

SUSTAINABLE RETAIL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT CO-OP

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ABSTRACT

This practicum explores the concept of sustainable retail development and seeks out innovative approaches that can be employed by retailers, retail developers and urban planners to create more sustainable retail environments in Canadian cities. This is achieved in part through a case study of how a notable Canadian retailer, Mountain Equipment Co-op, addresses the negative social, environmental and economic implications of predominant retail development practices. Although the concept of 'sustainable retailing' encompasses an extremely broad number of considerations which may include product sourcing, transportation and manufacturing standards, materials recycling, building construction and customer and employee satisfaction; this practicum focuses on the issues of 'sustainable retail development' from an urban planning perspective. These considerations include the economic, environmental and social impacts of site location and development decisions of retailers. The intention of this practicum is to promote change both locally and globally through the encouragement of more sustainable retail development initiatives at the district, block, site and community scales.

The conclusion of the practicum implies that planning and development considerations can have a significant impact towards achieving more sustainable retail development. The recommendations suggest that to realize positive outcomes, a municipality should adopt a comprehensive set of policies and guidelines that directly support sustainable development practices. Policy documents such as official plans, neighbourhood plans and zoning bylaws should be consistent with sustainability objectives, and should be supported by a variety of other planning tools including community collaboration, capital investment in mature areas, urban design standards and the encouragement of green building initiatives. The recommendations for retail developers stress the importance of utilizing a more strategic approach to site location and development considerations, including utilizing complimentary and co-location strategies, connecting with the local community to provide benefits beyond a retail amenity, exploring options for infill opportunities, and implementing green building or other technological innovations.

Key words: Mountain Equipment Co-op, sustainable, retail development.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the background information relating to the purpose and general problem statement of the practicum; outlines the more specific research questions to be addressed; and explains the potential significance of the research and the recommendations.

1.1 Background

Retailers — businesses that sell consumer goods — are an important component of contemporary cities and have been referred to as the “soul” of a commercial street (Beyard et al 2001). At certain times in the history of retailing, planners and economic development officials might have welcomed a retail development of any size and nature into the community without due regards for the consequences (Carn et al 1995). However, in the past couple of decades some retail development forms have been criticized due to their undesirable impacts. While some authors state that retailing can work to initiate a broader process of economic development (Goodno 2004), Gibbs (1987,15) argues that economic development through retailing is limited because it primarily results in the redistribution of personal income within cities. However, within today's global economy that is dominated by mega-corporations, it is even more difficult to contain the economic effects of retailing within the boundaries of the city and the community.

In addition to the economic considerations of retail development, the changing trends and the growth of retail development have had a significant impact on the built environment of Canadian cities.

The contemporary city is to a substantial degree articulated in relation to retail facilities, and this has important consequences for the nature of city growth and associated opportunities and constraints for urban planning. Shopping trips are also a major component of spatial behavior in the city, since the vast majority of the population is involved in some direct or indirect way with shopping activities (Bromley and Thomas 1993, 2).

The “creative destruction” of the built environment by the spatial shifting of retail capital is a persistent theme in the history of retailing. This process of creative destruction — “the perpetual struggle in which capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its condition at one particular moment in time only to have to destroy it at a subsequent point in time” — has been significant in spaces of profit extraction (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 132). The trend of retail development has changed in the last few decades towards larger establishments in the form of regional malls, big-box establishments and power-centres, located in the outer suburban, industrial and edge-of-city areas.

Location is an important consideration for both retail developers and retailers, however, there

is no generally agreed upon classification of retail location. The simple classification of retail location used in this practicum includes: downtown or city centre; inner city or inner suburban; outer suburban; and edge-of-city sites. Yet, Guy (1994, 21) states that the categorization of the spatial distribution of retail development is more complex as it must also relate to retail centre size and catchment area within the location. Therefore, the practicum also attempts to consider retail type and catchment area. Large-format retailers typically require large tracts of land for development, and are typically located in previously undeveloped outer suburban and edge-of-city sites. Big-box retailers and power-centres may require up to 20 acres of land (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 82) and regional malls may need up to 200 acres (Guy 1998).

This decentralization of retail activity began with the post-industrial outward migration of the middle-class from urban centres into suburbia (Kotkin 1997). The by-products of these new large sprawling suburban subdivisions, “where all those new families need groceries and furniture and kids clothes as soon as they move in” (Lorinc 2006, 99) are the segregated mega-mall and big-box store commercial developments popular today. However, it has not only been due to the trends in retail development patterns that have impacted the built environment of urban commercial areas, but also the rate of retail development. The amount of urban space allocated for retail development has increased significantly. As early as the mid-1980s, concerns were being expressed over the excessive growth of retail space (Carn et al 1995). There was a doubling of per capita retail floor space in the US between 1970 to 1990 (*Chain Store Age Global Powers of Retailing Supplement* 1996, from Halebsky 2004), which reflects the increasing importance of shopping and consumption during this time. But the rate of consumer spending did not correspond to the increasing rate of retail development, which affected the viability and distribution of retailing in urban centers.

As a consequence of this excessive and sprawling form of development, many North American downtowns and inner cities were negatively affected as they increasingly became characterized by “dead spaces” of vacant buildings, parking lots and blank-walled office buildings (Robertson 1997). More recently, retail investment that had once shifted from downtowns and inner cities to the suburban frontier has returned again with the rehabilitation and revitalization of some of these commercial areas. In addition, many older shopping centres that were unable to serve their markets effectively have been redesigned and redeveloped in an attempt to reestablish a competitive edge (Pressman and Peters 1996). However, with the exception of a handful of cities, including Hamilton and Winnipeg, Canadian cities did not experience this “hollowing out” in response to inner city violence, racism and poor educational opportunities

as was common in major US cities (Lorinc 2006, 228). Many Canadian downtowns effectively managed to survive the outward movement of sprawl-style development patterns. This was achieved, in part, by the recognition of planners and politicians that strategies to retain businesses and the urban population in central districts were needed (Lorinc 2006, 228). However, the more apparent and detrimental impact of these new large-format retailers in Canadian cities is manifested in the segregation of land uses and the unsustainable travel and consumption patterns that result.

The traditional role of the urban planner in retail development has been simply to allocate space for commercial activity through land use designations based on a perceived demand (Jamieson 1996). The approach by the government to retail development was laissez-faire and there was no co-ordination of regulations between federal, provincial or municipal levels of government (Pressman and Peters 1996). As well, the planning system after the 1950s was based on a land use system that insisted on segregation of commercial from residential from industrial. The mix of land uses that dominated older urban areas was replaced by larger single-land uses and has become the status quo for most development forms. Unfortunately, the development of retail space by these new large-format retailers was prior to any significant consideration of the effects of these retail formats or any attempts to establish forward-looking commercial policy (Toderian 1996).

The retail planning process and the tools available to planners have also evolved in many Canadian municipalities, and have involved a number of strategies. However, the retail planning process has been, and continues to be, more reactive than anticipatory. One such strategy, used by many municipalities was the implementation of various downtown revitalization programs as well as the creation of public-private partnerships in the form of Business Revitalization Zones (BRZs) and Business Improvement Areas (BIAs). However, many district and local commercial areas outside of the city centres and these designated regeneration areas have received less attention (Carley et al 2001, 1), and are still in direct competition with the new retail formats. A second strategy, most widely used in Ontario, has been through increased interest in and the eventual adoption of retail policies in many municipal official plans. These retail guidelines have attempted to guard against the provision of excess commercial land beyond which a municipality can support without causing “detriment” to existing commercial areas (Pressman and Peters 1996). However, in these retail guidelines the meaning and implications of “detriment” requires clarification. In addition, some municipalities have created a set of urban design guidelines for large format retailers. Yet design guidelines tend to primarily focus on aesthetic issues and

reject retail developments that have a detrimental visual impact, but have less influence on retail developments that are detrimental to the public interest and the environment.

The attempts of municipalities implementing these policies and programs have been insufficient to effectively counter the impacts of retail development trends in Canada. These decentralized and segregated forms of development in Canada have resulted from both the private sector and the policies of provincial and municipal governments in response to market initiatives to develop land (Pressman and Peters 1996). Retail environments are no exception to these market forces. Big-box retailers and power-centres continue to be built on edge-of-city sites along major transportation arterials, while developing retail in downtown and inner city commercial areas continue to be a challenge. However, a larger issue remains: the recent trends of retail development have not only impacted the built environment but also the natural environment, as well as the social and economic state of urban and suburban areas. Attempts to develop commercial areas in an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable manner requires further attention from both the private retail sector and local planning policy directives. Yet, in Canadian cities, as within Europe, there is little evidence of comprehensive requirements for local plans to conform with regional planning guidance, or initiatives to link strategies of sustainable development with economic development (Carley et al 2001, 4).

The theory of sustainable development within urban planning has become increasingly important and more widely utilized in the past two decades. The concept of sustainable development arose in the 1980s, and has since evolved into a widely utilized term within numerous fields of study. 'Sustainable development' was first defined in the 1980 World Conservation Strategy, but was not popularized until the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987. The Brundtland Commission defined it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, 8). At the same time within Canada, the National Task Force on Environment and Economy (1987, 3) produced a definition of 'sustainable economic development', which was defined as "development that ensures the utilization of resources and the environment today does not damage the prospects for their use by future generations". However, there was little attention given to cities and urbanization in the early development stages of the theory of sustainable development, even though cities are one of the primary medium through which the economic activities of people affect the environment (Richardson 1996).

As cities have grown larger due to population growth and the migration of rural populations towards these cities, the impacts of urban areas were recognized as reason for concern. In

1989, Richardson (1996) advanced the definition to include urban and social issues, defining sustainable development as “fostering economic development while conserving resources and promoting the health of the individual, the community and the ecosystem”. Richardson’s (1996) premise of sustainable development from an urban planning perspective is to reduce the effects of environmental degradation while attempting to maintain or improve the quality of life that society is being accustomed to, in a more equitable manner. Despite the implied simplicity of this statement, the difficulty is in translating this concept into practice (Jepson 2001).

1.2 Problem Statement

The idea for this practicum arises from the observation that these new large-format retail developments in decentralized and segregated areas are a prominent component of most municipalities and provide benefits to many Canadians. The benefits include gains through increased efficiency and economy of scale, as well as an increase in choice for the mobile and prosperous consumer (Guy 1998). However, there are also many who have less chance to enjoy these benefits, and who share in bearing the real costs. These decentralized and segregated retail developments — through their adverse economic impact on older retailing patterns, which affect the less mobile, the older and the poorer consumer, as well as smaller and inner city retailers — have been criticized by urban planners for the past couple of decades. More recently, further concerns have arisen amongst planners concerned with the effects of these new large-format retail developments, which includes not only the conservation of the natural environment, but also the encouragement of more ‘sustainable’ patterns of retail development and travel behavior (Guy 1998).

In many Canadian cities, the planning system has either facilitated or been unable to prevent large retail developments in the periphery of urban areas, yet many planners, politicians and the concerned public have expressed concern for downtowns, older retail areas and the environment. This is similar to what may be observed in many US cities, whereby officials and planning authorities have not shown the political will or had the legal means to stop decentralized retail development, “a position which is not politically feasible because of the strong pro-business sentiment in the business and political communities” (Guy and Lord 1993, 107). These large-format retailers persist as a consumer-driven reality even in the 21st century, as “Canadian shoppers continue to vote with their feet – or, more accurately, their tires” (Toderian 1996). In addition, Pressman and Peters (1996) argue that developers of large format retailers have been reluctant to build within the central business district without assistance from the municipality

because of high land costs, financing difficulties, the problems with assembling an appropriately sized parcel of land from smaller and separately owned parcels, and the construction problems that are inevitably faced on constrained sites. Thus, new-format retailers on edge-of-city sites have been welcomed by municipalities with very little opposition, and have even been used in the redevelopment of industrial areas (Pressman and Peters 1996).

Although the planning system has attempted to intervene in the trends of retail development through the implementation of various revitalization strategies such as urban renewal, themeing, and a main street approach, as well as other policy tools such as design guidelines for large-format retailers – there has been “little fundamental assessment of the nature of the retail situation and no comprehensive definition of how the entire retail structure can be readjusted in a sustainable manner with the assistance of the planning system” (Jamieson 1996). Unfortunately, there is little research or literature that addresses how retail development within Canada can become more sustainable — economically, socially and environmentally — from an urban planning perspective. The focus of this study is thus not to add to the existing research and literature on methods for retail revitalization of older commercial areas, but to clarify: *what is more sustainable retail development, and how may this be better achieved in Canada’s municipalities?* While the primary consideration of this study is sustainable retail development through market-led initiatives, the role of the municipality in the planning system will also be considered.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

This practicum is divided into two parts. The first part examines literature on the history of retailing, focusing where possible in a Canadian context, and addresses a series of secondary questions:

- In the last century, what are the changes that have occurred in retail development trends, and what influences were primarily responsible for these trends?
- What are the economic, social and environmental impacts of these retail development trends?
- In what ways have municipalities attempted to deal with the negative impacts of retail development?
- What have been the successes and failures of these strategies?

The final component of the first part involves developing the groundwork for a set of sustainability criteria based on the literature review to examine initiatives towards achieving sustainable retail development.

The second part of the practicum uses the criteria developed from the literature review to examine the efforts of a Canadian retailer, Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC), to achieve more sustainable retail development through its recent growth and expansion. The key secondary questions addressed in the second part include:

- What are the key factors considered by Mountain Equipment Co-op in establishing a new retail development?
- What are the social, environmental and economic implications of Mountain Equipment Co-op on the built and natural environment, and the surrounding commercial district?
- What is the impact of planning policies on the development of new Mountain Equipment Co-op retail stores?
- What are the points of inspiration and constraints that Mountain Equipment Co-op has learned in the process of attempting to create a sustainable retail development in Canadian cities?
- What is the future direction of sustainable retail development in Canada?

1.4 Rationale

MEC has been chosen as a case study for this research for three reasons. Firstly, MEC strives to achieve, monitors and promotes their sustainability initiatives in their business practices. MEC recently released an Accountability Report – *Marking Our Route* (2005), which is stated as an opportunity for MEC to “show leadership by example, and to challenge ourselves, our members, and the business community to search for ways to ensure a sustainable future for everybody”. This report highlights product design, ‘green’ buildings, employee well-being and member satisfaction, and what MEC has done and is doing to “mitigate the social, environmental, and economic impacts of our business” (MEC 2005). In early 2005, the *Globe and Mail’s* Report on Business’ annual Corporate Social Responsibility ranked MEC the top retailer.

Secondly, MEC is a leading retailer of outdoor recreation equipment with eleven store locations across Canada. The stores vary in size depending on the city in which they are located, but vary from just over 12,000 square feet to approximately 50,000 square feet. MEC stores are thus comparable in size to smaller big-box stores and so-called ‘category killers’.

The final factor in choosing MEC as a case study is due to the history the author has with MEC as an employee, through the relationships formed with store management and senior management. Therefore, MEC has been chosen as a suitable case study to examine in this practicum.

1.5 Significance

The significance of this practicum is to evaluate an example of what is considered at this time to be a leading model of more sustainable retail development, and its implications for future retail initiatives. Mountain Equipment Co-op can use the findings and recommendations of the research in an attempt to clarify and improve upon the successful and sustainable retail environment that has evolved in their existing locations, and in new retail locations. Other retailers can also use the findings and recommendations of this study in their attempt to become more sustainable. The research will also have applications for city planners dealing with commercial planning decision-making and policy making, and to assist retail developers in initiating more sustainable practices. Finally, the recommendations will also be of interest to those involved in Business Associations, Economic Development agencies, and in urban regeneration and redevelopment initiatives.

1.6 Organization of Document

Chapter 2 provides a literature review of the history of the trends in retail developments, and the economic, social and environmental effects of current retail development patterns within a Canadian context. It also examines the strategies used in some municipalities to mitigate these impacts, and concludes with an examination of future trends in retail development and how this can be achieved in a more sustainable manner.

Chapter 3 describes the research methods employed in the practicum, including the case study selection process, background research, interviews and site observations. This chapter also describes how the data was analyzed, and the assumptions and limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 is a synthesis of the research findings at each of the case study locations based on the various research methods used. The chapter begins with an analysis of the evolution of MEC's store development process. Each store is then evaluated based on the sustainability criteria in a chronological order of store development. The chapter concludes by highlighting the points of inspiration and constraints at each location.

Chapter 5 provides recommendations for city planners, policy makers and decision makers to encourage more sustainable retail development, as well as recommendations for MEC, retailers and retail developers in general.

The practicum concludes with a list of references and appendices.

HISTORY AND TRENDS OF RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

This literature review is divided into four sections. Efforts have been made to place all four sections within a Canadian context. First, literature related to the evolution of retail development trends is examined. It considers how the nature of retailing has significantly transformed due to the combination of changing trends in both retailing and transportation. Retailing after the 1950s began to be increasingly dominated by larger stores on edge-of-city sites to serve their clientele in the newly formed suburbs.

The second section of the literature review examines how these new retail formats; including regional malls, big-box establishments and power-centres has had a major impact on the built environment and spatial configuration of large cities. These new retail formats have also had a significant impact on the viability of the 'traditional' form of retailing – smaller and independent retailers in downtowns and older commercial areas. The social and environmental impacts of the new retail formats will also be considered at the local and a global scale.

The third section reviews literature that highlights the evolution of strategies such as revitalization schemes and policies that have been employed in many cities in an attempt to mitigate the impacts of these new retail formats. Based on the past and current trends in retail development, the literature review concludes by looking at the future trends in retailing, and how this can be achieved in a more sustainable manner.

Despite the significant impact that retailing has had on the Canadian landscape and economy, there is very little comprehensive literature on the history of retail development and its impacts from a planning perspective. The majority of existing research and literature on retail development originates from the US and Europe, however, Canada is frequently compared to both the US and Europe in these texts. The most comprehensive source of overall information on retail development in North America from an urban planning perspective identified in the literature review is *Reading Retail* by Wrigley and Lowe (2002). Two texts, a study entitled *A Guide for the Revitalization of Retail Districts* by Silberberg (1976) and a document by the Government of Ontario, REDDI (2006), *Managing Downtown Revitalization*, are essential to place the history of retail development within a Canadian context.

The economic, environmental and social impacts of retail development trends and how to approach achieving more sustainable retail development has been studied most extensively in Europe, by Carley et al (2001) in an extensive research document entitled *Retailing, Sustainability and Neighbourhood Regeneration*. This is supplemented by information from a number of studies

by Guy, most notably in *Controlling New Retail Spaces: The Impress of Planning Policies in Western Europe* (1998). There are also a number of Canadian studies of planning policies in Ontario, including Pressman and Peters' (1996), *Large-scale Peripheral Retail Developments: At What Price?* and Toderian's (1996) *Big-box Retailing: How are Municipalities Reacting?* The primary text on the future of retail development is directed from a study by Beyard et al (2001), titled *Ten Principles for Reinventing America's Suburban Strips*. A review of the importance of retailing in placemaking is most extensively reviewed by Smirniotopoulos (2001) in *The Meaning of Place*.

2.1 Evolution of Trends in Retail Development

The history of retail development in North America reflects the ephemeral nature of cities themselves. Wrigley and Lowe (2002, 132) refer to this process as 'creative destruction', described as the constant struggle in which capital invests in an appropriate physical landscape at one moment in time only to have to destroy it or a part of it at a subsequent point in time. In order to examine the current state and emerging trends of retail development, it is necessary to review this continual process of creative destruction – the shifting of retail investment over the past 50 years from downtowns to the suburban frontier and the consequent decline of inner city retail environments, to the rehabilitation and revitalization of these areas (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 132) and the creation of new spaces of consumption.

Prior to the First World War and the advent of the streetcar, retailing in most western economies was primarily dominated by small-scale businesses that were unspecialized and highly dispersed. Some commercial and retail establishments were concentrated in the downtown area, as most people both worked and lived in the central areas (Silberberg 1976, 13). Commercial streets were dominated by low-pitched or flat-roofed buildings, which provided a streetscape of continuous commercial buildings with large windows advertisement of merchandise (Government of Ontario REDDI, 2006). However, the combination of changes in retailing and transportation trends resulted in a rapid transformation of the retail landscape in urban areas. The electrification and expansion of the streetcar system in large cities enabled downtowns to become the most accessible location for retailers to serve the earliest 'suburbs'. The most valuable location for retailing in such cities — not only based on ease of accessibility, but also image and prestige — was the main corner in the heart of the city (Claus and Harwick 1972, 6).

With the emergence of trends towards the centralization of capital, the department store began to dominate as the prime focus of retail investment. Department stores not only relied

on location for drawing their clientele, but also on an image of prestige and association with the fashionable classes (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 133). The invention of the elevator and escalator allowed buildings to be constructed with more than one storey, permitting the department store to offer all its services in a single building (Government of Ontario REDDI, 2006). This type of retailing is recognized as the 'traditional' form of retailing, whereby the downtown was associated with special trips for particular personal or household items, and retailing in suburban areas primarily provided everyday goods to local people who traveled by foot (Guy 1998). Other forms of retailing also emerged in the 19th century, including chain stores and co-operative retailing movements. Co-operative retailing emphasized a combination of thrift and respectability, with a claim to a 'moral economy', linking education and cultural facilities to retail activities (Glennie 1998).

The first threat to the 'traditional' form of retailing and the central business district occurred as commercial strips were established along traffic and streetcar arterials outwards from the downtown area. These commercial strips evolved because merchants sought to intercept workers from the downtown living in what were then the 'suburbs' (Silberberg 1976, 13). It was at this time when merchants adapted to this increased use of the automobile by increasing the number and size of commercial signage (Government of Ontario REDDI, 2006). However, the largest threat to traditional retailing began with the centralization of capital in combination with these changes in transportation. Major decentralization of retailing began to occur after the 1950s as retailers increased their concentration of capital through the formation of large corporations and the use of economies of scale, at a time when automobiles became the preferred mode of transportation of suburbanites. The increase in use of the automobile and greater leisure time of the middle-class reduced the viability of both the central business district and commercial strips, as larger shopping centres became popular shopping destinations located within the new suburbs and at edge-of-city sites. This period of retail history recounts the emergence of a consumerist culture, and the formation of specialized consumption sectors (Miles and Paddison 1998). Robertson asserts that it also marks the beginning of "downtown retailing into a rapid downward spiral" (Robertson 1997).

The trend of retail decentralization accelerated into the 1960s as the middle-class, followed by many businesses, began to move outwards from the city centre (Kotkin 1997). Retail capital and investment left the 'traditional' business centers of the city, led by the department store chains as they discovered the competitive advantage of locating near the expanding middle-class suburbs. With the completion of expressways to the suburban "frontier", a ring of regional and smaller shopping centres was built around the city (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 136). The highly

individualized form of transportation provided by the automobile had an immense impact on changing the form of urban areas, including commercial sectors. Regional malls were designed to serve the automobile-oriented consumer and were constructed on extremely accessible sites with a significant amount of dedicated parking, and typically had negligible competition from rival stores in the catchment area (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 78). The development of shopping malls was also supported by governments through the creation and expansion of massive transportation systems. By the early 1970s, it was estimated that over three-quarters of all retailing in many cities involved the direct use of the auto (Claus and Harwick 1972, 5).

It is often easier and more convenient to drive twenty miles to an outlying shopping centre, even at a greater cost in fuel and wear on the car, than to drive one or two miles into the city core or central business section, which often does not have the space or facilities to efficiently accommodate the automobile (Claus and Harwick 1972, 7).

Malls became a popular form of retailing as they offered a unique shopping experience to consumers through provision of a climate-controlled, inward-oriented structure with access through a single entrance off an interior pedestrian street or parking lot. However, the exterior of malls and the adjacent area were designed with few architectural features or amenities and were surrounded by acres of free paved surface parking (Silberberg 1976, 14). Shopping malls had revolutionized retailing by providing a controlled retail area with an exciting mix of merchants planned by the central management, and in many cases, included a recreational component. The interior design of suburban malls created a very pleasant and safe shopping environment to encourage shoppers to spend a maximum amount of time and money (Robertson 1997). By the late 1970s and early 1980s, shopping had become a major recreational activity and replaced the social function of downtowns. People not only went to malls to buy goods, but also to meet friends, which soon became a national pastime (Milder 1997, 47). Downtowns provided little competition to the rapid expansion and growing popularity of regional shopping malls. With their “chaotic mix of businesses and often threatening public spaces”, some North American downtowns and other inner city retail centres were left to a gradual, or in some cases, a rapid process of deterioration (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 140). It was at this time when some local governments in Canadian cities began to introduce a variety of downtown urban renewal programs (Government of Ontario REDDI, 2006).

However, the boom of shopping centre development gradually began to slow. Towards the end of the 1980s, the conditions for retail development opportunities decreased due to the excess of commercial development and changing consumer habits. In some areas mall construction had

exceeded well ahead of population growth, and the beginnings of suburban growth regulations began to increase development times and costs (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 142). People shopped less frequently as malls no longer provided a novel experience; the aging baby boomers had less time and money for shopping; and with the increased prevalence of two career households there was less time for 'recreational shopping' (Milder 1997, 47). As the growth of regional mall development far exceeded the growth in retail sales, the 1980s were generally characterized as a period of instability for all retailers (Black 1983, 9). The beginning of the 1990s was also characterized by a period of frugal consumers, who chose speed and convenience over the luxury of regional malls. Another frequent criticism of shopping centres was that the retail mix was too predictable, and that there was little to distinguish one suburban mall from another – they all looked and functioned similarly (Robertson 1997). The retailers who prospered through this period were those that were able to provide a combination of selection, price and convenience (Carn et al 1995).

The trends in retailing changed again in the mid-1990s with the advent of supercentres and the discount mass merchandisers. The popularity of these larger stores increased for a number of reasons, including the economies of scale that permitted very competitive pricing and a consumer preference for the advantages of one-stop shopping. These large-format retailers quickly became the fastest growing retail sector. From the period of 1991 to 1999, the fastest growing big-box retailer in North America, Wal-Mart, increased the number of supercentres from just 10 to 721 (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 80). Supercentres have manifested in a variety of forms, and evolved over a short period of time to suit consumer's desires. 'Big-box' retailers or 'mass merchandisers' range in size from 50,000 to 200,000 square feet, and are generally constructed as "single-storey, windowless, box-like buildings with a minimum of landscaping and architectural flair...surrounded by many acres of blacktop devoted to parking" (Halebsky 2004). 'Category killers' are typically 25,000 to 100,000 square feet and dominate in a single retail category, whereas the newest form in retail developments are 'power-centres' in which two or three merchants provide an anchor for several other small retailers (Jossi 1998). The total leasable space of a power-centre is between 200,000 and 700,000 square feet (Carn et al 1995).

The development of big-box retailers and power-centres has been fairly limited to large parcels of land, typically on undeveloped edge-of-city sites or industrial areas. As they require between 15- to 20- acre sites and extensive catchment areas, they have faced considerable difficulties in their attempts to expand into the urban and inner suburban areas of metropolitan markets even though a large share of the market exists and is under served in those areas

(Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 82). In addition to the problems of assembling smaller parcels of privately owned land into a suitable sized parcel, as well as financing and construction difficulties, many larger-format retailers have also faced opposition by the public, as superstores are “the most dynamic and conflict-inducing forms of retail development” (Halebsky 2004). The majority of retail development in Canada continues to occur on these large segregated parcels and edge-of-city sites, contributing to the problems of an excess of retail properties in cities – which is evident through the high number of retail tenant vacancies in many commercial areas. In addition, as the average size of stores continues to grow, the total number of stores operating has declined sharply (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 76-77). Unfortunately, this trend of larger format stores has also resulted in many retail districts to face contraction and decline (Carley et al. 2001, 68).

2.2 Impacts of Retail Development

The trends in retail development towards malls and larger format stores in the last 50 years have had both positive and negative impacts. Carley et al. (2001, 10) describe modern retailing as a two-edge sword, “we may decry the trends, such as traffic growth or the spread of shopping malls, but many of us enjoy the benefits”. The economic and social benefits of retail development are evident as retailing is both a form of social service and can contribute to the local economy through gains in retail efficiency and an increase in choice for mobile and well-off consumers (Gibbs 1987). Larger format stores have taken advantage of the economic benefits and thus achieve a higher profit margin through the ability to provide a wider range of products and higher average sales to each customer due to the preference for stores that permit one-stop-shopping (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 78). Much of new retail development is also commonly located at edge-of-city or ‘greenfield’ sites — near the suburban areas of cities where the majority of their customers reside — where access by the automobile is convenient and quick and parking is provided at no cost. Some also argue that decentralized retailing has had the positive effect of diverting car-borne shopping out of congested inner city areas (Guy 1998).

However, these recent trends in retail development have also been increasingly criticized for their negative social and economic impacts on older, poorer and less mobile consumers, as well as having undermined the viability of older commercial areas and independent retailers. More recently, a further concern has arisen in the discussion of retail development, one of conserving the environment and encouraging more “sustainable patterns of development and travel behavior” (Guy 1998). Therefore, the impacts of these newer trends in retail development should be evaluated within the framework of sustainable development from an urban planning perspective.

This includes satisfying the following characteristics of sustainable development: achieving a balance of the three E's (economy, environment and equity), local-global considerations and maintaining a dynamic process.

2.2.1 Economic Impacts

The primary economic concern of the general trend towards larger format stores and malls through the centralization of capital as well as the preference for car-based shopping is the accelerated closure of local preexisting stores and retail centres as a result of consumers choosing a new store or centre (Guy 1998). With their global buying power, retailers such as Wal-Mart are able to provide benefits such as lower prices to low-income households, but this occurs at a price of eroding the local retail economy. Larger format retailers that provide a one-stop shopping experience at 'everyday low prices' are tough competition for the smaller and independent retailers. Research by Carley et al (2001, 10) suggests that during 1986 to 1995, the expansion of Wal-Mart resulted in the closure of 7326 shops in the US. This has had a major influence on both the downtown and neighbourhood retail environments of many major US cities and their residents, as described by Beyard et al.:

Over the last five decades, retailing in urban neighbourhoods has hollowed out, leaving most cities and inner-ring suburbs with too little to support healthy neighbourhoods and strong communities. The results are apparent to anyone living or visiting a 21st century city: commercial streets with deteriorating buildings, empty storefronts or marginal month-to-month tenants, an under supply of essential goods and services, social problems, poor pedestrian environments and amenities, and untended streets and sidewalks (2003, iv).

However, in most major Canadian cities the occurrences of increased vacancies, marginal tenants, deteriorating buildings and the accompanying social problems were visible, the downtown business district and inner city commercial areas maintained a stronger position with consumers and residents. Lorinc (2006, 228) states that except for a handful of cities such as Winnipeg and Hamilton, Canadian city centres did not experience such a devastating "hollowing out" of residents and businesses. In fact, in some cities, land in certain areas of downtown retained or increased their values as they continued to provide prestigious locations for residences and businesses. Yet it is difficult to dispute the economic research which shows that large format retailers adversely affect entire communities as local merchants with "long-standing involvement in community affairs are replaced by a few large chains" (Halebsky 2004). In addition, much of the profits from sales are passed to out-of-province or even out-of-country headquarters, thereby reducing the "multiplier effect" (Halebsky 2004).

2.2.2 Social Impacts

The social impacts of modern retailing relate to both efficiency and equity aspects (Goodno 2004). Retail efficiencies provided by large format retailers have brought unquestionable benefits to the consumer, such as the expanding range of consumer goods and the convenience offered to suburban housewives and commuters returning from work. These retailers also provide a source of employment for suburban dwellers. However, concerns of equity include reduced retailing in traditional centres and the impacts on those who rely on these shopping opportunities. There is an increasing disparity between the quality of retail available to the affluent than to the poor or less mobile (Goodno 2004). “The restructuring of retail activity over the past two decades has not taken into account the impact of this process on disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It has been market-led, with mobile consumers with high spending power having had the greatest impact over location decisions” (Carley et al 2001, 11). Thus as smaller retailers become less viable and must close, people have to and want to drive to further out locations to purchase products for their everyday needs.

However, this type of car-borne shopping is not a reality for those households without automobiles: poorer, disadvantaged, or inner-city residents who choose to not own or do not own an automobile, and must travel to more distant retail locations that are not easily accessed (Guy 1998). Another social impact of modern retailing is that the employment provided by these larger format stores, commonly located at edge-of-city sites, are not easily accessible for employees by other modes of transportation than the private automobile. In addition, they are also faulted for providing low-wage jobs — making a private automobile quite unaffordable — in addition to few benefits or opportunities for advancement (Halebsky 2004). There is also concern that because large format retailers use economies of scale to reduce labour requirements, they may cause a net decrease in retail sector employment (Dixon 2005).

2.2.3 Environmental Impacts

The environmental impacts of recent retail development trends refer not only to the physical development of new retail establishments, but also to the further social consequences of these developments (Guy 1998). While the built form of new retail developments consisting of big box stores and power-centres are consistent with the built form of their residential suburban counterparts — large and poor quality buildings surrounded by asphalt and arranged in a sprawling and incoherent manner — they are often criticized. In locations other than suburban or edge-of-city sites, these large-format retailers are often criticized for being inconsistent with the surrounding environment and the local identity, as well as adversely affecting the sense of

place as the local businesses are replaced (Halebsky 2004). New retail development is typified by large, single-storey box-shaped buildings of concrete and metal siding, surrounded by a huge asphalt area with minimal landscaping, which is required for parking and deliveries. Some regional malls may require up to 80 hectares (200 acres) of land, most of which is used for parking (Guy 1998). These types of retail development result in a landscape of segregated land uses, which is criticized for not being conducive to building strong and complete communities in urban neighbourhoods.

Access to these edge-of-city retailers and regional malls requires a considerable expense of constructing the appropriate transportation infrastructure to manage the increases in traffic flow, including expansive highways and overpasses. The increase in accessibility of shopping centres and big-box retailers by the automobile has subsequently caused a decrease of accessibility by other modes of transportation, thus resulting in substantial traffic impacts. Decentralized retailing promotes the use of the private automobile at the expense of walking, cycling and public transportation (Guy 1998). The immediate impact of several hundred vehicles per hour traveling to or from decentralized stores can be unpleasant to the local environment, as well as the nearly incontrovertible long-term effects on climate change from increasing levels of carbon dioxide in tailpipe emissions, and other forms of air pollution (Carley et al. 2001, 8).

In addition to the unpleasant aesthetic impacts of large format retailers, these retail developments have other common environmental effects including disturbing the natural balance of water infiltration and runoff, a lack of local and natural biota, and micro-climatic changes. Urban areas are common sites for flash flooding caused by impervious paving and the concentration of water flows at specific points. Intense commercial land uses such as shopping centres may produce more than 90 percent impervious cover. The runoff drained from these types of surfaces causes further problems such as increased river erosion and reduced water quality (Hough 2004, 31-32). The lack of vegetative cover in many commercial areas is another environmental concern, as plants are the basis of life – from the production of oxygen, to the provision of food and habitat for other living creatures. These commercial spaces of buildings and paved surfaces offer little in the way of food, shelter, or breeding places for wildlife. Plants also play a crucial role in modifying cold and warm climates, reducing air pollution, improving water quality, as well as serving cultural traditions and economic value (Hough 2004, 93).

Humans have created urban environments to suit local needs and conditions, which has had a direct effect on the local, as well as the regional and macro-climates. Global warming, air pollution and their related problems primarily originate in cities. Hough (2004, 190-192) describes

five influences that affect the urban climate, which include: the difference in materials in urban and non-urban environments; the aerodynamic roughness of built-up areas than in the countryside; the quantity of heat energy pumped into the atmosphere from heating and cooling systems, factories and vehicles; the problems resulting from precipitation; and air quality. In the US, the largest big-box “behemoth”, Wal-Mart, is the leading “private consumer of electricity... with a carbon footprint the size of Texas” (Little 2006). Retail developments, in their desire to attract customers, have compounded the problems by providing physical comforts at the expense of the local and global environment. However, environmental issues may prove more complex if you try to move a big-box into an urban site, including issues such as requiring changes to street patterns and sewage systems (Goodno 2004).

2.2.4 Local-Global Considerations

Globally, the impacts of new retail formats such as big-box stores are significant, and recently there has been an increasing recognition of the global impacts of general retail trends. However, many of these local-global impacts of retailing are beyond the scope of sustainable retail development from an urban planning perspective, and are more adequately understood from an overall perspective of sustainable business practices in retailing. The problems associated with large-format retailers and global corporations have become a popular subject in books, articles and documentaries, including Klein’s *No Logo* (1999) and Michael Moore’s *Roger & Me* (1989) and *Downsize This* (1997). In 2003, *The Corporation*, a Canadian produced documentary film and book (Bakan 2004) criticizes the modern-day corporation. *The Corporation* reviews cases dealing with issues such as sweatshops, unions, harmful working conditions, toxins used in both production and packaging processes, and the subsequent harm on animals and the earth’s biosphere.

However, in our consumerist culture it is difficult for the public to become conscious of how their individual consumption patterns fit into the larger picture, and even more difficult to change these consumption patterns within this new global economy. Many large format retailers have become so successful because they are able to offer the lowest price to the consumer. These mega corporations have the ability to source products from anywhere in the world, resulting in the loss of locally manufactured goods and the employment to produce those goods. In addition, these workers of offshore manufacturing companies are in many cases unfairly compensated for their efforts. This trend of ‘offshore’ production of goods is common and local manufacturing companies have experienced tough competition in the global economy.

As matters stand today, the monetary benefits of globalization rest at least partly on the externalization of pollution costs. The manufacturers and buyers of a diverse array of modern-day consumer goods have successfully pushed onto others some chunk of the costs of modern-day consumerism, while retaining for ourselves the bulk of the benefits... in this case, the benefits and costs are distributed in a quite lumpy and incommensurate way. A few people, in a few localized areas, seem to be bearing the brunt of the environmental health impacts of the production and the transportation processes -- while entirely different and substantially more diffused populations of producers and consumers are capturing its benefits (Vasishth 2007).

Other global impacts of offshore production include the increase use of resources in packaging and shipping the products. As previously discussed, the impacts of transportation by private vehicles is a main factor in increased carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases and pollutants, contributing to global climate change and air pollution.

2.2.5 Maintaining a Dynamic Process

Although the impacts of modern retailing are not obscure and unknown, shopping at “far flung or novel destinations” remains to be part of the modern experience of seeking gratification through consumption (Guy 1998). To some, cities are now primarily considered as sites of consumption, rather than as places of production (Halebsky 2004).

Retailing has changed forever. Big-box stores and category killers; fortress malls; outlet, lifestyle and power centres; catalogues; and the Internet are where today's consumers shop. The competition is fierce, and consumers want it all: low prices, endless variety, the latest designs, parking at the door, and an environment so entertaining that they go there even when they don't need to shop! (Beyard et al 2003, iv).

