PLANNING NEAR-UNIVERSITY NEIGHBOURHOODS
A case study of Kingston, ON and Ithaca, NY

Jeff Nadeau

A report submitted to the School of Urban and Regional Planning
in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Urban and Regional Planning

Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
May 2015
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Neighbourhoods near universities, especially those with campuses near the centre of town, merit study for a number of reasons. High concentrations of students in central neighbourhoods and the distinctive housing and lifestyle preferences of students result in certain unusual conditions wherein an area may have low vacancy rates and high land values but declining housing quality and tension between students and permanent residents.

Kingston, Ontario, and Ithaca, New York, are home to Queen’s University and Cornell University respectively and are both examples of small cities where a university campus and its attendant near-university neighbourhoods have a central and significant presence in the city. Kingston’s University District, where single-detached dwellings have been converted to student housing en masse, is immediately north of campus. Just to the north of this area, Williamsville is an underdeveloped main-street district at the edge of downtown. Ithaca’s Collegetown is immediately south of campus and has a dense and attractive mixed-use centre but an awkward transition to the surrounding residential area. Both of these near-university neighbourhoods have been the subject of recent urban design studies. There was a clear opportunity to evaluate these neighbourhoods and their plans.

Two fields of research were used in the analysis of these neighbourhoods. Urban design literature by Robertson (2001), Walker (2009), and Allan Jacobs’ Great Streets (1993) provided the evaluative framework for analyzing the attractiveness, pedestrian-friendliness, and mixed use characteristics of the case studies. The body of literature on studentification, by a variety of authors, was a source for evaluation criteria concerning the integration of student housing in the
neighbourhood at large and a source of information on issues faced by student neighbourhoods in general.

Despite initial expectations that Ithaca’s near-campus neighbourhood would excel in most respects, analysis resulted in a more nuanced perspective. While it has a few flaws relating to excessive building heights and awkward transitions to surrounding urban fabric, the mixed-use core of Collegetown is markedly superior to underdeveloped Williamsville in terms of scale, character, and built form generally. Despite its significant relative disadvantage in built form, Williamsville has more varied offerings in terms of mainstreet amenities that would service the mixed-use heart of a neighbourhood.

Figure 1: A low-density stretch of Williamsville

Conditions are different in the surrounding residential areas. While Kingston and Ithaca are peers in terms of studentification, and have similar issues of building upkeep and demographic imbalances related to the effects of dominant student populations in near-campus neighbourhoods, Kingston’s residential University District is more attractive due to the more
consistent scale and character of its buildings. The advantage of Collegetown is that there is more capacity for accommodating in higher-density buildings.

![Figure 2: Mixed-use core of Collegetown](image)

The urban plans for both case studies demonstrated an awareness of the challenges faced by their respective neighbourhoods, and their recommendations would result in greatly improved near-campus areas according to most evaluation criteria. It should be noted that Collegetown is significantly more developed than Williamsville. As such, Kingston faces a much greater gulf between existing conditions and the idealized conditions presented in the Williamsville study, whereas the Collegetown Urban Plan contains significant but mostly incremental improvements in the form of infill and redevelopment of key areas.
## Summary Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Attractiveness</th>
<th>Pedestrian Friendliness</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Mixed Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Williamsville &amp;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University District</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williamsville</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Street Study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegetown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Williamsville, if built according to the design guidelines in the Williamsville Main Street Study, promises to be a fine mixed-use mainstreet and an attractive gateway to downtown Kingston and the University District south of it. Two of this report’s recommendations concern the details of the plan’s implementation; the third concerns the city’s overall strategy:

- Given the amount of residential and commercial space to be developed, the City and more local actors need to be proactive in generating interest in and enthusiasm for the Williamsville area.
- Given the attraction of developing housing suited primarily for the profitable student market, it will be necessary to be critical of housing proposals in the area to ensure that the ambitions of the Official Plan and Municipal Housing Strategy are actually being met.
- Though it was not included in the Williamsville Main Street Study, the University District should be assessed for re-zoning to better accommodate residential infill and intensification. There is a demonstrated demand for housing in the area, and if the City is serious about an overall increase in urban residential density, this neighbourhood’s proximity to the Princess Street mixed-use corridor makes it a prime candidate for intensification.
With thanks to Per and to Ryan, for so readily sharing their research and insight;

    To Ajay and Leela and Sue, for the guidance and advice;

    To Catherine, for the support and the interesting hat;

And especially to Dave Gordon, for his tremendous patience, guidance, and encouragement.
# Table of Contents

Executive Summary ..................................................................................................................... viii  
Introduction ..................................................................................................................................... 1  
Case Descriptions ............................................................................................................................ 5  
  *Kingston* .................................................................................................................................... 13  
  *Ithaca* ......................................................................................................................................... 16  
Research Method .......................................................................................................................... 15  
Analysis ......................................................................................................................................... 20  
  *Attractiveness* ............................................................................................................................ 20  
  *Pedestrian Friendliness*............................................................................................................. 29  
  *Housing* ..................................................................................................................................... 35  
  *Mixed Use* .................................................................................................................................. 42  
Conclusions & Recommendations ................................................................................................ 49  
References ..................................................................................................................................... 57
INTRODUCTION

This report compares main streets in the near-campus neighbourhoods of two university towns. Universities represent an assortment of planning challenges in small to mid-sized cities like Kingston, Ontario, and Ithaca, New York, where students represent a sizeable portion of the population and have distinctive preferences with regard to lifestyle and housing.

Kingston is a small city with a large student population, approximately twelve thousand of whom are recorded as living in off-campus private housing (Denniston-Stewart, 2006, p.2) and concentrated to a significant degree in the neighbourhoods surrounding Queen’s University. This gives the near-university neighbourhoods of Kingston some distinctive characteristics resulting in problems concerning the affordability and condition of housing available to students and potentially in problems concerning the overall vitality of the neighbourhoods in which the overwhelming majority of Queen’s students opt to live.

In the search for a case study that could provide a suitable comparison with Kingston, Ithaca emerged as a fitting companion. Ithaca, too, is a small city with a large and relatively central university campus, a significant student population concentrated in the area near campus, and a similar history of studentification.

NEAR-CAMPUS NEIGHBOURHOODS

“Studentification” is a process of neighbourhood change in which student enclaves form in pre-existing neighbourhoods and alter them economically, socially, culturally, and physically (Smith, 2004). Studentification itself is a result of a few simple characteristics of the housing preferences of students. Students like to live near university campuses (Allinson, 2006; Brooks & Danford, 2012) and they like to live near other students to gain a sense of belonging to a wider
student community (Allinson, 2006, p.84). In combination, it is obvious how these characteristics could result in a tendency for student populations to collect in enclaves with high degrees of segregation from non-students.

The influx of a largely-transient student population with “little or no commitment to the community” (Sage et. al., 2012, p.606) is accompanied by negative effects experienced by the permanent residents of a neighbourhood. These can include behavioral problems and disturbance, heightened rates of minor crime (Allinson, 2006, p.84), and problems with on-street refuse as students with high residential turnover rates are slow to learn garbage collection schedules. Schools (Hubbard, 2009) are one institution noted to suffer as families move out of studentifying areas, reducing enrollment and the funding that corresponds with it. Munro et. al. note that these effects are intensified “as the overall proportional population of students increases.” (2009, p.1823).

Demand for housing of a particular type, concentrated reliably in the same neighbourhood year after year, results in high rates of return on investment and low vacancy rates (Hubbard, 2009, p.1904) and make rental properties marketed to students attractive to landlords entering the buy-to-let market. As a result, properties in studentifying neighbourhoods are converted from single-family housing types to rental units intended for multiple occupants, a type referred to in studentification literature as HMO, or Housing in Multiple Occupation. The demand for housing stock suitable for such conversion will result in a reordering and inflation of property prices (Smith, 2004, p.80) and can have the effect of pricing new owner-occupiers out of an area that might otherwise have been affordable to them.

