stores, and photo processing labs—there are significant differences. Of particular interest are the differences seen with respect to the provision of city- versus neighbourhood-oriented goods and services. Specifically, West 41st Avenue has a much larger proportion of
shoe and clothing stores and banks and a smaller proportion of cafés and restaurants and personal services than Commercial Drive. These differences result in the case studies having a decidedly different neighbourhood ambience. For example, the banks and clothing stores on West 41st Avenue create an upscale shopping street, while the personal services and cafés and restaurants of Commercial Drive create a sustained and diverse shopping street.

![Figure 5.1 Percentage of Businesses at Street-level on Commercial Drive and West 41st Avenue](image)

But apart from the general conclusion that some characteristics are more important than others, what do the case studies tell us about the specific elements that make a good neighbourhood shopping street? In particular, it would be useful to know what elements are essential and which are merely helpful. Based on the case study

14 Miscellaneous personal services include travel, insurance, medical and dental, dry cleaning, and alterations; specialty shops include jewellery, toys, gift, gems, maternity, optical, flower, electronic, chocolate, and liquor stores; and specialty food stores include bakeries, delis, butchers, and cheese stores.
findings, Table 5.2 illustrates these elements. As a checklist, it could serve as a blueprint for other neighbourhood shopping streets, helping to strengthen and improve them. For example, a neighbourhood shopping street such as Vancouver’s Fraser Street may have many of the essential elements of a good neighbourhood shopping street but lacks some of the helpful elements that could make it better.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential Elements</th>
<th>Helpful Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buildings</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consistent street wall</td>
<td>minimal height variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>close building setbacks</td>
<td>window and sidewalk displays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transparent frontages</td>
<td>canopies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>narrow frontages</td>
<td>decoration and beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>human-scaled buildings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diverse architecture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Streets</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relatively narrow street</td>
<td>quality paving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sufficiently wide sidewalks</td>
<td>curb ramps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diverse transportation modes</td>
<td>convenient and safe crossings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on-street parking</td>
<td>fine street network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sharp corners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amenities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garbage containers</td>
<td>good bus stops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seating (public and private)</td>
<td>pedestrian-scaled lighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trees</td>
<td>public art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>planters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not too many banks</td>
<td>independent businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daily necessities</td>
<td>locally-owned businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal services</td>
<td>definable and convenient core</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cafés and restaurants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housing near the street</td>
<td>maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>catchment area</td>
<td>neighbourhood association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supportive zoning</td>
<td>business association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 Essential and Helpful Elements of Good Neighbourhood Shopping Streets

The elements in Table 5.2 are roughly organized into five groups—buildings, streets, amenities, activities, and community. They reflect the characteristics of
good neighbourhood shopping streets discussed throughout the thesis. Specifically, the building elements reflect buildings that relate to the street, the street elements reflect good walking facilities and traffic management, the amenity elements reflect pedestrian amenities, the activity elements reflect neighbourhood goods and services, the community elements reflect maintenance, supportive neighbourhood, and supportive government, and all elements reflect street activity.

Like the characteristics, but more tangibly, the elements are a means to good neighbourhood shopping streets, and there is some interdependence and overlap among them. While it is not necessary to discuss each element in detail—most have been referred to previously—some points merit discussion. Firstly, essential building elements reflect the inherent value of older urban environments. Specifically, neighbourhood shopping streets developed at the turn of the century have the essential elements which are congruent with a pedestrian-scale and neighbourhood-orientation. Nevertheless, because these elements are largely determined by zoning bylaws, newer streets can also benefit from them. Furthermore, the helpful elements are mostly dependent on individual—and less predictable—initiative.

Secondly, essential street elements also reflect the importance of traditional planning, with narrow streets, sufficiently wide sidewalks, and sharp corners all being commonplace prior to the dominance of the automobile. Such elements emphasize the ability of pedestrian-friendly environments to create street activity that reclaims the street as a public space.

Thirdly, essential amenities—whether provided publicly or privately—include garbage containers, seating, and trees. Without these essential elements, streets would be littered, devoid of passive sidewalk activity, and poorly defined. Other amenities such as planters and pedestrian-scaled lighting can improve some streets
but, like other helpful elements, are neither essential nor appropriate in all cases.