The final consideration of the impact of big-box and power-centre retail developments is that the trends in retail will not stay stagnant, and these large-format retailers will need to continually change to meet the demands of the consumer. The closure of big-box retailers will require creative thinking of second uses for empty big-box buildings (Jossi 1998). However, the poor-quality construction and shorter life span that is typical of big-box retail buildings will aid in the replacement with a new retail format. Yet this comes at a time when the realization of the finite sources of petroleum products, the increasing cost of owning a private automobile and high construction costs may affect the near future of retail development trends. “Sustainable forms of transportation are inevitable. It is simply a matter of time until reducing automobile dependency will become an accepted part of urban development policy” (Pressman and Peters 1996). However, the impacts of recent retail development trends have already been suffered in Canada's large cities, and attempts to mitigate these impacts have been met with varying levels of success.

2.3 Retail Development and Planning Policy

The trends of retail development as discussed above have had major economic, social and environmental impacts on Canadian cities. This section of the literature review examines how the planning system has influenced and perhaps exacerbated these retailing trends and their overall impacts, and how it has been more reactionary than anticipatory. Traditional planning policies regarding retail development existed through a land-use zoning system, whereby local land use planners determined the amount and location of commercially zoned land (Guy 1998). There was also a lack of coordination of planning between the various levels of government on a regional scale. Perhaps one of the most dominant impacts of the planning system on commercial development was that in the post-war decades, “planners across North America insisted on strictly segregating residential areas from commercial or light industrial zones” (Lorinc 2006, 101). The mix of land uses that dominated older urban areas was replaced by larger single-land uses and became the status quo for most development forms.

Unfortunately, the development of retail space by these new large-format retailers was prior to any significant consideration of the effects of these retail formats or any attempts to establish forward-looking commercial policy (Toderian 1996). In essence, these new large-format retail developments were indirectly encouraged through Canadian land use and zoning policies. In addition, officials and planning authorities have not shown the determination or had the legal means to curtail these retail development trends, “a position that would not be politically feasible because of the strong pro-development sentiment in the business and political communities” (Guy and Lord 1993, 107). Yet, there has been a general sentiment from civic leaders and planners that a strong retail presence produces many benefits and is important for the overall viability of downtowns and of cities (Robertson 1997). Therefore, a number of strategies and initiatives have been undertaken, including a variety of downtown redevelopment schemes and the development of provincial and municipal retail guidelines.

2.3.1 Retail Revitalization Strategies

The first and most widely utilized schemes were those that involved revitalizing the downtown or central business district of many cities. The extent of downtown redevelopment schemes has been considerable, with an increased proportion of funds being provided by the local government over time, which reinforced the attitude that the maintenance of downtowns was in the public interest (Gibbs 1987, 10). The earliest revitalization efforts were based on the Norwich Plan which originated in England, a “paint-up downtown beautification program” (Government of Ontario REDDI, 2006). The second stage of downtown revitalization, which began in the 1960s and

continued into the 1970s, sometimes involved clearance-oriented urban renewal and various highway programmes. After a decade of these brutalizing revitalization schemes, urban planners, city officials and downtown business organizations began to discuss other revitalization options appropriate for downtowns – and the shopping mall was an important part of their vision (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 142). This downtown revitalization strategy sought to recapture the retail dollars lost to regional malls, through the creation of downtown indoor shopping centres and festival marketplaces, and the introduction of pedways and skywalks to emulate the climate-controlled conditions of suburban malls (Robertson 1997).

However, downtown malls were in direct competition with regional malls for the decreasing consumer dollars that were being spent at this time, as well as had less parking available. Downtown malls also had to compete with the changing trends in retail towards the one-stop-shopping convenience provided by superstores. Thus, this method of retail revitalization in downtowns frequently proved difficult or was never accomplished. It often involved high-cost developments, working with rigid building codes, and problematic land assembly (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 144). A further challenge to revitalization was the misperception in the private sector of the extent of urban buying power, and retail opportunities were perceived to be greater elsewhere because of the social problems faced by urban and inner city neighbourhoods proved difficult to solve (Beyard et al 2003, v).

Other efforts at downtown revitalization that began in the 1970s and the 1980s were through beautification and themeing (Government of Ontario REDDI, 2006). These initiatives were primarily driven by planners and were based on the idea that if the downtown area appeared nicer or had a common theme it would attract more retail business. The focus of the beautification initiative was to improve public property such as street furniture, sidewalks, lighting and trees through a combination of grants and loans. While in some cases the beautification or themeing was done “without regard to the identity and heritage of the downtown” and little regard was given to maintenance costs; in many other cases beautification was successful and helped to invigorate the local property owners (Government of Ontario, REDDI 2006). This stimulated another related strategy used by municipalities to revitalize the commercial areas of downtowns and inner cities: the creation of Business Revitalization Zones (BRZs) or Business Improvement Areas (BIAs).

This strategy again emulated suburban malls for potential solutions: the formation of a Business Association that would in effect pool and manage the resources of all the businesses within the designated area. Each Association determined their annual objectives to accomplish, including marketing, business recruitment and maintenance strategies, and collected a special

business levy required to complete these objectives. Although the funding for this form of revitalization was primarily through local business owners, Business Associations worked closely with city officials to ensure success and receive special attention in the form of programs and services from the municipality. This type of revitalization program has had varying levels of success in downtown and older commercial areas. Unfortunately, one of the downfalls of this strategy was that many of the district and local retail areas outside of the inner city and these designated regeneration areas received less attention and continue to decline (Carley et al 2001, 1).

Another strategy was the Main Street approach that became popular in the 1980s and 1990s in hundreds of communities across Canada (Government of Ontario, REDDI 2006). This program was initiated in 1979 by the Heritage Canada Foundation, and contributed over eight million dollars over a period of ten years (Heritage Canada 2006). It “fostered an integrated approach to bringing together effective management, economic development, appropriate design and preservation that led to incremental change” and was highly successful in generating positive results (Government of Ontario, REDDI 2006). Unfortunately, in 1994, federal government funding for the Main Street program eventually ended and the program has since been difficult to sustain.

The final downtown revitalization efforts included the strategic planning approach of the 1990s and most recently of building civic capacity in the 2000s. Both of these approaches have emphasized the importance of engaging the local community — citizens and institutions — for the creation and prioritization of strategies in downtown revitalization. The civic capacity approach to downtown revitalization is an attempt to incorporate the positive and successful elements of past approaches. Local partnerships were formed between the private, public and nonprofit sectors to ensure that resources were brought together to facilitate appropriate development schemes, infrastructure upgrades, and attracting new business ventures to downtowns (Government of Ontario, REDDI 2006).

While almost all of these approaches are currently still in use by cities — some more successful than others — the most successful ones have tended to follow a bottom-up or grassroots approach to the management of the revitalization process (Government of Ontario, REDDI 2006). However, all of these efforts have been criticized for isolating the downtown and inner city from the surrounding city. As well, while the planning system expresses concern over the decline of downtowns and older retail areas and attempts revitalization initiatives, it continues to approve and facilitate large retail developments on edge-of-city and suburban sites (Jamieson 1996).

2.3.2 Retail Policies

Another strategy used by some of Canada's municipal and provincial governments in an attempt to manage the rapid pace of changing retail development trends was through retail policies. At the beginning of the 1970s, there was little government involvement in retail business and a lack of a co-ordination of federal, provincial and municipal policy. After the proliferation of regional shopping malls between the 1960s to the 1980s, Canadian provincial governments responded with some form of action, varying from "studying the situation to outright moratoria" (Pressman and Peters 1996). However, retail policy in Canada has been more reactionary than anticipatory.

In 1996, Toderian studied the policy reactions of a number of municipalities in Ontario to big-box retail developments. The results revealed that in some municipalities these new large-format retailers were welcomed whereby new commercial zoning bylaws were created to permit these developments that had previously been locating in industrially designated areas. This ensured that the municipalities had both the locations and regulatory environment necessary to attract big-boxes. Some municipalities also removed the long-standing market caps that regulated the maximum size of suburban regional shopping centres. Other municipalities stated their intent to avoid involvement in the allocation of retail floor space with the concerns of excess floor space to be addressed by greater flexibility for retrofitting. Overall, the justification for the creation of these types of policy responses was the desire to permit traditional shopping areas to compete with the new big-box retail formats (Toderian 1996).

However, other municipalities were more cautious in their approach to policy changes to the retail planning process, and included the development of more comprehensive retail policies in their official plans. Pressman and Peters (1996) also describe how within the province of Ontario, some municipalities adopted retail policies to guard against the excess provision of retail developments beyond which the municipality could support without causing "detrimental impact on existing facilities". However, the provision of planning criteria was needed to more precisely identify what constituted "detrimental impact", as often the only proof of detrimental impact to the public interest was demonstrated by the opponents of these new retail formats. Many of these municipalities responded by refusing development permits to large-scale peripheral retail developments, or required the retail establishment to meet higher standards of development than normal (Pressman and Peters 1996).

Urban design standards are another approach that have been recently developed in municipal policies for creating more livable spaces. The definition of urban design itself has also

evolved from simply being part of the planning process that deals with the “physical quality and spatial design of the environment” (Shirvani 1981, 6) to a more comprehensive process of “the art of shaping the interaction between, people and places, environment and urban form, and nature and built fabric, and influencing the processes which lead to successful villages, towns and cities” (CABE 2000, 8). In a study of retail policies in other countries such as Switzerland, Jossi (1998) promotes the creation of design guidelines by municipalities for new-format retail developments such as big-boxes. These guidelines apply to single buildings over 25,000 square feet and address the architectural character, color and materials; relationship to the surrounding community, pedestrian flow and parking. An example of such guidelines may include forbidding uninterrupted facades longer than 100 feet, require that smaller stores located in the building have display windows and separate outside entrances, specify maximum setback distances, require eight-foot wide sidewalks, and encourage parking areas to be broken up and separated by landscaping and other features. The goal of design guidelines is to “disguise the size of the box by making the street side look like a series of smaller stores” (Jossi 1998).

However, critics argue that urban design guidelines “encourage architectural homogeneity” and design panels “impose ostensibly objective criteria on the inherent subjectivity of the design” (Lorinc 2006, 318). There are further considerations that urban design guidelines do not address, which are important to achieving sustainable retail development. The conclusions of a recent study of Winnipeg’s big-box stores and the use of urban design guidelines by Wang (2003) included that design guidelines focused primarily on physical aspects at the site scale, despite the complicated economic, social and environmental issues. Thus, “urban design should be just a small component of that policy framework” (Wang 2003, 7). Another conclusion of Wang’s study concerned the difficulty in implementing urban design guidelines for big-box retailers through the lack of an implementation mechanism and enforcement.

In addition, design guidelines have no influence over the lack of mix of uses that typically occurs in new commercial developments. However, more recently, the planning profession has become more accepting of mixed use zoning and infill developments are encouraged to create a greater mix of land use types and in the redevelopment of older urban areas. But mixed-use developments require support and acceptance from developers, city councils and the general public.

The final limitation of retail policy stems from the view that it is not the function of land use planning to prevent competition between retailers, or between methods of retailing, with the intent on preserving certain commercial interests, or preventing retail innovation. In an evaluation of

retail policy in Britain — which has more strict regulations than retail policy in Canada — Gibbs (1987, 15) concluded that: “Planners should refrain from intervention in the market”. However, some planners believe that there is a real opportunity to “shift the urban agenda in a sustainable direction with models of good practice” (Carley et al. 2001, 70).

2.3.3 Market-led Retail Initiatives

Porter (1995) suggests that rather than the government subsidies or policies that were used to stimulate economic activity, the most successful downtown revitalization strategies involved strictly private initiatives based on genuine competitive advantage. Downtown revitalization in effect began with the mixing together of retail, hotels, offices, recreation and car parking into a single high-density development. Office development, which began to boom in the downtown by the late 1970s and early 1980s, initiated the revival of urban living by young professionals who then began to gentrify inner city neighbourhoods (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 143). The cultural and geographical shift away from suburban malls that occurred in the 1980s towards more mixed-use complexes in urban areas was the commencement of retail revitalization in many downtowns. “It was the promise of urban authenticity, not simply in terms of the architecture and ambiance of historic public life but also in terms of the excitement and creativity of the retail mix, which was being offered by the downtown centres (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 83).

These men and women - “yuppies” - liked the accessibility of living near work and near other single people, and seemed enthused about the vitality of urban life. Their movement back into the city represented both an endorsement of social diversity and a desire for authenticity, and a refusal of the alienated and private lifestyles of the suburbs (Zukin 1998). This was the beginning of a model for private sector led urban renewal, as well as the gentrification of long-neglected inner city neighbourhoods. Zukin (1998) states that although relationships have been analyzed between urban lifestyles and their effects on the displacement of urban poor, which link consumption as having driven a wedge between urban social classes -- gentrification has a few notable virtues. It has made urban neighbourhoods interesting again to the broad middle class, supported historic preservation, assisted architecture and urban planning away from “modernism”, as well as naturalized a variety of household structures (Zukin 1998).

By the end of the 1990s, consumption is understood to be both a means and a motor of urban social change. The reorganization of world markets has expanded the consumption functions of mature urban economies, creating new jobs and new spaces of consumption (Zukin 1998).

These downtown spaces of consumption became exciting, yet familiar enough to suburban shoppers that a version of the urban street began a revitalization of other commercial streets.

This recycling of retail innovation and investment occurred in the retail centres of inner-ring suburbs, which were in the process of making themselves feel more “quirkily urban” (Zukin 1998). These retail developments catered to the portion of affluent consumers who were increasingly disenchanted with the creeping chainstore “suburbanization” of downtown retailing (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 147).

Although the general retail development trend in the twentieth century was towards larger-format stores, the late 1990s was also characterized by the emergence of a movement towards smaller-format retailing, which has proved to be a crucial direction of growth for some of the largest retail corporations. As suburban retail markets became saturated, even the largest big-box retailer Wal-Mart, was forced to develop a smaller format store of 109,000 sq. ft. (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 83). Most recently, even Wal-Mart, who is best known as the “catalyst of suburban sprawl, king of the 5,000-mile supply chain, and employer of 1.8 million, many with gripes about schedules, pay and benefits” has developed a model for a “grand green plan” (Little 2006).

2.4 The Future of Retail Development

Much of the retail growth in Canada’s metropolitan cities continues to be large-format stores commonly located at edge-of-city sites in segregated commercial areas. However, an increasing number of large-format retailers are beginning to redirect growth back into existing commercial areas such as downtowns and inner city suburbs. This reflects trends such as the popularization of urban lifestyles, the saturation of suburban markets, regional concern for the effects of sprawl, and pedestrian-oriented and street front retail environments which are gaining favor with consumers (Beyard et al. 2003, vii). Other lifestyle and demographic factors include the growth of two-income families, home-based businesses and flexible workforces, which will increase the desire for convenient shopping, either out of the home or in the local neighbourhood (Hollinshead 1996).

Also, early evidence of a general movement away from consumer and towards conserver values was present in Canada, which will continue to have implications for retailers. “People will be looking for durability and recyclability in goods, and so will look kindly on retailers whose method of retailing embodies ‘green’ values” (Hollinshead 1996). Evidence of this growing trend is apparent even in retailers such as Wal-Mart, who now claims to be the largest distributor of organic milk and purchaser of organic cotton. Wal-Mart also states that going green could “attract new customers, boost employee morale and burnish its public image, while saving big on energy bills” (Little 2006). One of Wal-Mart’s “fantastical” goals is to eventually run on 100 percent

renewable fuels, create zero waste, and sell an increasing number of sustainable products.

However, many are critical of Wal-Mart's intentions, and state that it is "too early to conclude that they are fully committed to their plan" (Little 2006).

Green values are also apparent in the recent increasing number of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified buildings in Canada. There are currently over 300 projects constructed or under review by the Canada Green Building Council (CaGBC).

The LEED Green Building Rating System™ is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings. LEED gives building owners and operators the tools they need to have an immediate and measurable impact on their buildings' performance. LEED promotes a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in five key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality (USGBC 2006).

The CaGBC, which formed in 2003, certifies buildings through a LEED program that was adapted from the United States Green Building Council (USGBC). Buildings are certified according to the LEED Canada-NC Green Building Rating System. The LEED Canada-NC project checklist in Appendix A provides an overview of the considerations addressed by the certification process.

Some believe that the future competitive advantage of retail stores will be found in 'main street' shopping districts — real commercial corridors in an urban context — characterized by locally or regionally owned businesses selling unique products and services (Smirniotopoulos 2001). This will rely on the ability of retailers to occupy those classical economic niches that are hard to replicate elsewhere. The emergence of the concept of "differentiated spaces of consumption" has become invested in by retailers of particular identities based on exclusivity (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 196). The identity and image of streets are attractive as prime locations for retailers to distinguish themselves, and these strong niches further recruit complementary retailers. When a niche has several alluring retailers, it serves as a specialized shopping centre that is able to provide the consumer with a suitable selection of merchandise and prices within its specialized area. Such strong niches can draw customers from a wide catchment area (Milder 1997, 4). Anchor stores will continue to be an important component of a retail district in helping the independent businesses to succeed by drawing customers to the area (Beyard et al. 2003, 7). The combination of a local customer base and a clientele drawn from outside the local community due to the uniqueness of the products or quality of services offered ensures the long-term viability of the retail district.

Mixed-use developments are similarly gaining popularity with retailers as the office component provides daytime demand, while residents provide customers during the evening. “It’s the density and mix of uses that extends the shopping day and creates an exciting urban feel to the street, and the proximity and continuity of diverse retailers that creates the opportunities for cross-shopping that makes the street a compelling retail destination” (Beyard et al. 2003, 21). Retailers, however, should be concentrated in designated blocks, as shoppers will typically only walk for three or four city blocks. Residential and office uses should predominate beyond this core walking area (Beyard et al. 2003, 7). In addition, according to Bohl (2002, 10), consumers favor compact centres over commercial strips by a wide margin. The future of commercial development in cities may also be found in a polycentric or multi-nodal pattern, rather than in the concept of a single central business district.

The most recent form of commercial developments to enter Canada are called ‘lifestyle centres’ – an outdoor “boutique shopping concept” that are typically located near affluent residential neighbourhoods and feature fancy stores aimed at well-to-do consumers (Bhatnagar 2005). Lifestyle centres differ from a traditional mall or power centre in a few ways. They tend to be smaller than traditional malls or power centres and have the appearance of a vibrant city street which appears to be public space. They also typically contain a large number of smaller specialty retailers and a mix of uses such as cafes and other entertainment. In addition,

“the tenant mix is carefully tailored to encourage cross shopping. Thematic zoning, whereby tenants are grouped in the centre according to specific target markets... is often employed to enhance tenant synergies. This differs from the tenant location strategies employed at many traditional shopping centres, where tenants in a single category are often distributed throughout the mall to encourage customers to travel longer distances, thereby passing a large number of stores (Faludi and Thomas 2000).

While there seems to be a number of positive contributions of lifestyle centres to sustainable retail development trends, a few concerns have been expressed for the long-term impacts of these developments. “Lifestyle centers do all the things that urban planners have promoted for years as ways of counteracting sprawl: squeeze more into less space, combine a mix of activities, and employ a fine-grained street grid to create a public realm” (Blum 2005). However, he continues, “The lifestyle center is a bizarre outgrowth of the suburban mentality: people want public space, even if making that space private is the only way to get it”. The perceived ‘public space’ “exists not for citizens, but for well-off consumers” (Klaszus 2005).

Even though a lifestyle centre has slightly more organic feel to it than an indoor mall, there is a higher probability that one lifestyle centre will be very similar to the next. “In real villages,

you find plenty of original, independent businesses. Suburbia's villages, on the other hand, consist of mostly chain stores" (Klaszus 2005). Lifestyle centres are also "carefully insulated from the messiness of public life" (Blum 2005). In other words, they provide a themed shopping and living experience rather than the true urban experience that has recently become more popular. Lifestyle centre developments are also currently associated with more affluent residential neighbourhoods. However, "It is a village that's built not for living — as evidenced by the lack of residential housing — but for spending" (Klaszus 2005). Lifestyle centres, which are touted as highly walkable and pedestrian-friendly shopping areas, have typically been located such that one needs to drive to the centre and park. "That walkable connection between the neighbourhood and the commercial centre is being destroyed" (Klaszus 2005).

Perhaps the greatest challenge for retailers and developers will be in identifying the type of retail centre that can provide a unique shopping environment that cannot be duplicated by competing retail centres or substituted for by Internet-based shopping (Gruen 1995). This challenge has recently been addressed through the idea of 'placemaking' and the role of retailing in placemaking. Smirniotopoulos (2001) relates how the meaning of 'place' is grounded in theories including those of cognition, the physiology of memory, within anthropology and sociology, and most importantly, within the basic human need for community and social interaction. He argues that this concept of 'place' is currently in contrast with those of architects and urban planners, who are creating built environments on "canned nostalgia" and "excessive control of the built environment". Although architecture and design should not be over-looked, they should not be substituted for what also occurs within: the combination of experiences that comprise a 'place'.

A place that is meaningful, to which the participant develops a deep emotional connection, is a place that will be visited again and again. That deep, meaningful connection to a place can translate into increased retail sales, more nights spent in a hotel, more frequent and larger beverage purchases, and increased visibility and of demand for residential products. These indicators of profitability will be long lasting, if the nature of the place is not contrived but genuine and the meaning of the place is virtual but real (Smirniotopoulos 2001).

There are many key ingredients involved in placemaking, which include a combination of civic, cultural, entertainment, residential and recreational uses, with retailing at its heart (D'Alesandro 2004). Putting this concept of placemaking into practice does not necessitate the exclusion of newer retailing formats. While the typical big-box retailer is not compatible with the pedestrian-oriented environment — an element that provides a connection between the user and the place — larger retailers can successfully integrate hybrid stores with careful site planning and building design (Lee 2000).

However, to achieve sustainability, plans for retail development must recognize the nature of retail and the changes that have occurred, and embrace solutions that are market-based and tailored to the realities of the area (Beyard et al. 2003, 22). Thus, much more time and effort may need to be committed to understand the existing context of the surrounding area and the target market, including the characteristics of the residents, the customers, the commercial tenants and other users of the place that is to be created. To increase meaning and vitality places must also be able to evolve over time; therefore change must be considered into any successful retailing concept (Gruen 1995).

The final challenge is to ensure that retail development plans realize these economic, environmental and social benefits simultaneously (Carley et al. 2001, 147). On a grander scale, retailers will also need to ensure that they are “matching their environmental goals with equally ambitious labour standards; making future *and* existing stores green and siting them in mixed-use downtown areas, to stop encouraging sprawl; requiring — not just urging — their suppliers to meet green standards; and sourcing regional food and merchandise at all its stores, to keep local farms and businesses alive” (Little 2006). These market solutions will also take acceptance by the general public as consumers — that even mass-market solutions will involve trade-offs, and will require the participation of communities of all income brackets and all corporations — to “reverse the potentially catastrophic ecological trends of our day” (Little 2006).

2.5 Summary

Through this review of planning literature related to the history and trends of retail development it has been shown that large-format retailers can have significant economic, environmental and social impacts. Efforts to minimize or mitigate these impacts have been implemented in the past, in addition to more recent planning and retail development initiatives that may be effective in the future to achieve more sustainable retail development practices. Mountain Equipment Co-op is one such retailer that has been a leader in Canadian cities towards implementing and encouraging more sustainable retail development initiatives. The following chapter describes the research methods employed in the case study analysis of MEC’s initiatives towards more sustainable retail development.

RESEARCH METHODS

The goal of this study is to examine the impacts of current large-format retail developments in Canada's large cities, and show what may be considered to be more socially, environmentally and economically responsible means for successful retail planning. The purpose of the research is to document the successful and less successful attempts of a retailer, Mountain Equipment Co-op, to achieve sustainable retail development initiatives in its recent growth and expansion. The practicum involves a case study approach and was informed through triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods drawn from a variety of primary and secondary sources. The sources included document research of both popular news media and planning documentation, as well as direct observations, photography and key informant interviews.

3.1 Case Study Selection Process

The practicum employs a case study approach to examine four Mountain Equipment Co-op stores across Canada, and the impacts of each store at a local, and to a lesser extent, global level. The conclusions and recommendations developed from the research are intended to give retailers, retail developers, policy makers and planners across Canada innovative solutions towards achieving sustainable retail development. The MEC stores examined in the study are the Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa and Winnipeg stores. These four locations were chosen in consultation with the CEO of MEC in November of 2005, who provided the author advice on which locations to research for a range of suitable models of sustainable retail development initiatives. This cost of travel by the researcher was partly funded by MEC as the information obtained from the research of these four store locations were also of interest to the MEC Senior Management team. MEC was considered as a highly appropriate case study for this practicum because of MEC's innovations and commitment to sustainability practices.

3.2 History of Mountain Equipment Co-op

MEC is a retail co-operative that began operating in 1971 through mail order and a single small store-front on Vancouver's East Hastings Street on the west coast of Canada. For a \$5 fee, MEC members become lifetime shareholders of the retail co-operative, a structure that ensures the organization is controlled by "people, not capital" (MEC 2005). MEC has grown to become Canada's largest outdoor retailer that provides equipment and advice for self-propelled wilderness activities. In 2005, MEC generated revenues over \$197 million, employed approximately 1,200 people and had a membership base of 2.3 million members (MEC 2005). As of 2007, MEC has

eleven stores across the country: with three stores located in British Columbia, two in Alberta, one in Manitoba, two in Ontario, two in Quebec, and one in Nova Scotia. The size of Mountain Equipment Co-op stores varies in each city across the country, with building footprints ranging from 12,000 to 50,000 square feet and gross areas ranging from 17,000 to 62,000 square feet (Appendix A). The larger of MEC stores are thus comparable in building footprint areas to other smaller big-box retailers. In addition to retail stores, MEC offers catalogue and online shopping, gear rentals, product information sessions, gear maintenance sessions and gear swaps to encourage the reuse of functional equipment. MEC's primary mission is:

...to provide quality products and services for self-propelled wilderness-oriented recreation, such as hiking and mountaineering, at the lowest reasonable price in an informative, respectful manner. We are a member-owned co-operative striving for social and environmental leadership (MEC 2006a).

MEC has been a leader in many aspects of sustainability since the inception of the co-operative. This has been formally articulated through the adoption of a Sustainability Policy in 2002, which stated that MEC "has a responsibility to make the world a more sustainable place" (MEC 2005). However, the primary challenge of a new policy is often implementation. The organization has attempted to address this challenge by formalizing specific sustainable accountabilities into key roles within multiple departments – ensuring that initiatives are linked into day-to-day business practices (MEC 2005). The management structure of MEC is also conducive to implementation of their sustainability policies through the following means: a democratically elected Board of Directors by MEC members; a CEO who is hired by the Board and leads a team of eight Senior Managers, all of which have at least one sustainability related performance goal linked to their bonus plan; an Ethical Sourcing Manager and a Sustainability and Community Manager who work with multiple departments to ensure social and environmental responsibility; and a Sustainability Coordinator in each store to deliver sustainability programs in the communities and to MEC members (MEC 2005).

MEC has committed to sustainable business practices through four main program areas including Product Sustainability, Ethical Sourcing, Greening our Operations and Community Involvement. "The most tangible example of our sustainability practices is our building program. For close to a decade we've been 'greening' our buildings by making design, materials, and construction decisions based on environmental considerations" (MEC 2006b).

In 2004, a study titled *Mountain Equipment Co-op's Green Building Approach* was conducted by Brady et al to document MEC's journey towards sustainability initiatives in their building practices. This report states that it was due to the publicity of the depleting ozone layer in the

1990s that compelled the Board of Directors to remove all ozone-depleting substances (ODSs) from their building cooling systems. During the construction of the relocated Vancouver store in 1994-95, MEC realized that by increasing the overall energy efficiency of the building, that all ODSs would also be significantly reduced or eliminated. This realization “spurred the broadening of MEC’s perspective on the possibilities of other green design features that could be integrated into new store designs” (Brady et al 2004). In 1997, it was decided that a broader policy approach to the design and construction of all new MEC facilities should be more holistic, and incorporate environmental and social considerations into building design. This was achieved through the use of an “Integrated Design Process” – whereby all expertise required in designing and constructing the building was brought forth at the concept development stage (Brady et al 2004). The design of each store is approached at a site-specific level, with consideration of four main categories of initiatives that can be adopted during construction. These categories are simple in nature and include: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rethink (look for new and better solutions). As a result of this process, the Ottawa and Winnipeg stores were the first and second retail buildings in Canada to comply with Canada’s C-2000 Green Building Standard, and the Winnipeg store became MEC’s first LEED certified retail building, obtaining certification in 2004.

MEC has identified a number of benefits that the organization realizes through the implementation of this green building approach. These benefits include lower operating costs, an enhanced public image and reputation, their employees are proud of where they work, an improved shopping environment, and improved market access. The latter has been especially important for the organization with the successive opening of new retail stores in the past ten years. “Cities tend to be quite receptive and even ‘roll out the red carpet’ when MEC approaches them about establishing a new business.... Obtaining permits has never been a problem for MEC” (Brady et al 2004).

A less tangible sustainability practice — but one related — to the green building program is the process of MEC site selection and location within the city, and how this influences both MEC’s retail success and subsequent impacts on the surrounding retail district. In the mid-1990s, changes in the retail environment towards large-format big box stores forced many Canadian retailers to improve many aspects of their operations, and not just focus on the bottom line. Sales in the retail sector generally experienced a decrease, and many large Canadian retailers were negatively affected and even started going into bankruptcy (Hutchinson 1997).

However, during this time MEC was operating with only four stores nationally and experienced an overall increase in sales revenues – partly through realizing the benefits of large-

format stores. While MEC was primarily concerned with improving the existing locations into larger stores, the co-operative retailer was also considering a few locations for new stores. MEC not only moved all four existing stores into new locations, and some with numerous environmental upgrades, but also shortly thereafter opened several new locations, including Edmonton (1998), Halifax (2001), Winnipeg (2002), Montreal (2003), Quebec City (2004), North Vancouver (2004) and Victoria (2006). Thus, MEC provides an appropriate case study for sustainable retail development due to their success in the last decade and the organization's advancement of sustainability initiatives.

3.3 Data Collection

Each store location identified in the case study was visited by the author for three days minimum over weekdays and weekends. The first days consisted of identifying the appropriate boundaries for the district and block, as well as general observations and photographic documentation. The latter days consisted of finalizing the site, block and district observations, and conducting key informant interviews. While visiting each city, the author used only public transportation systems and walking to access the stores to both experience the accessibility of the store location and for utilizing 'sustainable' research methods.

3.3.1 Background Document Research

Prior to visiting each of the four MEC store locations, popular newspapers and relevant planning journal articles from each city were examined for mention of MEC store development. Document research also included examination of official municipal development plans, area redevelopment plans, community plans, zoning bylaws and other pertinent documents available from local planning departments, as well as statistical demographic data.

3.3.2 Development of Sustainability Criteria and Theoretical Framework

The criteria used to evaluate the sustainability of Mountain Equipment Co-op were developed through the literature review (Chapter 2) of the trends of retail development and the impacts of these development trends. The list of criteria followed a similar format to the Smart Growth's Sustainability Checklist of the Site Design Manual for B.C. Communities (Condon et al 2002), and divided the criteria into categories of district, block, site and community. Some of the questions were derived from this Sustainability Checklist. The criteria attempt to include issues such as accessibility, safety, area characteristics, mix of uses, and economic, infrastructural and environmental considerations in each category.

There was no grading system for the sustainable retail development criteria used in the

study. Instead, the purpose of the criteria was to provide direction for examining and documenting MEC's successful and less successful initiatives of how more sustainable retail development can be achieved, to serve as an example to other retailers and retail developers. The nature of the criteria was broad in scope and addressed economic, social and environmental factors. However, the criteria were not designed to be a replacement for the CaGBC's LEED certification for green building standards. Therefore, LEED certification will be a general criterion examined in this study. Only the applicable sustainability criteria were evaluated at each location as some criteria did not have relevance in that part of the study, and will not be included in the analysis. Appendix A shows the sustainability criteria used in the study.

3.3.3 Direct Observations

Site observations and photographic documentation were used to examine each MEC site as well as the surrounding retail block and district. Observations were conducted over three to four days in each city during March and April of 2007. Site observations were undertaken and recorded according to the sustainability criteria that were developed from the literature review.

3.3.4 Key informant interviews

The interview format consisted of informed semi-structured research questions. This approach allowed for flexibility, but also provided focus and direction throughout each interview process. Another advantage of semi-structured interview questions was the ability to immediately clarify and further explore new information through the use of probes. The key information interview question paths are shown in Appendix C.

Key informant interviews were conducted with MEC Head Office staff involved in the development of existing MEC retail locations. Questions were directed to determine what factors have been important in the past and factors that are currently important to MEC when choosing a store size, location, site and building design elements. The interviews also were designed to determine any specific difficulties that MEC encountered in developing each of the store locations outlined in the case study. Although the intent was to conduct a focus group with the CEO, the Manager of Operations, MEC's primary consultants, and any other pertinent head office staff, the researcher was unable to organize a single meeting with all individuals. Instead, each of these key informants was interviewed individually in person or by phone.

Two or three key informant interviews were also conducted at each store location in conjunction with the site observations to provide insight into the existing character of the commercial area and how it has changed since the opening of the MEC store. The most appropriate key informants for these interviews were selected prior to and during the research

process. The informants included district planners, Business Association directors, and MEC store staff. An additional interview was conducted with the Sustainability Coordinator in each store to gather additional information regarding the community sustainability criteria.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

All data was analyzed as it was collected to allow for further exploration of emergent themes and identification of gaps in the data. As there was no grading system for the sustainable retail development criteria that were used in the study, results were noted as comments to highlight the key innovations at each location, and were supplemented by maps and photographs. Data analysis also involved a 'literal reading' and indexing of the interview results into the appropriate sustainability criteria categories. The literal reading of the background documents and interview data — "what is there" (Mason 2000, 149) — was determined to be sufficient to extract the necessary content to permit final integration of all sources of the research. Due to the integration of many sources, types and time lines of data, in addition to the non-applicability of certain criteria in specific locations, the data analysis is not displayed in the same format for each store location.

3.5 Assumptions

It was intended that the sustainability checklist would provide a user-friendly, yet comprehensive method to evaluate an existing or future retail development for sustainability initiatives. This study also assumed that Mountain Equipment Co-op could provide a suitable and informative example to highlight various sustainability initiatives, and that these initiatives are achievable in the market through business models other than a consumer co-operative. Another assumption was that the recommendations would be applicable to urban planners, and provide insight into retail policy formation and in land use planning.

3.6 Limitations

A few limitations to this study were identified during the practicum, including issues with data collection and application of the recommendations. Inclement weather that was experienced in Vancouver and Ottawa may have influenced the amount of local traffic and shoppers. The researcher was not able to interview a planner with the City of Toronto and thus could not obtain the perspective of a local planner in the sustainability criteria. Toronto's zoning bylaw was unavailable to analyze as it was under the beginning stages of a review process and could not be included in the data. The Ottawa zoning bylaw was also under a review process, but the City had made available the proposed bylaw changes which were examined in the study. However, these proposed zoning regulations for the city of Ottawa may not be adopted into a bylaw. It was

also difficult to determine the impact of an individual retailer such as MEC on the central business district or other surrounding commercial districts.

Other limitations of the study are that the findings and the recommendations of this practicum may only apply to stores of similar size as MEC, not to larger department stores, malls or small stores. Also, the list of sustainability criteria only provided a general overview of the considerations for retail developers to create a sustainable retail development and was very subjective. The criteria were not meant to be sufficiently specific to delineate an exact method to achieve retail sustainability. The conclusions should, however, stimulate ideas for innovative solutions.

SUSTAINABLE RETAIL DEVELOPMENT: CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to evaluate four MEC locations according to the sustainability criteria (Appendix A), as well as determine the successful and less successful attempts towards sustainable retail development. As each location was developed, MEC learned from various points of inspiration and constraints, and used these lessons to improve its site selection and development processes. The chapter begins with an analysis of the current process of developing new retail locations; the most important considerations; and the people involved in the process. This strategy, however, was developed by MEC through lessons learned at each location and is constantly evolving. As the site selection and retail store development considerations were developed through each experience at a new retail location, the current strategy does not apply to all locations.

What is apparent from the following analysis is that with each retail store, certain aspects of the retail development process — or in many cases a combination of considerations — resulted in more successful outcomes. The remainder of the chapter consists of a chronological analysis (Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa and Winnipeg) of the background document research and the sustainability criteria observations, followed by the points of inspiration and constraints at each location. Chapter 5 will provide recommendations based on the analysis of how MEC can continue to develop sustainable retail locations, and how other retailers, retail developers and planners can use this information in sustainable urban planning.

4.1 MEC Site Selection and Retail Store Development Process

Analysis of each key informant interview with MEC senior managers and the facilities planner involved in MEC's retail store development processes revealed that each respondent had different perceptions and explanations behind MEC's growth and development. While MEC's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) emphasized the importance of environmental and social sustainability in MEC retail store development, the Operations Manager's (OM) responses tended to focus more on how the economics could support the sustainability initiatives. The Facilities Planner (FP) responses were the most in-depth and reflected the logistical requirements to undertake the sustainability initiatives at each location, and the difficulties that MEC has encountered.

MEC is unique in the realm of retailing: a retail co-operative that operates within a specialized niche market of providing goods and services for self-propelled wilderness activities. MEC is fundamentally different from other retailers in that it began operating primarily as a mail order store, and a substantial portion of their current retail activity continues through the mail and

Internet ordering systems (MEC-FP). As well, the mandatory provision that MEC's customers are members of the retail co-operative ensures that MEC has access to an extensive internal information database of their customers from all over Canada, and all over the globe (MEC-FP). One of the key means by which MEC develops new retail locations is through an extensive demographic profiling of their 'core' membership, including income and education levels, and lifestyle preferences. MEC's approach to developing new store locations has therefore been more "sophisticated" (MEC-OM), as MEC "has the ability to more accurately respond to the market based on the membership demand rather than the conventional approach at attempting to create and thus fulfill a market" (MEC-CEO).

MEC's goal is to develop retail environments that express the underlying values of the organization. Other large-format retailers tend to go into large shopping areas and not put much consideration into the buildings, which are essentially "just a box" (MEC-CEO). Much of greenhouse gas emissions are due to the operation of buildings, and the built environment must be taken more serious for achieving sustainability (MEC-CEO). In addition to site location and development considerations, MEC also contributes to local community groups and environmental initiatives through financial and educational supports – rather than just a retail offering (MEC-FP). MEC also strives to undertake new initiatives, to be a model for other retailers and retail developers by creating a positive business model and to influence consumer behavior over the long-term (MEC-OM). The following two sections describes MEC's rationale for its recent unprecedented growth and what has facilitated this growth in a positive direction.