As a result of this and aforementioned behavioral issues, there is resistance to the expansion of student neighbourhoods. Paradoxically, this resistance can take the form of
opposing increased housing density, which would help accommodate student demand in a variety of housing types instead of landlords purchasing owner-occupied properties for conversion into HMO intended for student housing.

While much of the discourse surrounding studentification has concerned its negative neighbourhood effects, significant student populations are supportive of healthy downtown retail (Filion et al., 2004) and “culture-oriented services” (Smith, 2004, p.80) such as restaurants and bars patronized by large numbers of students.

Moreover, while the effects of large populations of resident students dominate debate concerning university neighbourhoods, they represent just one segment of the population associated with universities. Universities employ thousands of people—faculties, researchers and staff—all of whom should be considered stakeholders in near-campus areas where they might shop, access services or live. These neighbourhoods—and, crucially, the main streets that are the essence of the neighbourhood’s public realm (Walker, 2009, p.59), being the focus of frequent trips, interactions and encounters—should have something to offer everyone.

**TWO DESIGN PLANS**

The essential building block of the public realm is the street, and none more so than the main street, which can define the character of a neighbourhood as the principal thoroughfare and address for retail, services and commercial use. Accommodating the distinctive needs of near-campus neighbourhoods is not only a question of management through policy and bylaw. It is a question of design, of skilfully combining the vital elements that make a neighbourhood attractive not just to students but to everyone.
The Williamsville Main Street study (Brook McIlroy, 2012) outlines a vision for intensifying a segment of Princess Street with mid-rise mixed-use development. This development will occur within a 15-minute walk of the Queen’s University campus in an area that has a strong student presence, though it is worth mentioning that the Williamsville and the University District are distinct areas, and as such that the Williamsville Main Street study does not cover the area immediately adjacent to the campus. Regardless, the emergence of the Williamsville study and its likely influence on the area surrounding the university campus suggested that it would be timely to assess this urban plan in the context of near-university neighbourhoods.

As nearby Ithaca, New York had also recently produced an urban plan for an area sharing many of these attributes, I elected to undertake a comparative case study of two near-university main streets—the redevelopment plan for Williamsville in Kingston and the Collegetown plan in Ithaca, NY—and assess each in terms of urban design as it relates to “studentification” issues faced in near-campus neighbourhoods. In doing so, I hoped to provide perspective on the challenges faced in Williamsville and identify a number of best practices for accommodating students and sustaining viable mixed-use neighbourhoods near universities.
CASE DESCRIPTIONS

This report includes two case studies of areas of university towns with recognized or demonstrated potential for traditional-style main street development. The case studies were selected because they share a number of important characteristics:

- Region, the cities being situated within 300km of each other and having been developed over similar time periods resulting in similar architectural styles;
- City size, Kingston (metro population 123,000) and Ithaca (metro population 101,000) having roughly equal populations, allowing for challenges arising from different metro area boundaries;
- University size, Queen’s having approximately 24,000 full- and part-time students and Cornell having a total of approximately 21,000;
- Urban economies, education being a major component of both cities’ local economies;
- Recent events in planning, both cities having recently adopted new urban design frameworks for neighbourhoods near their universities and both university campuses having recently adopted new campus master plans;
- Physical location of the universities’ main campuses relative to the rest of the town, in this case being that both Queen’s and Cornell are both centrally located and are adjacent to central neighbourhoods in their respective cities.
The case studies are focused on parts of each city adjacent to their major universities, each of which has been subject to a recent urban design plan. My study area in Kingston is a combination of two areas in the city; the University District and the part of Princess Street recognized as the main street of the Williamsville neighbourhood, which was the subject of a January 2012 urban design study by the City of Kingston. Conveniently, the Collegetown study area in Ithaca includes analogues to the Williamsville Main Street study area (the dense mixed-use core around the intersection of College Avenue and Dryden Road) and the residential University District.

KINGSTON

The Kingston study area consists of two distinct but related neighbourhoods, the University District and Williamsville.

The University District—bound by Barrie and Collingwood Streets to the east and west and Colborne Street to the north—is colloquially referred to as the student ghetto, which is perhaps indicative of attitudes toward the dominant student population in this part of town. This area has been the location of a highly concentrated student population for decades, and surrounding areas have experienced the gradual creep of studentification. It was recently re-branded as the University District in an effort to improve its image.
Figure 3: Typical conditions in Williamsville
Williamsville is located to the immediate north of the University District, and is therefore a short walking distance from the university campus. Williamsville is a transitional area, where the attractive traditionally-styled main street development prevalent in downtown Kingston gives way to structures of variable attractiveness and quality, underutilized lots, decreased density and auto-oriented development patterns. Brook McIlroy’s Williamsville Main Street Study outlines a vision for correcting these deficiencies by intensifying the area with mid-rise mixed-use development.

THE PLAN FOR KINGSTON

The Williamsville Main Street Study is a visioning exercise and set of urban design guidelines for a transitional part of Princess Street between Bath Road and Division Street, divided into three Character Areas defined generally by predominant existing land use, street treatment, and building character. The Study contains recommendations for built form (“private realm”) design, streetscape (“public realm”) design, and sustainable design.

Area 1, the westernmost segment of the study area, is “characterized by medical and employment uses” (Williamsville Main Street Study, 2012, p.21) and is expected to remain a destination for commuters throughout the city. A need for further ground-floor retail is identified here. Area 2 is noted for its vacant and underutilized sites, and is considered to have the highest potential for redevelopment as a mixed-use traditional mainstreet (p.25). Area 3, which ends at the corner of Princess Street and Division Street, has fewer redevelopment sites and is identified as a gateway to downtown Kingston and to Queen’s University (p.29). Several sites in this area, such as the terminus of University Avenue or the northwest corner of the intersection with Division Street, are ideal locations for special landmark buildings.
The Williamsville Main Street Study the following guiding principles (p.17). The relationship of these principles to the challenges of near-university neighbourhood design will be further discussed in the Analysis chapter.

1. Ensure community vitality through a mix of uses that includes retail/commercial at-grade
2. Improve the pedestrian and cyclist experience along Princess Street.
3. Identify opportunities to green the public and private realm.
4. Guide development at an appropriate scale and density that is compatible with the street width and neighbourhood context.
5. Encourage high quality architecture that is representative of the cultural heritage of Williamsville.
6. Protect existing residential areas from negative impacts.
7. Provide a sustainable framework for future redevelopment.
ITHACA

Ithaca’s student enclave is called Collegetown, and is located across the scenic Cascadilla Gorge to the immediate south of the Cornell University campus. As a result of the steep gorge, access between Collegetown and the Cornell campus is limited to bridges located at Stewart Street, College Avenue, and on Dryden Road.

Collegetown is also distinguished from the rest of Ithaca by its topography, as it is located at the top of a steep hill. The intersection of College Avenue and Dryden Road has an elevation about 100 metres higher than Ithaca’s downtown only 850m to the west. The population in this neighborhood is composed overwhelmingly of young renters, in contrast with the protected East Hill Historic District to the west and affluent, largely owner-occupied Bryant Park and Belle Sherman to the east (Collegetown Urban Plan, 2.4). Like in Kingston, there is a likelihood of student encroachment in adjacent areas if enrollment continues to increase and housing pressures continue to mount without a corresponding increase of density in Collegetown itself, but opposition to added housing has resulted in exclusionary zoning that promises to perpetuate the process of studentification (Ithaca Voice, Oct. 20 2014).