Fourthly, the importance of essential activities has already been discussed with regards to neighbourhood goods and services. Though these elements are largely out of the control of government, the influence of zoning and property taxes cannot be underestimated. For example, the inclusion of offices as an approved use in C-2 Commercial Districts enables financial institutions to establish a prominent presence on neighbourhood shopping streets. Furthermore, because property is taxed with respect to its zoning—i.e. property tax is partially based on the land's assessed value which is, in turn, based on the use that the zoning allows, not the use that exists—the zoning of some areas may facilitate property taxes that are prohibitive to small retailers. Such effects have been particularly felt on West 41st Avenue.

Finally, essential community elements reflect the importance of a population to the street. Specifically, housing both near the street and in a certain catchment area around the street provides a market regardless of overall density. And while safety is an essential element, it is important to acknowledge that it may be perceived differently by different populations. For example, while safety on Commercial Drive may not preclude panhandlers, on West 41st Avenue, safety requires a security patrol. Though BIAs and other merchant associations appear to be most influential with regards to non-essential elements such as beautification, they may also provide a voice at City Hall that can help establish the essential elements.

5.3.2 Reflections on Neighbourhood Shopping Streets

In addition to highlighting the relative importance of the general characteristics and specific elements of good neighbourhood shopping streets, the research provides other insights. Neighbourhood shopping streets are changing, with chain stores
increasingly common and community-oriented goods and services being replaced by more city-serving goods and services. This is a result, to some extent, of changing retail patterns and changing neighbourhoods. For example, the loss of a grocery store in the Kerrisdale neighbourhood probably reflects the trend for grocery stores to serve increasingly large catchment areas. However, the concurrent trend of smaller, specialty grocery stores such as Caper's may bode well for West 41st Avenue. Furthermore, as neighbourhoods continue to densify, the market demand for convenient goods and services will increase.

The changing retail scene is also a result of a surge in street retailing by chain stores and a consequent increase in property taxes. As Wiedenhoeft (1981, p. 174) notes, too much success may result in an "excessive increase in property values and taxes, thus forcing out established residents and low-volume commercial activities." This is obviously of concern because as neighbourhood shopping streets lose neighbourhood goods and services, people must fulfil their daily needs elsewhere. Given the current planning emphasis on the importance of sustainable neighbourhoods where residents can live, shop, and work, some effort should be made to ensure that neighbourhood goods and services are retained. To some extent this is dependent on zoning bylaws and property taxes. For example, the City of Vancouver's commercial property tax rate is substantially higher than the residential rate, resulting in large overhead for businesses, particularly those who are situated in valuable locations.

The case studies also illustrate that each neighbourhood shopping street is unique, with its particular ambience, retail mix, and marketing reflecting different neighbourhood contexts with different populations. For example, Commercial Drive's ethnic population is reflected in its numerous restaurants and cafés, while the relatively affluent population of Kerrisdale supports the luxury stores of West 41st Avenue. However, successful streets are also popular with the city as a whole,
suggesting that a good street has a population that extends beyond the immediate neighbourhood. Furthermore, each street will respond to the characteristics and elements of good neighbourhood shopping streets differently, particularly those elements that are not essential. For example, while West 41st Avenue's planters help create a pleasant, village environment, similar planters on Commercial Drive would perhaps detract from its more urban, independent atmosphere.

Finally, the research findings also indicate the importance of community groups to contribute to good neighbourhood shopping streets. For example, Community Police Offices can play a large role in street security and, in the absence of a BIA, provide a _de facto_ sounding board for business concerns. Community centres, schools, and non-profit organizations are other potential stakeholders in the street and can be great sources of energy and ideas. Neighbourhood associations in particular are very aware of community issues and are adept at highlighting them when necessary.