4.1.1 Rationale for Growth and Development

Although MEC is a retail co-operative that is not operated on a profit-driven business model, MEC has experienced rapid growth and expansion in the last decade. MEC's Senior Managers clarify that there are two primary reasons for the increase in retail store locations across Canada: membership demand and the financial health of the organization. The CEO states that it is the membership driving MEC's retail growth, and that:

It is based on the philosophy of how MEC operates as a business. MEC is a member owned cooperative which has no membership restrictions and the organization is successful at connecting to a population of active people in the outdoors. The membership has grown quickly across the country, primarily through word of mouth. Once a certain threshold of members is reached in a community; it is an indication that MEC should open a store there (MEC-CEO).

However, the current Operations Manager states that it is a combination of member demand and the financial health of the organization, whereby "growth protects the brand and the ability to

offer lower prices, keeps the organization going in a positive direction” (MEC-OM). MEC’s Facility Planner confirms this statement, and adds, “MEC is a dominant retailer in this market. It needs, as all businesses do, to increase growth in sales by one means or another. It is difficult to sustain a business plan that does not include annual growth and predicts ‘neutral’ sales” (MEC-FP).

However, MEC has attempted to direct its growth in a conscious manner, where

... MEC can be regarded as an ecosystem, a forest which has larger trees that form the canopy and there are smaller species in the understorey. MEC is a canopy organization that needs to leave room for smaller organizations and retailers to have part the market, because if you have little or no diversity in the market, then the market and the model is less robust. Wal-Mart was not so despised before it became so ubiquitous in the market. So MEC must carefully walk that line and ensure that it offers something that other stores cannot – to maintain social capital (MEC-FP).

4.1.2 Facilitation of Sustainability in Site Location Decisions

MEC Senior Management and a team of their staff make the majority of the site location and development decisions. The Operations department has an executive team of several staff, including the Facilities Planner, that search out the city and the logistics. The Operations Manager, the Finance Manager and the CEO further examine the site and determine whether the site meets MEC’s objectives and the criteria. The final approval and determination of the capital budget rests with MEC’s Board of Directors. The only external consultation used in the process is demographic consultants who have a specialty in locating retail sites at the initial stages and real estate agents, as well as architects and engineers are consulted later in the design stage.

MEC does not typically use any public consultation process in the site location and development decisions. The CEO states that one of the main reasons that the public is not involved is because MEC tends to be rigorous in their site criteria and needs to keep site costs affordable as MEC operates on small margins. “If the public said ‘choose location x’, the price of the property would likely increase and become unaffordable” (MEC-CEO). However, in the recent Montreal store, there was a study session done with MEC members to determine MEC acceptance in the market as well as potential locations. “MEC members tend to be very vocal and frequently give suggestions for potential locations. These tend to be good locations for that member but not for MEC in general” (MEC-FP). Another consultation method that the Operations Manager attempted while developing the Victoria store location was to organize a meeting with local retailers in the market to share information, answer questions, and try to make it a ‘friendly competition’ through partnerships (MEC-CEO). The Operations Manager found that many of the retailers were “suspicious of MEC at first”, but over a while MEC was able to gain their trust

before the MEC store actually opened (MEC-CEO).

The implementation of sustainability initiatives in site location and development of MEC retail stores are supported by all staff, Directors and Senior Management. These initiatives are also supported by MEC's members, the architectural community and the political community (MEC-CEO). The Operations Manager states that the growth of sustainability is due to the culture of the organization. "MEC believes in doing it in a way that makes business sense. If MEC can create a positive business model... other people can take it and use it. Success to MEC isn't building great green buildings, it is having our operation copied" (MEC-OM). MEC's Facility Planner further elaborates on how the sustainability initiatives are ingrained within the organization:

MEC is an idealistic company and its mission extends beyond just purveying a commodity. Social capital is an intangible asset. MEC is very cognoscente of what people think about it, and how it is portrayed to the public. MEC not only stands for good quality gear, but also social equity and environmental protection and other things that go along with MEC ethos. Those play into how MEC thinks about urban fabric and how its members live, work and behave. MEC has an extraordinarily committed staff towards its values and activities it supports (MEC-FP).

The following sections describe MEC's current strategy and the important considerations for retail store location and development decisions. This strategy has evolved as a result of each new store location, as well as through MEC's basic philosophy of sustainability.

4.1.3 What City?

The process by which MEC determines Canadian cities for retail store locations is based on the following information:

- 1) The total number of MEC members within a defined area;
- 2) The total population of that area; and
- 3) The propensity for that population to partake in the core activities that MEC supports through retail stores, such as backpacking, cycling, climbing, skiing and watersports.

MEC's Operation Manager states that another factor in the decision process is demand through the number of requests. However, a limitation of MEC's current business model is that MEC is only able to locate in cities that are typically over a total population of 350,000 and has projected revenues around \$6 million per annum (MEC-CEO). The potential success of each retail location is determined through a "sophisticated external analysis of site characteristics" (MEC-OM).

4.1.4 What General Area?

A combination of factors then determines what area MEC should search for an available site within the city. This includes using MEC's membership demographic information to determine:

- 4) Where the existing members are located; and
- 5) The potential for new members based on the characteristics of the surrounding community.

These factors tend to have very high correlation and, in general, an overlay of existing membership and demographic data indicate that the most successful location for MEC stores is within or near the downtown core of large Canadian cities (MEC-FP). MEC's 'core' customers are typically a unique sector of the population (MEC-CEO) who tend to have a high level of income, education, and are generally very 'urban' people who live in downtown and cosmopolitan areas. This indicates that downtown stores have strong potential for MEC and it has been proven in most of the locations (MEC-FP). However, the majority of people who shop at MEC know that they are going to MEC — especially with existing members — therefore the sensitivity to location is fairly low, as members will travel long distances to shop. But, MEC has proved through certain locations that there are benefits to the right location – faster sales growth and greater penetration into the market (MEC-FP).

From this information, MEC then determines what size of store this population could support and the necessary size of real estate. There are currently three store sizes:

- 'A' sized – Usable retail space ranging from 35,000 to 50,000 ft²
- 'B' sized – Usable retail space from 15,000 to 25,000 ft²
- 'C' sized – Usable retail space below 15,000 ft²

The search for real estate first begins with:

- 6) Appropriate zoning; and
- 7) An analysis of the character of existing retail precincts within the general area.

In the past, MEC used a 'decision matrix' and input a number of community factors such as bars, coffee shops, proximity to universities and modes of transportation to produce a relative rating for each site (MEC-FP). Recently, the decision matrix has been used less in the last few locations because the concept of the matrix is now embedded in how MEC searches for sites. The areas that MEC has typically looked at have been on the edge of the urban core of major centres to get lower cost real estate, and within previously developed areas as well as up-and-coming areas (MEC-FP).

4.1.5 What Location and Site Characteristics?

MEC has traditionally been very rigorous in site location characteristics, and these considerations are based on both philosophical and financial reasoning. The CEO advocates that the most important site location considerations are philosophical, such as that MEC attempts to

be a model and break new ground, to influence consumer behavior in the long-term, as well as to create a richer retail environment – “a feeling that you don’t get in regional malls or big-box environments” (MEC-CEO). The Operations Manager (MEC-OM), however, states that the most important considerations of a successful retail location are related more to financial aspects.

The following list reveals a compilation of numerous location and site characteristics that MEC considers when choosing a new retail site:

- 8) High traffic and visibility;
- 9) Good accessibility by all modes of transport including public transportation, walking, cycling and private automobiles;
- 10) Proximity to other amenities such as restaurants, universities, theaters and other forms of entertainment, as well as access to MEC’s core outdoor activities;
- 11) Proximity to a source of human resources;
- 12) Ability for new building construction or building reuse through redevelopment into a ‘green building’;
- 13) Potential contribution to neighbourhood revitalization;
- 14) Potential for ownership; and
- 15) The ‘right’ place for MEC based on feeling and intuition, rather than theoretical information.

4.2 Vancouver

Address: 130 West Broadway

Opening Date: May 9, 1995

Gross Retail Area: 62,209 SqFt

Building Footprint: 52,487 SqFt

4.2.1 Background: City and Site Selection

The city of Vancouver was the birthplace of MEC and contains MEC's flagship and largest retail store. MEC was started by a group of students from the University of British Columbia who wanted to have access to and provide outdoor gear at an affordable price. It is not surprising that MEC originated in Vancouver, as it has the third largest metropolitan population in the country and it is well-known as an outdoor mecca. Although the company started operating out of the back of a Volkswagon van in 1971, MEC shortly thereafter occupied a retail space on the second floor of an office building on Hastings Street. MEC outgrew this retail location on Hastings and opened a new store on 130 West Broadway on May 9, 1995. This new and current location is only a few blocks from the previous store on Hastings.

At the time of selecting a new site for the store in the early to mid- 1990s, MEC was still a "young and loose operation" and moving into such a large facility was a major step (MEC-FP). Those involved in the new site selection, including the Board of Directors, believed that MEC needed to stay in the same general area and there was no consideration of locating the new larger store to an undeveloped commercial area. Even the CEO at that time was not completely in support of opening large stores. However, it was more due to a "strong intuitive sense" that MEC should move to the current location on Broadway (MEC-FP). But it was not until MEC opened a store in Calgary that a "more holistic strategy" to locating retail stores was even a consideration (MEC-FP).

The primary considerations in developing a location for the new Vancouver store were about finding opportunities for reducing ozone-depleting substances (ODSs) and achieving energy efficiencies within a certain development time line. The final location selected resulted in a large building that was constructed partly from an old auto-repair shop and a few smaller adjacent buildings on the block that MEC renovated into what was considered at the time, an environmentally friendly retail building. MEC anticipated that a few of its Vancouver members would oppose the new and larger format store.

The store is within the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood of Vancouver, the "once-notorious" area that has been remaking itself into a sought-after urban location. Mackie (1999) describes

how Mount Pleasant was the first suburb of Vancouver that was built outside of the downtown peninsula, and was developed as an enclave for large working-class homes. However, as was common in other large cities at the time, the city spread out from its historic core and leaving the inner city suburb to enter into a period of decline. Many of the larger houses were divided into rooming houses, while others were knocked down for the wave of apartment buildings that were constructed in the 1960s and 1970s. But the area “hit the bottom” in the 1980s when the prostitutes moved into the area after being pushed out of the West End (Mackie 1999).

The perception of Mount Pleasant has been changing and it is now often referred to as “Heritage Central”, where homeowners have restored their houses to their “pre-First World War glory and rejuvenated one of Vancouver’s oldest neighbourhoods” (Mackie 1999). The revitalization of the residential area also spilled into the surrounding commercial areas. “The minor renaissance on Main has been matched by a big change on Broadway, where a giant Mountain Equipment Co-op has breathed new life into what was basically a thoroughfare to the suburbs” (Mackie 1999). In but a few years the neighbourhood was further described in a review for a new condo development as: “There are tons of outdoor and travel-equipment stores, including Mountain Equipment Co-op, up the street and a couple blocks over are the increasingly cool cafes, restaurants, home-design shops and nightspots of Main and Kingsway” (Read 2004). Mount Pleasant is in a central location, and is only a few minutes from Kitsilano and the downtown. It “is becoming a sweet spot to live and will likely develop more cachet over the next few years, especially with young urban professionals” (Read 2004).

When the new store on West Broadway opened, MEC expected a few of its members to hate the new store and view its size — at nearly 60,000 square feet and covering almost a full city block — as a “loathsome embrace of the mega-store concept” (Luke 1995). The manager of MEC operations at the time stated, “there will be people who say we’ve become a big-box retailer. They say we’ve sold out, strayed from our roots” (Luke 1995). But there was little opposition in the popular press to the movement of MEC into the larger store. Rather, the news reports of the new store came with headlines such as “Co-op scales another peak” (Constantineau 1995).

The two-story building — at almost a whole block long — was designed with a number of features that are now characteristic to MEC stores. It was during construction of the new Vancouver store in 1994 and 1995 that MEC began directing efforts into green building initiatives. Increased publication of the effects of ozone-depleting substances (ODSs) from sources such as cooling systems encouraged MEC to look for alternate cooling technologies. However, it was too late in the construction phase for MEC to eliminate all ODSs from the Vancouver store. But MEC

did realize that “by increasing the energy efficiency of its retail buildings, dependency on ODSs would be reduced or even eliminated” (MEC-FP).

This realization spurred the broadening of MEC’s perspective on the possibilities of other green design features that could be integrated into new store designs” (Brady et al 2004). MEC’s Facilities Planner during this time, stated that although MEC “predominantly advanced its green building approach through its internal knowledge base... the 1996 Green Building Conference in Vancouver clarified a lot about the tools and techniques required for effective green building design and construction” (Brady et al 2004). Therefore, the Vancouver store itself is not considered a model of green building, and did not receive any popular media press as such.

The second level of the new building was initially occupied by MEC’s head office and phone order service. However, in 1999, MEC’s head office moved from the upstairs of this retail store on West Broadway to a new location nearby in the light industrial area of Mount Pleasant. The design of the old auto-parts warehouse into a new 48,000 square foot head office was described “as eco-friendly as the great outdoors” (Lewis 1999). The second floor of the retail building on Broadway still contains MEC’s phone and mail order service, in addition to a meeting room, bike storage room and staff kitchen.

The Vancouver MEC on Broadway was often referred to only a few years later as a good example of a large commercial development during a number of big-box debates, when other large retailers faced opposition. There was also very little negative press even when MEC announced the opening of a second store on the west coast in 2004. MEC decided that it would experiment with a new business strategy by opening a second smaller retail location in a major Canadian city. 33 years after opening the first retail store, MEC made the decision to come full circle and open a second retail store in one of its major markets, in the greater Vancouver area. The choice of location was dependent on two factors: to “be in an area where the cooperative’s flagship store on West Broadway is inconveniently far away, and where there is already a heavy concentration of MEC members and participants in the five major sports it services” (McCullough 2004).

4.2.2 Sustainability Criteria

The following sustainability criteria data for the Vancouver store were gathered during site observations, interviews and document research. Individual key interviews were conducted with the Sustainability Coordinator (Van-SC) who worked the position for over one year but had very recently transferred to another senior staff position; an Urban Designer, who has lived in the Mount Pleasant area for fourteen years and worked with the Vancouver Planning Department

(Van-UD); and the current Executive Director of the Mount Pleasant Business Improvement Area, who moved to a staff position after eight years on the Board of Directors (Van-BIA).

Vancouver: District

The district boundaries considered in the study are those of the western section of Mount Pleasant and includes the West and Central Neighbourhood areas, the Main, Uptown and Broadway West Shopping Areas, and the industrial area in the northwest. The entire Mount Pleasant Community is defined by Great Northern Way and False Creek to the north, Clark to the east, Cambie to the west and 16th Avenue to the south. Based on the census data (City of Vancouver 2005a), the total area of land is 364 hectares with a population of 24,535. The Mount Pleasant Community is divided into a number of separate areas, in which MEC is located within the Broadway West Shopping Area. The statistical data used to represent the study area was provided in the Mount Pleasant Community Census Data (City of Vancouver 2005a).

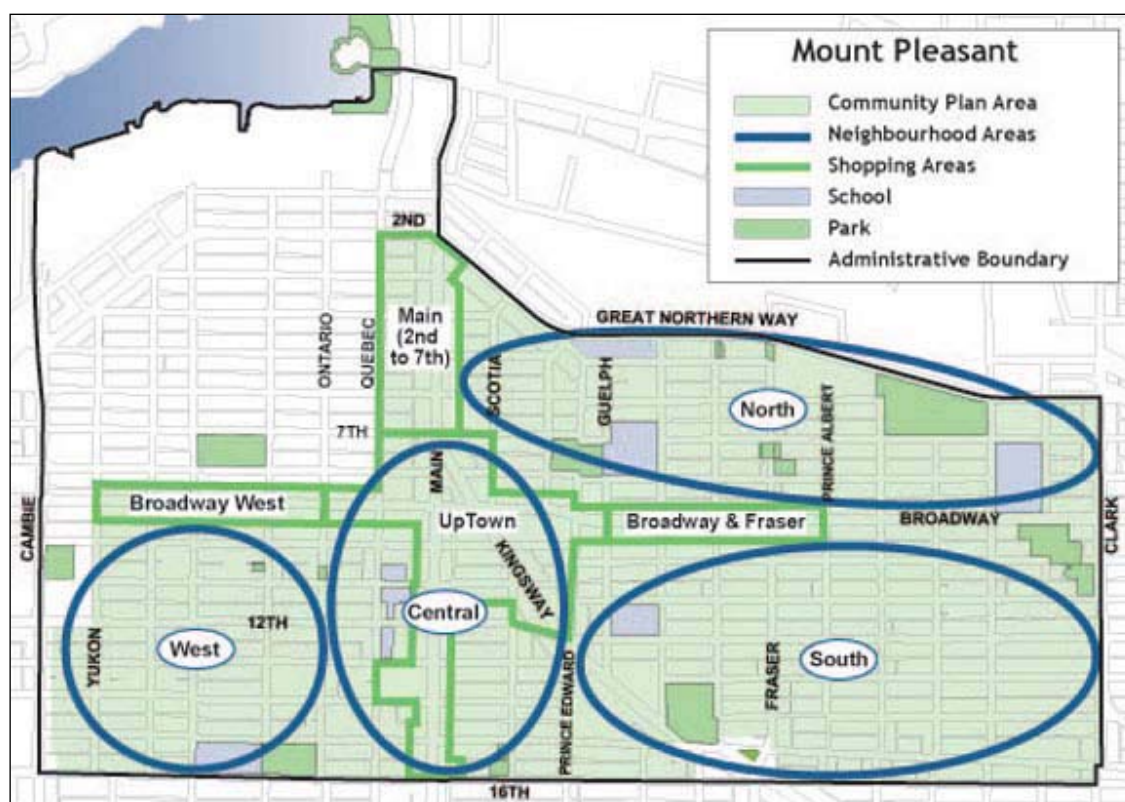


Figure 4.1 Mount Pleasant district boundary and the Community Plan Areas. Source: City of Vancouver.

Planning objectives in Vancouver and Mount Pleasant

The Vancouver MEC retail store on Broadway conforms to the current directions and policies within Vancouver's official long-term development plan, CityPlan (City of Vancouver 1995)

and may in the near future have a significant influence on the development of the local Mount Pleasant Community Plan. In 1992 Council recommended that CityPlan be created, because although Vancouver had many policies, an overall plan to guide development decisions was needed. Council adopted CityPlan (City of Vancouver 1995) as a broad vision for the city until 2021; to guide policy decisions, corporate work priorities, budgets and capital plans; as well as to define a series of mechanisms for implementation. Although CityPlan (City of Vancouver 1995) retained some of Vancouver's existing directions and policies, such as maintaining neighbourhood character and improving the environment, it also included a number of new directions.

The plan supported increasing the variety of housing options and job opportunities throughout the city, creating neighbourhood centers, keeping industrial land and finding new ways to involve communities in developing and delivering municipal services. A main priority for Vancouver identified within CityPlan (City of Vancouver 1995) is the creation of distinct neighbourhoods, whereby each neighbourhood can be thought of as a unique village within the city. These neighbourhoods meet the needs of their residents, by providing places to live, shop, play, work and feel part of a community. Neighbourhood 'centres', which are to be developed from existing shopping streets, are identified in CityPlan (City of Vancouver 1995) as the 'heart' of neighbourhoods. Other priorities include policies that support a healthy economy and a healthy environment, such as diverse job opportunities, promoting walking, cycling and transit as modes of transportation.

CityPlan (City of Vancouver 1995) also recognizes that to achieve these priorities, a number of actions are required. This includes involving local neighbourhood residents in the planning and decision-making process, ensuring that shops and services – “from groceries and hardware to day care and community police” are provided, and public spaces that promote strolling, window shopping, conversations and entertainment. Retailers are infrequently referred to in CityPlan (City of Vancouver 1995), and there is no discussion of how the changes in the nature of retail in the last few decades may have affected Vancouver. Although, the plan does articulate that increased retail space should support the downtown and the creation of new neighbourhood centres, as well as protect the city's industrial lands. There is no specific reference to how shopping needs will be met in each neighbourhood, rather, CityPlan (City of Vancouver 1995) directs each of these decisions towards each community through public consultation and the creation of Community Plans.

A component of CityPlan (City of Vancouver 1995) is the Community Visions program, which provides each community the opportunity “to look into its future, determine its needs and aspirations, and set a course that is consistent with CityPlan” (City of Vancouver 1995). In

2007, a Community Visions process was started in Mount Pleasant to update the 20-year old development plan. This plan will address “plans for the shopping areas and neighbourhoods, action plans for pressing social concerns, and longer-term policies to address community-wide issues” (City of Vancouver 2005b). Council decided that Mount Pleasant would be the first neighbourhood to undergo the new planning process. The Terms of Reference created for the Mount Pleasant Community Plan (City of Vancouver 2007) provides a detailed history of the area and an overview of considerations for developing the plan. This includes community-wide directions and policies, which encompasses housing, social/cultural sustainability, traffic and transportation, economic development, safety and community benefits.

Another focus of the plan is to create directions and policies for the shopping areas within Mount Pleasant. Plans created through the Community Visions program are to be tailored for each shopping area, and will consider issues such as streetscaping improvements, business mix, the potential for additional residential density near shopping areas, and the potential for new large-scale developments. Based on comments from the popular press and statements from CityPlan (City of Vancouver 1995), the MEC store on Broadway will likely fit with — and perhaps provide precedent for — the directions that are identified in the creation of the plan. The Terms of Reference also recognizes other planning recommendations that may arise from the Mount Pleasant Community Plan, which could involve the creation or expansion of Business Improvement Areas. The Vancouver MEC is not located within any Business Improvement Area (BIA), however, it is in between the Cambie Village BIA and the Mount Pleasant BIA.

Another planning recommendation of the Community Visions process may be the redistricting of certain shopping areas. The Mount Pleasant district currently contains a number of zoning schemes, ranging from residential, commercial, mixed use and industrial (City of Vancouver 2005b). Residential zoning includes many types, from single-family dwellings, duplexes and row-housing, to four-storey apartment-style buildings. To increase density, some zones allow the conversion and renovation of older homes with infill dwellings permitted over the garage upon a design review.

Sustainability objectives in development plans

Although CityPlan (City of Vancouver 1995) does not directly use the term ‘sustainability’ to describe the directions and policies it contains, many of the principles are in alignment with the current concept of ‘sustainability’. It was not until April of 2002, whereby Vancouver council adopted a definition of ‘sustainability’ and a set of principles and objectives to meet these sustainability initiatives (City of Vancouver 2002). The City of Vancouver now has a “Sustainability

Group” who is dealing with these issues defined in the “Sustainability Initiatives” report to council. The City of Vancouver now widely promotes itself as a sustainable and liveable city.

Mix of land uses and zoning

In 2001, the average density of the Mount Pleasant Community was 34.8 dwelling units per hectare (City of Vancouver 2005a). Of these, a significantly large proportion of dwellings are within less than five-story apartment buildings (72.8%) and a relatively low proportion are single detached dwellings (5.6%). The primary form of tenure in Mount Pleasant is rental (71.7%).

Commercial zoning permits a variety of building types as well, with commercial uses on the main floor and either residential or office uses in successive floors up to four-stories in height. Also permitted within the Mount Pleasant district are light industrial and service commercial uses, as well as live-work studios. The flexibility and range of land use types results in the district’s ability to achieve the objectives of a complete neighbourhood with a variety of housing types, commercial services and employment. Recently, a number of commercial properties along Broadway have had older buildings demolished and new mixed-use buildings constructed, or were in a stage of the development application process during the period of the study.

Demographics

The Mount Pleasant Community Census Data (City of Vancouver 2005a) shows that the district has a high proportion of single person households



Figure 4.2 Typical mix of housing in Mount Pleasant.



Figure 4.3 Older character house in Mount Pleasant.

(46%) which has been increasing. The largest proportion of residents are between 20-39 and 40-64 years of age at 46% and 30%, respectively. Although increasing, the average annual income of Mount Pleasant residents at \$47,467 is much below the average of residents in the entire city, at \$57,916 (City of Vancouver 2005a).

In the past, Mount Pleasant was a relatively more affordable place to live and was the first home to many new immigrants. The district continues to be an ethnically diverse community, with only 55.7% of the residents speaking English as their first language (City of Vancouver 2005a). It was also more affordable for the artists as it provided live-work spaces (Van-BIA).

More recently, younger families have moved into the area and renovated older homes, as well as began a trend of new residential construction of higher density and mixed use developments (Van-BIA). There has been a raised awareness of the history and culture in the district, and it has become more popular and experienced revitalization (Van-UD). However, this revitalization has also caused gentrification of certain areas which have become less affordable for some residents and independent business owners alike (Van-BIA).

Character

The commercial areas in the district have been undergoing change to reflect this change in residents, and some are now emerging as “vibrant” and “trendy” (Van-UD). Broadway West has not been as quick to revitalize as other nearby



Figure 4.4 Recent mixed use developments along West Broadway.

commercial areas, such as Main or Cambie. However, since the relocation of MEC within the Broadway West commercial area, it is now known as the “polar fleece” part of the city (Van-UD). The revitalization of this part of Broadway is nearly complete, and the commercial areas are distinct and no longer solely dependent upon the residents of Mount Pleasant.

The various commercial areas in the district contain a mix of retailers and services that attract customers from a larger catchment due to unique destination-type of businesses. This area of Broadway may not have revitalized as quickly as Main and Cambie due to not having any level of organized support comparable to those respective Business Improvement Areas. However, Broadway West is currently a mix of independent and national businesses that provide goods and services to a niche market that fits with the character of the neighbourhood (Van-BIA).

Placemaking

Two of the key informants, who were both long-term residents and employees in the Mount Pleasant district, stated that the area has maintained “a small town feeling” (Van-BIA) and is “built on history and character”. The Mount Pleasant residents are “a community with a heart... very distinct and supportive... and take pride in their area”. (Van-BIA). However, this feeling of ‘place’ is not felt the same in each district. “Main Street provides more feeling of place... It has more places such a variety of unique and trendy shops, cafes and restaurants...



Figure 4.5 Unique businesses along Main Street.



Figure 4.6 Character building at Broadway and Main Street.

It also has a vibrant night-life” (Van-UD). This feeling is reflected in the thoughts of the key informant who is newer to the city and only a recent resident of Mount Pleasant within the last few years. In particular, there is not much of a feeling of place within Broadway West because “it is missing some of the more active commercial uses and outdoor public space” (Van-SC).

Transportation and accessibility

The Mount Pleasant district is an inner-city neighbourhood with an exemplary coordination between land uses and transportation. Main roads, including Broadway, are encouraged as thoroughfares and conduct high volumes of traffic. However, these roads are typically lined with mixed, commercial and industrial uses. Traffic is directed along these streets as a variety of traffic calming measures are used within the residential areas, such as a number of stop signs, circular islands at intersections, and dead-end roads.

MEC is located along one of the main express bus routes in Vancouver (the B-line), which provides fast connections to other express buses, the Skytrain and the Sea Bus. Transit is coordinated at a regional level (the Greater Vancouver Regional District) and TransLink provides exceptional service not only within Vancouver, but also to all the surrounding cities and suburban areas. The roads within Mount Pleasant are generally short in length and on a grid system that facilitate easy navigation and movement through the district. The district also supports other modes of transportation including



Figure 4.7 Traffic on Broadway heading east from the downtown of Vancouver.



Figure 4.8 Traffic calming measures such as circular islands at road intersections are used on residential streets to reduce through traffic.



Figure 4.9 Some residential streets have also been closed to vehicle traffic, but create safe and efficient pedestrian and cyclist paths.

walking and cycling.

The Mount Pleasant district has a number of designated and signed cycling routes and recreational multi-use trails which facilitate movement within the district as well as providing connections to other areas of the city. Pedestrian movement through the district is safe, interesting and efficient. This is reflected in the Mount Pleasant Community Census Data of 1996 (the 2001 travel data was not reliable due to a transit strike), whereby only 50.2% of the residents are drivers or passengers of private automobiles, 32.6% use public transit and 16% either walk or cycle to work (City of Vancouver 2005a).

Vancouver: Block

The area of study at the block level was along Broadway between Ontario Street to the east and Yukon Street to the west. The Vancouver MEC has a fair evaluation for the block sustainability criteria. While the block rates higher for pedestrian amenities, character, utilization of streets and niche market retailers, it has a lower evaluation for the mix of uses and economic viability of the businesses.



Figure 4.10 Block study area of Vancouver. Source: City of Vancouver, Vanmap. ● MEC

Off-site parking

One of the most apparent characteristics of the block is the number of vehicles, both traveling through and parked. The MEC store, which was constructed by renovating and joining a number of buildings on the block, increased the number of on-site parking stalls than what existed for the previous uses. Another large retail business on the block has designed on-site roof-top parking similar to MEC. In addition to the on-site parking, the block also has provision for off-site parking through metered parallel parking during non-peak hours on both sides of Broadway.



Figure 4.11 On-street parking at non-peak hours along Broadway provides many parking opportunities for shoppers.

The pedestrian environment

However, the provision and concentration of parking along Broadway does not detract from the pedestrian environment. There are no surface parking lots along the block, and the on-site parking areas for all the businesses are not at ground level and access to these parking areas is primarily from back alleys. Although Broadway is a main thoroughfare through the city, allowing parallel parking along the curb makes the roadway seem narrower and less intimidating for pedestrians. The parked vehicles also provide a barrier between the sidewalks and the busy road that is often used by large trucks and a main transit route.

The block is also becoming more pedestrian friendly. The sidewalk is very wide and does not have any unnecessary interruptions. However, it is a very concrete environment. Boulevard trees were only recently planted along parts of this section of Broadway to increase the streetscaping aesthetics, but it will be a few years before the trees significantly add to the pedestrian environment.

Even though Broadway is 6-lanes wide, there are intersection lights at regular intervals for pedestrian crossings. Sidewalks are connected for safe and easy pedestrian accessibility on each side of the block. Buildings have very little or no setback from the sidewalk, which provides good opportunities for window-shopping along the retail section of the block.



Figure 4.12 Parked cars along the block provide a barrier for pedestrians and make the road appear narrower than 6 lanes.



Figure 4.13 Wide sidewalks, little or no building setback, boulevard trees and window shopping provide an interesting pedestrian environment.



Figure 4.14 Well-spaced crosswalks at intersections facilitate safe pedestrian movement.

Table 4.1 Business mix on Broadway, located between Yukon and Ontario

Yukon to Alberta	South	North
	Royal Bank Kalmata restaurant Pho Hoa restaurant Office Depot	Gateway College Spiros Greek Donair Vanity Room Hair Studio Checkstation (payday loans) Value Computer Services Vacant Locksmith shop NADEX sports store Chiropractic Taiga outdoor gear
Alberta to Columbia	South	North
	Style Hair studio UFO (United Factory Outlet) clothing Inside Outside Bridal salon Express copies Pacific Angler Valhalla Pure Insurance services Eco Outdoor sports	Thrifty car rental African Drum Shop Vacant Zodiac club café La Bicyclette Art & framing Global AV services Travel agency Hair studio Tailor Climate Outdoor retailer Tailor
Columbia to Manitoba	South	North
	MEC 3 Ride BMX bikes Travel cuts Westside sporting goods Tropical express food store Rino's cappuccino bar Sports junkies (used)	Europe Bound Travel outfitters Best Burrito Gigi's Pizza Luggage / Handbag repair shop Backpackers shop Stitchers sewing and repair Code II computers Canadian Mental Health Assoc. Bike doctor Martini restaurant AJ Brooks Outfitters Hair design Lee's printing Altus Mountain Gear
Manitoba to Ontario	South	North
	Under Construction Sports Check	Soccer Cents Rino's shoes and repair Hennessey Lounge and Dining Fed. of Mountain Clubs of BC Broadway grocery Printing and sign services New Way Easy Wear 5 Star Nails Bridal Shop Travel and tour shop Scrape Records music store Circle circle's pizza Starzone beauty salon Scotia Bank

Niche market of independent and national retailers

A unique retail component exists along this section of the block along Broadway, and it is known as the “polar fleece” area of Vancouver (Van-UD). As shown in Table 4.1, there are 21 retailers, of which 17 of these are in the outdoor and sports equipment retail market. These retailers include a mix of large or national retailers such as MEC, Sports Check and Valhalla Pure, but also a variety of smaller and independent retailers that are unique to Vancouver. This mix is possible due to the variation in sizes of the lots and the ability for commercial uses within two-storey buildings.

Variation of lot sizes

On the south side of the block the lots are typically deeper and wider to permit larger building footprints and are occupied by larger retailers such as MEC and Office Depot (Van-UD). On the north side of the block the lots are narrower and have less depth, which provides adequate space for smaller retailers. These smaller buildings are a mix of newer strip-style commercial buildings, while other retailers have converted two-storey character residences for commercial uses. However, while this portion of the block has many similar types of retailers that typically draw customers from a wide geographic area and provide for easy comparison-shopping, the block is lacking in other commercial uses.



Figure 4.15 Larger sites on the south side of the block permit buildings with larger footprints, many of which have recently been redeveloped.



Figure 4.16 Shorter and narrower sites on the north side of the block typically contain smaller retailers and businesses within older and some character buildings.

Mix of retail, office and service uses

In addition to the retailers there are a few restaurants, personal and professional services offered that are complimentary to the retail uses, such as shoe and luggage repair shops. Other personal and professional services on the block bring local residents to utilize these commercial amenities during the day.

Even though there are very few office uses on the block to provide customers during working hours, the nearby light industrial area would provide a source of daytime users. However, there are only a few uses, such as the couple of restaurants and lounges that attract customers to the block during the evening.

Revitalization

The block is still “emerging” as a “trendy and vibrant” area; in the recent past there were problems with crime and commercial vacancies (Van-UD). There are currently only 2 vacant store-fronts in the study area, and one vacant site that was for a mixed use building beginning construction.

One key informant stated that in the past Broadway remained a “dead street” as it was slower to revitalize than Cambie or Main. “After MEC moved in, the retail strip on Broadway also began to revitalize, and now the activity of successful commercial between Cambie and Main is almost complete” (Van-BIA). The block is very pedestrian-oriented as there is only one commercial use that is automobile-oriented: a car rental business.

Table 4.2 Summary of commercial uses

Retailers: 21
(Outdoor and sports retailers: 17)
Banks: 2
Other financial: 1
Restaurants: 8
Cafes: 2
Personal services: 9
Professional services: 9
Convenience-grocery store: 2
Educational or other organizations: 1
Government: 1
Automobile Oriented: 1
Vacant storefronts: 2



Figure 4.17 A national outdoor equipment retailer that recently developed a mixed use building on the south side of the block.

Vancouver: Site

The site evaluation for the Vancouver retail store was lower compared to other MEC retail stores involved in the study. Partly, the reasons are due to the fact that the Vancouver store was constructed in 1995 – prior to any significant considerations of the impacts of site selection, and before MEC began to investigate new and innovative green building technologies. However, there are still notable site characteristics that were implemented and set MEC in the direction for site selection characteristics and ‘green’ site improvements.



Figure 4.18 Site study area of Vancouver (2006 orthograph). Source: City of Vancouver, Vanmap.

Renovations: towards green building innovations

Although the Vancouver store has a lower evaluation of site sustainability for criteria such as green building design when compared to the Winnipeg store, other site sustainability criteria compensate for this deficiency.

Even though MEC opened its largest store ever at this time, moving outwards to an undeveloped site was not considered. Rather, the site on Broadway was located in an existing commercial area within the inner city suburbs of Vancouver. Thus, the infrastructure also existed,



Figure 4.19 Exterior facade of the Vancouver MEC store.

and the buildings that MEC adapted to a new retail use rather than demolishing the buildings. The building renovations and retrofits cost \$2.8 million, but the environmental additions were only a small portion of the total cost at \$250,000 (Luke 1995).

Utilization of natural site features

One unique characteristic of the Vancouver store is the utilization of site grading. The site elevation increases significantly towards the rear and allows the building to provide easy access to roof-top parking for 129 vehicles. MEC increased the size of the roof-top parking area during the building renovation, as well as provided a roof-top patio space to provide staff and customers an unobstructed view of the downtown and the mountains on the North Shore.

On-Site Parking

The on-site parking lot is metered and the majority of the money collected from the parking lot is donated towards environmental causes to offset the costs of customers driving to MEC. MEC does not provide for staff vehicular parking, however, the building has a large interior storage area for employee bicycles, in addition to the large bicycle parking area for customers on the exterior area adjacent to the front entrance. The Vancouver zoning bylaw contains a section of mandatory provision for bicycle parking in addition to the provision of vehicle parking. Another unique feature of the Vancouver zoning bylaw is that certain zones have parking maximums as well as parking minimums to prevent excess parking spaces.



Figure 4.20 Exterior of the building on the west side is landscaped to reduce site runoff and increase the aesthetics.



Figure 4.21 The ramp at the back of the site leading to the roof-top parking lot.



Figure 4.22 The roof-top parking lot provides 125 off-street parking spaces.



Figure 4.23 Ample covered parking spaces for bicycles at the front of the store.

Access and safety

Access to the entrance of the store from the parking lot is safe for pedestrians. There is both a lit stairway and an elevator from the parking area to the store entrance. Although the building is 2-storeys, the retail area is limited to the first floor. The upper level is used for staff areas and a separate area for the 'mail-order' part of the business operation. In addition to the elevator that provides access from the parking lot to the entrance, an internal elevator provides access to both levels within the staff area. Thus, the building maximizes floor space and minimizes both building footprint and surface parking areas through multiple storeys.

Building character, scale and facade

The façade of the building is very conservative as compared to the newer stores such as Ottawa and Winnipeg. However, large signs of photographs displaying outdoor activities are the primary and distinguishing feature of the façade. The Vancouver store also has large window displays facing the street for a large portion of the front façade. The windows provide both views into the store and at highlighted products in window displays.

Social interaction space

There are a few locations for social interaction on the site within and outside of the building. The Vancouver store has a reference area with couches and tables for reading and trip planning, as well as a roof-top patio with picnic tables and flower beds.



Figure 4.24 Stairwell and elevator at the front entrance leading to the roof-top parking lot.



Figure 4.25 The conservative building is easily identifiable by enlarged photographs and simple signage.



Figure 4.26 Couches in the reference area provide space for social interaction.



Figure 4.27 The roof-top patio also provides space for social interaction and taking in the view of the North Shore mountains.

Vancouver: Community

The Vancouver MEC's greatest contribution to community sustainability is the attempt to build a relationship between MEC members and the public to the outdoors (Van-SC).

Education

MEC provides education to local organizations and schools by offering free sessions on outdoor equipment and outdoor etiquette, which are provided by experienced and paid staff members. MEC also educates members and the public on general sustainability issues at various outdoors events and festivals, rather than gear promotion. MEC has also begun to take on the role of providing recycling and composting services at these events (Van-SC). MEC also provides space within the store for local community organizations to erect displays and information booths, as well as hold presentations and meetings.

Funding

Funding initiatives at the store level are directed towards local organizations that provide wilderness conservation education programs and wilderness access societies, in addition to local organizations that promote community bike initiatives and a bike path project. Funding is also provided through paid staff to share outdoors experiences with children and other organizations, to attend and support local events, and provide labour for trail maintenance with biking and climbing organizations (Van-SC).