Apart from a portion of the mixed-use centre of the neighbourhood, at the north end of College Avenue where it approaches the Cornell campus, built conditions in Collegetown are noticeably degraded relative to surrounding areas. An Ithaca alderperson described much of the neighbourhood as “a dump […] built to the lowest standard,” adding that as Collegetown is the most expensive real estate in the city, it needs to be done well (Ithaca Times, Dec. 4 2013).
Figure 5: Typical conditions in Collegetown
THE PLAN FOR ITHACA

The Collegetown Urban Plan was prepared by Goody Clancy in 2009 at the behest of the City of Ithaca and Cornell University. It examines existing conditions in the neighbourhood’s urban design, its parking and transit situation, and its real estate market. The recommendations that follow propose changes to the area’s transportation system, indicate opportunities for future development, and contain urban design guidelines to govern built form in a variety of character areas, from the area’s mixed-use core (6.4) to “village residential” along major streets (6.14) to other blocks identified for “preservation” (6.20, 6.23, 6.26).
Compared to the Williamsville Main Street Study, the Collegetown Urban Plan is a lot more specific and opportunistic in its recommendations. There is more existing urban fabric for the plan to work with, so in addition to general guidelines (as in Figure 4) the plan is characterized by a number of site-specific interventions such as infill housing, upgraded plazas and through-block pathways.

Its implementation has been subject to revision owing to political and legal challenges, eventually giving way to the Collegetown Area Form Districts plan, but it is the original 2009 plan that will be evaluated in this report as a guiding document for the policies that ensued. These are the objectives listed in the Collegetown Urban Plan’s Illustrative Plan (5.9):

1. Focus high-density mixed-use projects at the intersection of College Avenue and Dryden Road. Permit heights up to 90’ at this location, provided that higher buildings follow regulations governing dimensions and massing included in the design guidelines.

2. Explore opportunities for redevelopment that can provide landscaped connections between College Avenue and Linden Avenue; accommodate larger, denser housing models; and support use of lot interiors for open spaces instead of surface parking.

3. Investigate the use of new multi-unit housing types to allow a significant expansion of housing options. Design of such units should respect the area’s existing architectural vocabulary, as defined in the design guidelines.

4. Regularize curb extensions to allow for street-tree planting and to coordinate with enhanced sidewalk crossings.

5. Develop plazas, parks, and attractive pathways along Cascadilla Gorge.

6. Pursue infill development along Dryden Road that accommodates more residents but leaves existing character along the street fundamentally unchanged.
RESEARCH METHOD

How does the planning for the Collegetown neighbourhood in Ithaca differ from the planning for Williamsville in Kingston, and what lessons can Kingston draw from Ithaca’s experience with Collegetown?

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analytical framework for this report was developed drawing on two fronts. For the planning and design of central neighbourhoods, the work of Robertson (1999, 2001), Walker (2009) and Burayidi (2013) on small and mid-sized downtowns proved informative. Many of the general principles of good planning in downtown neighbourhoods—physical attractiveness, pedestrian friendliness, and mixed use development—can also be said to contribute to good central student neighbourhoods. Strictly speaking, any good urban design must have an inclusive appeal, and in this sense an attractive student neighbourhood should not differ significantly from any other attractive area in terms of urban design.

Where university neighbourhoods differ is in the economic, social, cultural and physical characteristics that make these neighbourhoods distinctive and challenging to work with. The management of each of these dimensions is important, particularly in cities the size of Kingston or Ithaca, in which university populations dominated by young, unattached adults represent a significant portion of the overall population. Criteria for the management of near-university neighbourhoods were drawn from a reading of the literature on studentification by such authors as Smith (2004), Hubbard (2009), Munro et. al. (2009) and Chatterton (2010).
**EVALUATION METHODS**

The evaluation criteria for this report are drawn from the fields of urban design and studentification and were modified to fit the particular needs of this report.

Robertson (2001) cited Mixed Use (p.14) and Pedestrian Friendliness (p.17) as important development principles for small cities, and Attractiveness is implicit in a number of his principles, but corresponds especially to the mention (p.18) of design guidelines for the downtown. Other principles in the work—heritage, waterfronts, and moderation in parking requirements—were deemed non-essential or redundant for the purposes of main streets in these student neighbourhoods.

Allan Jacobs’ *Great Streets* (1993) contributed greatly to an understanding of urban design at this level with respect to street definition and enclosure, the complementarity of buildings to one another, and the transparency of ground floors offering a visual connection between commercial interiors and the public realm.

**Housing Integration** as an evaluation criterion asks whether near-university neighbourhoods have the capacity to absorb student housing demand, whether they can support sufficient diversity in users and residents to avoid the behavioral issues common in student enclaves, and also whether the quality of housing stock has diminished as a result of studentification. These criteria are informed heavily by the work of Sage, Smith & Hubbard (2012).

Together these evaluation criteria served as my framework for assessing these two near-university neighbourhoods and their respective plans. I have considered which components are necessary to each of these criteria and what indicators I might use in assessing them.
### EVALUATION MATRIX FOR STUDENT NEIGHBOURHOODS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
<td>Components: Follows design principles contributing to walkable, mixed-use</td>
<td>Indicators: Direct observation and document review. Application of design principles, visually legible street boundaries, sensitive transitions of built form, appropriateness of buildings, quality building materials and care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>neighbourhoods of human scale.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedestrian Friendliness</td>
<td>Components: Accommodation of active transportation and alternatives to</td>
<td>Indicators: Direct observation. Trees on sidewalk, close-knit urban fabric, sidewalk space, traffic speeds, shaded area, daylighting, windows and doors on the street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>automobile use. Services and amenities within reasonable walking distance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of housing. Built form and landscaping contributing to streets as civic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>spaces.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Integration</td>
<td>Components: No “ghettoization” of students in distinct enclaves or</td>
<td>Indicators: Direct observation and document review. Quality and variety of housing stock. Analysis of policies in official plan and zoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>exodus of families and working professionals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capacity of near-university neighbourhoods to absorb student housing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>demand with sufficient density. Affordability &amp; suitability of housing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for various tenant types.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Use</td>
<td>Components: Multifunctional neighbourhood including shops, services and</td>
<td>Indicators: Commercial buildings with residential above grade, available variety of businesses and services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>amenities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SCOPE

This report will present a comparative case study of two mid-sized university towns, Kingston and Ithaca, both of which are the sites of major universities and both of which have central neighbourhoods that have concentrated populations of young adults enrolled in the universities and are located within walking distance of campus.

Existing conditions in Kingston’s and Ithaca’s near-university neighbourhoods will be evaluated and compared to the planned future conditions to be found in their respective plans, the 2012 Williamsville Main Street Study for Kingston and the 2009 Collegetown urban plan and conceptual design guidelines for Ithaca. These plans will be reviewed for their management of studentification issues and land use concerns for downtown neighbourhoods with main streets.

Williamsville is within a 15-minute walk to the Queen’s University campus and has a strong student presence. It is slated for intensification and redevelopment as a main street in a more traditional style, with some ambition of catering to the university demographic so prominent in the area. Collegetown is located directly south of Cornell University and is densely built at the main intersection of College Avenue and Dryden Road. The neighbourhoods are not exactly similar, but have enough in common that a comparison of their plans could provide valuable insight.

LIMITATIONS

Cornell is a private university with high costs of tuition, which suggests a relatively wealthy student demographic in Ithaca. Different socio-economic statuses could be confounding variable in a comparison of land use and housing availability if the market for private rentals is affected by student populations more capable of paying competitive rents.
While both neighbourhoods in the case study are located at a similar distance to the universities, they differ significantly in their relationship to the rest of the city. Because of Ithaca’s hills and gorges, there are hard limits on the boundaries of Collegetown and it is relatively densely built—more so than anything yet to be found in Williamsville, which is peripheral to Kingston’s downtown and badly in need of sprawl repair.

Ithaca is located in the United States and its urban plans are crafted in a different policy context. This is less a limitation on the validity of the report, and more a constraint demanding more of the author’s time and research.