5.4 Implications

This thesis has implications for academic interest on streets as public space and for the practical planning of neighbourhoods and pedestrian-friendly streets. From an academic standpoint, it is seen that good neighbourhood shopping streets in the literature are not necessarily congruent with what are considered good neighbourhood shopping streets in reality. Certain fundamental characteristics or essential elements may be evident while others are less evident. In addition, the changing role of many neighbourhood shopping streets is creating challenges. For example, the fine line between pedestrian-friendly shopping streets and neighbourhood shopping streets is being blurred, with some streets losing their neighbourhood function at the same time that they are experiencing widespread popularity.
From a planning perspective, challenges facing good neighbourhood shopping streets are again interesting, highlighting the need to clearly articulate the function of a street and then work towards achieving or maintaining it. The relative importance of the characteristics and elements of good neighbourhood shopping streets is also of relevance to planners. In particular it gives weight to the importance of good building development, human-scaled streets, a supportive neighbourhood, and supportive government. Other characteristics that may have seemed fundamental may be less so. Aesthetics, for example, should not be stressed at the expense of simple, quality buildings with windows and a close setback. Similarly, there should not be too much regulation. For example, though canopies are desired in terms of pedestrian comfort, not every building needs one. In addition, the variety amongst the buildings is more interesting to pedestrians, and private initiatives that add diversity to the street should be encouraged.

While streets do not need too much intervention and can be largely self-maintained, government can be very influential to neighbourhood shopping streets, particularly with respect to the built environment and zoning. However, government is less able to influence neighbourhood goods and services, the most important characteristic that distinguishes a neighbourhood shopping street from a pedestrian-friendly shopping street. Furthermore, though neighbourhood shopping streets and busy arterial streets are not necessarily incompatible, the needs of car traffic should not overwhelm the role of the street as a “place,” and the City has the ability to balance these roles. In addition, government can set a good example—for example by using activity-generating, civic buildings as landmarks on the street. Finally, neighbourhoods take pride in their shopping streets and want them to be “good.” Facilitating community involvement in them—for example via neighbourhood planning offices and the support of merchant associations—is important.
5.5 Recommendations for Further Research

One of the limitations of the research was its concentration on predominantly physical factors. Though socioeconomic factors were also considered, more attention may have been warranted given their influence on the street. Further research into the effect of non-physical factors—for example, a study into the influence of BIAs on neighbourhood shopping streets, the effect of chain stores, or gentrification—would therefore be useful.

Another potential research limitation was the case study streets' similar roles as relatively large neighbourhood shopping streets with a “district” function and their similar background as streetcar strips. Future research that looks at smaller and newer—for example, suburban—neighbourhood shopping streets would be valuable.

Also of interest would be a study into the perception of the characteristics of good neighbourhood shopping streets by pedestrians and others who use the street. For example, the perceived influence of window displays, on-street parking, and street furniture should be investigated. Similarly, research into the importance of neighbourhood shopping streets to the community and of their tendency to change would also be of interest.

Finally, any further research into good neighbourhood shopping streets would contribute to the enhancement of neighbourhood—and consequently urban—livability. Neighbourhood shopping streets, as the “main streets” of community, are vital as planners work towards that goal.
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APPENDIX A:

INTERACTION OF COMMERCIAL DRIVE BUSINESSES WITH THE STREET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Store</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Width (m)</th>
<th>Canopy</th>
<th>Window Display</th>
<th>Sidewalk Display</th>
<th>Sandwich Board</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Side of Street</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VanCity</td>
<td>1675 Commercial</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Eyes</td>
<td>1641 Commercial</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercato Smoke Shop</td>
<td>1655 Commercial</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avalon Salon</td>
<td>1631 Commercial</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming Photoland</td>
<td>1629 Commercial</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carepoint Medical Centre</td>
<td>1623 Commercial</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercato Dental Centre</td>
<td>1617 Commercial</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allied Insurance Brokers</td>
<td>1605 Commercial</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avanti's Neighbourhood Pub</td>
<td>1601 Commercial</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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Table A.1 Interaction of Commercial Drive Businesses with the Street
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<th>Sidewalk Display</th>
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Table A.1 (Continued) Interaction of Commercial Drive Businesses with the Street
APPENDIX B:
INTERACTION OF WEST 41ST AVENUE BUSINESSES WITH THE STREET

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Table B.1 Interaction of West 41st Avenue Businesses with the Street

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<th>Window Display</th>
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<td>Hobbs Gifts</td>
<td>2129 W 41st</td>
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<td>Hobbs Florists</td>
<td>2127 W 41st</td>
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<td>Hills of Kerrisdale</td>
<td>2125 W 41st</td>
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<td>TD Bank</td>
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Table B.1 (Continued) Interaction of West 41st Avenue Businesses with the Street