Figure 4.28 Informational signage for local outdoor areas and initiatives.

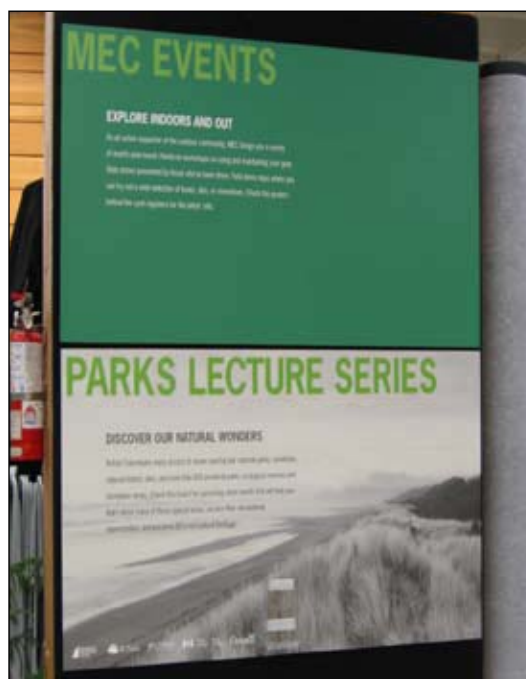


Figure 4.29 Educational events offered at the store such as lecture series, meetings and presentations.

Partnerships

The Vancouver MEC has also formalized a number of official partnerships with local groups including access societies and educational organizations. These partnerships ensure that funding and educational opportunities continue, and the role and responsibility of MEC and each of the organizations has been defined in the process.



Figure 4.30 MEC offers funding and advertizing space for local organizations.

4.3 Toronto

Address: 400 King Street West

Opening Date: March 31, 1998

Gross Retail Area: 51,077 SqFt

Building Footprint: 27,373 SqFt

4.3.1 Background: City and Site Selection

The Toronto store was MEC's third retail location and the first in eastern Canada, which opened in 1985 on Front Street. The first two stores to open in Canada were in the western cities of Vancouver and shortly thereafter followed by Calgary. The Toronto store was a natural expansion of MEC as it had the largest metropolitan population in Canada and would have a good chance for success in the eastern part of the country. Due to the large population, there was a significant proportion of that population to provide MEC its typical 'core customer' – young, urban and educated (MEC-FP).

The concept of a retail co-operative was regarded as "unique" and in 1986 it was advertised in the local papers as "Canada's only company of this sort" (Livesey 1986). This distinctive retail co-operative philosophy was thought to allow MEC to have more capital to grow with and to open three stores. It was also viewed as the reason that the store was stated as "probably the city's only retail shop with a reading room for shareholders in its front window" (Livesey 1986). Even though at the time it was not in MEC's mandate to advertise, it was already a very popular brand in Toronto. Its "knapsacks and brightly colored fleece jackets are so trendy that a U.S. women's magazine ranks the Toronto store among the top places to meet men in Canada's largest city" (Lawton 1996).

Due to MEC's success, the Toronto store relocated into a building more than double in size in just over ten years of operation. MEC is proud to state that this retail store — although only their first attempt — shows their commitment to environmental sustainability in their building practices. Despite the fact that at the time large retail giants such as Eaton's and Kmart started going into bankruptcy, MEC not only moved the Toronto store into a new building with numerous environmental upgrades – but shortly thereafter opened a number of other stores in new cities such as Edmonton, Winnipeg and Halifax. Whereas sales in the retail sector generally experienced a decrease by 12 percent, MEC experienced an overall increase in sales revenues, even though "MEC remains a not-for-profit corporation, one that would rather repair the zipper on your MEC jacket than sell you a new one" (Steed 2002).

MEC's second location in Toronto opened March 31, 1998, within a new building at 400 King

Street West near Spadina Avenue in the Waterfront neighbourhood of downtown Toronto. Similar to the relocation that occurred in Vancouver, the new Toronto store was not located too far from the original location. “In contrast to the recent explosion of suburban big box retail development, the Co-op is located on a downtown infill site... and as a result is easily accessible by foot, bicycle and public transit” (Matuk 1999). The new Toronto store was developed during the start of the revitalization efforts of the King-Spadina area.

In 1996 the City of Toronto implemented a redevelopment plan that lifted restrictive zoning bylaws for the King-Spadina area, which has been credited as the primary driving factor behind the area's growth. The area was rezoned from primarily light industrial uses and warehouses to a zoning scheme that permitted a variety of uses such as commercial, residential, live/work spaces, institutional and light industrial to attract investment in the area. “The traditional approach of segregating land uses and regulating the size of development with density and parking was replaced with a more flexible planning approach” (City of Toronto 2002).

Allied Canadian Corporation, formed in 1988, was also known as a key player in the redevelopment of the King-Spadina area, in addition to some of Toronto's other older historic districts. Allied has “redeveloped, leased and brought back to market a number of old factories and warehouses in mid-Toronto, downtown east and most recently downtown west, its largest portfolio to date” (Southworth 1999). Allied began to restore many of the buildings lining King Street West and Adelaide Street West and convert them into office and retail buildings in an effort to bring activity to the area (Southworth 1999).

Although Allied's vision had only just begun to materialize, a number of retailers slowly moved into the area, including MEC. “MEC was the first retailer in the area shortly after the King-Spadina plan, even though retail ‘merchandisers’ such as MEC traditionally follow other uses such as residential, office and other ‘display retailers’ and service commercial. MEC is a destination retailer that could have opened anywhere in the city, and MEC came in advance of the majority of the residential and other commercial” (Tor-Dev). The area is “attracting young professionals and companies, such architects, high-tech firms, and film-production companies, who are moving into old warehouses that offer a street presence” (Southworth 1999). While some expressed concern for the displacement of garment merchants and the artistic community, Allied responded that “we are an agent of change. It is not economical for light industrial companies to be on such valuable property” (Southworth 1999).

The opening of MEC in Toronto, even back in 1986, was a publicized event, even though the “co-op's success hasn't been welcomed by everyone” (Livesey 1986). While some local

retailers were “indifferent to the competition”, other retailers stated they were “miffed at Mountain Equipment Co-op’s non-profit status, which exempts it from paying income tax” (Livesey 1986). However, the first MEC on Front Street was viewed positively for playing a key role in generating a niche market of outdoor retailers in the area. As stated by Slinger (1998) in the *Toronto Star*:

Mountain Equipment Co-op discovered VISA gold on Front St. Other outfitters rushed as close to next-door as they could get to cash in on the credit-card Klondike. Looking south, and reading along Front from right to left, are Out There, Hikers Haven (Est. 1976), Europe Bound Travel Outfitters, and Trail Head (“Where Adventures Begin” Est. 1971). And that’s just one block. But where’s Mountain Equipment Co-op? Wasn’t it right there in the middle? It was, but it fled the hell and has gone to King at Spadina where it has big-box-supered itself. Eight checkouts! Nine tents completely set up! The climbing wall is there; almost any expedition you can imagine, providing it stops short of Earth’s orbit.

After the Toronto MEC retail store moved locations, many of these same competitors that had locations near MEC “scrambled to move into digs near the new store. It’s so influential” (Gibbon 1998). MEC has been acknowledged as key in sustaining a niche of outdoor retailers in this area of Toronto. The feeling of ‘uniqueness’ remains within the new Toronto store, and is perhaps even stronger. “Indeed, once you’re in the Toronto store, you absorb a different message about how a business can operate. Three large pine slabs near the entrance say: Tread Lightly. Leave No Trace. Take Only Memories. Come to MEC and you will find out” (Steed 2002). MEC operates based on its passion for the outdoors and wild places, and attempts through their stores to inspire people to get out, active and healthy. As Steed (2002) observed “The Toronto store was full of people who wanted to do just that”.

4.3.2 Sustainability Criteria

The following sustainability criteria data for the Toronto store were gathered during site observations, interviews and document research. Individual key interviews were conducted with the Sustainability Coordinator of the Toronto store (Tor-SC), the Administration Assistant of the Toronto store (Tor-AA), and the CEO and president of Allied Properties (Tor-Dev). Despite numerous phone calls and e-mail correspondence with the Toronto Planning Department, no interview could be obtained with a planner working in the King-Spadina area. The statistics used in the analysis were obtained from the City of Toronto’s study: *Regeneration in the Kings: Directions and Emerging Trends* (2002).

Toronto: District

The district boundaries for the study are confined to a small area within Toronto and are considered to be the King-Spadina area, which includes Bathurst, Queen Street West, Front Street, John Street (south of King Street) and Simcoe Street (north of King Street), as shown in Figure 4.31. The population within the King-Spadina district boundaries has significantly increased since the first revitalization efforts of the King-Spadina Secondary Plan. In 1996 the total population was only 945, which increased by 118% by 2001 to 2081 residents (City of Toronto 2002).

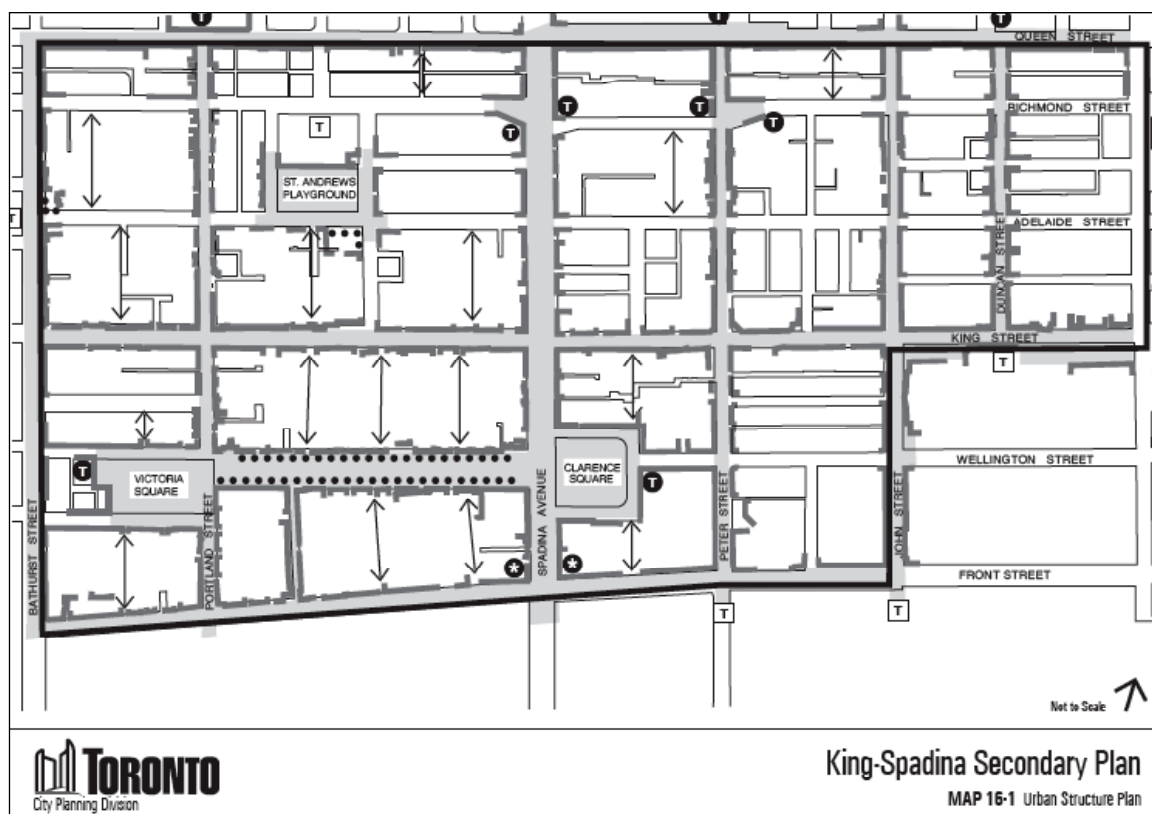


Figure 4.31 King-Spadina district boundaries. Source: Toronto Official Plan (2006).

Planning objectives in Toronto and the King-Spadina district: Sustainability focused

Overall, the Toronto MEC retail store has a significant contribution to the district sustainability criteria including enhancing planning objectives, infrastructure utilization and accessibility, and enhancing a placemaking effect. A number of current planning documents relate to the King-Spadina area and include the *Official Plan* (City of Toronto 2006a), the King-Spadina Secondary Plan (City of Toronto 2006b), *Regeneration in the Kings: Directions and Emerging Trends* (City of Toronto 2002), and the King-Spadina Urban Design Guidelines (City of Toronto 2004). The Toronto MEC provides a good example of a large-format retailer that fits within the direction of the

Official Plan and secondary plans, and may have even set precedent for these documents.

Since the implementation of the first King-Spadina redevelopment plan in 1996, the district has undergone an extensive revitalization and transformation, which is visibly ongoing at an extraordinary rate. The increased investment and densification of the district has not only been catalyzed by the King-Spadina Secondary plan, but has also been further identified in Toronto's *Official Plan* (adopted by council 2002, and approved by the OMB 2006) as an area that contains a number of properties with high redevelopment potential.

Toronto's *Official Plan* is a complex and detailed document which prioritizes the importance of making sustainable choices about how Toronto should grow; integrating social, environmental and economic perspectives into decisions, and meeting the needs of current residents without compromising the needs of future generations (City of Toronto 2006a). The third chapter of the *Official Plan*, titled 'Building a Successful City', is dedicated to policies that relate to guiding Toronto's growth by "integrating social, economic and environmental perspectives in our decision making" and that "all applications for development will be evaluated against the policies and criteria" (City of Toronto 2006a, 3-1). These policies provide direction on matters that affect city-building for improving everyday life, including the built environment, the human environment, building new neighbourhoods, the natural environment and economic health.

The third chapter also contains an entire section on the future of retailing in Toronto. It recognizes the importance of retailing on Toronto's economy and acknowledges that the patterns of retailing have drastically changed in the last few decades - and will continue to change. It attempts to deal with these issues in a number of ways. Although large-format retailers and power centres are permitted, these development forms are restricted to 'Employment' and 'Mixed Use Areas' and must take into account the "potential impact on existing shopping areas and patterns of retail activity". The *Official Plan* also attempts to provide "the flexibility for owners of retail properties to adapt to changing circumstances" (City of Toronto 2006a, 3-32). This is achieved by designating existing and new commercial districts within Mixed Use Areas.

The *Official Plan* also encourages the development of traditional shopping streets, and states that large stand-alone stores that are not urban in form are not compatible within the 'Downtown' or along designated 'Avenues'. The policies governing retail development in the Plan promote diverse retail environments for local shoppers; specialty retail markets for attracting tourists and residents from a larger area; enhancing traditional retail areas through quality developments, improving public amenities such as transit, parking and landscaping, enhancing pedestrian environments along Avenues, and supporting business associations. However, there is no specific

mention of environmental initiatives that retail developments can achieve. Also, there are no further social considerations in the Plan such as the appropriate mix of retailers or the role of retailers in creating a 'place' beyond those that may be achieved through design.

The King-Spadina Secondary Plan (City of Toronto 2006b) is a component within the *Official Plan*, and sets specific guidelines for the King-Spadina area. Key themes within the Secondary Plan are: to achieve a high standard of urban structure and built form by enhancing the public nature of streets, open spaces and pedestrian routes; preserving heritage buildings; encouraging transit use and minimizing private vehicles; permitting large retail developments that fit with the surrounding form and massing; encouraging the development of a district heating and cooling system; and promoting new residential uses.

Mix of land uses

The current land use scheme of the King-Spadina district comprises three primary uses, which are defined in the Official Plan as Regeneration Areas, Mixed Use Areas, and Greenspaces. The Mixed Use areas are typically on the east side of the district and closer to the downtown's financial district and the waterfront. It is composed of high-density residential, office, retail and service, institutions, entertainment, recreation and culture, and parks and open spaces.

MEC is located on the edge of the Regeneration area, which permits a wide array of uses to further attract investment and redevelopment. It is characterized by commercial, residential, live/work spaces, institutional and light industrial. Unfortunately, during this study, Toronto's zoning bylaw was under a major process of consolidation and review, and was not available for the study.

Multiple players in revitalization

Although the revitalization of the King-Spadina area was initiated by the city's redevelopment plan, the private sector played a large role in implementing the process. The vision of a local company, Allied, and its president and chief executive officer, went beyond those of traditional revitalization schemes.

Ignore the darkness and dirty brick. Forget the silence and sporadic potholes. Turn your mind instead to the elegant street lamps lining the sidewalk, or to the people sipping coffee on outdoor patios. As [he] continues with his instructions, he waves his hand through the air, and with the panache of a magician, buries the ugly hydro wires, removes the chipped paint and creates shops, activity, a community alive... "I want to create something truly spectacular" (Southworth 1999).

Allied's vision included a retail strip, which would develop as residents and office worker moved into the area and increased the demand for businesses. While a few properties were unoccupied, they were being "held out for the perfect restaurant" (Southworth 1999). The ultimate goal was to create character area in Toronto that was similar to other 24-hour cities such as

London or New York City. “Allied is in the business of creating lively downtown communities, not just renovated office space” (Belford 2004). Allied’s success was through identification of a niche market where property ownership was widespread and poorly managed, and subsequently created management and leasing synergies to develop areas such as King-Spadina into “desirable locations” (Belford 2004). By 2004, the occupancy rate of Allied’s properties in the area were just over 98 percent, and “best of all... the tenants love the buildings” (Belford 2004). The King-Spadina area is not part of one of Toronto’s extensive and successful Business Improvement Areas (BIA) program, but could be viewed rather as an example of market-led initiatives towards ‘placemaking’.

Transportation and accessibility

The King-Spadina district of Toronto is a high-density area containing a variety of land uses that is well supported by an existing road network and transit system. Transit service was increased to the area shortly after implementation of the King-Spadina redevelopment plan and re-zoning scheme, which likely facilitated increased access to the area, and the revitalization process. Both King Street and Spadina Avenue are major public transportation routes with frequent streetcar service.

MEC is also located within five blocks of the underground subway system. The street system within the King-Spadina district is a grid pattern that facilitates easy movement for all transport modes. In addition to the above-ground sidewalks, the downtown of Toronto has the underground ‘Path’ system which is an extensive corridor of retailers, food establishments and service providers. MEC is not connected to the ‘Path’, but is easily accessible within a few blocks.

Transit usage and walking is a common mode of travel by residents of the King-Spadina district (City of Toronto 2002). In 2001, 30% of all non-work related trips were by transit or walking. The pedestrian environment was also important as 32% of residents walked to work while 29% used transit. Even more notable is that 38% of those residents in the study did not even own a vehicle, and a substantial number of residents wanted to see an increase in public spending to improve transit service (City of Toronto 2002).

While this area of the city is very accessible by alternative modes of transport such as transit and walking, there are few cyclist amenities. MEC is only a few blocks within access of one signed cyclist route that provides access to other routes in the larger downtown area. However, the overall provision of signed and designated cycling routes in Toronto’s downtown is limited. Only 1% of King-Spadina residents cycle to work and 5% cycle for non-work related trips. Cycling is thus more of a recreational activity rather than a mode of commuting. The Toronto MEC is

located near the only greenway/recreational trail accessible from downtown, which runs along the waterfront.

A high volume of traffic, both pedestrian and vehicular, was observed in the King-Spadina district throughout the day. MEC is located in between the office towers of the Financial district and the revitalizing office warehouse district that both provide daytime shoppers. It is also within the Entertainment district which generates evening traffic with Toronto's residents and visitors.



Figure 4.32 Street car passing MEC on Charlotte Street.



Figure 4.33 A major street car transit station on Spadina at King Street.

Character

The current character of the district is best described as “eclectic” and “interesting”. It has changed in the last 10 years from a “bleak and forbidding” light industrial area within the inner city of Toronto, with continuing redevelopment and conversion of old warehouse buildings to complete demolition of upper-end high rise condo buildings (Tor-Dev).

While the King-Spadina district is more of a destination retail and entertainment area that draws in customers from all over the city, the area is rapidly changing to support the growing residential population – typically young and single professionals, or married without children, and retirees who want to live near amenities (Tor-Dev). There is a significant residential population in the area, which is expected to grow in the next decade.

The increased number of local residents in the district is reflected in the evolving retail merchants. The King-Spadina district is beginning to move away from the early stages of commercial development of food establishments and “display retailers such as furniture stores” towards the “merchandise retailers” such as MEC (Tor-Dev). However, MEC was one of the first retailers to come into the area when it was undergoing transformation from a “blank slate” and has added strength to the “distinctive area” (Tor-Dev).

Demographics

Compared with the demographic profile for the entire city of Toronto, the King-Spadina area



Figure 4.34 Character of the Entertainment District, looking east on King Street.



Figure 4.35 Looking east on King Street towards the Financial District.



Figure 4.36 Character of the warehouse buildings in the King-Spadina district, looking west on King Street.

has a significantly lower population of younger and older residents. In 2001, over 50% of residents were between the ages of 25 and 39 years (City of Toronto 2002). In addition, approximately 87% of King-Spadina households were composed of one and two persons, in comparison to 5% for the city average (City of Toronto 2002).

Average rates of education and income of King-Spadina residents were much higher than the city average. Nearly two-thirds of all residents had university education and half of the surveyed households had annual incomes over \$70,000 (City of Toronto 2002). The age, household type and income of King-Spadina residents is reflected in the type of housing and tenure in the district. Residents of King-Spadina are primarily owners. In 2001, 76% of residents were owners compared to only 50% of Toronto residents (City of Toronto 2002). Approximately 58 percent of King-Spadina residents live in apartment buildings, and over 11 percent live in warehouse-condominium conversions (City of Toronto 2002).

Placemaking

There was a general agreement from all interviews that the King-Spadina district did evoke some level of a feeling of 'place' with residents and visitors. Toronto's Sustainability Coordinator stated that the King-Spadina area is "a mixed bag – a place to live and work; trendy and artsy, and creates a feeling of place for some" (Tor-SC). However, one respondent thought that although the King-Spadina district has strong potential of evoking emotions and becoming a 'place' because



Figure 4.37 Three-storey rowhousing next to a park in the King-Spadina district.



Figure 4.38 Two-storey rowhousing next to a park in the King-Spadina district.



Figure 4.39 High-rise condos provide a higher density of residents in the district.

of the “human scale”, the area is still in the early stages of this process. “It is open and accessible, there are courtyards.... It is full of young creative and energetic people living and recreating. It is becoming a neighbourhood in the true sense, and residents are beginning to create this community identity” (Tor-Dev).

Many of the key elements in ‘placemaking’ are visible, and MEC enhances the unique feeling of ‘place’ that one experiences in the King-Spadina district. However, one concern raised was that due to the future construction of a number of high-rise residential buildings, the area may not have the appropriate mix of housing and residents to develop into a “family-friendly” neighbourhood which could have negative effects (Tor-Dev).



Figure 4.40 Looking west down King Street at MEC and a near by high-rise condominium.

Toronto: Block

The area of study at the block level was along King Street, from John Street to the east and to Spadina Avenue on the west. The Toronto retail store also contributes at the block scale for the sustainability criteria in the utilization of streets, pedestrian amenities, character and scale. However, the block is less successful in the mix of uses and retailers.

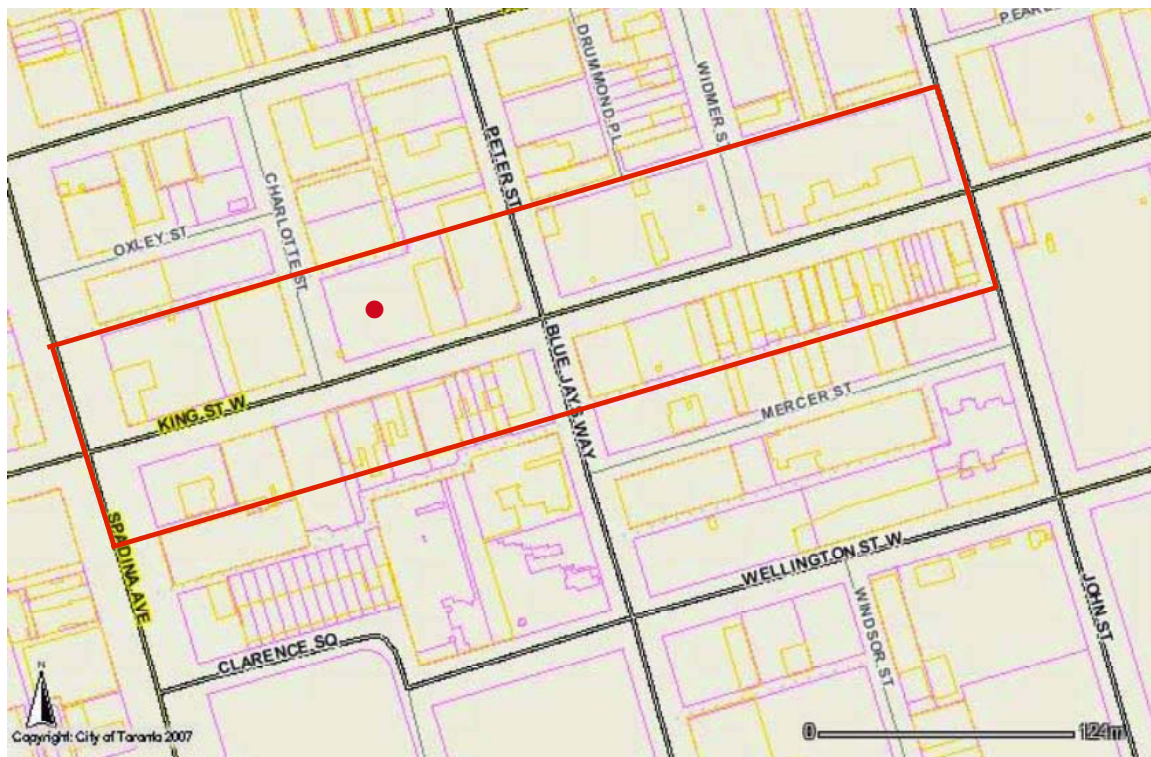


Figure 4.41 Block study area of Toronto. Source: City of Toronto, TOMaps. ● MEC

Off-site parking

Although the current location for MEC was initially built on an empty lot in an area with many vacancies and parking lots, an underground parking lot for approximately 75 vehicles was developed for MEC customers (MEC-SC). In addition to the underground parking provided by MEC and two undeveloped surface parking areas along the block, there is also on-street parking available along the block in non-peak hours. King Street is a four-lane road with parking on both outside lanes in non-peak hours.



Figure 4.42 Off-site parking is provided on both sides of King Street.

Pedestrian Environment

The provision of parking for MEC shoppers does not detract from the pedestrian-friendly environment on King Street. Each side of King has wide, attractive sidewalks to facilitate easy pedestrian movement. The streets are generally short with some variation in length, and the buildings have little or no setback from the sidewalks, both of which also provide an interesting pedestrian environment.

However, this area of Toronto has no marked pedestrian crossings at intersections with smaller streets on King Street, and no marked cycling lanes. Although pedestrians are generally given the right-of-way and can be found dashing onto the road to catch a passing street car, the safest place to cross King Street is at the major intersections with Spadina Avenue and Peter Street.

Mix of independent and national retailers

The retail component along this section of King Street is a unique retail destination — even though it only contains 8 retailers — with 5 outdoor equipment and sporting retailers concentrated between Peter Street and Spadina Avenue for easy comparison-shopping. MEC is the largest of these and acts as an anchor that draws the target customers from a wide geographic area. The remainder of the block study area is lined with a variety of restaurants, cafes and some service businesses (Table 4.3).

Other retail areas exist within the King-Spadina district, further west along King Street, along Spadina Avenue, and the ‘mall’ style



Figure 4.43 Looking west at the pedestrian amenities provided on King Street.



Figure 4.44 A concentration of specialty outdoor retailers on the block provides a niche retail market within Toronto.



Figure 4.45 Other large-format retailers are entering the area and redeveloping existing buildings for new uses.

Table 4.3 Business mix on King Street, located between John and Spadina Avenues

John to Wildmer	North	South
	Second Cup Aroma Indian Mizu Japanese Ultimate Café Hey Lucy Café Kit Kat Bar and Grill N'Awkins Urban Restaurant/Patio/Bar Gabby's Dhaba Le Saint Tropez Zazou Lounge Joe Mama's La Fenice Fred's Hot Here Red Tomato Lexy Lounge	Block under construction
Wildmer to Peter	North	South
	Forget About It Journio Bistro 333 Verona Surface parking lot Amp'd Mobile	The Laugh Resort Comedy Club The Canadian Bar and Grill Photoshop Thrifty Rent-a-Car Holiday Inn and Convention Centre Features Café Taylor's Outdoor Gear
Peter to Charlotte	North	South
	M5V Condo showroom Dim Sum Palace Pur Supper Club Marathon Outdoor Adventure Muse Banditos Speedy Auto Service Adventure Travel Europe Bound Princess Thai Cuisine Asakusa Japanese Spoon	Shoppers Drug Mart MEC Travel Cuts Timothy's Cafe
Charlotte to Spadina	North	South
	Surface parking lot Royal Bank Fresh and Wild grocery	Venice Cafe Venice Fitness Venice Tan Computer Consumables Buyers Club Hogtown Extreme Sport Shoeless Joe's Budget Car Rental Surface parking lot

shopping along the popular Queen Street. MEC is not the only large-format retailer in this district of Toronto. Recently, other anchor retailers such as Lee Valley Tools and Winners moved within a few blocks and are occupying redeveloped warehouse buildings. The retail component of the King-Spadina district is just beginning to catch up to the demand that has been created by the intense residential development (Tor-Dev).

Variation of lot sizes and building height

Although the Toronto MEC store is a large-format retailer with a total retail area of nearly 52,000 square feet, it does not detract from the character of the area. This is partly achieved by the multiple levels of the 2-storey MEC store, and the design of the building. The built form on the block is varying in height, age and design, which adds to the eclectic character of the district. The scale of buildings ranges from two-storey buildings to high-rise towers; the age of buildings ranges from old and renovated businesses within two-storey character houses and warehouses typical within the Entertainment district, to brand new towers with a more contemporary aesthetic.

The range of lot sizes that exist on the block facilitates the variation in the scale of the buildings. However, the recent redevelopment activity has resulted in a number of smaller lots being consolidated and high-rise towers and mixed-use buildings replacing the older buildings and empty lots. The newer high-rise developments are higher-income developments and contain new shops and services that are targeted at this population,



Figure 4.46 Scale of buildings on the block range from two-storeys to high-rise towers.



Figure 4.47 A specialty grocery store provides local amenities targeted for the district residents.



Figure 4.48 The Toronto MEC store provides leaseable space for complimentary businesses along the streetfront.

such as the specialty grocery store and the services provided by the new 'Venice' mixed-use development.

Mix of retail, office and service uses

Although the buildings are beginning to have larger footprints, the streetfront retail and service have remained within spaces of various sizes in an attempt to conserve the mix of businesses and the aesthetics of the block. MEC also used this approach and during construction of the building, spaces on the ground floor were created for three additional tenants. These are currently leased to a national coffee shop and a travel company. The third space was used by MEC for various uses, but has recently been rented to a condo development company for a sales office and show suite.

The remainder of the block also incorporates a mix of uses to provide customers at varying times of the day. During the day, activity is generated through the national pharmacy, specialty grocery, cafes, restaurants and various retailers. Nighttime uses are the restaurants, lounges and some retail and theaters. The block provides opportunities for both local residents and visitors to use throughout the day. In addition to the amount of people and traffic and the mix of businesses, the commercial strength of the block is apparent through the lack of vacancies. Although there are no vacant buildings or storefronts on the block, there are currently two major condo redevelopment sites under construction and two other sites that are waiting to finalize development approvals prior to construction.



Figure 4.49 Other large format retailers have adapted old buildings and maintained design standards.



Figure 4.50 Even the side of the MEC building is interesting for pedestrians. The loading bay and parking lot entrance is located along this wall, but is not an eyesore!

Table 4.4 Summary of commercial uses

Retailers: 8
(Outdoor and sports retailers: 5)
Banks: 1
Other financial: 0
Restaurants: 27
Cafes: 7
Personal services: 2
Professional services: 3
Convenience-grocery store: 1
Educational or other organizations: 0
Government: 0
Automobile Oriented: 5
Accommodations: 1
Entertainment: 1
Vacant storefronts/Temporary Use: 1



Figure 4.51 A mix of uses generates activity on the street at varying times of the day.

Toronto: Site

The highest evaluation of the sustainability criteria for the Toronto MEC store was at the site level. Although when MEC chose to develop at this “brownfield” location on King Street, which was a surface parking lot in an area of derelict light industrial and warehouse buildings, over the years the area has drastically changed (Tor-SC).

Infill site

By redeveloping the site, MEC took advantage of under utilized infrastructure in the downtown rather than requiring a new area to be serviced. The site may have ranked lower at the time of development because the site was not located in an established commercial centre or node, but it had significant potential and been identified as an area for redevelopment into a successful commercial strip. The site is, however, near other commercial strips in downtown Toronto, such as Spadina Avenue and Queen Street that are ‘boutiquey’ and have a mix of independent and chain stores.



Figure 4.52 Aerial view of the Toronto MEC retail store, 400 King Street West. Source: City of Toronto, TOMap.

On-site parking and building access

During development, MEC made many physical improvements to the site in addition to constructing a new building with numerous environmental upgrades. Although the underground parkade provides parking for MEC customers, there is no internal access to the store. Yet pedestrian movement between the store and parkade is safe along the sidewalks and does not require a street crossing. MEC also provides 9 large bike racks for bike parking in the front window of the store under the canopy and monitored by security camera.

The store is also very easy to locate from the street for pedestrians, and to a less extent, vehicular traffic. Signage consists of projecting signs along the front facade, two smaller signs located higher on both sides of the building facing the streets, and typical of MEC, a large poster displaying the Co-op's Paddling Buyer in a whitewater canoe.

Building character and facade

Rather than displaying large 'Mountain Equipment Co-op' signs, MEC attempts to be distinguishable on the block with a façade that is unique and reflects both MEC's product selection and commitment to green building practices. There are no blank walls along the front façade, which has large windows that allow a view into the store and at products on display.

Social interaction space

The design of the site also provides opportunities for social interaction through street



Figure 4.53 Entrance to MEC's underground parking lot.



Figure 4.54 Pedestrian access from the parking lot to the front entrance of the building is safe for customers.



Figure 4.55 Plenty of bicycle parking spaces at the Toronto MEC store.

furniture outside the store, and inclusion of a coffee shop within the building.

Green building innovations

The ability for MEC to design and construct the Toronto store from the ground up was crucial, as during construction of the new Vancouver store on Broadway, MEC realized that developing and incorporating environmentally friendly construction standards was important. Although it was too late for the Vancouver store, the Facilities Manager was determined to ensure that the next store to undergo construction, the Toronto store, received as many environmental upgrades as possible.

At the time, retail buildings had “not played a significant role in the evolution of environmentally sustainable design” (Matuk 1999). The Toronto architectural firm that designed the building, Stone Kohn McQuire & Vogt, says this was the first time it “worked to such a strong environmental agenda,” says the firm’s Dan Cowling. “Every aspect of the building was questioned. It’s a very unusual retail store, it’s like an experiment in environmental solutions” (Steed 2002).

Although the Toronto store has the following environmental upgrades, the building is not LEED certified. Approximately 50 percent of the materials used were recycled from other structures in eastern Canada, in addition to a variety of locally sourced materials (Tor-SC). The building was constructed with exposed construction materials and unfinished interior surfaces, “which incorporated recycled materials and products labeled under Environment Canada’s *Ecologo*



Figure 4.56 Projecting signs make MEC easy to locate for pedestrian traffic.



Figure 4.57 The Toronto MEC has a unique and easily distinguishable facade.



Figure 4.58 A large picture (below the photovoltaic panels) displaying MEC products and activities helps to identify the retailer.

program” (Matuk 1999).

Other interior features include rug tiles laid without glue to avoid off-gassing, which are currently being removed to expose the unfinished concrete; recycled lumber cut from old log booms from the Ottawa River; low-flush toilets; and wood flooring from timber selectively logged that are finished in naturally based waxes, such as beeswax, instead of urethane (Smith 1997). The concrete contained recycled materials, which reduces the amount of other waste materials to the landfill and reduces the use of cement. Insulation that is approximately one-quarter thicker than commonly used was installed.

Skylights were also constructed from reclaimed wood, and provide natural daylighting in the store. Even though the store is two levels to maximize floor area without creating a large footprint, the store is designed so that the natural light can penetrate to the main floor. Lighting is enhanced through energy-efficient light fixtures that are controlled by a computerized building management system. Photo-voltaic panels — an emergent set of technologies at the time — were also installed to supplement energy requirements.

The windows are designed to provide cooling and natural ventilation, and the rooftop HVAC system provides a 16 percent increase in efficiency and utilizes environmentally friendly refrigerants. A roof-top garden also provides a natural cooling system for the building. Due to these building enhancements, MEC expected to lower their energy costs by 37 percent, and receive long-term



Figure 4.59 The interior of the Toronto store with exposed structural components and natural building materials.



Figure 4.60 Large windows along the front facade provide natural lighting, as well as display space visible from inside and outside of the store.



Figure 4.61 The upper level of the store is open to permit natural light from skylights to penetrate to the ground floor.

benefits through the durability of the construction materials (Matuk 1999). The initial cost of the environmental upgrades was approximately 9.25%, adding an extra \$350,000 to the total cost of the building. The final construction cost of the new Toronto store was \$4.13 million (Smith 1997).

The addition of a green roof was considered both visionary and gutsy, as a fund had not been set-aside by MEC for the green roof, nor was there certainty for the garden's design and performance in Canada (Johnson 2003). Yet, MEC went ahead with the green roof halfway through the design and construction process. It was designed differently than 'traditional' green roofs, which have deeper soils and are typically cost and maintenance intensive. Although the garden was designed with only a shallow (5 inch) growing medium, the roof structure had to be adjusted in a later phase (Johnson 2003).

But the real fundamental challenge was that this type of garden had never been constructed in Canada before, other than an experimental garden. This required expertise in the selection of plants that were hardy, resistant to drought, low growing, shallow rooted, resistant to heavy winds, and fast growing but not invasive. As irrigation of the garden was not planned, the most important plant properties required were hardiness and resistance to drought. However, three years after construction, an irrigation system was installed after a number of dry summers in Toronto. The garden is now successful as the plants have filled in and the maintenance is low (Johnson 2003).



Figure 4.62 The roof-top garden.



Figure 4.63 Windows are mechanically opened and closed to control indoor temperature.



Figure 4.64 A cross-section of the low-maintenance roof-top garden.



Figure 4.65 MEC provides space for an experimental 'Zero' roof-top garden.