Owing to limitations of time and budget, a fully comprehensive case study is not possible. Initial drafts included evaluation criteria for assessing the maintenance and vitality of neighbourhood streets. These qualities, while important, are not easily captured in design documents such as those examined in this report, and are more the purview of bylaw enforcement and departments of public works. Early drafts were also ambitious regarding analysis of housing markets and town-gown management practices. These topics will be discussed briefly, but in-depth consideration of either subject would be sufficient material for an entire report.

The chief ambition of this work is a comparative assessment of urban design plans by two university towns for implementation in near-university neighbourhoods, representing a step toward an evaluation framework for the management-by-design of town-gown issues and student enclaves in mid-sized cities.
ANALYSIS

ATTRACTIVENESS

Both study areas have a dual character in which the more recently developed main streets contrast with the adjacent residential areas consisting largely of older detached housing that has been converted into apartments or multi-occupant dwellings.

An interesting distinction between the plans is in how future development is expected to relate to existing urban fabric. The Williamsville Main Street Study suggests that architecture should be representative of Williamsville’s cultural heritage, protect adjacent residential areas from negative impacts, and fit the neighbourhood context. In many ways, the neighbourhood context for this under-built portion of Princess Street is nominal and will have to be established through sensitive redevelopment of under-utilized sites in Williamsville. By contract, in Ithaca, the study area has an established and clearly identifiable character. The Collegetown Urban Plan targets specific sites with specific interventions, and provides strategies for blending new additions into the existing urban fabric and respecting the vernacular styles.

ATTRACTIVENESS: KINGSTON

The University District consists predominantly of detached houses two or three storeys tall, many of which were constructed of red brick early in the 20th century. The scale, character, and arrangement of these buildings is relatively consistent, though there are variations in upkeep and the occasional case of unattractive infill housing that detract from the attractiveness of the neighbourhood.
Williamsville is located between the low densities and large commercial lots of Kingston Centre and the more traditional mainstreet character of lower Princess Street. It is a transitional area, and the attractiveness of this area in terms of street enclosure and coherence suffers as a
result. There are frequent breaks in the continuity of the street wall and significant variations in building setbacks throughout Williamsville. The street enclosure is further eroded by large variations of building type and height as shown in Figures 6, 7, and 8.

Transparency—in Jacobs (1993, p.285), “an invitation to view or know, if only in the mind, what is behind the street wall”—is generally lacking in the Williamsville area. Many of the buildings here—older houses converted to commercial uses, auto-oriented retail, and office buildings—were not designed with main-street commercial activity in mind.

ATTRACTIVENESS: THE WILLIAMSVILLE MAIN STREET STUDY

The Williamsville Main Street Study devotes considerable attention to the attractiveness of Princess Street as a traditional mainstreet, citing the high surface parking coverage (p.5), the emphasis on auto-oriented land uses (p.6), the “lack of continuity in the street design” (p.25), and underutilized land (p.25) as challenges to overcome. The Study’s Guiding Principles (p.17) address scale and density (#4.) and quality of architecture (#5.) In Private Realm Design (5.0), p.34, the Williamsville Main Street Study includes guidelines for design quality generally—the design of facades, transparent ground floors connected visually to the street, articulated massings for larger buildings and limits on blank walls, for example—and specifically in terms of streetwall heights, building heights, upper storey step-backs and building setbacks.

Should the development of Princess Street in Williamsville proceed as proposed in the Main Street Study, there would be a drastic transformation of the built form along Princess Street. The mid-rise main street typology proposed in the Study is fundamentally different from the mixture of low-rise auto-oriented development and buildings poorly integrated to the public realm currently in place in the study area.
Figure 9: A part of Williamsville decent in scale with some transparent ground floors, but incoherent in design.

Figure 10: Auto-centric development in Williamsville.
Williamsville Existing Conditions

Much of Williamsville is emblematic of poor urban design for a main street. It is dominated by low-density auto-oriented uses and has a dearth of civic spaces. On several blocks there is little in the way of street enclosure or public-oriented ground-floor uses; the few blocks successful in this regard make do with inconsistent or incoherent architecture.

Williamsville Main Street Study

The Williamsville Main Street Study’s private realm contains design guidelines with recommendations on building materials, articulation, transparency and massing that are a significant departure from existing conditions and represent best known practices for mid-rise mainstreet design.

ATTRACTIVENESS: ITHACA

Side streets in Ithaca’s Collegetown, like Kingston’s University District, are populated by residential buildings of a generally consistent style: very large detached houses built of wood, with generous porches, predictable setbacks and building heights.
The northernmost block of College Avenue, nearest Cascadilla Gorge and Cornell University, is well designed, with quality materials, facades broken up by architectural detail, ground-floor commercial uses with frequent entrances and large windows for visual interest and street-side transparency.

Owing in part to extremely high land values in the area (Collegetown Urban Plan, 2009, p.2.23) there is a dramatic increase in density at the intersection of College Avenue and Dryden Road. The very large buildings along Dryden Road, the low level of architectural detail in many of the facades, and the lack of an adequate angular plane setback result in a monolithic, overbearing street wall. This area is quite different from Williamsville; the ratio of building height to street width is high and results in a nearly overbearing sense of enclosure.

Figure 12: The northern extent of College Ave. is excellent in scale and character
Figure 13: Awkward transitions in scale and gaps in urban fabric typical of Collegetown

Figure 14: Buildings on Dryden Rd. slightly taller than the street width
ATTRACTIVENESS: THE COLLEGETOWN URBAN PLAN

The Collegetown Urban Plan recognizes deficiencies in the urban design of Collegetown’s mixed-use core: the poor relation of newer buildings to the area’s historic character, uneven quality of ground floor character, and disjointed urban form due to sudden and awkward transitions in scale (5.7).

Typical Setbacks
- Any portion of a building, along any elevation, that exceeds a height of 50’ shall be set back from the edge of the building by no less than 12’, in order to diminish the impact of the height on street level or areas located on the downhill side of the street.
- Corners shall be beveled, based on connecting two points that are set back 10’ from the intersection of the two wall planes. Treatment of corners in this way is intended to provide additional space for pedestrian circulation or entries to ground floor spaces at corners.

College Avenue and Oak Avenue
- Given its special prominence as the terminus of College Avenue, location along Cascadilla Gorge, and symbolic role as the bridge to Cornell University, the site currently occupied by Collegetown Bagels and Student Agencies should be able to accommodate additional height in a way which reflects its many unique aspects.
- The corner shall be permitted to allow heights of 90’ without the typical setback at 60’ as defined in all other locations within the mixed-use zone, provided that this height does not extend more than 30’ along either wall plane projected back from the corner. The intention is to create a slender form whose proportions and scale do not overwhelm pedestrians, while serving as a beacon for Collegetown throughout the city and region. In order to emphasize this form, the maximum height for the remainder of the building shall be 80’. The wall planes along College Avenue and Oak Avenue shall be set back 5’ in order to emphasize this form at the ground level.

Figure 15: Example from Collegetown Urban Plan’s design guidelines

Transparent ground floors and frequent entrances (every 100 feet, or 30 meters) are recommended to create visual and physical connections to the street, while varied setbacks, mixed building materials and architectural detailing are suggested as means of lending interest to large facades (6.12). The Plan recommends high densities and building heights of up to 90’ (27m) around the important intersection of College Avenue and Dryden Road, with twelve-foot setbacks and a 45-degree angular plane setback above 60’ (18m). The setback rule is waived for
the corner of College Avenue and Oak Avenue, with the intent of creating a distinctive, slender form that can serve as a ‘beacon’ for Collegetown (6.8).

Because Collegetown is already substantially built-up, the design recommendations contained in the 2009 Collegetown Design Plan are more evolutionary than revolutionary; the intent is not to transform the area but to seize on missed opportunities and correct deficiencies via infill and selective redevelopment.