Toronto: Community

MEC's effect on the district, block and site go beyond the physical and economic benefits. The Toronto store initiates and provides support to local groups in a number of other ways, including funding through product donations, space within the store for displays and fundraising, promoting events, and providing staff for tours, presentations, outdoor events such as paddling festivals and other community events such as clean-ups.

Partnerships

The Toronto store has a large impact on the surrounding community, primarily through their relationship with local schools and organizations. The Toronto MEC has articulated three formal agreements with local organizations, including a paddling co-op, an access coalition and a cycling coalition.

Education

MEC provides educational opportunities regarding MEC products and a "leave no trace etiquette", MEC's business philosophy, and Toronto's green building (Tor-SC). Each year, approximately 3,000 people learn about green building techniques and green roofs on tours of the store.

Funding

In addition to environmental enhancements on site, the Toronto store also provides up to \$10,000 through a store-level granting program towards local environmental initiatives and organizations twice a year.



Figure 4.66 The Toronto MEC store proudly displays a number of awards and achievements.



Figure 4.67 MEC community involvements.



Figure 4.68 Display space is provided in the store to local organizations to promote their causes.

4.4 Ottawa

Address: 366 Richmond Road

Opening Date: June 14, 2000

Gross Retail Area: 29,310 SqFt

Building Footprint: 16,002 SqFt

4.4.1 Background: City and Site Selection

MEC chose the city of Ottawa for its fourth retail store location. Ottawa is not only Canada's capital city, but also has Canada's fourth largest metropolitan population. The first MEC to open in Ottawa was in 1992 after "numerous requests" from the outdoor community. It was located in the neighbourhood of New Edinburgh, within an old 10,000 square foot movie theatre at 5-B Beechwood Avenue that had been vacant since 1989 (Scanlan 1992). The store quickly outgrew both its sales floor and parking lot capacity, and a new larger store was needed. By 1996, the sales in the small store were said to be "phenomenal" by one retail analyst, approximately twice as much per square foot than average retailers (Lawton 1996).

On June 14 2000, the new MEC store opened in a reconditioned 28,000 square foot building — a grocery store that was meticulously dismantled and the building constructed in its place used many of the recycled parts — at 366 Richmond Road. Richmond Road is located in the neighbourhood of Westboro, which is now widely known as 'the place' to buy outdoor gear in Ottawa. "If you can't find it in Westboro, you probably can't find it in Ottawa" where "outdoorsy mecca MEC dominates this section of Richmond road" (Heidebrecht 2006). Richmond Road was an attractive location for outdoor retailers such as MEC due to accessibility and the proximity to the Ottawa River as well as a number of trail systems (Hill 1999a). Westboro is an older neighbourhood of Ottawa with history as an area of cottages, and existed as a village until it was annexed in 1949.

The relocation of the Ottawa store into Westboro was the most publicized in this study, with both support and opposition being voiced. In Ottawa, as in some other Canadian cities in which MEC opens a retail location, competitors state the unfair tax advantages of retail co-operatives. "It looks like a duck and quacks like a duck" (Lawton 1996). However, when the rumours of MEC moving to Westboro began to start in 1999, local retailers were primarily supportive regarding the potential move. One local retailer stated that it was great news for his business. When MEC in Toronto moved near another of his stores, his "business improved significantly" (Campbell 1999). The director of the Westboro Business Improvement Area (BIA), who stated, "It's a viable business that would be an asset to all of us", also welcomed MEC (Campbell 1999). Unlike the

controversial plan for a Loblaws to open a mega-grocery store in the same area, the popular press expected that the residents would be more accepting of MEC. The first official press release that the Co-op would be relocating in Westboro ran in early August 1999, and MEC was praised for its plans to meet the highest accredited environmental standards. An Ottawa city councilor stated he welcomed MEC to the neighbourhood, as “the Westboro Business District needed regeneration because it had been dying a slow death” (Hill 1999b).

However, the excitement surrounding MEC locating to the area and the subsequent increase in investment and development of the retail strip on Richmond Road, was not received positively in all aspects. There were concerns that MEC would cause an increase in traffic and decrease the amount of parking available to customers of other retailers, even though MEC planned to provide on-site parking. A local business owner stated in defence of the increases in traffic that “Sure, traffic may be a concern. But isn’t that the essence of success?” (Schmidt 2000). Shortly after opening, the Ottawa MEC was also criticized by disappointed customers when MEC decided to charge for parking. The “parking fees are part of Mountain Equipment Co-op’s philosophy of doing what it can to protect the environment... to encourage customers to get to the store by bike, bus or foot... and deter motorists from parking there if they do not plan to visit the store” stated the store manager (Prentice 2000). Although some residents have complained about the traffic increases in Westboro, “we all want to be part of that traffic and visit those stores” (Ward 2005).

Only one month after the announcement of MEC’s new location in Westboro, the title of a newspaper article exclaimed “Outdoor gear sector chooses Westboro as home: influx of stores expected to increase business, improve service” (Hill 1999a). Two smaller independent outdoor retailers immediately decided to open shop on the retail strip upon hearing that MEC would be moving there. This “explosion of activity in one small area is no mistake... Clustering creates synergies for everybody because it generates more customer traffic” states a local retail analyst (Hill 1999a). Yet the regeneration of Westboro did not halt there. By December of 1999, at least 13 of the major commercial properties in Westboro had been sold or were about to sell in “an unprecedented redevelopment of one of the city’s few remaining traditional downtown strips... without the help of government” (Gray 1999). The Westboro area had been in decline for the past decade, and in the summer of 1998 — only one year earlier — Richmond Road was lined with empty storefronts or rundown businesses.

The cause of the rapid redevelopment was linked in the media to a number of factors, including the general upturn in the economy, changing demographics in the area from seniors selling their residences to young families in the hot housing market and the opening of two

anchor businesses – MEC and Loblaws. Although, some were concerned for the implications of larger stores moving into the area such as drawing too much traffic and destroying the small, older businesses and the neighbourhood feel of Westboro. One small business owner was concerned that rent and taxes would increase so only the big firms or chain store would survive. “The cure could kill the patient... Development is going to destroy the neighbourhood” (Gray 1999). Unfortunately, this did occur to a few businesses. A small stained glass store and a local barbershop moved, as they could not afford the rent increases.

Yet others remained more optimistic that many of the smaller stores would experience increased business as they catch customers patronizing the anchor stores. However, the majority of the opposition was towards the proposed 98,000 square foot Loblaws development, even though the community had been voicing the need for a local grocery in Westboro (Leadman 2000). “It became abundantly clear that they just didn’t want Loblaws. The size of the building is a remarkable improvement in light of what is currently there”... otherwise “Mountain Equipment Co-op would have faced the same opposition” (Leadman 2000). But after the construction of the new MEC building was complete, the building’s distinctive look had created love-hate feelings amongst the residents who were not used to such large sized businesses in the neighbourhood. “The building — at 28,000 square feet — is almost double the size of the Hong Kong Market that was formerly on the site, and it is considerably taller than the neighbouring businesses. Its not quite a big box store, although it does have that appearance” (Lofaro 2000).

The changes that were occurring in the Westboro area of Ottawa in the late 1990s seemed to be more than just an issue of neighbourhood revitalization. “People are tired of the malls... In Westboro they can shop in a real neighbourhood” (Gray 1999). The renovations that were occurring in Westboro were part of a larger trend of many people preferring to living in an established neighbourhood with character and community. Some residents were happy to have retail giants such as MEC and Loblaws to fit into this trend of other unique businesses into the area.

With Mountain Equipment Co-op at one end of the street and the famed Budapest Delicatessen is defecting from the Byward Market to take up digs on the street’s other end, Wellington Street/Richmond Road is experiencing a renaissance. “It reminds me a lot of the Market area 20 years ago, before it became to gentrified or touristy” (Landon 2000).

In addition to the outdoor retail stores, other “funky” stores could be found locating there, including a fair trade coffee house, next door to MEC. They store relocated in Westboro due to the strong “neighbourhood appeal” (Landon 2000).

By 2003, Westboro was thought to be the next area of Ottawa to “set itself apart as a vibrant retail area”, with MEC acting as the main draw of the area and all other retailers “thriving” (Elliot 2003). The Westboro area was becoming most like the Glebe area of Ottawa: a neighbourhood that is described to consist of blocks of boutiques, myriad of services — bakeries, dry cleaners and the like — plus lots of people on the street, many of whom live in the area. “History, geography, and investment money all play a part” (Elliot 2003). However, others feel that the Westboro area was able to maintain the small community feel. Even after the controversial big box Loblaws store opened an editorial in The Ottawa Citizen stated:

Westboro Village is now a place in which you'd like to spend some time... [It] is a fine residential neighbourhood in Ottawa, now being rounded out by a commercial street that allows people to enjoy daily life without driving everywhere. It's a good lesson to keep in mind when new businesses are proposed for Ottawa's other neighbourhoods (2003).

4.4.2 Sustainability Criteria

The following sustainability criteria data for the Ottawa store were collected during site observations, interviews and document research. Individual interviews were conducted with the Ottawa Sustainability Coordinator (Ott-SC), the Executive Director of the Westboro Business Improvement Area (Ott-BIA) and a local urban planner for the Westboro area (Ott-P) with the City of Ottawa Planning Department.

Ottawa: District

The district boundaries used in the study were those of the Westboro Community Design Plan. It is a narrow strip of land adjacent to the Ottawa River on the north, and is bound by Island Park Drive to the east, Byron Avenue on the south and the Ottawa River Parkway to the west. Census data for the study was taken from the Westboro Urban Neighbourhood 2001 Census Data from the City of Ottawa (2001). The census boundaries are not the same as the area within the study, however, the data is considered to be a representative sample of the Westboro district. However, the estimated 2006 population within the study boundaries was 8910 (City of Ottawa 2007a).

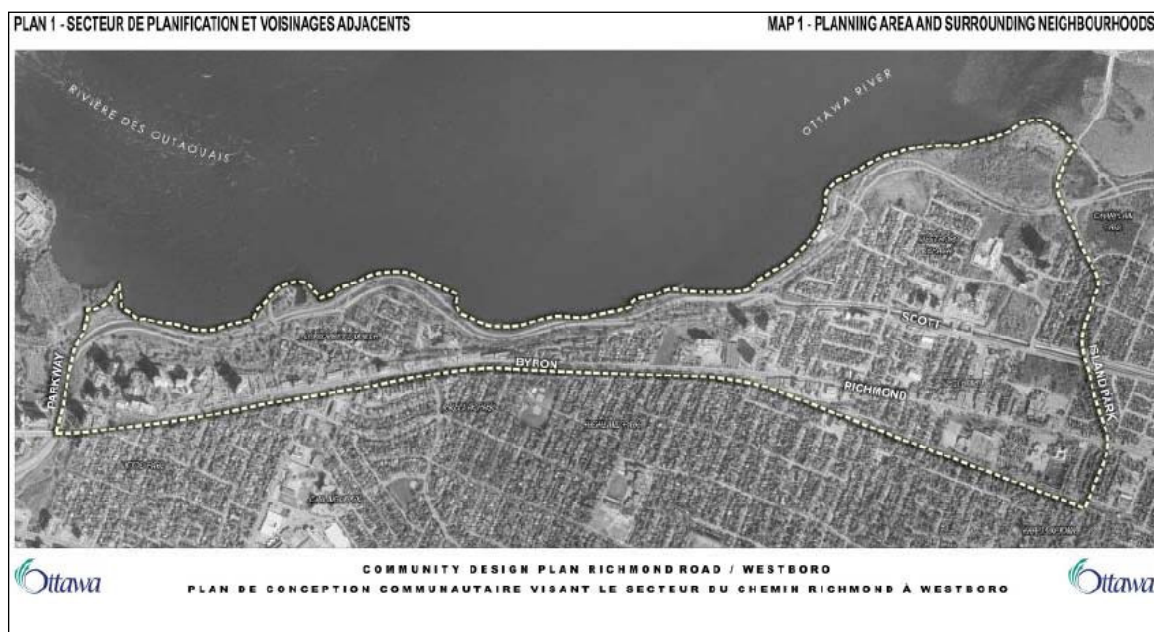


Figure 4.69 Westboro district map. Source: Richmond Road/Westboro Community Design Plan (City of Ottawa 2007).

Planning objectives in Ottawa and Westboro: Sustainability focused

The Ottawa MEC complements and enhances the planning objectives within a number of planning documents and objectives for the city as well as the Westboro area. These documents include Ottawa's Official Plan *Ottawa 20/20*, (City of Ottawa 2003), the Richmond Road/Westboro Community Design Plan (City of Ottawa 2007a), and the Urban Design Guidelines for Large Format Retail (City of Ottawa 2006).

Ottawa 20/20 was adopted as the new Official Plan in May 2003. The primary goal of the plan is sustainable development, "a strategy that requires the integration of economic growth, social equity and environmental management" (City of Ottawa 2003, 1-2). The principles within the Official Plan support this goal, with objectives such as: directing growth into existing urban areas; increasing compact mixed-use communities; doubling transit use; emphasizing good design; and preserving environmental integrity. As with many other large Canadian municipalities, Ottawa has been faced with challenges of growth management. The Official Plan states that Ottawa will meet these challenges of growth by supporting livable communities and healthy environments by directing growth to key areas with a mix of housing, shopping, recreation and employment where "destinations are closely grouped together" and "future development will be compact and efficient" (City of Ottawa 2003, 2-3). However, the plan recognizes that each neighbourhood is unique and development must respect these characteristics.

Many Ottawa communities provide most of the basics of a community, but there are wide variations. It is these variations that provide communities with their unique sense of place. However, Ottawa's communities are changing. Population growth, economic development, finite resources, environmental concern and financial limitations are triggering a re-evaluation about how we live and how we plan our communities (City of Ottawa 2003, 2-31).

Although the Official Plan does not have any one section that solely considers the impact of recent retail development trends, retail is considered in a number of areas throughout the plan. Retail is primarily regulated through general land use and neighbourhood design principles such as encouraging retail to locate in the Central area and within Main street or Mixed-use areas. The Official Plan protects the city's Employment and Enterprise Areas for business and economic activities such as office, warehousing, distribution and research uses. These areas, which typically have large parcels of land, are often pressured for uses other than what may find it suitable to be located there. However, large format retail is discouraged in the Official Plan from locating in these industrially designated areas.

The Official Plan (City of Ottawa 2003) states that building compatibility is a key design principle of the built environment. Thus, the city has also created a set of guidelines that were adopted in 2006, Urban Design Guidelines for Large Format Retail (City of Ottawa 2006), to complement the directions of the Official Plan. This document sets regulations that where large format retailers are permitted, these developments must consider not only the built form, but the operational context and development context. The guidelines consider the following design characteristics: Streetscape and Built Form; Pedestrians and Cyclists; Vehicles and Parking; Landscape and Environment; Signs; and Servicing and Utilities.

One of the primary implementation strategies of the Official Plan is the creation of Community Design Plans in collaboration with the affected communities. A CDP is "an approach to collaborative community building that emphasizes shared values and mutual obligation and builds trust and responsibility within the community" (City of Ottawa 2003). Community Design Plans are intended to replace any existing Secondary Plans, and contain background information, set objectives and targets, determine key policies and regulations, and delineate an implementation strategy. In 2005, a new Community Design Plan (CDP) for the Richmond Road/Westboro area was approved by Council and was completed in July 2007. The CDP recognizes that Westboro is "a diverse area, containing a mix of residential housing types and densities, retail, office, institutional and industrial uses as well as an open space network along the Ottawa River" (City of Ottawa 2007a). The CDP also recognizes that Westboro Village has been undergoing a "renaissance in recent years and has attracted a number of businesses specializing in outdoor

recreation, such as Mountain Equipment Co-op” (City of Ottawa 2007a).

Mix of land uses and zoning

The second strategy for implementing the goals and objectives of Official Plan is through a new zoning bylaw that is expected to be approved in early 2008. Ottawa is currently in the process of consolidating 34 zoning bylaws into one comprehensive bylaw, and thus the proposed zoning has not yet been adopted by Council. However, the following are examples of new policies that are proposed to be enforced in the new zoning bylaw, and include permitting a variety of uses and highest density in the Central and Mixed-Use areas, ensuring an efficient use of land through minimum parking areas to accommodate a basic level of demand, and reflecting neighbourhood character in zoning categories.

In particular, the Westboro Village area is proposed to be a Traditional Main street zone which permits a wide variety of retail, restaurant and community uses at the ground level and office and residential uses above (City of Ottawa 2007a). The height limit of development is 24 metres (or eight storeys) and there are no required setbacks, except when adjacent to residential uses. Industrial zoning permits existing low intensity and small industrial developments in certain areas.

Westboro is designated under the Official Plan (City of Ottawa 2003) as an area that will undergo an intensification of residential uses. This residential growth is directed towards mid- and high-rise buildings along Richmond Road and



Figure 4.70 The Westboro district has a mix of uses in a variety of built form and scale.



Figure 4.71 New apartment-condominium building development on Richmond Road.

part of Scott Street, in an effort to utilize existing infrastructure and slow urban sprawl. The new zoning bylaw will reflect this proposed residential intensification.

The current residential zoning includes a variety of types, from low density single detached and medium density attached housing, smaller apartment buildings, as well as a more recent increase in high density high-rise apartment buildings.

In 2001, the proportion of single detached dwellings in Westboro was 44.8%, while approximately 23.3% of dwellings are within apartment buildings fewer than five storeys. The remainder of the dwellings consist of a mix of semi-detached dwellings, row houses and apartment buildings higher than five storeys (City of Ottawa 2001). New development in the district, especially along Richmond Road, is typically mixed-use and higher density. Tenure of housing in Westboro is approximately equal between ownership (51.5%) and rental (48.5%).

Demographics

A high proportion (40.4%) of all households in Westboro are non-family, with the average household size at 2.2 persons (City of Ottawa 2001). The age distribution of Westboro residents is fairly even, with the largest proportion of residents between the ages of 30-39, as well as a significant number of residents over the age of 75. The high proportion of seniors may reflect on the ability for residents to 'age in place' due to the variation of housing types offered in the Westboro



Figure 4.72 Automobile-oriented commercial uses are designed to fit with the development concept in Westboro.



Figure 4.73 Small scale and low intensity business-industrial uses within the district.



Figure 4.74 Typical Westboro single detached dwellings.

district.

The ethnicity of Westboro residents is quite varied, with the primary ethnic backgrounds ranging from Canadian, English, Italian, French, Irish and Chinese. This reflects the history of the district as a village outside of Ottawa that was settled in the early 1900s. Westboro residents also have a low mobility rate, which may explain the residents' participation in the planning and development of their neighbourhood, and their extremely active Westboro Community Association (<http://lovewestboro.blogspot.com/>). The residents are also very well educated, with 42.6% over the age of 20 having attended university and 23% having attended college. However, the average income of Westboro residents is only slightly higher at \$40,081 than the average income of Ottawa residents at \$39,713.

There has been a recent residential growth spurt in the last few years, with many new families moving in as older residents are down sizing or moving out, in addition to a revival of residents who are characterized by a "healthier urban lifestyle" (Ott-BIA). The Executive Director of the Westboro BIA also agrees that there is a potential for more residents in the district. Westboro is primarily busiest on the weekends as it is a destination retail area that has a very large customer base. "But there are always lots of people about" (Ott-BIA).

Prior to the revitalization of the Westboro district there was much concern over gentrification. However, the Executive Director of the BIA



Figure 4.75 Older style rowhousing development.



Figure 4.76 Newer rowhousing development.



Figure 4.77 High density housing along Richmond Road, adjacent to a linear trail.

believes that Westboro did not gentrify, as there was already a large affluent population. The retail area is improving from primarily car lots, to an exciting retail area that “reflects the character of the residents” (Ott-BIA).

Character

The Westboro district has a very unique character, that is described as “hip”, “trendy” and “quaint with a main street feel” (Ott-BIA). The character of the built form reflects the history of the area of pre-1945 style of development, with small lots and narrow frontages along Richmond Road (Ott-P). But the character of the district is more than just the built form. It reflects that although the residents are mostly affluent, it is still a dynamic place with a mix of residents. Westboro would not be characterized as a “suburb” – “it has a good feeling to it”.

Placemaking

The Westboro district had the strongest responses and most apparent feeling of ‘place’ of all the districts in the study. This distinct feeling of place was attributed to a variety of factors. The residents are very “community-minded”, “passionate” and “remain strong and active to lobby with force to get the things they want and to protect what they love” (Ott-BIA). The people in Westboro “identify with their neighbourhood and are active in their community design. 200 to 300 residents have participated in open houses during the community design process” (Ott-P). Westboro is also a “diverse area that is easily accessible, and in an ideal location close to the downtown”



Figure 4.78 A public garden in Westboro.



Figure 4.79 “live shop work” - The advertising slogan for a new condo development along Richmond Road targets residents who desire a certain lifestyle.



Figure 4.80 A number of murals bring character to the area.

(Ott-SC). MEC's Sustainability Coordinator also comments that Westboro has everything that residents need, including paths to the river and daily needs. "Westboro makes people realize how easy it is to live a sustainable life" (Ott-SC).

Transportation and accessibility

The Westboro district has exemplary coordination between land uses and transportation. Main roads such as Richmond Road are encouraged to be used as a main thoroughfare rather than residential roads. Traffic calming measures are also used to reduce through traffic. The district is designed on a grid pattern, but the long axis of some streets are perpendicular to the primary roads to provide variation in block length. The road design also accommodates a few larger parcels and natural landscape features.

Pedestrian and cyclist movement is facilitated by a linear trail network, as well as certain roads are dead-ends for vehicular traffic. The district has three multi-use trails and within close access of MEC. These local trails also provide access to a larger trail network along the Ottawa River Parkway and across to Gatineau Park.

Many of the cyclist paths in Ottawa outside of the district are disconnected, however, there are a number of unmarked suggested routes. Westboro has only a couple of signs that mark the cyclist routes, "but it is known as an area that residents live because they can walk and cycle within the neighbourhood, and have good access to other areas of the city" (Ott-SC).

Westboro is also supported by an effective



Figure 4.81 Westboro thoroughfares along commercial streets.



Figure 4.82 Residential traffic calming measures also encourage local residents to walk or cycle.



Figure 4.83 Local linear trails in Westboro for commuting and recreation.

and efficient public transit system. Richmond Road is a primary bus route across Ottawa, but the designated major transit route exists adjacent to Scott Street. This transit path is for the sole purpose of an effective transit system, where the bus is below grade and no other vehicular traffic is permitted. MEC's location is very accessible to both the bus system and the O-Train.

Despite the provision of alternative modes of travel, approximately 63 percent of Westboro residents drive a private vehicle to work, 20 percent use Ottawa's public transit system, and only 11 percent walk or cycle to work. The alternative modes of travel are utilized less than some of the other districts in the study and may pose issues. Although Westboro can accommodate more growth, the recent residential growth has caused increases in vehicular traffic and more infrastructure is needed. The City is looking at infrastructure improvements in alternative ways than simply increasing road width and capacities (Ott-P).

Business Improvement Area

The Westboro Village Business Improvement Area is currently located along Richmond Road between Tweedsmuir Avenue and Golden Avenue. The mandate of the BIA is to maintain, improve and beautify public lands and buildings, beyond that which is provided by the municipality, and promote the area as a business and shopping area. The BIA was successful at coordinating a streetscaping effort in the last few years that was implemented through a Local Improvement levy on



Figure 4.84 The Ottawa River Parkway.



Figure 4.85 Westboro Village streetscape improvements.



Figure 4.86 The BIA promotes the Westboro Village as a unique shopping area.

the BIA businesses.

The web site for the Westboro BIA promotes itself as “the exclusive home to some of the hippest shops in Canada, Westboro Village offers a quaint, yet urban shopping experience. Street parking in Westboro Village is always free, so you can relax and take your time visiting its fine boutiques” (Westboro Village BIA 2007). The BIA also promotes itself as a place for healthy lifestyles, a place for socializing, or to just “sit in one of its coffee shops and watch the world go by” (Westboro Village BIA 2007).

The Westboro BIA is an example of a very successful business association. The BIA recently applied to expand its current boundaries approximately seven blocks to the east towards Island Park Drive. The BIA states that by “extending its boundaries it would enhance the Westboro Village’s already powerful brand as Ottawa’s number one destination shopping area” (Zakaluzny 2007).



Figure 4.87 Free parking along the block reduces the need for on-site parking lots.

Ottawa: Block

The block area of study was along Richmond Road from Athalene Avenue to the east and Golden/Dominion Avenue to the west. The block area of the Ottawa store has a very high evaluation for every sustainability criteria in the study. This block is the best example of a successful and sustainable commercial area of any of the four areas studied.

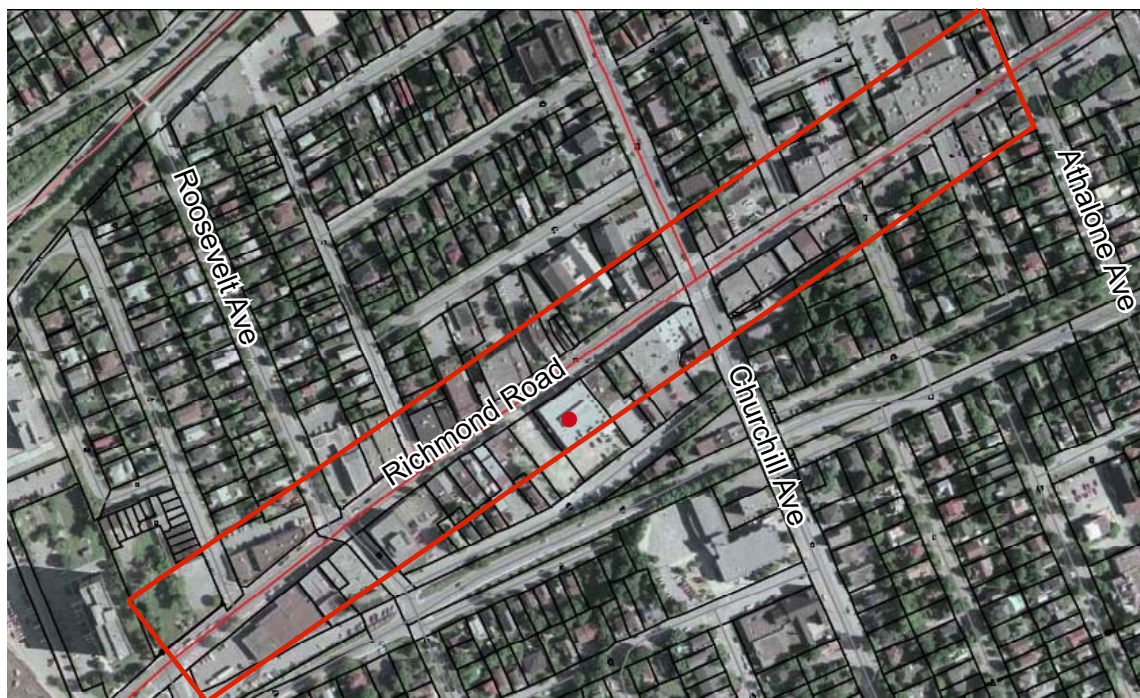


Figure 4.88 Block study area of Ottawa. Source: City of Ottawa, emap. ● MEC

Off-site parking

Parking opportunities along Richmond Road are maximized by minimizing on-site parking and maximizing on-street parallel parking. These parking stalls are free at all times of the day and are highly utilized. Increased parking is also achieved through angled parking on perpendicular roads adjacent to the businesses. There are very few surface parking lots that front to the roadway. Parking lots located in the rear are proposed to become policy within the new zoning bylaw.

The new Loblaws (Superstore) big-box development is an example of how parking can be located in the rear to accommodate sufficient on-site parking as well as an interesting built form. The Loblaws is designed with no front setback from a wide sidewalk, and there are multiple entrances into the store. The accommodation of parking does not detract from the pedestrian environment along the length of the block.

Pedestrian environment

The recent streetscaping initiatives of the Westboro Village enhance the pedestrian environment. This section of Richmond Road has a distinct character and is unique from the remainder. The streetscape is not only aesthetically pleasing with the wide brick-laid sidewalks, but ensures for convenient and comfortable pedestrian movement. There are no interruptions along the sidewalk, except for a few businesses such as the cafes and restaurants that have patios. Richmond Road along this section is a busy four-lane street, but the provision of parking along the curb reduces the impact of heavy traffic for pedestrians.

Pedestrian movement is also safe and efficient due to the marked crosswalks at each intersection and typical short block lengths. A few of the streets along Richmond Road have been closed to vehicular traffic to further increase pedestrian safety. The buildings have no front setback and are divided into smaller individual storefronts which also make the blocks feel shorter and more interesting for pedestrians. The recent streetscaping improvements increased the amount of lighting with more pedestrian-scale light standards for safe travel at night.

The one component of the streetscape that is lacking and in some cases missing, is boulevard trees and landscaping along sections of Richmond Road.

Mix of independent and national retailers

The study area encompassed the primary retail area of Westboro Village, which is concentrated



Figure 4.89 West entrance to the Westboro Loblaw's along Richmond Road. On-site parking is provided at the rear of the lot.



Figure 4.90 A redesigned big-box store can fit into a pedestrian-oriented retail environment.

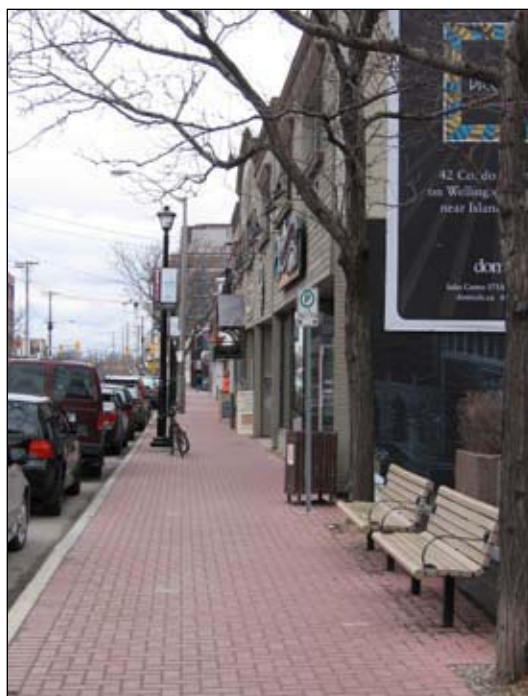


Figure 4.91 The improved streetscape is characteristic of a traditional Main Street.

between an equivalent of three city blocks. This portion of Richmond Road has a very defined niche market that draws customers from a wide geographic area. Of the total of 49 retailers, 13 are outdoor equipment or sports retailers. There are also two other major outdoor equipment retailers within a few blocks of the block study area. In addition to the large number of outdoor equipment and clothing retailers, the block has the equivalent number of home decor retail stores (Table 4.5).

“Prior to MEC, Richmond Road had a combination of some good retail stores, many vacancies, and more car lots and car associated uses”. Westboro is now known as the “outdoor mecca” of Ottawa, as well as a place for healthy lifestyles (Ott-BIA). After MEC moved to its current location, it was shortly thereafter followed by other sporting goods and clothing retailers, as well as other types of healthy lifestyle amenities such as yoga studios, various types of health providers, and healthy home and business retailers. “They are all very successful - they do not sell the same products but all operate providing merchandise within the same realm of consumer” (Ott-BIA).

The mix of outdoor sports retailers is a good combination of larger national chains in addition to unique and independent retailers. Westboro is thus an example of a successful retail area that has an anchor store such as MEC that draws customers from a wide geographic base, yet other independent retailers provide healthy competition for comparison shopping and complimentary products or services.



Figure 4.92 A national sports clothing retailer provides complimentary products to the outdoor sports equipment market.



Figure 4.93 A variety of outdoor equipment retailers and home decor retailers provides easy comparison shopping.



Figure 4.94 Revitalization of a commercial strip has both positive and negative outcomes.

Table 4.5 Business mix on Richmond Road, located between Athalone and Dominion

Athalone to Churchill	South	North
	Design First Interiors Kitchenalia Tiroli florist Bank of Montreal Vacuum Cleaner Centre G-Cars used car sales Harnn and Thann Salon Forbie active wear Capital Beauty Supply Divine Hair and Tanning Valberg Imaging photo studio Multi-image Home Designs The Works burger bistro Douvris Marital Arts Newport pizza restaurant	Paramed Community Health Services The Village Quire cards and gifts Richmond Beauty Salon Rhubarb home decor Family Dentistry The Country Clover home decor Louise's Belgian Chocolates & Pastries Arevco Lighting Ginsberg Gingras financial assistance The Village Café California Closets home organization Widdicombs of Westboro antiques Westboro Baptist Church Travel Finders travel Westboro Optometric clinic Trio restaurant and lounge Fratelli restaurant Mrs. Tiggy Winkles toys, etc Avenues Garage Shorline surf and wakeboard shop Westboro Sports Centre
Churchill to Roosevelt		
	Lululemon The North Face Puzzles Bar and Grill Westboro shoe rebuilders Truffle Treasures Chocolaterie Body Up fitness and wear Brittons magazines and news Bark and Fitz pet store Westboro Bakeries Bread of Heaven Architectural Antiques home décor Studio II Framing Cycle Logik Runway clothing Bridgehead Coffee shop MEC Extreme Pita Auto Racks Brio clothing Under construction Crafts and Treasures gift shop Fenrico and Mena tailors Scotia Bank Senior Tours Vacant parking lot and office building	Canada Trust Bank Barb's Touch of Elegance home decor Farrow and Ball paint and paper Churchill Seniors Recreation Centre Anglican Church Milagro Grill East Wind table wear Frontline Financial Credit Union Expedition Shoppe Ten Thousand Villages West End Kids Domicile new home sales Travel cuts Ottawa Chinese Bible Church Baker Street Café Royal Canadian Legion Vacant Hush resale clothing Changes hair studio Tickled Pink childrens clothing Heather's design consignment Tubman Funeral Home
Roosevelt to Golden/Dominion		
	Hydroculture Emporium Polanto Leather Furniture store Farah Studio (clothing design) Fab gear 64 Tall Trees cycle Paddle Shack Retrotown Music Westboro Station Condo sales office Suede Contemporary Living home décor	Starbucks Westboro Village Medical Centre Pharmasave New mix-used building space for lease The Best You Gerry Weber clothing

Unfortunately, the success of Westboro did cause some changes to the commercial area whereby some smaller stores such as a local barber could not afford the increases in rent and was forced to find a new location. However, change in commercial areas is what keeps things new and exciting for repeat customers. Competition also ensures that businesses are offering products and services at an appropriate price. The Westboro BIA is very active in business recruitment and gets many requests for opportunities to locate within the Village.

Variation in lot sizes

The mix of large national retailers and smaller independent retailers is possible within the block study area due to the variation in lot sizes. On the north and the south sides of Richmond Road, the lots vary greatly both in length and depth. This variation in lot sizes permits larger retailers such as MEC to have on-site parking at the side and rear of the lot, as well as smaller retailers on narrow lots with no on-site parking. To keep the traditional main street character, the storefronts of the buildings are narrow and varied.

The smaller lots contain new and old buildings that are mostly undergoing renovations and upgrading. The buildings on the block are typically one and two-storeys with retail at ground level and office uses above. A few of the newer mixed use buildings are up to eight storeys with office and residential uses above.

Mix of retail, service and office uses

Although the block has a dominant retail



Figure 4.95 One and two-storey buildings on small lots with narrow storefronts.



Figure 4.96 An eight-storey mixed use building can be designed to appear as only three-storeys to a pedestrian.



Figure 4.97 The block is primarily a mix of retail, personal service and eating establishments.

component, there is also a small variety of other uses such as personal services, professional services and a few office uses. Most uses on the block are daytime commercial retail and service providers. There are a few evening uses, including restaurants, lounges and cafes. A church also draws visitors to the block in addition to adding to the traditional main street character.



Figure 4.98 A church brings offers different uses as well as character to the block.

Table 4.6 Summary of commercial uses

Retailers: 49
(Outdoor and sports retailers: 13)
Banks: 3
Other financial: 0
Restaurants: 7
Cafes: 4
Personal services: 14
Professional services: 7
Convenience-grocery store: 0
Educational or other organizations: 6
Government: 0
Automobile Oriented: 3
Accommodations: 0
Entertainment: 0
Vacant storefronts/Temporary Use: 5



Figure 4.99 Many buildings on the block have undergone extensive renovation as part of the revitalization.



Figure 4.100 National retailers, restaurants and cafes are a draw to the area.

Character and revitalization

The character of the block is evolving towards a more traditional main street. Although, some of the newer buildings such as MEC are more modern and distinctive in design. The Executive Director of the Westboro BIA states that Westboro has evolved into a place where “healthy lifestyle people” come, and it “started from MEC” because “like-minded people followed the lead” (Ott-BIA). Prior to the revitalization, the block was an area dominated with 10 to 15 car lots and was known as the “car lot mecca” of Ottawa (Ott-BIA). There were “many empty shops” and the BIA was “hard pressed to fill merchant locations” (Ott-BIA).

After the revitalization began, most of the car lots moved out. Not only did the streetscape change, but also the mentality of the business owners in the Village. They began to keep the area clean and take better care of their shops and streets (Ott-BIA). Then there was an influx of businesses that wanted to locate within the village.

Space is still be built for new businesses, and the BIA is hoping to expand several blocks to the east. There is an “urban” and “trendy” feel to the area now which has “snowballed since MEC” - the area is home to places such as Starbucks, Bridgeheads and LuLulemons (Ott-BIA). “There are more possibilities and more opportunities” (Ott-BIA). At the time of the study, there were only five vacancies or temporary uses on the block: two of which were storefronts used for condo sales offices, and one which was just finished being built.



Figure 4.101 An office building and associated parking garage sit vacant.



Figure 4.102 A vacant site awaiting construction of a mixed-use building.

Ottawa: Site

The site evaluation of the Ottawa store was again one of the best of all the locations (Figure 4.4.34). The new Toronto store that opened in 1998 was MEC's first attempt at constructing a green building, but it was only the beginning of the learning process. The new Ottawa store, which opened in 2000, was expected to be "a superior product" (Boddy 1999).

MEC had gained previous experience with the Vancouver store in renovating existing buildings in an attempt to meet their needs, which resulted in a few drawbacks. The location chosen for the Toronto store allowed MEC to attempt to build a green store from the ground up. However, the Ottawa store was the first location whereby many of the materials, but not the structure itself was used in the construction of their greenest building to date. The Ottawa store became the first retail store in Canada and the first commercial building of similar structures in Ottawa to conform to the C-2000 energy efficiency standards.



Figure 4.103 Site study area of Ottawa. Source: City of Ottawa, emap.

Innovative design process

MEC consulted with a team of outside experts in the design of the building, which consisted of MEC staff, an architectural firm and C-2000 program staff. Whereas the environmental enhancements to the Toronto store were approached through an item-by-item basis, the



Figure 4.104 MEC's Ottawa store.

success of construction of the Ottawa store has been attributed to the use of this “Integrated Design Process” (Brady et al 2004). The process brought together all expertise into the design and construction of the building, including the project architects, engineers, building contractors and HVAC system experts, and resulted in many innovative solutions.

Materials reuse and recycling

In addition to the challenge of achieving energy efficiency, MEC also had goals to produce net zero landfill waste in the demolition and construction of the new building, and any new construction materials needed to be sourced within 500 kilometers from the site to reduce vehicle emissions from material transportation as well as support locally made goods. The costs of the environmental upgrades were estimated to be about 10 percent of the total cost. However, MEC estimated that these expenses could be recovered in the first 5 to 7 years through savings in energy use (Boddy 1999).

The process began with the careful dismantling of the old grocery store, and reclaiming much of the material to be used in the new store. MEC estimated that 70 percent of the materials could be reused, and the remainder would either be recycled or sold (Boddy 1999).

For example, the terrazzo flooring and some of the concrete was salvaged for reuse. Steel from the existing structure was reclaimed and used in addition to steel from crushed cars to manufacture steel trusses. Other recycled materials include



Figure 4.105 Many materials used in the construction of the Ottawa store were reused or recycled.



Figure 4.106 The interior of the building was constructed so that it can be easily adapted to new uses and configurations in the future.

wood flooring recovered from a barn built in 1876 (Smiderle 2000), and Douglas Fir posts and beams that were salvaged from log booms in the St. Lawrence River (Catalli and Williams 2001). Bricks from the exterior wall were ground up and combined with crushed pink granite from the Canadian Shield for the parking lot, to reduce water run-off and reflect excess heat. However, the gravel parking lot was paved shortly thereafter as it was hard to maintain and was often too muddy.

Designing for disassembly

“Recognizing the need for flexibility in a rapidly changing market” the structure was constructed using bolts and screws, rather than nails, so that the building could be more easily taken apart in the future and allow for reuse of the materials (Gillespie 2001). The process of “designing for disassembly” addresses both issues of environmental priorities as well as future building adaptability (Catalli and Williams 2001).

Energy efficiencies

The primary savings were identified in the use of energy for electricity, and heating and cooling. For heating improvements, a high efficiency gas furnace was installed and the walls sealed by a specialized vapour barrier. Natural lighting from skylights provides a significant source of light in the building. The skylights were also equipped with shades to draw in the summer and keep the building cool in addition to the landscaping with vegetation such as vines to produce shade around the windows.



Figure 4.107 Skylights on the roof of the second floor allow natural lighting to the ground level.



Figure 4.108 Window shades and vines reduce cooling needs in the summer heat.



Figure 4.109 Straw bale wall display in the store.

Other factors that were considered included the orientation of the building, and the amount and location of windows for providing natural lighting into the building. Efficient light fixtures and a management system supplement natural lighting in the building.

One of the most unique features was the inclusion of a straw bale wall. “The wall is made of 100 stacked bales, each measuring 14 x 18 x 36 inches, and covered with half an inch of stucco on either side” (Boddy 2000). Another wall uses I-joists on their sides as studs, and packed with shredded paper for cellulose insulation. Both walls increase the insulation value as well as being environmentally friendly.

Building character and facade

The exterior façade of the building is composed of lightweight corrugated metal, reclaimed Douglas Fir in the canopy and rock salvaged from the site at one end of the building. While some Westboro residents did not like the metallic façade, others acknowledged that the façade reflects MEC’s values towards preserving the environment. The store architects stated that the use of corrugated metal was deliberate and “fits in well with the streetscape” and “is more aesthetically pleasing than traditional concrete walls and helps to break down the building’s scale (Lofaro 2000).

Although some criticized the store for being shaped like a big box store and too few windows on both floors visible to the street, other architects felt that the store is visually interesting and has



Figure 4.110 Facade of the Ottawa MEC store facing Richmond Road.



Figure 4.111 Visible signage on each building elevation.



Figure 4.112 A combination of large windows and interesting building materials on the building facade.

“incredible texture” (Klotz 2000). But it is hard to debate that tastes will continue to change — as will the nature of retailing — and “projects like the Ottawa MEC store serve as ongoing examples of how an environmentally motivated client and project team can achieve designing for disassembly and other sustainable objectives without compromising building aesthetics, practicality or performance” (Catalli and Williams 2001).

Unlike many of the other MEC stores, the Ottawa store does not have large pictures of outdoor pursuits for signage. Instead, “Mountain Equipment Co-op is on each face of the building. Signage is also placed at a visible height for pedestrians. Although there are fewer windows for viewing merchandise in the store or at window displays, the use of interesting building and landscaping materials increases the aesthetics.

Landscaping

Opportunities were maximized to landscape the site with native and low water vegetation. The on-site landscaping is a combination of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ landscaping techniques, including rock beds and various types of coniferous and deciduous trees and shrubs.

Water conservation measures were taken through a rain-water collection system for landscaping requirements. Indigenous plants such as maples, sumac, honey suckle and wild rose were chosen for landscaping due to their hardiness and lower water requirements. A solar panel on top of the large rain barrel provides



Figure 4.113 The irrigation system is integrated into the building design and landscaping.



Figure 4.114 Unusual social interaction space provided at the entrance of the store.



Figure 4.115 A playhouse for children's entertainment during shopping visits.

power for the electric pump in the watering system (Boddy 2000).

Social interaction space

The entrance of the Ottawa store provides space for social interaction on the site. The largest draw was the rocks used for the hard landscaping along the sidewalk. Many groups of people were observed sitting and chatting, as well as watching their children playing. Within the children's section of the store, a playhouse is also provided for entertainment while shopping.

Although no space was provided on-site for other complimentary businesses, a coffee shop was very quick to open a location next to the new MEC. This very successful co-location strategy is also seen at other MEC locations.

On-site parking and store accessibility

The Ottawa MEC provides on-site parking spaces for customers at ground level. However, the parking is located at the side and rear of the building so as to not detract from the pedestrian environment. The parking lot has two entrances, one at the front and one at the rear, to provide easy vehicular flow and accessibility options. Sidewalks are provided around the exterior of the building for safe access from the parking area to the store entrance. The parking area is also well lit for increased safety.

There are also many covered parking spaces provided for cyclists. Although the racks are not visible from the interior of the store, they are located at the front near the store entrance in clear view and monitored by video surveillance.



Figure 4.116 The on-site parking is located at the side and rear of the building.



Figure 4.117 Sidewalks and lighting make the parking lot safe for accessing the store entrance.



Figure 4.118 Covered bicycle parking along the front of the building is monitored by passing pedestrians and video surveillance.

Ottawa: Community

Education

The role of the Sustainability Coordinator in the Ottawa store is to educate both staff and members about sustainability issues in a variety of areas. MEC provides both guided and self-guided tours of the green building improvements. The Sustainability Coordinator also attends local enviro-fairs, car-free day at Ottawa's university and various film festivals to promote sustainability initiatives. The Ottawa store also supports the commuter challenge with a local Environmental Non-Government Organization.

The store also provides space within the store for local groups to set up displays, hold meetings, as well as on-line advertising space. The store manager provides a free shared office space with the Executive Director of the Ottawa Riverkeepers who plays a large role in educating the community about the health of the Ottawa River.

Funding

The Ottawa store supports local groups with various funding initiatives. This includes funding and product donations towards groups that have a conservation focus, promote wilderness activities, and not-for-profit groups. MEC also provides paid staff to attend local community events such as park clean-up days. Rental gear and climbing evenings provide local community groups the opportunity to experience the outdoors and challenge themselves in a safe environment.



Figure 4.119 Community advertising boards in the store.

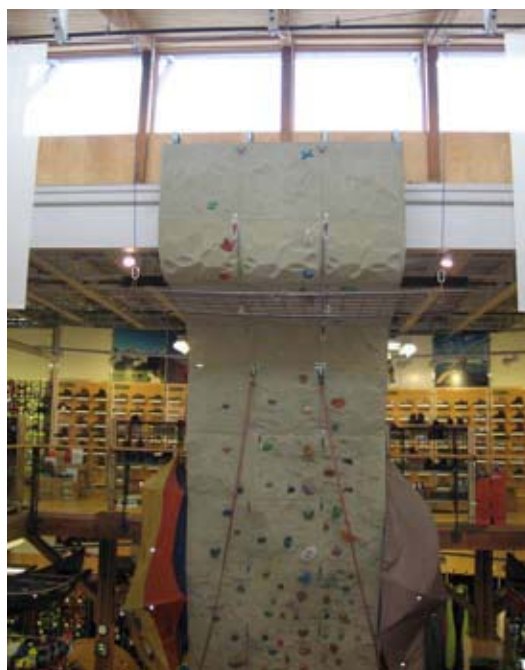


Figure 4.120 The climbing wall is opened in the evenings with the local Community Centre.

Partnerships

The Ottawa store has formalized a number of partnerships with cycling, climbing, skiing and conservation groups. The formalization of these partnerships ensure that support is continued and the role of each organization is defined.

4.5 Winnipeg

Address: 303 Portage Avenue

Opening Date: May 30, 2002

Gross Retail Area: 18,488 Sqft

Building Footprint: 10,200 SqFt

4.5.1 Background: City and Site Selection

The Winnipeg store was MEC's seventh location to open, shortly after the Edmonton (1998) and Halifax (2001) stores. Winnipeg was chosen as an ideal location for a MEC store because it was Canada's ninth largest municipality by population, and contained a large portion of MEC members who shopped by catalogue and the Internet. The two-storey retail store opened within Winnipeg's downtown core on May 30, 2002 at the intersection of Portage Avenue and Donald Street, at 303 Portage Avenue.

The site previously contained three existing city-owned buildings, which were carefully demolished and many of the materials were salvaged for use in the new structure. The building footprint is 10,200 square feet and the structure contains approximately 95 percent recycled materials, most of which were obtained from the site. The building had only a few added capital costs, and was constructed for approximately \$85 per square foot (Thompson 2002). The building uses over 50 percent less energy than the baseline specified in the federal government's model energy code for similar structures, and produces 30 tonnes less of greenhouse gases per year than a conventional building (McNeill 2005). In addition to the roof top garden, the facility was equipped with composting toilets and radiant floor heating.

The decision by MEC to open a retail store in Winnipeg was highly publicized, and the City played a role in attracting the store to be located within the downtown core. CentreVenture — an economic development organization in Winnipeg — was given a collection of failed properties in the downtown that the City had acquired when the owners of the properties walked away (Winnipeg Free Press 2006). MEC was seen as one of the main strategies in revitalizing Portage Avenue retail. "Mountain Equipment Co-op's well-being is considered crucial to the revitalization of a four-block stretch of Portage Avenue between Fort and Hargrave streets, where many buildings stubbornly resist redevelopment. Some buildings on the avenue have remained vacant for so long, the cost of renovations exceeds what owners would receive in rent" (Kives 2006).

However, the arrival of MEC was controversial within the business community. Some local outdoor equipment retailers in Winnipeg said the arrival of MEC would force them to be on their toes, but would be good for most of them in the long run. A co-owner of a nearby supply store

said in addition to growing the outdoor pursuits market, MEC's presence would also attract people downtown. "We've always had competition. That's healthy. The more people that come downtown, the better off we'll all be. I hope we get another thousand businesses like them down here," adding that the supply store and MEC shared many customers (Kirbyson 2002). Another co-owner of a local bicycle shop expected the store, which sells some of the same items as MEC such as technical outerwear and bike accessories, to pick up a bit of business in the future. "(MEC's arrival) will make people more aware of outdoor activities. Compared to the big box stores that we've been inundated with for the past few years, this type of business is a lot easier for us to deal with because we deal in different specialty items." (Kirbyson 2002).

The CEO of MEC said it's been the company's experience that wherever it opens a store across Canada, a small community of related retailers is quick to spring up in the immediate vicinity. "I don't doubt that it will happen in Winnipeg as well. They just pop up because they know we're a draw. We can create a little hub of an area that caters to the outdoor market and people can compare, then they have a choice," he said in an interview (Kirbyson 2002).

Hirst (2002) describes that the attempts by the City to revitalize Portage Avenue oscillated between "two steps forward and one step back, and one step forward and two steps back". In 1998, \$6 million worth of lighting, sidewalk expansion and parking bays were completed. The streetscaping was believed to be particularly important as it "initiated a downtown revitalization movement and got the private sector involved in partnerships with the city and the province" (Hirst 2002). It was through those efforts that helped the creation of CentreVenture, and in turn, a "much broader effort to refurbish our city centre".

However, planning rules and downtown tax rates were perceived as being in the way of further redevelopment. Downtown redevelopment in Winnipeg had long been stymied by debates over which come first: the people or the development. The round of attempts to bring life back to downtown began with Portage Avenue and resulted in some development, including the A&B Sound which moved into a space that had previously been one of the less attractive bars in town, and "the magnificent Mountain Equipment Co-op renovation gave another retail reason to go downtown" (Hirst 2002).

In early 2002, the downtown of Winnipeg was stated to be undergoing one of the biggest building and construction booms since the city's great growth spurt at the turn of the last century. "The last big building boom downtown was back when we built Portage Place mall and The Forks in the 1980s," said a councilor and chairman of the city's property and development committee. "But that was nothing like what's going on now. I'd say we're in the middle of one of the biggest

boom in the last 100 years” (O’Brien 2001). But, “those projects were all financed by taxpayers and they don’t quite match the scale of development now going on”, said the previous executive director of the Downtown Business Improvement Zone, who recalls the diversity of public and private investment going on more closely resembles the development that unfolded downtown 100 years ago. “At that time, it wasn’t just the private sector or the public sector doing all the spending, but a combination of both working to promote the city,” he said (O’Brien 2001).

Among those developments was MEC, in which CentreVenture actively encouraged to locate within one of their properties in the downtown at Portage and Donald, although it had been criticized as one of the deadest corners in downtown Winnipeg. MEC was also considering another location in a more suburban commercial area the south part of the city, but chose rather to locate as per the typical strategy – in a downtown or established inner suburban neighbourhood. The downtown location was chosen despite the inability to provide any on-site parking.

The immediate effects of MEC were very positive, according to the director of CentreVenture, who said their “office has already fielded inquiries from several businesses wanting to set up shop in downtown Winnipeg - all because of the new MEC store. They include a specialty cafe, a travel agency and another outdoor equipment store, and CentreVenture is now trying to match these businesses up with available retail space in the vicinity” (Owen 2001). In addition, the third floor of the MEC building, which contained 4,500 square feet of vacant office space, was rented to “like-minded organizations” (Rollason 2004). The organizations were various provincial environmental groups, including the Manitoba Eco-Network, Resource Conservation Manitoba, Western Canada Wilderness Committee, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Manitoba, Boreal Forest Network, and Climate Change Connection.

However, in November of 2002, only six months after the store opening, the CEO of MEC stated that the Winnipeg store was not receiving the business that had been expected. “Most of MEC’s business is during the week and it does not get the kind of weekend traffic seen at locations in cities such as Calgary and Toronto. Until more empty storefronts are filled along Portage Avenue and the residential population increases, the downtown will not have the same vibrancy enjoyed elsewhere” (Hendry 2002a). He further stated that MEC “has created foot traffic, but the downtown still has a long way to go in its revitalization”. This was reinforced by a study that was conducted in 2002, which stated that “there are between 5,000 and 6,000 people on Portage Avenue in an eight-hour time period, which is considerably less than it needs to support more stores” (Hendry 2002b).

4.5.2 Sustainability Criteria

The following sustainability criteria data for the Winnipeg store were gathered during site observations, interviews and document research. The Winnipeg store was the first location studied in this practicum and provided the author the opportunity to learn how to perform the required research proficiently. However, during data collection in Winnipeg, the importance of photographs at the district level was underestimated. Therefore, there is a lack of district photographs to complement the text.

Individual key interviews were conducted with the Sustainability Coordinator (Win-SC) who has worked the position for over four years; a downtown Senior Planner with the City of Winnipeg (Win-P) who has only been in the position for a few months; and the Executive Director of the Downtown Winnipeg Business Improvement Zone (Win-BIZ) who has been in the position for approximately three years.

Winnipeg: District

The district boundaries considered in the study were those of the Downtown, as defined in the zoning bylaw and Winnipeg's CentrePlan (1999). It extends north to the main CNR rail line, to the Assiniboine River on the south, the Red River on the east. The total area of land is approximately 315 hectares with a population of 28,840 persons (City of Winnipeg 2001a). The downtown includes a number of separate areas, including the North Main Business District, the Exchange District, the Forks, the Central Business District, and a few residential neighbourhoods. MEC is located within the Central Business District, near the physical centre of the downtown. The statistical data used to represent the study area was provided by the City of Winnipeg's Downtown East Neighbourhood Profile Census Data for 2001.

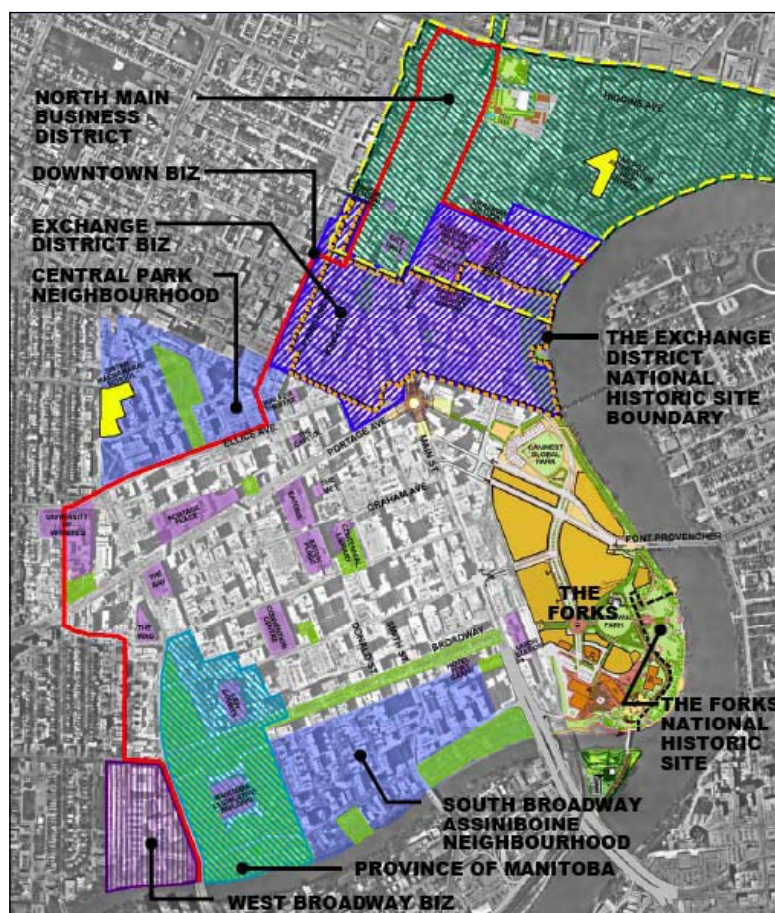


Figure 4.121 The downtown district boundary and separate character areas as defined by Winnipeg's CentrePlan. Source: City of Winnipeg 1999.

Planning objectives in Winnipeg and the downtown

The Winnipeg retail store greatly enhances the directions and policies outlined in Winnipeg's long-term planning policy document, Plan Winnipeg 2020 (City of Winnipeg 2001b). Plan Winnipeg 2020 is an updated plan from a previous plan adopted in 1993, and includes "statements of plans, policies and proposed initiatives" that are in accordance to "section 583 of the City of Winnipeg Act" (City of Winnipeg 2001b, 3). The document recognizes the challenges that Winnipeg has faced in the past and will continue to address in the future. The challenges in Winnipeg are very unique compared to the other cities in this study, such as minimal population growth and even population decline, a higher rate of unemployment, and a declining inner city. However, the plan contains a number of principles that are proposed to assist Council in the decision making process to capitalize on opportunities (City of Winnipeg 2001b, 10). These principles include sustainability, social consciousness, thoughtful development, partnership and collaboration, healthy living and local empowerment. However, Plan Winnipeg 2020 is a unique

planning document from the other official plans in the study – it is a highly colored and visually aesthetic document that is lacking in scope and mechanisms for implementation of the principles.

The introduction of the plan admits its weakness in stating that “the passing of the Plan Winnipeg by-law does not require Council or any person or organization, association or department agency of the Crown to undertake a proposal contained in the by-law, but no public work, undertaking or development shall be inconsistent with a Plan Winnipeg by-law” (City of Winnipeg 2001b, 3). The remainder of the document is a series of numbered policy statements that begin with words such as ‘consider’, ‘encourage’, ‘support’ and ‘maintain’. The first section of the plan puts “Downtown First” through statements such as promote downtown development, encourage downtown living, promote the excitement of downtown and encourage accessibility to and within the downtown.

The plan does recognize the importance of retail and states that to promote downtown development, the City should “consider the effects on the downtown in the evaluation of new development, commercial/retail policies, staff and budget resource allocations, and transportation priorities” (City of Winnipeg 2001b, 12). However, there is a lack of any other supporting retail policies. Prior to the adoption of Plan Winnipeg 2020, Coriolis Consulting Group (2000) prepared a report for the City of Winnipeg and Manitoba Urban Affairs titled *Retail Development Policy Recommendations for Plan Winnipeg*. They evaluated the retail policies and the effectiveness of those policies within the previous Official Plan. The report made a number of recommendations for addressing retail in Plan Winnipeg 2020. Firstly, the report noted that the previous policy of “limiting the location of regional scale shopping facilities outside the Downtown and restrict them in site area to those existing locations designated as regional shopping centres....” (Coriolis Consulting Group 2000, 70). This policy appeared to have the effect of only applying to ‘traditional shopping malls’ and not to the new stand-alone or large-format retailers. Thus, Winnipeg’s planned pattern of regional retail development does not reflect the actual pattern (Coriolis Consulting Group 2000, 70). The City attempted to address the short-comes of this policy in Plan Winnipeg 2020 by stating:

The City shall support orderly land development through land use designations... by considering the identification of areas of Regional Commercial and Mixed-Use Concentration to signify the general desired locations for large-scale commercial developments attracting customers city-wide and beyond.

The retail policies are the weakest of all Official Plans in the study as it does not address the impacts of large-format retail, rather, it only considers the most appropriate areas in the city to accommodate such commercial development types. There is no required Official Plan or

zoning bylaw amendment, and no requirement for any studies which may expose any detrimental impacts on surrounding retail or the downtown. There are no requirements for how these retail development forms should fit within these identified areas or ways to improve the commercial environment. The Plan does not address stand-alone retailers or concentrations of large-format retailers as the report by Coriolis Consulting Group (2000) suggested. Winnipeg Plan 2020 does, however, encourage densification and infill of existing commercial areas, and that regional commercial areas are supported by public transit.

However, there are only very few policy statements that have a clear direction or method of implementation. One such statement is the very first in the document, that the “City shall promote downtown development to stimulate revitalization and capitalize on existing infrastructure by.... implementing a visionary downtown plan (CentrePlan) through an action-oriented development corporation (CentreVenture) to provide clear direction, coordination of planning and implementation, and strong leadership for the downtown” (City of Winnipeg 2001b, 12).

While the City of Winnipeg implements Secondary Plans, they are fairly limited in scope and extent for a city of its size. A report to Council in 2002 on Downtown Initiatives stated that “The Industry will tell you that there is no vision for the downtown. Yet, a downtown plan has been in place for years. Clearly, it is not well known in the development community that CentrePlan exists. There is very little understanding of the vision and strategic direction that it articulates for the downtown” (City of Winnipeg and CentreVenture 2002). A recommendation was also made in this report that smaller Secondary Plans needed to be created within the downtown for each character area.

CentrePlan Vision and Strategies (City of Winnipeg 1994) is the sole Secondary Plan mentioned in the Official Plan, beside a few seemingly random suggestions of other plans that could be created to guide the city’s development. Implementation of Plan Winnipeg 2020, thus relies on that “Council will establish a clear agenda, one that identifies a set of priorities from within this plan and directs the civic administration to develop strategies and budget proposals” (City of Winnipeg 2001b, 58). While this provides flexibility for Council to direct its attention towards the most needed areas, the plan does not facilitate action or any means to accomplish these policy statements, and does not provide much basis for the use of performance measures to monitor these goals. However, since the adoption of Plan Winnipeg 2020, the City has created the Downtown Winnipeg Design Guidelines (2005), the Waterfront Development Principles and Guidelines (2006) and the Universal Design Guidelines (2006).

The CentrePlan Development Framework (1999) is a more directive document for the

downtown and uses stronger statements such as “downtown needs leadership and concentrated planning efforts.... but require expanded resources to conduct research, analysis, consultation, information dissemination, planning, design and implementation schemes” (City of Winnipeg 1999, 6). The plan provides specific recommendations for the downtown based on the various character areas that it identifies. The plan recognizes that the residential districts in the downtown have “physically and socially” distinguishable characteristics, and these neighbourhoods need “ongoing support to maintain strengths and remedy problems” (City of Winnipeg 1999, 10). Although CentrePlan delineates Portage Avenue as the ‘retail area’ of the Central Business District on a few maps, it fails to provide a vision or policy directions for this important commercial area in which MEC is located.

Sustainability objectives

Sustainability is addressed in Plan Winnipeg 2020 in a very generic manner. The plan states that it is intended to “guide Winnipeg into the twenty-first century by addressing the physical, social, economic and environmental conditions in the city”. However, the term ‘sustainability’ is not linked to these objectives. The plan’s proposed “commitment to sustainability” will be achieved through “establishing and adhering to a set of guiding principles for sustainability against which all policy decisions and actions are evaluated”, by “monitoring and reporting on quality of life indicators” and “providing opportunities for full public information and meaningful public participation” (City of Winnipeg 2001b, 22). There is no further discussion of directions or implementation of these ‘sustainability’ policies.

Mix of land uses and zoning

Winnipeg’s downtown district has a variety of identified land use district categories. The central area — in which MEC is located — is categorized as the Multiple Use Sector which permits a combination of office, retail, services, restaurants, entertainment, educational institutions, multiple-family residential and off-street parking. The two other land use categories are the Character Sectors, such as the historical and cultural Exchange District, and the Downtown Living Sectors.

Unique to Winnipeg, these land uses are also the zoning districts within Winnipeg’s Downtown Zoning Bylaw No.100/2004. The intent of regulating zones based on Use Categories is to “group common uses with common functional or physical impact characteristics into broader categories”, which also provides maximum flexibility. Each district has a extensive list of permitted and conditional uses, which are regulated in bulk (height or floor area ratio, required yards), signage, parking, loading and urban design. Each of these sectors also permits a residential

component to encourage downtown living and increase the residential density.

In 2001 the entire Downtown East population was 28,840 persons in a total area of 756 hectares. This represents an overall density of 38 persons per hectare. A significant proportion of total dwellings are within apartment buildings. Approximately 50% of dwellings are within buildings five storeys or higher, and 33% of dwellings are in apartment buildings with fewer than five storeys. A very low proportion (11%) of dwellings are single detached (City of Winnipeg 2001a). Recently, a number of existing warehouse and historic buildings are being converted into apartment condominiums to increase the residential opportunities downtown, but “these have not been as popular on the real estate market as in other cities (Win-P).

Demographics

The population of downtown of Winnipeg is characterized primarily by single person households (60%) between the ages of 20-35 with low-income (Win-BIA). The residents have a higher than average mobility rate, and are “unstable for any community orientation” (Win-BIA). The downtown is also known for a large population of immigrants (Win-P). It contains many of Winnipeg's ethnic neighbourhoods, including North Main, the oldest neighbourhood of Winnipeg settled by immigrants in the late 1800s and now a centre for the aboriginal community (City of Winnipeg 2002).

The downtown is thus composed of a more ethnically diverse population than the remainder of the city's residents. 21% of residents are of Aboriginal origin, with other significantly higher rates of ethnicities including Filipino, Chinese, European, Portuguese and Asian (City of Winnipeg 2001a).

The Sustainability Coordinator of the Winnipeg MEC believes there is a large discrepancy between ‘typical’ downtown residents – they are “either very rich, very poor, or a student...the middle-income group is missing”. There are certain amenities missing from the downtown to draw middle-income residents, including a “good grocery store” (Win-SC). The average employment income of a downtown resident is significantly lower (\$20,688) than the city average (\$29,145). The incidence of low income is extremely high in the downtown, with rates above 50% for households and over 60% for individuals. The high incidence of low income correlates to the high rate of rental tenancy. Over 87% of downtown residents are renting their dwellings, and 43% of these residents are spending more than 30% of their income on shelter (City of Winnipeg 2001a).

The rate of unemployment is also much higher at 10.6% in the downtown compared to the city average at 5.7%. Downtown residents are most commonly employed in manufacturing, accommodation and food services, health care and administrative support (City of Winnipeg

2001a). The lower average income and employment rate corresponds to the lower levels of education. There are fewer individuals within the downtown with a college or university level education, and a higher percentage (12.7%) of downtown residents with less than a grade 9 education level (versus 7.8%), even though the University of Winnipeg and Red River College are both located within the downtown.

Character

Winnipeg's downtown has a few distinct character areas. One of the most well-known areas is the Exchange District, the "home to a hub of culture and creativity" in which "turn-of-the century warehouse architecture" buildings are now prime locations for arts facilities, restaurants, boutiques and nightclubs (City of Winnipeg 2002). More recently, a number of these buildings have been restored and converted into condominiums, which appeal to students, artists, downtown workers. Another character area is the Forks, a historical gathering place at the meeting of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. The Forks not only provides green spaces and a river-walk; there is a market-place, theatres and spaces for a number of cultural activities and festivals that occur each year (City of Winnipeg 2002).

However, the downtown has a large area of land compared to the total size of the city and population of Winnipeg. The boundaries of the character areas of the downtown are not well defined, and are weak in pedestrian-oriented amenities and connections in-between (Win-P). The central area of downtown, in which MEC is located, is not one of the areas that is commonly identified as an area that rich in character. There is a mix of new and old buildings and a variety of uses, but no characteristics that provide a distinct identity. Therefore, the residents, workers and visitors that are drawn to the character areas such as Chinatown, the Forks or the Exchange are not drawn to the remainder of the downtown.



Figure 4.122 Character of the central 'retail area' of downtown.

Placemaking

While each key informant described certain character areas within the downtown as having a sense of 'place', the central 'retail area' was not one of them. There is no strong community, no vibrant nightlife, very few unique shops, and a lack of visitors and pedestrians. "There are not enough residents in the downtown to create a streetlife or to support the existing retail. It is not an active commercial downtown – the major shopping centres in the suburbs are the most used retail areas in Winnipeg" (Win-P).

However, the Executive Director of the Downtown BIZ believes that there is a sufficient population of downtown residents and office workers to support the existing retail, but "not enough to fill the vacancies in between the fragmented successful areas". The streetscaping improvements completed along Portage Avenue in 2000 have been a step towards revitalizing the central retail area and a process of placemaking (Win-P).

Yet there are larger issues that need to be addressed to make the downtown into a 'place'. "Part of a successful downtown is a feeling of safety. The public and downtown businesses have expressed concern about the safety of themselves when confronted by aggressive panhandlers and intoxicated people, as well as concern for the safety of intoxicated people themselves" (Downtown Winnipeg BIZ, 2007).



Figure 4.123 Streetscape improvements and street art along Portage Avenue.

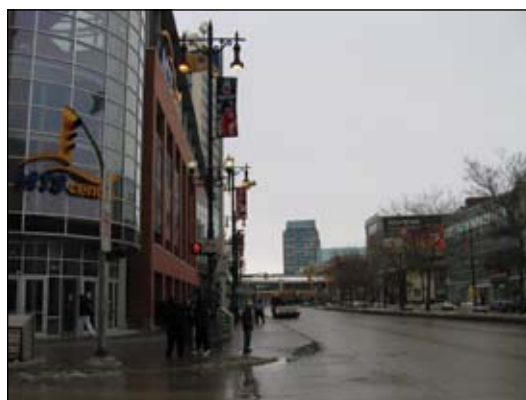


Figure 4.124 Pedestrian environment in the central downtown area.

Transportation and accessibility

Transportation within the downtown is, to a certain extent, well coordinated with land uses. The downtown is composed of higher density residential dwelling types, a variety of employment and commercial uses, and major entertainment facilities, and is thus internally well serviced by a public transit bus system. MEC is located along many of the city's major transit routes and within easy access of other major transit stations. The Graham Mall bus station, a major transit interchange, is only a one-block walk from MEC.

The transit system is efficient for travelling within the downtown and to major transit stations in most areas of the city. However, transit service to and from the low-density residential suburbs is not supported much beyond peak-hour service (Win-P). This is reflected in the mode of transportation statistics where 27% of downtown residents use public transit to travel to work, and only 32% of downtown residents drive a private vehicle. The remainder walk (30%), cycle (3%) or use another method (City of Winnipeg 2001a).

This is very a low rate of private vehicular use in comparison to the remainder of the city's residents, where 69% drive to work and only 14% use public transit (City of Winnipeg 2001a). CentrePlan identifies the need for a rapid transit corridors to link the downtown with the rest of the city (City of Winnipeg 1999, 25).

Traffic is regulated in the downtown primarily through the provision of one-way streets. However, CentrePlan suggests that there is a need to review



Figure 4.125 A transit stop along one of the main transit routes through Winnipeg on Portage Avenue.



Figure 4.126 One-way streets (shown in red) should be reverted to two-way streets, while one-way thoroughfares (shown in black) should remain (Source: Centre Plan).

the possibility of reverting some of these into two-way streets. Two-way streets would provide easier mobility within downtown residential areas, and facilitate easier navigation for improved traffic circulation, while maintaining major one-way streets would ensure efficient traffic flow in and out of the downtown (City of Winnipeg 1999, 27).

Streets within the downtown are configured on a grid pattern which facilitates direct and efficient pedestrian routes. Block lengths are different between the north-south to east-west direction to provide variation. Intersections are well-spaced for efficient movement and to provide safe pedestrian crossings. Typical of many winter cities — of which Winnipeg is no exception — pedestrian pedways above and below ground provide sheltered routes throughout the central downtown. In addition, a river walk located along the Assiniboine and Red Rivers provides a scenic and recreational path around the downtown and through the Forks.

However, Winnipeg's downtown does not provide for very safe bicycle commuting. There are no designated or signed cycling routes within the downtown or to provide access to other areas of the city. The river walk, a recreational trail, is the only designated cycling route. Due to the proximity of the trail to the rivers edges and the lack of elevation changes at the riverbanks, the trail commonly floods in the spring. The river walk not only becomes fully submerged, but also sustains damages to the trail, retaining walls and stairs.

Business Improvement Zone

Winnipeg's downtown has two very successful Business Improvement Zones, the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ and the Exchange BIZ. MEC is located within the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ, the oldest of the sixteen business associations in Winnipeg which was formed in 1989. The purpose of the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ is to "make downtown the place to work, do business, live and enjoy" (City of Winnipeg 2002).

The Downtown Winnipeg BIZ is very active, and provides services such as Downtown Watch Ambassadors, the Downtown Clean Team, the Outreach Patrol Program, flowers, banners and murals. It also attempts to address issues such as parking and transportation, social and safety issues, and improving the downtown image (Downtown Winnipeg BIZ 2007).

Winnipeg: Block

The block area of study was along Portage Avenue from Garry to the east and Carlton to the west. The Winnipeg MEC was the most unsuccessful store at the block level for the sustainability criteria of all the locations studied.



Figure 4.127 The block study area of Winnipeg. Source: City of Winnipeg, Planning and Development.

● MEC

Off-site parking

Vehicles are a very prominent component of the block, as Portage Avenue is a main thoroughfare through the downtown and is a busy 6-lane street. However, there is very little provision for metered on-street parking along Portage, even during non-peak hours. Thus, parking is mostly available in hourly or daily surface parking lots and parking garages. There is no street parking in front of MEC, as it is a bus stop.

The pedestrian environment

Portage Avenue has very wide sidewalks that can accommodate a large number of pedestrians. The sidewalks are constructed with unique brick patterning set into the concrete on each side. Curbs at street intersections are connected at each side, and well designed for those with impaired mobility. Intersections are consistently spaced with pedestrian lights at each

crosswalk. The consistent spacing may even be a bit short, which results in pedestrians frequently waiting at traffic lights or illegally crossing on a red light.

Pedestrian amenities along the block include trees, benches, street art, garbage receptacles and pedestrian-scale lighting. Buildings are built up to the sidewalk to provide a further sense of enclosure on the block. Portage Avenue is characterized by a mix of historical and modern building styles, which provides an interesting pedestrian environment and a glance at Winnipeg's history.

Lack of unique and street-oriented retail uses

Although the block is considered part of the 'retail area' of the Central Business District (City of Winnipeg 1999), there are only nine retailers (Table 4.7). The most apparent concentration of retailers near this area of downtown is within the malls, including Portage Place only a few blocks from MEC to the west. There are very few retailers on the block that are accessible from the street. MEC is not connected to the other retailers in the mall by the skywalk system.

There is only one other outdoor equipment retailer or other such complimentary retailers on the block for comparison-shopping. The retailers within the downtown malls are typically not unique, but instead are the retailers generally found in other regional malls. Thus there is no visible niche market on this section of Portage Avenue, except perhaps 'discount' type shopping due to the number of bargain and clearance shops.



Figure 4.128 The pedestrian environment along Portage Avenue near MEC.



Figure 4.129 Sidewalks are wide with brick patterning, and the buildings are built up to the sidewalk.

Table 4.7 Business mix on Portage Avenue, located between Garry to Carlton.

Garry to Smith	North Destination Winnipeg and Chamber of Commerce Winnipeg Economic Development Vacant building Vacant building Vacant Service Canada	South Offices Vital Statistics Dominion News Vocational School Vacant The Chocolate Shop Manitoba Property Registries
Smith to Donald	North Cash store Offices U-picks restaurant Red Apple Clearance Centre MEC	South Confections shop Radisson Hotel Money Mart Bargain Shop
Donald to Hargrave	North Vacant Vacant O'Calcutta Cheater on the Avenue L.A. Collection formal wear Vacant	South MTS Centre Moxies restaurant Sports Pro Shop
Hargrave to Carlton	North Royal Bank Aboriginal Peoples Television Network Air Canada and Offices	South Bank of Montreal Fyxx coffee shop Used Book store Vacant Salisbury House restaurant Warehouse-1 Jean store

Variation of lot sizes and building height

The block study area has a variety of lot sizes ranging from the length of the entire block to a few very narrow lots. However, in many cases the buildings on the larger lots are divided at the street level into smaller retail and service establishments.

The height of buildings in the central business district range from two-storeys to high-rise office buildings at fifteen storeys. Although MEC is a three-storey building and a few other retail buildings on the block are only two-storeys, the block has less of a 'pedestrian-scale' to it.

Mix of office, service and retail uses

The block has a number of high-rise office buildings to provide a source of customers during working hours. However, there are very few services and retail that are accessible from the street level than within the malls.

The block contains as many retail uses as there are vacant storefronts and buildings. There are very few personal and professional services, and just as few restaurants. The current vacancy rate in the downtown at 12 percent is quite high compared to suburban retail markets, which have a vacancy rate around 3.6 percent (McNeill 2007).