**Collegetown Existing Conditions**

While tall buildings create a canyon effect on Dryden Road and the quality of building materials is variable across the study area, the urban design of main streets in Collegetown is generally attractive, with sufficient enclosure, active and transparent ground floors, and appropriate architecture.

**Collegetown Urban Plan**

Though Collegetown is already fairly attractive, the Plan adroitly identifies the neighborhood’s deficiencies and missed opportunities, proposes solutions to them, and explicitly identifies desirable design elements. The plan also suggests opportunities for landmarks.

**Summary Table: Prescribed Built Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Williamsville, Kingston</th>
<th>Collegetown, Ithaca</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property Line Setbacks</td>
<td>1m, with 75% of building frontage built to property line</td>
<td>5’ to 8’ (1.5 to 2.4m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Ground Floor</td>
<td>“Transparent to establish a strong visual connection to the street.”</td>
<td>In mixed-use core: 75% of frontage to be transparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streetwall Height</td>
<td>3 to 4 storeys, 10.5 to 13.5 metres</td>
<td>60’ (18m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Height</td>
<td>6 storeys generally; up to 10 storeys with sufficient lot depth &amp; approvals</td>
<td>In mixed-use core: 60’ (18m) generally, up to 90’ (27m) in select areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Storey Setbacks</td>
<td>45 deg. angular plane taken from height equivalent to 70% of right-of-way width</td>
<td>45 deg. angular plane set back 12’ from the edge of the building at 60’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ATTRACTIVENESS: OVERVIEW

The mixed-use core of Ithaca’s Collegetown is far more attractive than Williamsville owing to its strong sense of enclosure, appropriately scaled and situated buildings, and attractive facades. Collegetown suffers from awkward built-form transitions from the dense mixed-use core to the surrounding residential fabric, the tall building heights on Dryden Rd. relative to the street width, and the sometimes uneven quality of residential development.

Conversely, residential areas of Kingston’s university neighbourhood are more attractive than those in Ithaca owing to consistent architectural styles and site design and plentiful street trees, while Williamsville suffers from, at best, inconsistent architectural design and, at worst, built form at a scale completely inappropriate to a traditional mainstreet area, lacking any sense of character or enclosure.

PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLINESS

Because walking is the primary mode of transportation to school for most students at Queen’s and at Cornell, it is natural that both of the study areas in this report have become “student neighbourhoods” due in part to some degree of pedestrian friendliness attributable to the areas’ proximity to their respective universities.

Pedestrian friendliness concerns not only the movement of pedestrians, but also streets as a civic space suitable for loitering, chance encounters, window shopping, spontaneous exploration, and the myriad small civilities that distinguish traditional mainstreets from suburban thoroughfares. These characteristics can offer downtown neighbourhoods competitive advantages over suburban shopping areas (Walker, 2009, p.66).
PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLINESS: KINGSTON

Compared to the University District, Williamsville is perceived as less of a student housing area in part due to the abundance of rental housing closer to Queen’s University to the south of Princess Street and due to the perception of the heavily auto-oriented Princess Street as a barrier to pedestrian access.

Present-day Williamsville’s walkability suffers from high traffic speeds, a relative lack of street furniture or other amenities, irregular relationship of buildings to the sidewalk, the generally poor condition of sidewalks, and the great perceived width of Princess Street due to the combination of low enclosure ratios in some areas and dearth of visual complexity elsewhere. There is little or no sense of the street as a civic space in this area.

The University District is more attractive to the pedestrian for a number of reasons, including handsome and mature street trees, a regular street grid, modest traffic volumes, and the
relationship of neighbourhood buildings to the street. As a whole, Kingston’s university
neighbourhood benefits from its central location within the city and its proximity to services and
amenities.

**PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLINESS: THE WILLIAMSVILLE MAIN STREET STUDY**

The Williamsville Main Street Study contains several recommendations for enlivening
the pedestrian experience of Princess Street. These include entrances oriented to public spaces
(p.34), awnings and canopies at building entrances for shade and weather protection (p.35),
pedestrian lighting (p.55), and features intended to add character and variety to the pedestrian
realm, including small signs (p.54), public art (p.56) and improved street furnishings (p.55).

![Figure 17: Improvements to right-of-way suggested by Williamsville Main Street Study](image-url)
Williamsville Existing Conditions

The study area benefits from flat topography, some bike lanes, and the benign pedestrian atmosphere in the University District, but Princess Street’s Williamsville corridor suffers from a lack of pedestrian amenities such as furnishings and lighting, dedicated cycling infrastructure and greenery.

Williamsville Main Street Study

The Main Street Study explicitly states the objective of creating a “cohesive and pedestrian oriented urban environment” (p.41) including visibility of pedestrians, street trees and furniture on boulevards to buffer against vehicular traffic and protect a continuous pedestrian clearway.

Pedestrian Friendliness: Ithaca

At the densely-built intersection of Dryden Road and College Avenue, the constricted right-of-way contributed to sidewalks as narrow as 8 feet (2.4m) wide—with the obstruction of street furniture, barely wide enough for pedestrians to pass oncoming pedestrians (Collegetown Urban Plan, 2009, p.2.17) and out of scale with the density of built form on the surrounding blocks. As Walker (2009, p.72) writes, “sidewalk widths should reflect the scale of adjacent buildings and the significance of the particular street.”

Though the most attractive block in Collegetown’s mixed-use core has some small forecourts at the north end of College Avenue, the same block suffers worst from the lack of sidewalk space. Pavements and sidewalks in a poor state of repair were evident in several parts of Collegetown.

In addition to the lack of dedicated cycling lanes and inadequate provision of bicycle parking in Collegetown, the steep hills of the area present a natural challenge to cyclists.
PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLINESS: THE COLLEGETOWN URBAN PLAN

The Collegetown Urban Plan recommends several infrastructure improvements (4.37) to build a better environment for pedestrians, cyclist and transit users: crossing improvements to key intersections, to include signal improvements and curb extensions at the corner of College
Avenue and Dryden Road, sidewalk widening on College Avenue, bicycle parking upgrades and shared-lane chevrons, or “sharrows,” on key bike routes, modernized bus shelters on the busy College Avenue route and, most intriguingly, a raised “woonerf” section of College Avenue. The woonerf is not featured in any of the plan’s illustrations but represents an ambitious prioritization of pedestrians on a busy street.

A plaza is proposed at the corner of Dryden Road and College Avenue (p.5.11) to offer outdoor seating and also to provide a contrast to the prevailing street wall in this area.

**Collegetown Existing Conditions**

- Steep hills, narrow and under-maintained sidewalks, inconsistent street trees and street furniture which, while present, is often in poor condition.

**Collegetown Urban Plan**

- The Collegetown Urban Plan has a list of priorities for improving the area for pedestrians, cyclists and transit users, including the possibility of a pedestrianized section of the main artery through the neighbourhood.
PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLINESS: OVERVIEW

Neither study area is the picture of walkability; Williamsville owing to poor design and infrastructure, Collegetown owing to steep topography, poor upkeep and often inadequate sidewalk widths. The residential parts of each study area, in isolation, would score better; Kingston’s University District has made notable advances in accommodating cyclists with new bike lanes and is within pleasant walking distance from all the amenities of the city’s downtown.

Both plans have comprehensive recommendations for remedying these deficiencies.

HOUSING

Both of the study areas in question are noteworthy for demographic reasons, namely the disproportionate number of young people living within their boundaries. This can result either in problems concerning the affordability and condition of housing available to students, or in problems concerning the overall vitality of the neighbourhoods in which significant numbers of Queen’s or Cornell students opt to live, especially as it becomes difficult to attract and retain non-student residents.