In the evenings, the primary attraction to the block is to watch events such as hockey, music and other large events at the MTS Centre. To a lesser extent, the evening draw is to the few retailers, the mall and the restaurants. However, "it is a dead zone in the evening" (Win-SC).



Figure 4.130 The vacant A & B Sound building across the street from MEC.



Figure 4.131 Scale of buildings on the block range from one to fifteen storeys high.

Table 4.8 Summary of commercial uses

Retailers: 9
(Outdoor and sports retailers: 2)
Banks: 2
Other financial: 1
Restaurants: 4
Cafes: 1
Personal services: 0
Professional services: 0
Convenience-grocery store: 1
Educational or other organizations: 2
Government: 5
Automobile Oriented: 0
Accommodations: 1
Offices: 3
Entertainment: 1

been in a state of decline for a number of years and more retail at street grade is needed (Win-P).

On-site parking and building access

The parking regulations of the Multiple Use Sector in the Downtown Zoning Bylaw support the pedestrian nature of this district which does not require the provision of off-street parking for new developments. MEC designed the site to accommodate only two on-site parking stalls, one of which is designated for disabled parking. Although bicycle parking is provided at the front entrance of the store, it is uncovered parking.

MEC shoppers must use alternative modes of travel, or park at one of the nearby surface parking lots, parking garages or parking meters. Depending on the availability of parking, an MEC customer may spend a bit of time finding a parking stall and walking to the store. This approach may have encouraged some shoppers to use other modes of transportation, as well as enhanced the numbers of pedestrians and potential customers at nearby shops and services. However, the lack of on-site parking may have been detrimental to MEC.

The lower than expected level of business inspired MEC in December of 2006, to experiment by providing an hour of free parking at a nearby Smith Street lot for customers who had spent at least \$10. The two-month parking promotion marked a shift for MEC, which “previously insisted its environmentally conscious clientele does not need to drive to the store. ‘We’re still hoping people take the bike or public transit, but



Figure 4.133 The Winnipeg MEC store.



Figure 4.134 Bicycle parking is provided at the front entrance, but it is not covered from the elements.



Figure 4.135 A sign advertizes the hour of free parking at a nearby parking garage for MEC customers.

we're also aware people like to take their cars, especially if they're driving in from rural locations' said the MEC store manager" (Kives 2006). But, the executive director of the Downtown Winnipeg Business Improvement Zone asserted "parking, unfortunately, is part of our culture" (Kives 2006).

Building Character and Facade

The building facade is very distinguishable and characteristic of the new MEC developments. However, the appearance of the Winnipeg MEC store is quite different than the surrounding buildings, which in themselves are an eclectic mix. The range of building types and styles include historic buildings, high-rise office buildings and more modern big box stores such as the Red Apple adjacent to MEC.

The facade is composed of a combination of materials and colors including brick, masonry, red metal panels, and has large display windows from the ground to the top of the second floor. Even the side facade facing Donald Street is designed to be interesting, which also makes the wall appear to be shorter.

The store is also very identifiable through signage. Each exposed wall has an MEC symbol and sign that is visible for both pedestrians and travelling vehicles. One large poster of a climber also indicates the type of retailer in the building in a tasteful manner.

Social interaction space

The Winnipeg MEC has less available and interesting public social interaction space than other stores. The building is setback at the



Figure 4.136 The facade of the store is very distinguishable.



Figure 4.137 The combination of materials, textures and images on the side of the building enhances the visual appeal.

entrance to the store to permit a tree in a planter and a small gathering area for the public. Seating areas are available near the roadside and bus stop, but outdoor social interaction spaces are not widely utilized in the winter.

The roof-top garden, however, provides a patio space and picnic tables for employees at MEC and other organizations within the offices above.

Green building innovations

Perhaps one of the most recognized aspects of the Winnipeg MEC is the building itself. The building was constructed with mostly recycled or local materials and designed to be energy efficient. The building was constructed by reusing approximately 95% of the materials, many of which were from the buildings that were carefully dismantled on site in addition to locally sourced materials.

Other energy efficiencies of the building include maximizing natural lighting, which is supplemented by an efficient lighting system. The building is cooled from the natural cooling effect of the roof-top garden, and a solar panel powers the irrigation pump. Rainwater is collected and stored for summer irrigation needs. The building also contains two composting toilets in the public washrooms to reduce water use and wastewater treatment needs.

The multi-storey building and small building footprint also reduces land requirements. The MEC store is located on the first two levels, and the roof-top garden and offices are located on the third floor. The space requirement of MEC is fulfilled in

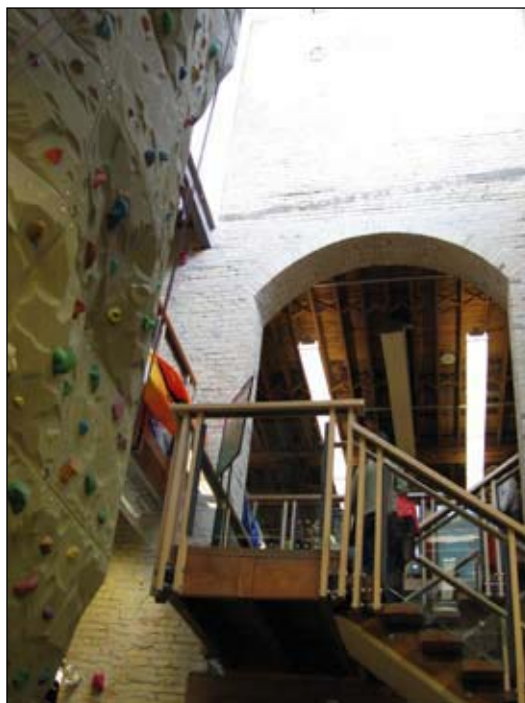


Figure 4.138 Natural lighting penetrates to the ground floor.



Figure 4.139 The first floor of the Winnipeg MEC.



Figure 4.140 The second floor of the store also shows exposed building materials.

almost exactly half of the footprint that would exist if the store was a single level.

It was also one of the first buildings in the city with a green roof, which is believed that it will “help solve Winnipeg’s biggest pollution problem by absorbing the storm water that too often washes sewage into the city’s rivers” and significantly decrease “the volume of water overloading city sewers during rainstorms”. In addition, the green roof reduces the energy required to cool the building. The store was designed to cool itself by “sweating.” When the sun is beating down, it powers a solar generator that pumps stored rain water up from the basement for drip irrigation on the green roof. Evaporating water on the roof cools the building (Fallding 2002).

These green building innovations not only significantly reduce the environmental impacts compared to a traditional retail building, and save MEC money on operating costs. It also signifies MEC’s commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility. After three years of operating, the Winnipeg MEC became the fourth building in Canada and the first outside British Columbia to earn a LEED gold rating.



Figure 4.141 The roof-top garden reduces stormwater runoff, naturally cools the building and provides a green space for building workers.



Figure 4.142 The solar panel which powers the irrigation pump is just barely visible on the roof.



Figure 4.143 The LEED Gold certification is proudly displayed in the front entrance of the store.

Winnipeg: Community

Sustainability is ingrained into all aspects of the organization, from operations at MEC's head office to the smallest operation at the store. Sustainability is a "large part of the culture of MEC" (Win-SC).

Education

Green building tours are offered to groups from grade 2 up to a university level. In these tours, it is discussed why MEC chooses to integrate these green building innovations. The Winnipeg store attempts to "integrate sustainability principles that tour participants can practice in their homes and schools – that the small things can make a difference" (Win-SC).

MEC supports other educational opportunities by providing grants to fund educational programs, such as theatre groups, 'environthons' and puppet shows. MEC also provides displays at environmental awareness week activities, and contributes articles to local newsletters on topics such as the 7 principles of 'leave no trace' ethics. Space is also provided within the store for local organizations to set up displays, and to hold meetings and presentations.

Funding

The Winnipeg MEC provides funding through grants, prize donations, volunteers and publicity to local groups such as a river stewardship organization. Urban sustainability grants are provided to the Manitoba Eco Network, a local environmental organization.



Figure 4.144 Self-guided green building tour information.



Figure 4.145 A composting toilet in the public washroom.



Figure 4.146 Space for local organizations to provide information to MEC customers.

4.6 Points of Inspiration

The following sections highlight the successful initiatives and points of inspiration of MEC in their attempt to create sustainable retail developments.

4.6.1 Vancouver

Catalysts for Revitalization

Not only has this portion of Broadway been revitalized by commercial reinvestment, but also the entire Mount Pleasant neighbourhood has experienced a process of revitalization primarily driven by private investment. While the City of Vancouver states that the previous redevelopment plan for Mount Pleasant implemented in 1989 resulted in “commercial revitalization and beautification of the Main and Broadway area... and neighbourhood-wide street greening” (City of Vancouver 2005), the neighbourhood seems to have revitalized partly on its own accord.

Homeowners began renovating historic character houses in the early 1970s, and a community effort to eliminate prostitution in the area succeeded in the early 1990s. “Its become much more of a family neighbourhood...The mix of people is great” (Luke 1995). West Broadway, the once derelict commercial strip in Mount Pleasant that was lined with empty storefronts and marginal tenants, is again becoming a vibrant commercial street. “Mountain Equipment Co-op has breathed new life into what was basically a thoroughfare to the suburbs. Several outdoor equipment stores have opened near MEC, and a large Office Depot has brought more shoppers to the street” (Mackie 1999). MEC helped show how a large retailer could fit into a commercial street and act as an anchor for other businesses.

Retail Niches: Complimentary and Competitive Co-Location

During development of the Vancouver store on Broadway, no strategic process of site selection or location criteria formally existed. MEC was more concerned with developing a significantly larger store than ever before in the past and to successfully gain efficiencies through an increased size. However, MEC did not want to develop the store similar to other large controversial retailers. MEC redeveloped a site within an established, yet marginal, commercial strip that enabled MEC to obtain the necessary size of site at a reasonable rate. Shortly thereafter, various other outdoor stores began to open or relocate in the same area, now known as the ‘polar fleece’ district. “MEC is a strong magnet for other businesses” and helps create a “ghetto of outdoor stores” (MEC-FP). The Vancouver store was key in providing and insight into determining what helps MEC to be a successful store in any location. Co-location of associated businesses, such as repair shops, travel stores and cafes create a unique commercial destination. MEC began to look at how to attract complimentary businesses and create space for

them, how to encourage healthy competition for comparison-shopping, and ask questions such as: What is the 'critical mass' of competition and co-location strategies? Can MEC be a catalyst to the redevelopment of a commercial area?

4.6.2 Toronto

Making a Case for 'Green Building'

The success of the Toronto store's green building enhancements proved to MEC that green building was an area where the organization should continue to explore and push the envelope. It also provided an example for other retailers and retail developers that environmentally friendly buildings are financially feasible, if not beneficial, and may result in a variety of other positive outcomes.

The benefits of the rooftop garden are felt by more than MEC through the satisfaction of successful implementation of a new technology. The green roof effectively assists in moderation of the building's temperature. It also absorbs rainwater, which reduces runoff into the combined storm and sanitary sewer system and the amount of wastewater overflow into Lake Ontario that bypasses the sewage treatment plant. Excessive storm runoff "is one reason why the beaches are contaminated" (Johnson 2003). Other benefits include the view of plants such as sunflowers from the surrounding buildings whose windows overlook the garden. The garden also provides increased urban habitat for insects and birds, including ducks. Creative landscaping can also improve air quality (Huang 2000).

One of the most important contributions, however, is that "MEC's green roof has broadened people's imaginations; it has helped other people make the case for green roofs" (Johnson 2003). MEC no longer has the only green roof in the area. Johnson (2003) states that even "Toronto's City Hall, close by as the crow flies, now has a green roof". Today, Toronto prides itself as one of the only Canadian cities that actively promotes green roofs through research and policy discussions, and through the creation of a pilot incentive program where successful applicants receive up to \$20,000 of the installation costs.

Public and Private Efforts Towards the Making of a Place

MEC is a destination retailer that significantly added to the strength of the distinctive character of the King-Spadina area (Tor-Dev). The Toronto store located in an area with existing infrastructure and servicing, and assisted with the redevelopment of a derelict area. Although retail typically 'follows' residential development — recently to the edges of cities where large sites are readily available and more economical — MEC chose to remain within the downtown of Toronto and assist in a process of revitalization.

The success of redevelopment of the King-Spadina district of Toronto does not appear to be due to the single efforts of either the public or private sector. It was the combined efforts from a number of players in both sectors that have so quickly changed the area in just the last ten years. Although it was the private sector that invested capital into creating new employment, living and shopping spaces, it could not have been done without the cooperation of the public sector to permit such developments.

The King-Spadina Redevelopment Plan realized the need “to provide a mixture of compatible land uses with the flexibility to evolve as the neighbourhood matures” (City of Toronto 2006). It recognized the importance of retaining both industrial and commercial uses for employment, and attracting new retail and businesses for new and existing residents. The plan also permitted large stand-alone retailers, subject to a variety of conditions including parking, scale, design and character. These conditions are further outlined in the King-Spadina Urban Design Guidelines (City of Toronto 2004). In addition, public transit service was increased to the area as a part of the redevelopment plan to ensure that the area would develop into a pedestrian-friendly and accessible district.

4.6.3 Ottawa

Urban Retail Anchors: Making the Big Box Fit

MEC's new location in Ottawa was a site within an existing commercial area in the Westboro neighbourhood. Some concerns were expressed about the potential impacts of larger stores moving into the area, such as creating too much traffic, reducing the viability of the smaller and older businesses, and destroying the community feel of Westboro. However, the success of Westboro is felt by many as it is considered a vibrant and thriving retail area with a myriad of unique boutiques and a variety of services. Despite the recent entrance of large retailers such as MEC and Loblaws, Westboro has maintained the feeling of a village. Many smaller and independent businesses recognized the advantages of co-locating with other 'like-minded businesses' and have been instrumental in creating this unique commercial environment.

Community Involvement in Neighbourhood Development

The Westboro community has been very involved in all aspects of the development of their neighbourhood since the opening of MEC and Loblaws. Near the end of 2006, the residents conducted a poll to debate whether or not another Canada-wide coffee shop, Tim Horton's, should be permitted to open on the commercial strip. Residents were concerned that the unique independently owned business would be replaced by a corporate presence. Although no regulations exist on where a business can or cannot operate based on competition or

ownership, the residents were active at voicing their opinions to ensure the continued success of the independent businesses and the “village feel” of the neighbourhood (Dare 2006). Ottawa’s planning department has taken advantage of the residents passion for their neighbourhood towards creating a vision and direction for the development of a new Westboro community plan, and ensuring these principles are implemented in the new zoning bylaw.

The Meaning of ‘Place’: a Model Neighbourhood

Despite the opposition to development by some of the community, the Westboro area was called a “model neighbourhood” and “so desirable has the Westboro brand become that its boundaries would seem to be expanding, as businesses and homeowners from farther afield identify themselves as inhabitants of that neighbourhood” (Singer 2004). Westboro has grown so successful that it is difficult to tell — especially on the commercial strips — where it begins and where it ends. “Westboro is as much a state of mind as a geographic entity. So what makes it so special?” (Ward 2005). The director of the Westboro BIA believes it is due to the people themselves, who have stayed here through the down times and invested in their properties and the business operators.

A local university professor and author adds: “It’s the character of the community... an area of established homes, a lot of the subdivisions were laid out before the First World War. You get a mix of older homes and not-so-old homes... Some of the new infill housing is quite wonderful” (Ward 2005). Westboro residents enjoy a high-quality of life. “Kids can walk to school, there’s great parks, shopping and restaurants. Everything is at your fingertips” (Wilson 2005). The Westboro neighbourhood is evidently successful in its mix of both residential and commercial properties, including the Westboro Loblaws, which “took a big box and adapted it to a downtown setting” (Gray 2006).

Designed for Disassembly

The Ottawa store was the first commercial building in Canada of similar structures to comply with the C-2000 Energy Efficiency Standards. In addition to numerous green building initiatives such as zero net construction landfill waste and building material reuse, one unique feature of the Ottawa store was that it was built using bolts and screws instead of nails. This design ensures that the building can be dismantled again in the future for easier redevelopment and recycling of building materials.

4.6.4 Winnipeg

Green Building: a Model for Others

At the time of construction, the Winnipeg store was MEC’s greenest building. Utilization of the

Integrated Design Process facilitated a more comprehensive and consistent approach to green building design. After three years of operating, the Winnipeg store became the fourth building in Canada, and the first outside of British Columbia, to earn a LEED Gold rating. The architect for the new Mountain Equipment Co-op retail facility appreciated having the MEC building achieve gold certification, as it helped authenticate Prairie Architects as an expert in the design of environmentally friendly buildings. All the buildings Prairie Architects designs now are sustainable buildings “because that’s the way I think we have to go as a globe... and we want to be ahead of the wave” (McNeill 2005).

The taste and thrill of ‘green’ development became visceral to me in the last year. I have had the opportunity to put environmental sustainability to the test. With a creative client and design team, we have used made-in-Manitoba solutions to create what is being called the ‘greenest retail building in the world’. We can begin to create sustainable employment opportunities, sustainable town centres, sustainable homes and offices, sustainable transportation within and between our new green communities (Thompson 2002).

The architect further stated:

An environmentally sustainable capital region could be the defining metaphor for creating and reimagining our collective futures in the Winnipeg area. Sustainability could be the filter through which we redefine our public policy, plan for our communities and assess our achievements. Environmental sustainability would not just be one of a list of good ideas for the capital region; rather it could be seen as the overarching framework for the future of our capital region (Thompson 2002).

The concept of green building has since become popular in Winnipeg, having one of the most energy efficient high-rise office buildings currently under construction. The Manitoba Hydro building is being constructed on Portage Avenue just a few blocks from MEC. The building is 18 stories tall and will house over 1200 employees. “The \$258-million, 690,000-square-foot head office is expected to have numerous environmentally friendly elements to help heat and cool itself. For example, there will be three six-storey atriums and unobstructed floors for maximum exposure to natural light. The building will be entirely fed by fresh air, with minimal forced-air circulation” (Paraskevas 2006). The Manitoba Hydro building is aiming to be a gold LEED certified building, and has already won architectural awards on not only its building design, but also on the benefit the building would bring to its community (Paraskevas 2006).

4.7 Constraints

In addition to a number of points of inspiration and successes, there have been many constraints that MEC has been challenged with in creating sustainable retail developments.

4.7.1 Vancouver

Building Reuse and Adaptation

Although the Vancouver store was the start of MEC's exploration into energy efficient building design, the building has caused a few issues. Firstly, the existing buildings on-site were joined together to make one large structure. While this resulted in a reduction of demolished construction wastes going to landfill, the structure of the building itself and roof beams that were added for support provide complications for store layout and merchandising. Secondly, this would not have permitted MEC to do many environmental upgrades that MEC was able to do at other stores such as Winnipeg and Ottawa. In addition, some staff feel that the Vancouver store does not make as much of a contribution to the environment or the community because the building is not as 'green' as others (Van-SC).

Future Site Redevelopment

MEC invested approximately \$2.8 million into redeveloping the building on a site in which MEC does not own. MEC will thus be challenged in the future to either redevelop the site in coordination with the owner, or to relocate a store of its size in an increasingly tight market (MEC-FP).

4.7.2 Toronto

The Highest and Best Use

The Toronto store represents a loss of opportunity for MEC as the rezoning of the King-Spadina area would have allowed MEC to build a higher density project. During development, MEC considered a design exploration into constructing a mixed-use building with condos, but did not have the time or the organizational structure to pursue this option (MEC-SC). Currently, the value of the land is such that MEC could realize a significant profit by selling the land because the utilization of the land is below what the value dictates. However, selling the property would likely result in demolition of the building, which is a poor ecological outcome that does not fit with MEC's values or objectives (MEC-SC). As the market has also tightened up, MEC may also have a difficult time finding another suitable and affordable location in Toronto.

In addition, within the last few years the King-Spadina area around MEC has seen a number of high-rise condo buildings constructed. From the roof-top garden at MEC, there are currently four new high-rise condo developments starting construction in the immediate area. What remains

unknown is how these developments will affect the light availability on MEC's two-storey roof-top garden and solar panels.

Technological Risks and Limitations

The Toronto store was MEC's first attempt at constructing a green building – which also required beginning development at the design stage and continuing from the ground up. However, back in the late 1990's, there was "little industry information or expertise of green retail buildings" (MEC-FP). MEC added a green roof to the structure at last minute, although the knowledge and technology for green roofs was not well developed in Canada. Yet, taking the risk for including these new technologies and building material have had their benefits. For example, the Toronto MEC is still a testing ground for new emerging technologies, such as the patch of 'Zero' green roof and new solar technologies.

4.7.3 Ottawa

In the Eye of the Beholder

The reclaimed wood and corrugated metal clad building exterior — although environmentally friendly — is not aesthetically pleasing to all tastes. The facade of the Ottawa MEC store is not that of a traditional Main Street, but instead is rather modern and urban. However, the building is very distinct and adds a unique flavour to the street.

Change, or Gentrification?

Prior to MEC, this portion of Richmond Road was an existing commercial strip with a variety of businesses — although mostly car dealerships — and vacant storefronts. After MEC relocated to Richmond Road, the revitalization caused an increase in the viability of operating a business in Westboro Village, but also increased commercial property values and rent. Some of the existing businesses could not afford to stay in this area of Westboro. Whereas change in a commercial area often has positive outcomes, there was apprehension expressed about the degree of changes in the area. "It is pleasant. I hope it just doesn't change too fast. I'm concerned about Richmond Road...there's a point at which growth ceases to be good, and becomes more problematic than beneficial" (Ward 2005). The displacement or exclusion of these existing businesses was an unforeseen outcome, but many other businesses were attracted and helped in the success of Westboro Village. MEC recognizes that such change must be a consideration, but has not altered their decision-making process (MEC-FP).

4.7.4 Winnipeg

Resistance to Revitalization

MEC's past experiences in influencing a commercial environment that is in the process of

revitalizing has not been the case in Winnipeg. “There was a lot of non-occupied space near the chosen location... it was hoped that MEC would catalyze a renaissance... but that was not the case” (MEC-FP). Some believe that this is not uncommon or unexpected in Winnipeg due to larger issues. “Manitoba, and its largest city Winnipeg, are slow-growth markets; population is stagnant; wealth is not abundant and what’s there is not shared equitably in the community” (Lett 2001).

Although many efforts have been directed towards revitalizing the downtown, including a number of public and private initiatives such as MEC, A & B Sound and the MTS Centre, this portion of the retail area of downtown has proven resistant to revitalization due to a combination of persistent barriers. The lack of downtown residents, especially in the middle to upper-income levels, and the lack of services and amenities to draw those residents is one issue. Also, the size of Winnipeg’s downtown is excessively large compared to the population of the city itself. Thus, there are large distances between the character areas of the downtown, and a lack of linkages between them (Win-P).

The streetfront retail environment in Winnipeg has suffered; and the attempt to bring the once popular ‘mall environment’ into the downtown has not been as successful as was hoped. Although it mimics the regional mall and draws in shoppers, it has had a detrimental effect on the remainder of the retail area along Portage. While the vacancy rate of the downtown in general is 12 percent, the vacancy rate in Portage Place is only 3 percent (McNeil 2007).

When Portage Place mall was built in 1986, it was trumpeted as the saviour of the downtown. Instead, it sucked the remaining street traffic off the sidewalks and into the mall. Higher-end retail stores such as Birks and Club Monaco pulled out of the mall as soon as their leases were up (Hendry 2002).

Car Culture

With no room for on-site parking and the proximity of the site to other parking opportunities in the downtown, MEC did not develop an on-site parking lot. MEC was willing, “on the grounds of sustainability, to make a point” (MEC-FP). However, either due to the reluctance of shoppers to find parking and walk to MEC or to use alternate modes of transportation, and the lack of a rapid transit system into the downtown, MEC decided in 2006 to experiment with promoting ‘free’ parking at a nearby parkade. The promotion allowed one hour of free parking at the Smith Street parkade to customers who spent at least \$10 at MEC.

The Facilities Planner believes that MEC “underestimated how shoppers would not walk to access the Winnipeg store”. However, the site was “less than ideal, and perhaps should not be transferred to other cities” (MEC-FP). For example, the highly successful Quebec City store which

opened in 2004 — four years earlier than planned — also has no on-site parking. The reluctance of Winnipeg residents to use public transportation or other alternative modes of travel is not surprising, as Winnipeg has a significantly higher use of private vehicles of any other city in the study.

Location, Location, Location

Obtaining the ‘right’ location for a retail store is important and can have such benefits as better and faster sales, and a greater penetration into the market (MEC-FP). There have been a few locations that MEC has selected which have proved to be less “robust” than expected. The Winnipeg store is one such location where MEC was “oddly pioneering” and “would not make that same decision again” (MEC-FP). Although those involved in the store development knew there would be risks associated with the location, “MEC is cognoscente of what people think about it.... MEC stands for social equality and environmental protection.... a pad development is not what MEC thinks of itself” (MEC-FP).

The alternate location on the south side of the city had the greatest potential for sales, but MEC chose to not locate there because “there was no strong retail component” and “MEC was optimistic about revitalization” (MEC-FP). However, the retail revitalization in Winnipeg’s downtown seems to be occurring in another character area – in the Exchange District. A recent shop owner there stated “...the Exchange District is becoming a retail destination of sorts... most of them offer products that aren’t typically found in the mass-market stores that fill most suburban malls and retail power centres” (McNeill 2007).

4.8 Future Development Challenges

The various challenges that MEC currently faces in developing sustainable retail locations involve maintaining this balance between economic, environmental and equity goals. Due to MEC’s desire to maintain rigorous criteria for location and site characteristics, the organization has encountered difficulties in obtaining the ‘right’ site for new stores.

4.8.1 Development Timelines

Each new retail location that MEC proposes is developed according to a specified time line. Therefore, in the end the site is only as good as the real estate that was available in that time frame (MEC-FP). Yet, MEC still looks for and will wait for the best retail opportunity, and does not open a new location “come hell or high water” (MEC-OM). For example, MEC opened a location in Quebec City four years before plan because a great opportunity arose. Meanwhile in Montreal, the process was delayed and took over two years to open a store, and the results were “not as

hoped” (MEC-OM).

4.8.2 ‘Urban’ Land Availability and Value

Another limitation is that as the real estate market has recently “tightened up” there are fewer and fewer locations in the urban core for a store that is 30,000 to 40,000 square feet (MEC-FP). MEC has thus recently attempted to enter into more suburban markets, and it is becoming problematic to determine appropriate locations because there is no urban core structure like in more established areas (MEC-FP).

4.8.3 Efficient Store Size

MEC has realized significant increases in efficiency through operation of larger stores, which has allowed prices to remain lower. However, store size has become more of an issue for MEC as fewer affordable parcels of land remain in optimal downtown or inner city locations. This was the particular case in the recent development of the Montreal store (2003), which was eventually located within a suburban retail power centre development. MEC attempted to offset this location decision through constructing an exceptionally green building and pressuring the City to increase public transit service to the area (MEC-FP). Additionally, zoning regulations that limit building size in urban locations could present difficulties in new store development. For example, Vancouver has begun to ban stores of a certain size which “may result in MEC having to construct smaller stores of approximately 20,000 square feet in multiple locations... but this is not cost effective” (MEC-FP).

Despite the possible reduction of cost efficiency, another store development strategy that MEC is currently considering — ‘MEC Controlled Growth: A 10 Year Strategy’ — is to identify possible store locations that would provide an estimated 2 million dollars in annual revenue through a new business model of a ‘D’ sized store. This strategy has four proposed stages:

1) Current Realities

- Research competitive retailers in the market
- Research retail models and strategies
- Rebuild member profile and propensity overlay
- Map membership trends

2) Future Trends

- Predict how current activity trends could affect location, market and store size
- Build population/member growth model
- Complete business model and pro-forma for ‘D’ sized store

3) Strategic Choices

- Assumptions: build five possible business model scenarios

4) Plan, Selection and Rollout Strategy

- Senior Management Team finalizes 'D' store business model
- Execution Strategy built on approved models
- Board of Directors approval on business model and growth strategy

4.8.4 Finding New Markets

MEC has also already developed in most of the large markets, and must now deal with more “marginal locations” (MEC-FP). MEC is currently contemplating a few solutions. One experiment that has been largely successful in Vancouver is to open multiple locations in larger cities. Another currently untested consideration is how easily a population could be aggregated to a site through minimum drive times and ease of accessibility from a variety of directions and locations (MEC-FP). For example, in southwest Ontario there are a number of small and dispersed cities that combined make up a significant population and thus, justification for a store. However, MEC is struggling with how to open a retail store as such because it does not fit with the preferred and current strategy (MEC-FP), even though it would allow MEC to maintain a certain economy of scale. In addition, the fact that land values are increasing at a rapid rate — even in suburban locations — will be a challenge for MEC to match location decisions with environmental goals (MEC-FP).

4.8.5 Technological Limitations

MEC's CEO states that cost is a major factor that hinders sustainable retail development practices, and the trade-offs must be determined. MEC's intention is not to be the only ones doing it, but rather to show everyone that it is a viable way of doing business and everyone should “get on the boat” (MEC-CEO). However, the Operations Manager states that cost is not a major issue. Some of the greatest hindrances are technology and LEED accreditation systems. “MEC would build green even without LEED accreditation. As we enter 2007, the world is waking up to green operations.... more businesses and consultants are coming on board” (MEC-OM).

4.9 Summary

Table 4.9 shows a synthesis of the points of inspiration, the constraints, and the future development challenges of a retailer, Mountain Equipment Co-op, to achieve sustainable retail development in four stores across Canada. The following chapter provides recommendations based on the research for planners and retail developers to facilitate more sustainable retail development.

Table 4.9 Summary of points of inspiration, constraints and future development challenges of the four MEC retail stores in the study.

City	Points of Inspiration	Constraints	Future Development Challenges
<i>Vancouver</i>	• MEC can be a catalyst for commercial revitalization • Benefits of competitive and complimentary co-location	• Building adaptation and renovation prior to green building initiatives • Limited on-site redevelopment opportunities in leased building	• Development timelines and available real estate do not always result in the best store location • Urban land availability and cost makes suburban sites more attractive, but does not fit with preferred location criteria • Developing a new smaller efficient store size by balancing economies of scale and sustainable site development, versus new and larger stores with a much larger catchment • Finding new markets in smaller urban areas or more marginal locations • Limitations of green building technologies and accreditation systems
<i>Toronto</i>	• Making an economic and social argument for green building initiatives • Public and private efforts towards the making of a place	• MEC not taking advantage of highest and best use of site • Technological risks and limitations of green building initiatives	
<i>Ottawa</i>	• Making the big-box fit into urban street • Community involvement in planning • A model 'placemaking' neighbourhood • Building 'designed for disassembly' for easier materials re-use	• Retailers such as MEC may cause commercial changes, others believe it is gentrification • MEC does not fit the typical Mainstreet character or identity	
<i>Winnipeg</i>	• LEED certified building a catalyst for others • Success of using a collaborative and pro-active Iterated Design Process	• Resistance to revitalization in the downtown for a variety of reasons • Lack of on-site parking in a car culture • Choice of location may not have been appropriate due to the lack of an intuitive 'feeling' of a good location	

SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter first summarizes the purpose of the research and the analysis of the results. It concludes with general implications and recommendations for planners as well as retail developers, recognizing the study's limitations and assumptions.

5.1 Synthesis of Findings

The goal of this study was to clarify the meaning of sustainable retail development and to provide recommendations for how this may be better achieved in Canada's municipalities. Through a case study analysis of four MEC stores across Canada, the practicum evaluated each store against a set of sustainability criteria. The criteria were developed through an in-depth literature review of the economic, environmental and social effects of the trends of retail development from an urban planning perspective. Each store was evaluated at a district, block, site and community level. The data analysis involved the integration of various data sources including document research, site observations and key informant interviews to provide a qualitative overview of each MEC store and the surrounding commercial environment. The synthesis of the findings in sections 4.6 to 4.8 (as summarized in Table 4.9), highlights the points of inspiration; constraints; and the future development challenges for MEC and for other large-format retailers to best achieve sustainable retail development.

5.1.1 Application of Sustainable Retail Development Criteria

The sustainability criteria that were developed through the literature review and used in the study provided the researcher with an easy to use tool to evaluate and compare various retail site location and development decisions, and the subsequent impacts on the surrounding urban area. The criteria are not meant to replace more detailed criteria that have been previously developed. However, other criteria such as LEED for commercial buildings are very specific in one discipline, and have very strict performance requirements that may be intimidating, or time and resource consuming for a smaller or inexperienced retail developer.

The criteria developed in this study proved to be effective for the researcher primarily in three ways. Firstly, they are comprehensive for use by both planners and developers. For example, the criteria encourage a developer to ensure that not only does the proposed development meet any height or setback requirements in the zoning bylaw, but that it meets the local planning objectives which have been defined through a collaboration of the planning department and the community. The criteria also have no grading system, which implies that planning and development are not an exact science that may not be quantifiable. Rather the criteria provide a guide for the various

elements that a planner or retail developer should consider in developing sustainable retail environments. The final benefit of the criteria is that they are sufficiently general to be applicable in a variety of retail development situations and encourage innovative solutions that are tailored to the needs of the specific location.

5.1.2 The Meaning of Sustainable Retail Development

Based on this evaluation, it should be noted that although the practicum attempts to define the meaning of *sustainable retail development*, it is not a separate concept from the overall meaning of *sustainable development*. The considerations for attempting to achieve more sustainable retail development are not exclusive, but are one aspect towards a larger goal of sustainability. Thus, the following sections of the practicum provide recommendations for planners, policy makers, decision makers, retailers, retail developers, architects and designers towards achieving sustainable development in commercial areas. However, the recommendations should not be considered or used in isolation of each other, as synergies can be realized through concurrent implementation. Also, it is important to recognize that certain recommendations may not be applicable in all situations and solutions must be tailored to meet specific needs.

5.2 Implications for Urban Planning

Through a case study analysis of MEC's past successes and challenges of developing sustainable retail stores, it has been determined that the influence that municipal planners, policy makers, as well as decision makers can have on retail developments in the future is very significant. To assist MEC to be able to realize these influences with a positive or sustainable outcome requires a municipality to adopt a comprehensive set of policies or guidelines. However, it is important to ensure that these regulations are effective, yet not overly onerous for retail developers to comply with. The following provides recommendations and innovations in planning that would assist retailers such as MEC towards achieving sustainable retail development in the future.

5.2.1 Official Development Plans

An Official Development Plan is an important means by which of encouraging sustainable development, including sustainable retail development. There are many ways in which Official Plans can be organized; the various considerations that can be addressed; and the identification of other planning tools that can be used to implement the sustainability goals of an Official Plan. The following sections highlight the most innovative components of Official Plans in the study and provides recommendations that will assist retailers such as MEC and other large-format retailers

to achieve sustainable retail development.

Recognition of Retail Trends

It is important that the impact of the current trends of large-format retail developments and the segregation of land uses on a community be examined in Official Development Plans. An Official Plan should recognize that the nature of retailing will continue to change, and provide the opportunity for retailers to be able to adapt to these changes. It is not necessary to completely exclude large-format retailers, but rather to ensure that these commercial uses are located in appropriate areas of the city, such as 'Mixed Use Areas'. Official Plan policies can support a strong retail sector through permitting a broad range of shopping opportunities through flexible zoning in these mixed use areas, and by supporting these commercial streets and areas as the centre of a community. By permitting large-format retailers to appropriately fit in a variety of commercial environments, an Official Plan can thus enforce regulations to protect business-related and industrial lands.

In addition, Official Plans should also contain policies for large-format retailers that permit development in these mixed use areas subject to a number of conditions. For example, a large-format retailers must display that sufficient transportation capacity is available, the economic health of other retail areas will not be adversely affected, and the surrounding industrial uses will not be affected. While the process of determining these impacts may be difficult and subjective, it provides planners and decision makers an opportunity to decline a development proposal that is perceived to be potentially detrimental. It also places the responsibility of the retailer to determine the impact of the proposed development rather than planning staff, and may stimulate the retailer to look at another more 'sustainable' development approach rather than conduct such types of studies. Another policy that can be contained within an Official Plan is a comprehensive set of guiding sustainability principles in which to evaluate development proposals.

Sustainability Focus

Sustainability is a common concept within each of the Official Plans in the case study. However, the most important consideration is not whether the term 'sustainability' is actually used, but rather the intent of the plan to truly achieve sustainability goals. An Official Plan should clearly state the need to evaluate planning and development from an economic, environmental and social equity perspective, and to link all relevant municipal departments and stakeholders working towards a common sustainability goal. An Official Plan should also recognize that choices made today will impact the future, and the connection between the choices and consequences needs to be better understood. Sustainability should be a part of all Official Plans — not only as a passing

buzz word — but as a reminder that the economy, the environment and social equity must be the basis for all decisions.

Mixing Land Uses: Commercial at the Centre of a 'Neighbourhood'

In many cases, MEC has been able to achieve sustainable retail development objectives by locating in areas that incorporate a variety of land uses. The direction of many municipalities since the mid 1940s and 1950s has been to create divisions between land uses, which is especially apparent in suburban locations that do not offer any mix of land uses for large distances. A means towards achieving sustainability that should be emphasized in an Official Plan is the importance of creating 'complete neighbourhoods', whereby commercial uses are of central importance.

For example, the City of Vancouver encourages the creation of "distinct neighbourhoods" where each neighbourhood is a "unique village within the city... and meets the needs of their residents by providing places to live, shop, play, work and feel part of the community" (City of Vancouver 1995). CityPlan is unique to the other Official Plans in that it does not identify a set of land uses such as residential, commercial and industrial, and define these on a map. Rather, CityPlan is solely based upon principles and policies which create liveable neighbourhoods. These principles are then used in a comprehensive process of community consultation to create local plans. This approach to Official Plan policies can facilitate the creation of more complete and sustainable communities at a local level – one of the main means to achieving sustainability, in addition to aiding in better growth management.

Urban Growth Boundary

Growth management strategies that restrict new development in outlying areas are controversial, but can be effective in regulating large-format retailers from developing upon or outside of edge-of-city locations. An Official Plan can define an urban growth boundary and direct growth to occur within these areas. For example, Ottawa has established an Urban Growth Boundary in the Official Plan that will accommodate 90 percent of the growth in population, jobs and housing (City of Ottawa 2003, 2-4) for the next 20 years.

Concentrating growth within the designated urban area also allows for a pattern and density and development that supports transit, cycling and walking as viable and attractive alternatives to the private automobile. Altogether, this strategy has the least impact on agricultural land, mineral resources and protected environmental areas, and supports a cleaner, healthier city (City of Ottawa 2003, 2-4).