As property values are a function of possible rents (Collegetown Urban Plan, 2009, p.2.24) prices for houses suitable for conversion into student housing will rise and can become prohibitive to potential new owner-occupiers.

HOUSING: KINGSTON

In spite of possible advantages of using mid-rise buildings to add units at a sufficient density to meet the spatially concentrated demand for student housing, much of Kingston’s University District is zoned as “Residential A” for one- or two-family homes (City of Kingston,
The dominant residential use in this area is not by families but by young adults in multiple-occupant tenancies: excluding university residences, 82% of Queen’s undergraduate students and 65% of graduate students live within a 1.5 kilometre radius of campus (Chong, 2008). It is telling that “proximity to campus” has reliably appeared as the single most important factor in the housing choices of students in Kingston (Brooks & Danford, 2012).

The zoning in this area has stifled efforts at addressing the “studentification” of the University District in a pragmatic way with added density and infill development. HMO conversions and additions have proliferated in the area in response to housing pressures and limited capacity for intensification.

Relevant sections of Kingston’s Official Plan (2010) include the conversion policy (p.56) concerning the standards for residential intensification and a student accommodation policy (p.63) recognizing the unique characteristics and impacts that necessitate regulation in affected areas. It contains the statement that “this form of housing may not be appropriate in all residential areas.”

Kingston has sought a variety of policy responses to address the “height, scale and massing” (Housing Working Group, 2009, p.4) of building additions to manage their compatibility with the surrounding area and mitigate undesirable impacts on neighbours. In 1980 Kingston applied a Site Plan Control to construction of new one- or two-family dwellings, conversions of such dwellings, and additions greater than 50 square metres with the intent of giving the city some power of scrutiny over the type of structures that were symptomatic of HMO conversions in the student enclave. Because the city did not have power over important building details, the success of the Site Plan Control was limited (Ibid.) and the requirement for it was later repealed.
Kingston identified student housing as a specific type of residential land use activity in 1990 (Ibid.) and engaged in a review of approaches to controlling student housing stocks. Most of the approaches were restrictive in nature—for example, regulating persons per unit, or floor area and height. A subsequent 1991 study of areas near campus that had been “identified to be under pressure for residential intensification” (Housing Working Group, 2009, p.5) recommended Zoning By-Law amendments to regulate additions to dwellings and establish community standards to limit HMO to existing neighbourhood scale. These amendments were reviewed and further modified by the Downtown Residential Review Working Committee in 2002, mostly regarding building style, type and dimensions, but notably adding requirements for common rooms and rules on bicycle parking.

**Housing: the Williamsville Main Street Study**

The development prescribed by the Williamsville Main Street Study will alleviate housing pressures in the University District immediately to the south by dramatically increasing
residential densities near Princess Street. The study proposes a goal of adding an additional 672 units within ten years and another 2117 units within twenty-five years (Williamsville Main Street Study, 2012, p.79-80). The residential intensification of this area, which is intended to include affordable housing options for the purpose of achieving targets in Kingston’s Official Plan (Ibid., p.16) should increase the options available to residents and in doing so exert a downward pressure on rents. The significant student population in central Kingston will benefit implicitly from the increase in residential supply, but it is noteworthy that this increase in housing supply will affect all residents.

**Williamsville (University District) Existing Conditions**

Students are a predominant presence in the University District and have had a transformative effect on housing stocks, which the City of Kingston has attempted unsuccessfully to mitigate.

**Williamsville Urban Plan**

The significant expansion of housing options in Williamsville is promising and could also benefit non-students. The University District remains in need of residential intensification.

**HOUSING: ITHACA**

The Collegetown area has an extremely distinctive demographic profile, with over 90% of its residents living in rented housing and an average age of 22 (Collegetown Urban Plan, 2009, p.2.21). This strongly suggests that the neighbourhood is dominated by students.

Collegetown’s mixed-use core provides an option for high-density housing above the commercial ground floors. The conversion of large houses into student-occupied HMO is evident throughout the rest of Collegetown with built additions, subdivided dwelling, and various
hallmarks of student tenancy such as front-porch sofas, disorderly stacks of bicycles, and more parked cars than would be otherwise justifiable for a single household.

Figure 22: Large houses subdivided into student residences and strange additions

HOUSING: THE COLLEGETOWN URBAN PLAN

The Collegetown Urban Plan states a goal of “a significant expansion of housing options” (p.5.9) through new multi-unit housing types respectful of the area’s present architectural vocabulary, and provides several examples of attractive infill and redeveloped housing.

The Collegetown Urban Plan also recognizes the virtue of mixed use: “upper levels of buildings should include housing geared toward undergraduate students or commercial office space” (p.6.5). The wording of this recommendation is interesting in that it identifies students as potential tenants. Note that in Canada under the Planning Act and Charter we do not have the ability to plan with certain types of residents explicitly in mind.
Figure 23: Potential townhouse-style redevelopment on College Ave.

Figure 24: Handsome new PBSA just south of Collegetown's traditional boundaries
A visit to Ithaca also revealed a large and very recently-developed purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) complex outside of the boundaries of the Collegetown study area, but close to both Cornell University and Ithaca College. While such a development won’t correct the housing stock deficiencies or demographic imbalance in the residential areas of Collegetown, it will help accommodate growing demand for housing.

**Collegetown Existing Conditions**

- Good mixed-use buildings in the neighbourhood centre, provision of higher-density options throughout the area, and purpose-built student housing nearby, but low-quality HMO conversions still abound in Collegetown.

**Collegetown Urban Plan**

- The Collegetown Urban Plan addresses housing issues opportunistically, not systemically, and does not appear to have any ambition of reintegrating the student population with the city’s residents at large.

**HOUSING: OVERVIEW**

Both study areas have a preponderance of multi-occupant housing of varying condition; based on casual observation the converted residential buildings in Kingston’s University District appeared to be in a better state of repair. However, Williamsville lacks the kind of higher-density housing seen in Collegetown’s mixed-use core or in the newly-built development just to the south of Collegetown.

The issue of student housing demand in Ithaca is being approached with purpose-built student accommodation to the south of Collegetown and the promise of infill and redevelopment within the study area, but it is not evident that there is any concern for the overall vitality of the neighbourhood for a variety of users.
While Kingston is promoting a general residential intensification in Williamsville, there is a possibility that developers will favor unit types uniquely suited to the preferences of students at the expense of affordable general housing suitable for the general population.

**Mixed Use**

There are a number of potential benefits to mixed use development. Andy Coupland (2004, p.3-4) offers a list: “It ensures vitality through activity and diversity. It makes areas safer. It also reduces the need to travel, making people less reliant on cars, bringing welcome environmental benefits. Diversity of uses adds to the vitality and interest of town centres. Different, but complementary uses, during the day and in the evening, can reinforce each other, making town centres more attractive to residents, businesses, shoppers and visitors.”

A prerequisite for diverse land uses to harmoniously coexist is the appropriate use of building scale and design (Walker, 2009, p.45). In this sense urban design—and this report’s first characteristic of good main-street design, Attractiveness—are implicated in the capacity for mixed use development.

**Mixed Use: Kingston**

Kingston’s University District is composed primarily of detached single-family dwellings converted into rooming houses, with provision for limited corner-store and convenience retail. The streets in this area are primarily residential in purpose.

Most of the buildings fronting Princess Street in Williamsville are two-storey commercial units with apartments or commercial offices on upper floors (p.6). There is a decent variety of
neighbourhood amenities, including a grocery store, discount shop, pharmacies, restaurants, bars and several convenience stores to meet the needs of residents.

The main deficiency of this area is the low density along Princess Street. High residential densities in this area would better support nearby retail and services by providing a bigger customer base and, in doing so, promote a livelier main street with ground-floor commercial uses benefiting from greater foot traffic and client volumes.

**Mixed Use: The Williamsville Main Street Study**

The guidelines in the Williamsville Main Street Study are meant to accommodate an increase in residential density in keeping with Kingston’s Official Plan, which sets goals for an overall density of 23.5 net units per hectare and a minimum density target of 75 net units per hectare for areas like Williamsville:

“The Official Plan recommends a 9% (from 21.6 to 23.5 units/net hectare) increase in urban residential density by 2026, achieved through larger scale developments, the expansion or conversion of existing buildings, and the redevelopment of vacant, under-utilized, or brownfield sites and infill developments. For mixed-use buildings along Princess Street and in the Centres, the Official Plan sets a minimum density target of 75 dwelling units/net hectare.”

(Williamsville Main Street Study Appendix A, p.91)

Official Plan requirements for ground-floor commercial uses under the “Main Street Commercial” designation and the Williamsville Main Street Study’s design guidelines conducive to commercial activity should ultimately contribute to a lively mixed-use corridor as residential densities increase and, with them, demand for goods and services.
**Williamsville Existing Conditions**

There is a good variety of shops and services in the study area, but a preponderance of under-used sites and empty storefronts. Higher residential densities would better support the kind of ground-floor commercial uses that engender a lively traditional main street.

**Williamsville Main Street Study**

Traditional mainstreets like the one proposed in the Williamsville Main Street Study are mixed-use by definition, and all recommendations in the study have as their goal the establishment of a mixed-use district.

**MIXED USE: ITHACA**

In Collegetown there are nodes of mixed-use development at the important intersections of College Avenue and both Dryden Road and Eddy Street; the area defined by these intersections is referred to in the Urban Plan as Character Area 1, the mixed-use core of Collegetown. The rest of the study area, like Kingston’s University District, is comprised of housing—much of it HMO or small apartment blocks—and convenience retail. Amenities in the area are clearly tailored to a student populace in that there is a wide offering of affordable restaurants and bars, but Collegetown appears to be lacking in the provision of general retail and groceries, which is a detriment to its livability for a broader demographic.

**MIXED USE: THE COLLEGETOWN URBAN PLAN**

The Collegetown Urban Plan comments on the concentration of commercial and retail activity at the intersection of College Avenue and Dryden Road (5.7) and recommends continued high-density mixed-use development in that area, as well as the pursuit of infill opportunities to accommodate more residents in the area, drawing a causal relationship between residential densities in the area and the capacity for a neighbourhood to support retail and commercial activity in its mixed-use core (5.2).
The Plan also emphasizes the importance of an active ground floor. “Wherever possible, incorporate retail, cultural facilities, entertainment, or other uses on the ground floor in order to enliven the pedestrian experience” (6.5).

Collegetown Existing Conditions

The dense core of Collegetown is ideally configured for mixed use but the actual uses in place leave something to be desired.

Collegetown Urban Plan

The Plan recommends the addition of housing to support commercial uses in Collegetown’s mixed-use core and encourages neighbourhood amenities.

MIXED USE: OVERVIEW

The study areas are once again mirror images of one another: Williamsville is not ideally structured as a walkable mixed-use main street but presently offers an excellent variety of neighbourhood services and amenities spread out over a long, underbuilt stretch of Princess Street, while Collegetown’s dense core is excellent as a platform for mixed-use but, perhaps owing to the overwhelmingly young and mobile population in the area, has amenities suited primarily to itinerant students.

Both plans attest to the importance of mixed use; in practice the real question is whether Williamsville’s neighbourhood businesses can withstand redevelopment and neighbourhood change, and whether Collegetown can attract businesses that cater to more than the typical student lifestyle—or indeed whether there will be any impetus to.
IN SUMMARY

A direct comparison of Kingston’s and Ithaca’s university neighbourhoods is difficult. While Ithaca presents a single neighbourhood as its student area, the Kingston study area consists of two separate neighbourhoods. This is a problem, as far as any attempts to shape Kingston’s student neighbourhoods are concerned. An integrated approach to Kingston’s student neighbourhood would recognize that the University District is part of a larger system including Williamsville as its mainstreet and commercial area. How does the increase of residential density and commercial activity in Williamsville affect the residential neighbourhood south of it? What opportunities and challenges does the transformation of one area present to the other? I suspect that Kingston’s planners and consultants had some idea of this, but I can only evaluate what is in the plan. These are questions that ought to have been asked, addressed, and made explicit in a hypothetical Williamsville Main Street AND University District Study.

To speak of existing conditions, the best part of the dense, mixed-use core of Collegetown is a built form that any traditional main street could aspire to, but years of a predominant student presence have demonstrated the negative effects of studentification: deteriorating housing and poor upkeep on the surrounding residential streets and a limited variety of shops and services in the core. Williamsville, by contrast to the centre of Collegetown, is desperately unattractive, daunting to pedestrians and far short of its potential housing supply, but it does support a variety of affordable retail and commercial services useful to a wider variety of people.

While Kingston’s University District also shows the outward signs of studentification in terms of occasionally lax building upkeep and unattractive additions, this residential area is significantly more attractive than the outlying residential streets covered in the Collegetown
Urban Plan thanks largely to the consistent scale and character of housing, preponderance of street trees, and excellent walkability to campus and downtown.

The plans for both neighbourhoods are excellent in terms of proposing attractive urban design and in improving the areas generally with respect to the pedestrian environment, housing and mixed use. In both cases the physical parameters are set; what remains to be discovered is whether the neighbourhoods will grow to the extent of those parameters.

THE FUTURE OF COLLEGETOWN

Highly studentified Collegetown may have lots of housing demand from young and unattached Cornell students, which will support residential intensification, but may not have the demographic variety required to support a mature mixed-use neighbourhood. What we are likely to see is an increasingly dense and attractively-designed neighbourhood that continues to function as a student enclave. The increasing density in this area should satisfy residents of adjacent neighbourhoods that the encroachment of student housing will be mitigated.

THE FUTURE OF WILLIAMSVILLE AND THE UNIVERSITY DISTRICT

There is likely enough demand for housing to support the residential intensification in Kingston’s vision in the Williamsville Main Street Study, but vacant commercial space on the already-established downtown blocks of Princess Street call into question the likelihood that there will be enough demand to support a revitalized mixed-use district with lively ground-floor commercial uses. Without some way of attracting non-students to live in the area, there is a risk that Williamsville will become another student enclave and, rather than mitigating the effects of studentification in the University District, will become another iteration of the same problem.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Attractiveness</th>
<th>Pedestrian Friendliness</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Mixed Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Williamsville &amp; University District</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Attractiveness" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Pedestrian Friendliness" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Housing" /></td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Mixed Use" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williamsville Main Street Study</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Attractiveness" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Pedestrian Friendliness" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Housing" /></td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Mixed Use" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegetown</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Attractiveness" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Pedestrian Friendliness" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Housing" /></td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Mixed Use" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegetown Urban Plan</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Attractiveness" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Pedestrian Friendliness" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Housing" /></td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Mixed Use" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

DISCUSSION

Ithaca’s Collegetown was initially expected to excel in this comparative case study, based on positive feedback about the urban design of the nearby Ithaca Commons, the attractive natural features surrounding Collegetown and the campus, and the reputation of both Cornell and Goody Clancy. Site visits using the analytical framework developed for this report to compare the two neighborhoods revealed that the comparison of Kingston and Ithaca would have to be more nuanced, and that each case study has distinctive strengths and weaknesses. In summary: aside from matters of urban design and attractiveness, in which Collegetown appeared better than Williamsville largely on the strength of a small but excellent portion of its dense mixed-use core, the study areas were found to be—in the simplest possible language—the same but different.