While some argue that urban boundaries can decrease the amount of land available for development and increase land values within the boundary, this strategy should not be too restrictive and should not be used in isolation. Firstly, the boundary should allow for growth

within a projected time frame until the boundary will be re-evaluated. This ensures that new development can still occur, but it protects against 'leap frog' developments. Within the urban growth boundary, development should be directed to locations with significant development potential, such as redevelopment and mixed use areas. In addition, densification of these areas should also be supported by ensuring a coordination with transportation considerations.

Coordinating Land Use and Transportation

One method of improving land use and transportation options is to simply maintain a reasonable walking distance from the home to other activities. However, this method is not applicable or reasonable in all cases or developments, including for destination retailers. Thus, the importance of transportation alternatives is apparent for destination retail developments such as MEC who are attempting to encourage sustainable behavioral travel patterns. For example, the MEC in Winnipeg did not offer any on-site parking opportunities – which proved to be less than optimal in a winter city where transportation alternatives are not widely available or supported in any serious manner.

Thus, it is important to recognize the difference between placing an emphasis on mobility, “providing the transportation facilities (roads, bus routes, etc) to get people... to destinations in other areas, no matter the distance involved”, and accessibility, “increasing the range of options open to people who need to travel within the city” (City of Ottawa 2003, 2-10). Official Plan policies should not only attempt to reduce the distance between types of uses through creating complete communities, but also increase the transportation options for when travelling is required.

An Official Plan can contain general policies for designing and evaluating large-format retail development proposals for walking, cycling, transit and parking. Policies in mixed use areas should support an increased residential density in exchange for developments that build near transit stations and include a mix of housing types. Other initiatives may include investigating ways to financially support the residential component of mixed-use developments, in addition to other means for reducing parking requirements. It is important to also ensure that supporting documents, such as a transportation plan or zoning bylaw, reinforces the policies and objectives of an Official Plan.

5.2.2 Other Planning Tools

As mentioned by Jepson (2001), often the difficulty with sustainability is in “translating this concept into practice”. An Official Plan needs to recognize that it can provide a general guide, but cannot not encompass every possible circumstance. Supporting plans are required for effective implementation of these policy directions.

Further implementation plans and strategies are needed to bring the Plan to life. These include: a municipal housing strategy, a transportation strategy... Secondary plans, area studies and urban design parameters. What is key is that all these plans and strategies inform and support one another and the vision for city-building set out in this Official Plan (City of Toronto 2006a, 1-5).

Other specific planning tools are available to implement the policies contained within an Official Plan, which may include zoning bylaws, development incentives, site plan controls, property standards bylaws, temporary use bylaws and development charges. In addition, it is important to ensure that all decisions — no matter the size or cost — are consistent with the policies contained in the Official Plan. This decision-making process should be utilized by all municipal departments, agencies, boards and commissions who have a role to play in realizing these policies and objectives.

Regional Plans

Similar to an urban area, the impact that a large-format retailer can have on smaller adjacent municipalities can be significant. For example, if one municipality has strict controls on large-format retail developments but an adjacent municipality does not, many retailers would likely choose to locate where there are less controls. This requires cooperation to ensure that there are similar sustainability objectives and similar development standards in both municipalities. Another approach could be a requirement that a municipality agrees to provide the opportunity for a neighbouring municipality to provide meaningful feedback on developments that would affect the regional trade area.

For example in Ottawa, the need has been identified to include an improved approach to regional planning. Ottawa is a unique Canadian city in that it is a dominant urban area surrounded by a large rural area with 26 distinct villages. One issue that has been identified by these village in public workshops is the potential impact of big box retailers.

Many village residents feel that we need to manage the 'pace' of growth in order to retain the quality of the village. Based on the local observation of 'explosive' growth in some communities, there is a fear that growth might overwhelm the nature of the village if it is of a scale or at a pace that the residents are unaccustomed to. In turn, such rapid growth could attract non-village type development such as big-box stores (Village Development Working Group 2007).

The City of Ottawa has begun drafting a Rural Settlement Plan, in which the planning objectives for the villages will be included as a part of the Official Plan to ensure that regional issues are considered in all aspects of development (Village Development Working Group 2007).

Neighbourhood and Secondary Plans

Secondary Plans should be created for developed areas that are undergoing major change

or growth, but can also be an effective means for planning the future development of areas that are relatively stable. For example in Vancouver, rather than focusing on only neighbourhoods that were undergoing visible decline or change, the Community Visions Program was implemented in 1996 and was designed to bring CityPlan to the neighbourhood level – for every neighbourhood. Each neighbourhood was permitted a two-year period to create a plan on a range of topics, which could include issues from “transportation and the arts to housing to community services” to “balance the ‘rights’ and the ‘uniqueness’ of the community with its responsibility as part of the City and Region” (City of Vancouver 2007, 4).

The Mount Pleasant Community Plan will deliver comprehensive, sustainable, long-range policy guidance, and specific plans for shopping and residential sub-areas. It will also deliver short-term action on pressing social issues within the Community. Inherent in this process is a focus on public outreach, engagement and community capacity building, so that short and long term initiatives can be achieved (City of Vancouver 2007, 3).

The creation of such Secondary Plans can not only assist in building trusting relationships between planners and the community, but also provides planners with the opportunity to accurately make planning decisions that reflect the desires of the community. This process may also help planners to determine appropriate locations and site development standards for large-format retailers prior to even receiving a development permit application. Creating Secondary Plans is a meaningful way to obtain public input and collaborate with the community to ensure that the development principles of the Official Plan are brought to the neighbourhood level and that these principles are translated in a document that meets the specific needs of that area.

Involving the Local Community in Planning and Development Considerations

The importance of involving the community in planning and development decisions should be emphasized through involving the public in the creation of the Official Plan and Secondary Plans. This process should involve planners collaborating with each community to create maps, drawings and pictures to show how that particular community proposes to move forward with their planning and development objectives. The community players involved in any consultation or collaboration process must include residents, property owners, workers, business owners and community organizations. The community should be responsible for identifying the issues that the community faces and be able to provide ideas and solutions for those issues.

A separate group should also be created that contains key members of the community to guide the entire process. This group can assist planners with the details and communication of the process to ensure that it is equitable and meaningful for the local community. It is important

that the planners involved do not advocate for any particular direction or option, but remain open to ideas from the community. Planners should encourage the community to address both the short and long-term issues and solutions in creating plans. These plans can be utilized by planners and decision-makers in the future planning and development of that neighbourhood.

Flexible Zoning Bylaws

Zoning bylaws, sometimes otherwise known as land use bylaws, are the primary means in which a Canadian municipality implements development controls. It is important that these bylaws are consistent with the current policies within the Official Plan and any Secondary Plans. It is the responsibility of the planners and policy makers to ensure that the goals and objectives of these plans are reflected in new development. There are a number of critiques of past and current zoning bylaws that encourage development patterns that are not sustainable. For example, the separation of commercial and residential uses, permitting large-format commercial developments to locate within industrial areas, and very little or no site development standards for large-format retailers.

The City of Ottawa provides an example of a zoning bylaw that is currently undergoing a review process where the City has attempted to address these, as well as other issues in the proposed document. The following is a list of proposed zoning bylaw policies that promote sustainable development goals (City of Ottawa 2007c):

- Permitting the widest variety of uses and the highest densities within identified areas such as mixed use areas.
- Rather than basing the zoning on the density of dwellings or housing type, residential uses are regulated by building form and massing and on ground oriented dwellings or non-ground oriented dwellings.
- Using cumulative zoning – a way of “permitting all dwellings of lesser and comparable form and density” and exclusionary zoning – a way to restrict particular areas of land for a particular development form.
- Parking regulations that accommodate the basic minimum demand and setting parking maximums — rather than the typical minimum parking standards — where a development is located near rapid transit.
- Reserving employment generating areas by permitting only limited retail and service uses. A zoning bylaw amendment would be required for consideration of any stand-alone or large-format retailers.
- New development should reflect neighbourhood character through the

implementation of sub-zones whereby a number or letter is added to the primary zoning. The subzone differentiates between the physical character of each area.

- Reducing the use of regulations that hamper compact development, such as site coverage and units per hectare, and use yard minimums and maximums instead.
- Permitting residential uses in all commercial zones, and referring to these zones as Urban Mixed Use.
- Reduced parking requirements in many commercial zones, and only permitting parking in side and rear yards of most street-oriented commercial uses.
- Encouraging pedestrian shopping streets by regulating that 50 percent of a commercial building facade should abut the street and provide door and window openings.
- Minimum building heights of 2 storeys along main street commercial zones, as well as no parking requirements for small lots.

Rather than excluding large-format retailers in zoning bylaws, they can be encouraged to make themselves fit within an urban landscape and not compromise the character or quality of the neighbourhood. Large-format retailers can become an anchor for a retail area that is also composed of smaller retailers who benefit from the increased number of shoppers to the area. However, other controls such as design guidelines should be implemented to ensure that sustainability objectives can be maintained.

Design Guidelines

Urban Design Guidelines are another supporting planning document that municipalities can use to influence and ensure quality developments. Whereas a comprehensive zoning bylaw may not want to consider those “impractical regulations” such as window types and finishing materials (City of Ottawa 2007c), it may be more practical to place design regulations in a separate document or as part of a Secondary Plan that encourages, rather than stifles, good design. There are two ways of enforcing design guidelines: by performance or prescriptive measures. While each type of urban design guideline has its merits, it is up to each municipality to decide which method would be more effective in their community. The most important consideration is that there are basic development standards in place that are articulated with developers, architects, designers and planners to ensure quality developments. It is also important that these guidelines are communicated by a municipality in the early planning and development stages to reduce the time, and ultimately the costs, of development.

General design guidelines can be very effective for large-format retailers to help illustrate

principles such as quality streetscapes, pedestrian safety and accessibility, building character and massing, heritage preservation, and sustainable design. MEC's Winnipeg store is highlighted as an example in the downtown design guidelines where "New architecture and new ideals coexist in buildings practicing sustainable design" (City of Winnipeg 2005). MEC's Ottawa store is also an example in a set of general design guidelines of a building using "Salvaged building materials".

In addition to general design guidelines, it may be practical to create design guidelines for particular uses. The City of Ottawa has guidelines for transit-oriented development, greenfield neighbourhoods, development along Traditional Mainstreets, gas station development, among a variety of others. In 2006, an Urban Design Guidelines for Large-Format Retail was developed (City of Ottawa 2006). The principles for large-format retailers encourage high quality architecture and landscaping, comfortable pedestrian environments, enhanced streetscapes and neighbourhood character, and promote development that permits future intensification.

BIAs and BIZs

The creation of Business Improvement Areas or Zones can be an important tool for municipalities to enhance planning objectives for a commercial area. Once the BIA or BIZ is established, they can be quite effective at coordinating programs and festivals, promoting the shopping area, and attracting new businesses. Similar to a managed shopping mall, a BIA or BIZ can also be influential and selective in the type or mix of businesses it receives, and thus assist in the creation of a unique shopping area which draws customers from a wide geographic area. In addition to marketing and business attraction, an important role of a BIA or BIZ is the streetscaping initiatives that can be accomplished through the collection of a levy.

Streetscaping

Streetscaping efforts are often relied upon for initiating the revitalization of a commercial area. However, an inviting and pleasant streetscape is not only important for revitalizing a shopping street, but to help define a unique and memorable character. One constraint of streetscaping initiatives are the initial capital costs, but municipalities often have provincial assistance that can be accessed for these capital costs. For example, the City of Winnipeg took advantage of public and private investment to begin the revitalization process on Portage Avenue.

"The streetscaping was singularly important because it got downtown revitalization moving and... got the private sector involved in partnership with the city and the province. The work was overseen by a loosely knit Portage Avenue Working Group which reported to CentrePlan... as a first step in putting new life into the downtown renovation effort. It was that effort that helped lead to the creation of CentreVenture and in turn to a much broader effort to refurbish our city centre" (Hirst 2002).

However, as shown through the case study analysis, streetscaping is only one part of a successful commercial street. Planners should move beyond considering only the aesthetics of the street, and integrate the ideas of creating both aesthetic as well as functional spaces.

Placemaking

While design guidelines and streetscaping can help create well-designed public streets and buildings, the idea of creating a 'place' moves a couple of steps beyond. Smirniotopoulos (2001) explains that a place has much more to do about the substance and far less to do with the style. The theories of placemaking are contrasted against those of urban planning and design principles that build environments based on a "canned nostalgia and excessive control of the built environment.... True community gathering places, regardless of how well designed, are critically important in engendering meaning and a sense of place from a societal and cultural, not a profit-making, perspective (Smirniotopoulos 2001). Yet as D'Alesandro (2004) suggests — that retailers are at the heart of a 'place' — it is important to ensure that a commercial or retail area is not only vibrant, but that it effectively identifies and enhances the sense of place.

It is the memory of a past experience a person had that continues to draw them back to that place. Those experiences are not simply the shape or design of a building, or the number of trees along the boulevard. It is the combination of providing a well-designed and comfortable built environment for a person to engage in a certain pleasurable activity.

Experience has less to do with the design of the buildings than with the activities that occur within and around them. While the street is arguably the most visible public place, the quality and frequency of its use depends almost entirely on the uses that line it, with its design coming in a distant second in importance (Smirniotopoulos 2001).

Westboro Village, the block study area of Ottawa, has a distinct streetscape and a mix of uses that is very successful towards creating a sense of place. In the span of three city blocks, the area provides a wide variety of retailers, personal and professional services, restaurants and cafes, and institutional uses. There are daily living amenities for local residents, such as doctors, dentists, banks, pharmacies, hair salons, tailors, shoe repair shops and gift shops. There are community gathering spaces in restaurants, cafes, places of worship, a Royal Canadian Legion, as well as a seniors recreation centre. There are retailers that sell a variety of goods from chocolate and pastries, home decor, pet supplies, music, antiques, designer clothes as well as clothing consignment stores. Despite this side variety of uses, the retail area enhances the sense of place that was defined in the study as a "place for healthy lifestyles" (Ott-BIA).

Smirniotopoulos (2001) thus suggests that planners and policy makers must recognize that

much more time should be devoted to understanding the culture and context of the district – the characteristics of the residents, customers, business owners, in addition to the other uses that a place attracts. One of the most essential ingredients of a place is the people that occupy that place, and it must be able to accommodate a local as well as a stranger. A place must also be able to evolve over time and adapt to changes in both trends and demographics. The concept of ‘placemaking’ as planning tool needs to be further understood and integrated into the planning system and in planning policy. Placemaking can help planners move beyond planning for spaces into planning for places – distinctive places that appeal to all of the senses and meet the needs of the local community (Lee 2000).

A common misperception is that places can only be created by upscale retailers and coffee shops. However, there are an increasing number of large-format retailers that are “dispelling this myth and proving that big boxes and standard shopping centre tenants... can be designed for main street settings” (Bohl 2002). A note of caution though, is to ensure that these unique and distinctive places do not fall subject to a ‘mall syndrome’. “These places are often characterized by locally and regionally owned businesses selling unique products and services that cannot be found elsewhere” which “contrasts with the sameness and banality of the mall experience” (Smirniotopoulos 2001). The planning system is currently not capable of controlling this, and perhaps should not attempt to influence the private market. The hope for the future is that the success of commercial areas such as Westboro Village reveals to retail developers that “reconnecting commercial spaces with communities can serve both economic and civic interests as well” (Bohl 2002).

Green Building Initiatives

Green building is another aspect of development that the planning system should improve upon for sustainable development initiatives. Some of the key factors constraining green development standards are provincial building codes which present barriers towards energy efficiency and green building techniques, costs, and reliability of new technologies. Municipalities should play a key role in encouraging changes to provincial building codes, implementing and funding new technologies.

Municipalities need to be leaders in green buildings and provide an “integrated set of targets, principles, and practices to guide the development of City-owned facilities and to encourage sustainable development amongst the private sector” (City of Toronto 2007a). As different green building techniques vary across the country with respect to climate and other development considerations, municipalities should be at the forefront of discovering and promoting viable

techniques. This approach ensures that the appropriate information can be provided to designers, developers and builders to start implementing green development techniques without having the expense of money and time. Municipalities should also support pilot programs for green building techniques that could be used for educational and promotional purposes, and to help reduce the financial barriers of implementing a new technology.

5.3 Implications for Retail Developments

While it is the role of the planning system to provide the guidance and regulations for sustainable retail development, it is the development community that makes it a reality. The following recommendations are to assist retailers and retail developers in achieving more sustainable retail development.

5.3.1 Mandate for Sustainability

Corporate Values

MEC's ability to implement sustainability initiatives in retail development considerations is primarily due to the overall acceptance and promotion of sustainability within the organization. Sustainability is not only firmly supported by MEC's Senior Management team and the Board of Directors, but it is also part of the culture of the organization. Sustainability initiatives are considered in every aspect of MEC's business operations and are supported by staff at all levels. Staff are encouraged to further sustainability initiatives within the organization and to promote sustainability with MEC's members and the community at large. MEC receives benefits in numerous ways through the implementation of its sustainability initiatives, including free marketing.

Similar to integrating sustainability initiatives into the planning system, sustainability must be considered and promoted at all levels of the system and the organization to be most effective. This requires an organization to not promote meaningless policies, but to provide an educational component as well as rewards for positive behaviors. This can include introducing the role of a Sustainability Coordinator position into the organization to look at means of incorporating sustainability aspects into the business activities for even the smallest component. An organization may also designate a champion to further develop a certain sustainability initiative. The business community is an excellent place to begin encouraging sustainability into all aspects of daily living.

Retailer values in some cases have had as much or even more to do with the opposition to large-format retail developments. In 2001 a proposal by Wal-Mart to build in Vancouver on

Southwest Marine Drive received enough community and political opposition that forced the company to back off and re-submit a new greener design for the 128,000 square foot building. However, even the new design was criticized as 'greenwashing' (Bula 2005). But the even larger big-box proposal by Canadian Tire right next door to the Wal-Mart did not seem to create any commotion at city hall. The fight does not seem to necessarily be against big boxes, rather who owns the big box and their public profile. A retail consultant in Vancouver stated, "Wal-Mart has very vocal opponents. It has come to represent everything bad about big-box retailers and U.S. retailers coming into Canada" (McLellan 2005). And some go as far as to assert, "Maybe that's what this whole kerfuffle is really all about. Shopping snobbery.... Ikea is cool. Wal-Mart, on the other hand, is not" (Fralic 2002). However, consumer values towards conservation have even affected companies such as Wal-Mart, and companies such as MEC are leading the way.

Green consumerism is the exercise of choice by people who want a quality lifestyle, but not at the expense of our natural resources or the environment. Green consumers are sending businesses scrambling to bring environmentally friendly products to the market – and fast... [they] are also concerned about the values these products represent... Green consumerism is also changing the face of our communities (Wiebe 2006).

Appropriate Economies of Scale

Like many other businesses, especially retailers, MEC has realized a significant gain through economies of scale. Developing larger store sizes has enabled MEC to experience unprecedented growth, yet keep prices at a reasonable level. However, there are a few reasons for MEC, and other retailers, to maintain individual store sizes below 50,000 square feet in gross floor area, with building footprints averaging around 20,000 square feet. In municipalities that could support a second or multiple store locations, opening satellite stores may be the best strategy. For example, the North Vancouver store has been extremely successful and has not resulted in a significant loss of revenues to the flagship store in Vancouver on Broadway.

The recent trends in retailing suggests that shoppers are trending towards smaller 'boutiquey' stores in high-quality shopping environments as evidenced by the increased development of lifestyle centres. In addition, with the constant and inevitable shifting of retail markets, smaller stores provide for easier redevelopment options. Smaller parcels of land are also more widely available in urban areas. This will require MEC to develop other viable efficiencies for their proposed 'D' sized store that can be applied in areas where the market cannot support the existing 'C' sized store. The 'D' sized store would also provide MEC with a business model suitable for smaller municipalities, and maintain their sustainability objectives in site location

decisions. In addition, with changing attitudes towards height and density, a two-storey retail building or multiple-storey mixed use building is again becoming an attractive development form from an economic, as well as a sustainability perspective.

Bringing the Store to the Consumer

Another strategy that has been successful for MEC is to maintain using established technologies such as mail and telephone ordering, as well as incorporating new Internet ordering technologies. This strategy can be viewed as the most extreme method of bringing the store closer to the home, and can be particularly successful for specialty stores such as MEC that sell a limited range of product brands.

5.3.2 Site Location and Development Decisions

Sustainable Development Criteria

Early in MEC's store development process, a 'decision matrix' was used for aiding with site selection. The matrix provided a general rating for potential sites that MEC was considering developing into a store. The sustainability criteria developed in this practicum is a similar tool that is sufficiently broad to provide most large-format retailers a guide to considerations for developing a successful store within a sustainable retail environment. The criteria require the retailer to consider more than just the site itself, but how the development will fit into the 'district' and 'block' context. The criteria also encourages retailers to research how the proposed commercial development may fit with or enhance the community's goals for the neighbourhood.

Categorizing the sustainability criteria into geographic areas of influence and integration of environment, equity and economy into each category provides the retail developer with a more holistic view of potential impacts. This prevents a retailer from 'greenwashing' a proposed development that may be environmentally-friendly but less equitable to a certain portion of the population. While many larger municipalities are beginning to enforce a variety of regulations on large-format retail developments through bylaws and guidelines, retail developers would benefit from a general set of sustainability criteria, such as those developed in this study, that are applicable anywhere in Canada.

Market Research

MEC is a unique retailer that operates on the basis of a retail co-operative. This co-operative business structure allows MEC to collect detailed information on its member's spending habits and thus determine the most economical location for a new retail store. Even without this detailed type of information, a retail developer should undertake adequate market research to determine the target clientele and potential complimentary businesses, and locate their stores accordingly.

However, a market analysis should not only consider demographics, sales potential and available retail space. It should also include a review of local planning objectives for any potential areas, discussions with the local planning authorities and if applicable, directors of Business Associations. A market analysis could also include discussions with other complimentary or competitive retailers for synergies or partnerships.

Complimentary and Competitive Co-location Strategies

MEC has realized the importance of creating a niche market that is supported by competitive and complimentary businesses. This retail location strategy is not new, as Nelson had described in 1958 the “principle of cumulative attraction” whereby “the clustering of similar but complimentary retail outlets will have greater drawing power than the same outlets if they were geographically dispersed”. Co-location creates a richer commercial environment through the provision of smaller independent stores, other brand stores, coffee shops, restaurants, personal services and a variety of other businesses that offer services to the community. In combination with high quality buildings and a pedestrian friendly and aesthetic streetscape, these types of commercial environments evoke emotion and attachment — a feeling of place — within the community. Devising co-location strategies is important to the future success of more sustainable retail development.

For example, this study showed that there are typical types of retailers and services that MEC should consider in a co-location strategy. In addition to the various national sports retailers such as SportsCheck, Valhalla Pure and Trailhead, other local independent sports retailers provide direct comparison shopping opportunities. Other complimentary businesses include travel shops, luggage and shoe repair shops, and restaurants and cafes. However, it is not only the type of businesses that locate near MEC to create a unique commercial area. Many of these businesses have similar values as MEC towards the environment and sustainability, such as the organic coffee shop Bridgehead, the organic grocery Fresh and Wild, fair trade shops like Ten Thousand Villages. Other businesses provide similar lifestyle stores and services, such as home decor stores, Lululemon and other yoga and fitness studios.

One potential co-location strategy could lead MEC to examine entering the most recent lifestyle centre form of commercial development, if the market research showed that a significant number of MEC’s core members chose to reside near and shop at these lifestyle centres. However, considering the long-term impacts of lifestyle centre developments which are typically limited in residential uses, this commercial concept compromises some of MEC site location requirements for achieving sustainability.

Mixing Land Uses: Residents a Key to Commercial Shopping Areas

In contrast to the suburban lifestyle centre commercial developments, locating within a more unique and 'real' mixed use development concept would assist MEC to better achieve sustainability objectives in its site location requirements. Due to the increasing challenges in retail development including the rising costs and availability of land, as well as soaring construction costs, many developers have been drawn to mixed use projects (Retail Traffic 2006). Although the returns on mixed use projects are similar to other retail developments, an advantage is that in many cases a mixed use development occurs within a mature area where there is less competition (Retail Traffic 2006).

In addition, MEC's core members tend to live in more urban locations and redevelopment areas, which typically have more mixed use developments. Mixed use developments are also supported in all of the Official Plans of the municipalities in the study rather than other forms of retail. In Vancouver, Toronto and Ottawa, mixed use buildings both existed and were under construction within the block study area. In these cities MEC should consider mixed use developments for any redevelopment opportunities. However, a mixed use development option may present challenges as this would either require MEC to become a developer rather than a retailer, or for MEC to form a partnership with a developer of mixed use properties with similar sustainability objectives and corporate values. Although the latter is the more likely and less risky development option for MEC, it may not be financially feasible or accepted by MEC's membership or board of directors.

Refill Versus Infill

The Regional Plan Association and Lincoln Institute of Land Policy (RPA 2001, 21) describe another approach to redevelopment opportunities that retailers and retail developers should be cognoscente of. This is the idea of "refill" rather than infill. Refilling is the process of redevelopment through small-scale and incremental changes to result in long-term and large-scale change. Refilling not only applies to existing buildings in urban areas, but also to dead spaces such as under-utilized parking lots in more suburban areas. It also means that redevelopment initiatives must respect the local character and proceed at a scale that is acceptable by the community.

Although it seems like only a small difference in semantics, retail developments which are sensitive to the idea of developing in a 'place' are likely to be more successful in infill situations.

...some of the most memorable places are those that have been adapted to preserve the existing building stock — which often already has independent meaning for local residents — in new and creative ways. The nature of that reuse will do more

to determine the meaning of a place than the quality of the architecture or the integrity of the restoration (Smirniotopoulos 2001).

The selected MEC stores in the study provided a variety of examples for refilling. The Vancouver store resulted in the redevelopment of a group of buildings. The Ottawa store is the result of carefully dismantling an existing building and reusing many of the materials in the new building. Each of MEC's stores in the study are not replicants of each other, as is common with many retail chains. However, there is debate regarding the facade of the Ottawa store to whether or not it fits with the existing character.

Community-Minded Marketing

MEC provides more to the community than simple a retail offering. Each MEC store in this case study supports the community through education of general sustainability concepts and green building initiatives, providing staff and product donations for events, promotional space for local community groups, and through funding. Where most retailers spend a large amount of money on general marketing, MEC spends extremely little. MEC's primary marketing strategy is through word of mouth and being recognized as a business that contributes exceptional resources to the environment and the local communities in which they are located. The extra cost of integrating energy efficient green building upgrades has likely financially benefitted MEC in the long term by more than just reduced operational costs. For example, the Toronto store estimates that over 5,000 people come for green building tours on an annual basis. This is just one way in which MEC indirectly undertakes a very inexpensive but targeted marketing strategy. These marketing strategies benefit the community and are more environmentally-friendly than traditional marketing.

5.4 Further Research

Many opportunities exist to further the research on sustainable retail development. Firstly, this study evaluated only four of MEC's stores. To provide more detailed and accurate recommendations to MEC for future developments, a complete study of all locations would prove to be beneficial. Secondly, the study evaluated the stores at one particular time and did not compare the current status of each store compared to before the store was developed. A future study may provide better insight by examining the evolution of the district, block, site and community sustainability criteria over a period of time with the opening of new store locations. Thirdly, similar studies could be undertaken with other large-format retailers to provide as a comparison to MEC. Lastly, a future study could involve careful testing of the sustainability criteria

for potential improvements in site location and development considerations on a random sample of large-format retailers in a variety of cities. The effectiveness of the sustainability criteria could be evaluated by comparing newly developed stores to previous locations.

5.5 Conclusion

The future of sustainable retail development may be best realized through a combined effort of the planning system, decision-makers, designers, architects, engineers, retail developers and retailers. A number of recommendations have been provided in this study which the planning system can utilize to increase its effectiveness in creating and regulating sustainable retail development. However, there are certain issues that are beyond the scope of the current planning system, such as corporate values and co-location strategies, which must be addressed by retail developers and retailers. This study developed a set of general sustainability criteria that planners and retail developers can use towards creating and evaluating retail developments. The criteria are broad in scope and cover environmental, social and economic considerations, in addition to attempting to provide a longer-term perspective on the impacts of retail development decisions.

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APPENDIX A: MEC STORE SIZE

Table 5. Building footprint, gross and total useable area (square feet) of Mountain Equipment Co-op stores in Canada.

Store	Vancouver	Calgary	Toronto	Edmonton	Ottawa	Halifax	Winnipeg	Montreal	Quebec	North Vancouver	Victoria
Area (sq.ft.)											
Building Footprint	52 487	32 508	27 373	26 750	16 022		10 200	23 988		11 839	
Gross Area	62 209	59 575	51 077	25 536	29 310	17 261	18 488	45 540			
MEC Usable											
Main Floor	44 785	26 986	17 431	N/A	13 063	6 734	8 003	19 199	13 006	11 291	
2nd Floor	2 747	20 464	21 026	N/A	12 772	7 576	7 998	18 776	3 344	959	
Total Usable	47 532	47 450	38 475	22 491	25 835	14 310	16 001	37 975	16 350	12 250	

Definitions

Building Footprint: the area of ground that the building occupies including canopies, loading bays, cold storage, etc.

Gross Area: the area within the outer surface of the exterior walls.

Useable Area: the area within the exterior walls (excluding vestibules, mechanical/electrical, vault/rooms, fire rated stairways, elevators).

APPENDIX B: SUSTAINABILITY CRITERIA

District Sustainability Criteria

1. Does the development support local planning objectives for the district?
2. Are sustainability objectives outlined in Official or Secondary Plans?
3. Does the district support coordination between land use and transportation?
4. Is the development concentrated around a primary public transportation node?
5. Is the street system interconnected to allow multiple paths for movement within the district?
6. Are greenways and bikeways integrated into the local transportation network?
7. Does the district contain a sufficient retail base of customers that will support the retail development based on the goods and services provided in relation to their income and lifestyle?
8. Does the development enhance local identity and character?
9. Does the retail development contribute to a “placemaking” effect?
10. Does the retail development utilize existing infrastructure networks?
11. Is there incorporation of district-scale energy and servicing infrastructure to the retail development?
12. Is the retail development located in a Business Revitalization Zone or Business Improvement Area?

Block Sustainability Criteria

1. Are on site parking requirements minimized while on street parking is maximized?
2. Is parking located such that it does not detract from the pedestrian environment?
3. Do sidewalks connect blocks on both sides of the street?
4. Are interruptions to the sidewalk minimized?
5. Are blocks short enough to provide easy movement for pedestrians in the retail area?
6. Is the retail area concentrated between three or four city blocks to provide for easy comparison-shopping?

7. Are streets designed to be safe and comfortable for pedestrians and cyclists?
8. Are setbacks minimized to create a sense of enclosure on the street?
9. Does the street lighting provide for safe travel at night for pedestrians and cyclists?
10. Is the design and scale of the retail development consistent with the rest of the block?
11. Are there multiple lot sizes within the block to accommodate a variety of building types and sizes?
12. Does the block incorporate a mix of uses to provide customers at varying times of the day?
13. Is there an established niche market of products and services that serves to draw customers from a wide geographic area?
14. Is there an anchor store that serves to draw customers from a wide geographic area?
15. Does the mix of retailers permit comparison-shopping?
16. Does the mix of retailers and service providers serve the needs of the district residents?
17. How many sites are undeveloped on the block?
18. How many vacant buildings are on the block?

Site Sustainability Criteria

1. Is the site located in an established commercial centre, strip or node?
2. Is pedestrian movement between the parking lot and the store entrance safe and easy?
3. Is the store well signed and easy to locate for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicular traffic?
4. Is there sufficient and safe bicycle parking?
5. Does the building provide sufficient lighting to provide safe access to the entrance?
6. Is the building articulated in response to natural features or phenomena?
7. Does the site have a structure with local character that can be reused for a new establishment with minimal renovation cost?
8. Does the building have an attractive and appealing façade that fits with the character of the neighbourhood, yet is unique and distinguishable?
9. Are there display windows that allow a view into the store or at the variety of products sold?

10. Are blank walls minimized on the building at the pedestrian level?
11. Are there opportunities for social interaction on the site?
12. Is the building LEED certified?
13. Are alternative storm water management designs incorporated into the development?
14. Does the building and site design minimize energy and material inputs?
15. Are materials from an old structure on the site recycled into the construction of the new building?
16. Are opportunities for water reuse and recycling incorporated into the building and site design?
17. Does the building maximize floor space and minimize the building footprint through multiple levels?
18. Are opportunities to include the maximum vegetative cover and landscaping of native flora incorporated onto the site?

Community Sustainability Criteria

1. Does the retailer incorporate and support educational opportunities for sustainability within the community?
2. Does the retailer employ marketing strategies to raise awareness of sustainability concepts within the community?
3. Does the retailer support local community groups?
4. Does the retailer support local environmental initiatives?
5. Do any partnerships exist between the retailer and local organizations?

APPENDIX C: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW QUESTION PATHS

Mountain Equipment Co-op Head Office Staff

Firstly, I would like to thank you for your participation in this interview. Before we proceed, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study and how this information from the interview will be used. Please take the time to read through and sign the informed consent form provided to you, and ask any questions that you may have.

Before we begin, I will need to gather some basic information about you. This includes: occupation/position with MEC; duration of employment/contract with MEC; employment or education prior to obtaining your current position/contract; and the number and name of MEC store locations that you assisted/directed the retail development process.

As you know, I would appreciate hearing you discuss issues related to the recent development of MEC stores.

1. What has been the main impetus for opening these new locations?
2. What is the decision-making process that MEC undertakes for choosing Canadian cities for new store locations?
3. Once a city has been determined, what is the process for choosing a site location? What are the most important considerations?
4. What kinds of information are used in the process of site location decisions?
5. Who is predominantly involved in making these decisions? Is it primarily by MEC staff, or is outside consultation used?
6. Is there a local public consultation process beyond any requirements for planning permission?
7. Has MEC received any feedback regarding any of the new store locations? From the general public? From other retailers? From the Planning Department or other city departments?
8. In what ways are the concepts of 'sustainability' applied to new store location and development decisions?
9. Would you say that the process of developing the 'sustainable' initiatives has been different from the processes of developing conventional initiatives? In what ways?
10. What has facilitated 'sustainable' initiatives? What has hampered them?
11. What are the benefits to MEC of including 'sustainability' initiatives to retail development?

Please provide examples.

12. Do the costs of these benefits outweigh the benefits to MEC, or vice versa?
13. If so, how does MEC justify the costs of 'sustainable' retail development?
14. How do these 'sustainability' initiatives of MEC retail development benefit the broader community? Other retailers?

Store Specific Key Informant Interviews

Firstly, I would like to thank you for your participation in this interview. Before we proceed, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study and how this information from the interview will be used. Please take the time to read through and sign the informed consent form provided to you, and ask any questions that you may have.

Before we begin, I will need to gather some basic information about you. This information includes your current occupation, duration of employment and amount of time you have been familiar with the district.

General Questions

1. How would you characterize the retail/commercial district that MEC is currently located within? Is there any type of existing niche market?
2. How would you characterize the residents in the district?
3. Does the district contain a sufficient number of residents for the retail area based on the goods and services provided in relation to their income and lifestyle (ie. A 'complete community')?
4. When Mountain Equipment Co-op announced that it would be opening a store in this city, what was the reaction of the public? Of other retailers? Of the local government?
5. At the time, were you satisfied with the proposed location? In hindsight, do you still feel this way?
6. In your opinion, have any changes occurred in the surrounding retail/commercial district since the opening of MEC, and what kinds of changes?
7. Are there any particular types of retailers or service providers that have relocated into the district since the opening of MEC?
8. Are there any particular types of retailers or service providers that have relocated out the district since the opening of MEC?

9. In your opinion, has the opening of MEC in this retail/commercial district caused any negative impacts? Positive impacts?
10. Are you familiar with the concept of 'placemaking'? Would you describe this district as such a 'place'?

City Planner Questions

1. To your knowledge, did MEC have to apply for variances on the zoning bylaw?
2. Did MEC receive assistance from the city (financial or otherwise) to construct the new store?

Sustainability Coordinator Questions

1. What is the primary role of the Sustainability Coordinator in your store?
2. Does your store incorporate and support educational opportunities for sustainability locally for the community? Please provide examples.
3. Does your store employ marketing strategies to raise awareness of sustainability concepts within the community? Please describe these strategies.
4. Does your store support local community groups? How is the support provided?
5. Does your store support local environmental initiatives? What kinds of initiatives?
6. What kinds of partnerships exist between your store and local organizations?

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Architecture

Department of City Planning
201 Russell Building
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9458
Fax (204) 474-7532

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is part of the process of informed consent. It will provide you with the basic information of the intention of this research and what your participation will involve. If you require more detailed information regarding any concerns please feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this consent form carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This study is being conducted to gather information on market-led initiatives towards sustainable retail development from an urban planning perspective. The information gathered in this study will be used to further develop and clarify the concept of sustainable retail development in relation to current retail planning practices in Canada.

This study is being conducted by Tracy Woitenko as a part of the requirements to graduate with a Master in City Planning degree from the University of Manitoba. It is being advised by Dr. David van Vliet and Dr. Tom Carter of the Department of City Planning, Faculty of Architecture, University of Manitoba and by Douglas Clark, MLA, also in the Faculty of Architecture.

During this interview, our conversation will be audio taped. You may decline audio-taping. However, audio-taping allows for efficient and accurate collection and analysis of information at a later date. Written notes will also be taken to supplement audio-taping. This interview may last approximately 1 to 2 hours long. During this time you will be asked questions regarding the development of new Mountain Equipment Co-op retail stores and your observed changes to the surrounding commercial area. There are no right or wrong answers.

All responses and your identity will be kept confidential. This includes your name; your business or company name and any other information that would give your identity away will not be included in the final report of this study. Your responses will, however, be associated with the city in which you participate in the study and your type of employment. Where information occurs within the session transcripts that will be included in the final report, names and other confidential information will be omitted. Data will be collected using a digital audio-recording device, if permitted, and written notes. All digitally recorded interviews will be stored in a secure manner that only the principal researcher can access through pass codes, and erased upon completion of the practicum. All written notes will also be stored securely and only accessed by myself, and shredded after completion of the practicum.

If you are interested in viewing the final report, it will be available to read after October 2007. It will be published as a practicum in the Architecture and Fine Arts Library at the University of Manitoba and available on request through Alberta GEOS library services. It will also be available online through the Theses Canada Portal at <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/thesescanada/>. This information may also be considered for future publication within planning journals by the researcher.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

If you have any questions or concerns after the interview is completed, please feel free to contact myself at (204) [redacted] or [redacted] or Dr. David van Vliet at (204) 474-7176 or vandvliet@cc.umanitoba.ca.

This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board, University of Manitoba, Canada. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above named persons of the Human Ethics Secretariat (204) 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and for your reference.

Respondent's signature _____

Date _____

Researcher's signature _____

Date _____

Tracy A. Woitenko, Masters Student, Department of City Planning
Faculty of Architecture, University of Manitoba