In terms of the scale and density of main-street areas, Collegetown clearly excels relative to Princess Street in Williamsville, which is developed either badly—in mismatched and inappropriate building styles—or too sparsely, resulting in absent streetwalls and inadequate enclosure. By contrast, development in Collegetown at the key intersection of College Avenue and Dryden Road (and to a lesser degree at the north ends of Eddy Street and Stewart Street) consists of generally appealing mid-rise buildings built to the sidewalk’s edge having transparent, active ground floors for lively engagement with the street. The Williamsville extent of Princess Street also lags behind Collegetown’s mixed-use core in terms of housing density. The density in this area is such that, unlike Williamsville, building heights in Collegetown’s mixed-use core—relative to right-of-way widths—are sometimes excessive, and demand some mitigating intervention on the street to soften the effect.
The situation is different on mostly-residential side streets. Both study areas show physical signs of studentification (poor upkeep relative to adjacent neighbourhoods) and a preponderance of building types unsuitable to mass student housing, but certain differences were also evident in an examination of area housing. Kingston’s University District has the advantage of higher architectural quality and overall better upkeep and maintenance than a lot of Collegetown. Some of the difference may be attributable to differences in housing types. While residential side streets in both study areas are dominated by single-detached dwellings, structures in Collegetown’s residential area have been converted into sprawling multi-unit housing complexes while zoning in Kingston’s University District generally prohibits such conversions and results in more modest conversions into rooming houses.

Both study areas have deficiencies in the pedestrian environment, though for different reasons: Williamsville is very car-oriented by means of street design, while Collegetown’s inadequacies are a result of insufficient sidewalk space and poor upkeep, combined with the challenge of very steep topography in the area.

It is noteworthy that Collegetown is already densely developed. As a result the Collegetown Urban Plan’s recommendations are largely evolutionary in scope, while underdeveloped Williamsville leaves the more daunting task of building a main street from the present low-density conditions. To a certain degree, present conditions on the best block of College Avenue—north of Dryden Road—are what Williamsville Main Street Study should aspire to, while conditions in other parts of Collegetown can be treated as cautionary.
Should the recommendations in Williamsville Main Street Study be carried out to their full extent, future Williamsville should be as attractive as the best of Collegetown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Attractiveness</th>
<th>Pedestrian Friendliness</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Mixed Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existing Conditions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williamsville</td>
<td>🌚</td>
<td>🌙</td>
<td>🌙</td>
<td>🌙</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegetown</td>
<td>🌙</td>
<td>🌙</td>
<td>🌙</td>
<td>🌙</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>As Planned</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williamsville</td>
<td>🌙</td>
<td>🌙</td>
<td>🌙</td>
<td>🌙</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegetown</td>
<td>🌙</td>
<td>🌙</td>
<td>🌙</td>
<td>🌙</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This report was initially envisioned as a comprehensive study of near-university neighbourhoods. It soon became obvious that this level of ambition was unsustainable, and the scope of the report was reduced to a general emphasis on urban design due largely to the timeliness of the two urban design plans discussed herein.

This was not strictly an apples-to-apples comparison. As previously noted, the Kingston study area contains two neighbourhoods, only one of which, Williamsville, has an urban design plan. This makes it difficult to comment on how the residential University District will evolve compared to similar lands in the Ithaca study area. On the other hand, close observation of outcomes in Collegetown will provide a precedent for similar innovations in Kingston’s own student enclave, and the residential infill guidelines contained in the Collegetown Urban Plan would serve as a useful template for future changes to the University District.

Though the City of Ithaca still refers to the Collegetown Urban Plan as a guiding document, its adoption and implementation was complicated by disputes over buildings heights and parking. In 2014 the City of Ithaca finally adopted form-based codes for Collegetown. An evaluation of the implementation of the plan and continued follow-up of Collegetown’s development could prove informative.

Useful research could also be done on the role of universities as actors in urban land development, on planning where the edge of campus meets the city, and on real estate in near-university neighbourhoods. Research could also be done on other kinds of near-university areas. A commuter campus in a more suburban setting, for example, will likely exert a different influence on its surrounding neighbourhoods, and this could bear investigating.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The Williamsville Main Street Study is quite good in most respects, and adequately supported by policy context. Some observations on the possible execution of the plan:

1. **Tactical Urbanism**

   The Williamsville Main Street corridor will take a long time to build out to the extent shown in the plan. There is already a phasing plan in place (Williamsville Main Street Study, p.79-80) and a recognition that immediate demand for commercial space will not be enough to provide ground-floor commercial uses for the entire length of the corridor (Ibid., p.71) but interim measures to generate interest in the area should be explored by the city and by the Williamsville Neighbourhood Association in the short term.

   *Figure 26: A plea for Williamsville pedestrians to care about their environment*

   The development catalysts discussed on p.81 of the Main Street Study address streetscape and open or vacant spaces, but partnerships with citizens’ groups, cultural organizations and small businesses would also contribute to leveraging vacant and underutilized spaces to make Williamsville a more interesting and welcoming place.
2. **Residential Unit Variety**

Steps need to be taken to guarantee the variety and affordability of housing in Williamsville. The viability of the Williamsville Main Street corridor as a mixed-use neighbourhood centre will depend on having residents of varying age, vocation and civil status—meaning a sufficient variety of housing units, which might not be provided by the private sector if it is more profitable to build units that satisfy the distinctive preferences of a large population of undergraduate students.

![Figure 27: A five-bedroom unit in a proposed development: limited utility to non-students](image)

Kingston’s Official Plan (2010, p.64) insists that “new or redeveloped residential uses intended for student accommodation must be designed and built to be viable for a wider rental market.” For this to happen the number of bedrooms per unit should be limited; a shared six-bedroom unit makes sense for groups of students living together as an
affordability strategy, but would have little appeal to young professionals, families or seniors. The *City of Kingston and County of Frontenac Municipal Housing Strategy* mentions a number of vehicles for meeting housing objectives, including “seeking opportunities to appropriately integrate student housing” (2011, p.12). This point should be expanded upon by the City and associated housing committees in the near future.

3. **University District Zoning**

Meeting the residential density targets for Williamsville will reduce housing pressures in the nearby University District, but the consistently high demand for student housing in the District also means there could be ample opportunity for medium-density infill and purpose-built student accommodation.

This is a question of the city’s objectives: if Kingston wants to rely on development in Williamsville to absorb the demand for student housing, it can hope that the expansion of the “studentified” University District will thus be mitigated. Housing that has already been converted into student housing is likely to remain so, but the residential areas east and west of the area may be spared if Williamsville can provide a path of less resistance.

If Kingston is serious about overall residential intensification, diversifying its housing stock, augmenting the city’s supply of rental housing, and integrating students in the community—and if Kingston is interested in what Chatterton (2010) calls a “revalorisation of students as an agent of city-centre renewal” (p.513)—it would be worthwhile to revise the city’s approach to the University District. It is apparent that the market has already spoken in this regards to the disposition of students to gather in this neighbourhood. Residential intensification here, in addition to the mixed-use revival of
Williamsville, would take advantage of the obvious enthusiasm for housing in the area and help Kingston meet its housing and intensification targets in the long term.
REFERENCES


Brook McIlroy. (2012). City of Kingston / Williamsville Main Street Study. Kingston, ON.

Brooks, M., & Danford, N. (2012). Housing Master Plan. Housing & Hospitality Services, Queen’s University: Kingston, ON.


Chong, S. (2008). Accommodation location patterns of Queen’s Students. Queen’s University Town-Gown & Dean of Student Affairs, Queen’s University: Kingston, ON.


Denniston-Stewart, R. (2006). Housing strategy in response to the Queen’s Centre project: a report for the City of Kingston from Queen’s University. Student Affairs, Queen’s University, Kingston.


Thomas, M.T.C. (2010). *Studentification, Neighbourhood Change and the Role of Planning in Kingston, Ontario*. School of Urban and Regional Planning, Queen’s University: Kingston, ON.


