

1. Introduction to Guidelines

Preserving Westmount's distinct character

Westmount is a distinctive city with an intimate neighbourhood quality and a sense of community which has few equals in Canada. Property owners and architects know that a building in Westmount represents a major investment. The property values are, in part, the result of careful preservation of the high quality buildings. It is in the property owner's interest to maintain these high standards.

When first conceived, each building was the fruit of a series of design decisions resulting in a coherent whole, evidence of the particular time and place of construction as well as the approach of its architect. Today, many of Westmount's buildings have reached an age when renovations have become necessary or when owners wish to add contemporary amenities. However, the cumulative effect of many, seemingly minor, inappropriate changes can diminish the appearance and attractiveness of an entire neighbourhood and depreciate its value. To prevent such changes, a careful design approach and a regulatory body is called for to maintain the distinct design integrity of particular features as well as the character of the landscapes and streetscapes of Westmount.

A system of design review, which exists in many cities across North America, best protects property values and property rights. In Westmount, The Planning Advisory Committee regulates building aesthetics- with reference to a set of guidelines. First published in 1985 these guidelines have been revised and updated. Furthermore, to help determine what type and what extent of modification, upgrading and/or extension is acceptable for a given building, a system of categorisation has been set up. Every building in Westmount was surveyed and analysed with the help of leading experts. Westmount has been divided into 39 "character areas", each of which shares common physical or historical characteristics. Character Area information sheets include the rating of every building as well as the shared physical characteristics of streetscapes or areas.

The application of the guidelines together with the character area information sheets will ensure that what we inherited from the past and what we build today, all become the heritage of tomorrow.

Objectives

The guidelines for renovating and building in Westmount seek to achieve the following objectives:

1. Maintain and enhance Westmount's distinctive character by:
 - preserving significant buildings and building features, such as groups of buildings and landscaping features;
 - ensuring that changes to existing buildings or new construction harmonize with existing buildings, the site and the area.
2. Limit the negative impact that new construction or modifications to existing properties have on public areas and neighbouring properties.
3. Seek design excellence in all new work.

The specific methodology and criteria for achieving these objectives are outlined in this booklet as well as in the guideline booklets dealing with the various specific types of interventions. There is also a general booklet on Obtaining a Building Permit. The following is the list of all the guidelines in the series:

0. Obtaining a Building Permit
1. Introduction to Guidelines
2. Exterior Walls
3. Roofs
4. Windows and Doors
5. New Buildings, Additions and Major Modifications
6. Landscape Design
7. Storefronts and Signs
8. Glen Yards
9. Large Sites of Institutional Character and Places of Worship of Heritage Interest

Applying the Guidelines

The Planning Advisory Committee will act in accordance with the *Guidelines for Renovating and Building in Westmount*. If necessary, the Committee will decide which guideline takes precedence over another. Note that when the word building is used in these guidelines it refers to all construction including retaining walls, fences and major landscaping features.

Each building must first be considered in its own right and the integrity of its own particular defining characteristics must be respected, even if it differs from the predominant characteristics of the streetscape or character area in which it is located.

Note that the requirements set by The Planning Advisory Committee, which might deal with building form and location as well as materials and design features, are in addition to all applicable building and zoning regulations. Neither the Committee, nor City Council, has the authority to waive any applicable by-laws.

The original features of a building or streetscape are considered when determining the appropriateness of a new intervention. For example, a feature such as windows that had been changed in an inappropriate way are not considered. Over a period of a few decades, this will lead to the return to the original design integrity of Westmount's neighbourhoods.

How to determine what kind of work is suitable for a particular property

Consult the guideline booklet(s) for the type of work being contemplated and the Character Area Information Sheet of the particular area in order to carry out the following steps. A list of all of the character areas along with a map can be found on the facing page. Note that the following steps are part of the overall procedure outlined in Step 2 of the "Obtaining a Building Permit" leaflet.

Step 1: Determine the architectural significance (category) of your building

Indicated on the coded map of the Character Area Information Sheet, the category of your building is an indication of its architectural and heritage significance. Consult the table on page 5 for the type of intervention(s) acceptable for your building based on its category.

Step 2: Determine whether your building is part of an architectural ensemble

This can be determined by consulting the Character Area Information Sheets. A building that is part of a group designed and built as a single venture such as a pair of semi-detached houses or a row of almost identical buildings is considered to be an architectural ensemble. This information is important because several criteria require a similar treatment for all buildings in an ensemble.

Step 3: Determine the design integrity of your building

A professional examination of the building will indicate whether its original design is intact or has been changed. Plan to respect what is still there and reverse at least the minor, inappropriate changes made in the past. (Note that design integrity is not the same as building condition. A building may have its original features but be in poor condition, or might be in good condition after a refurbishment that destroyed its original design features).

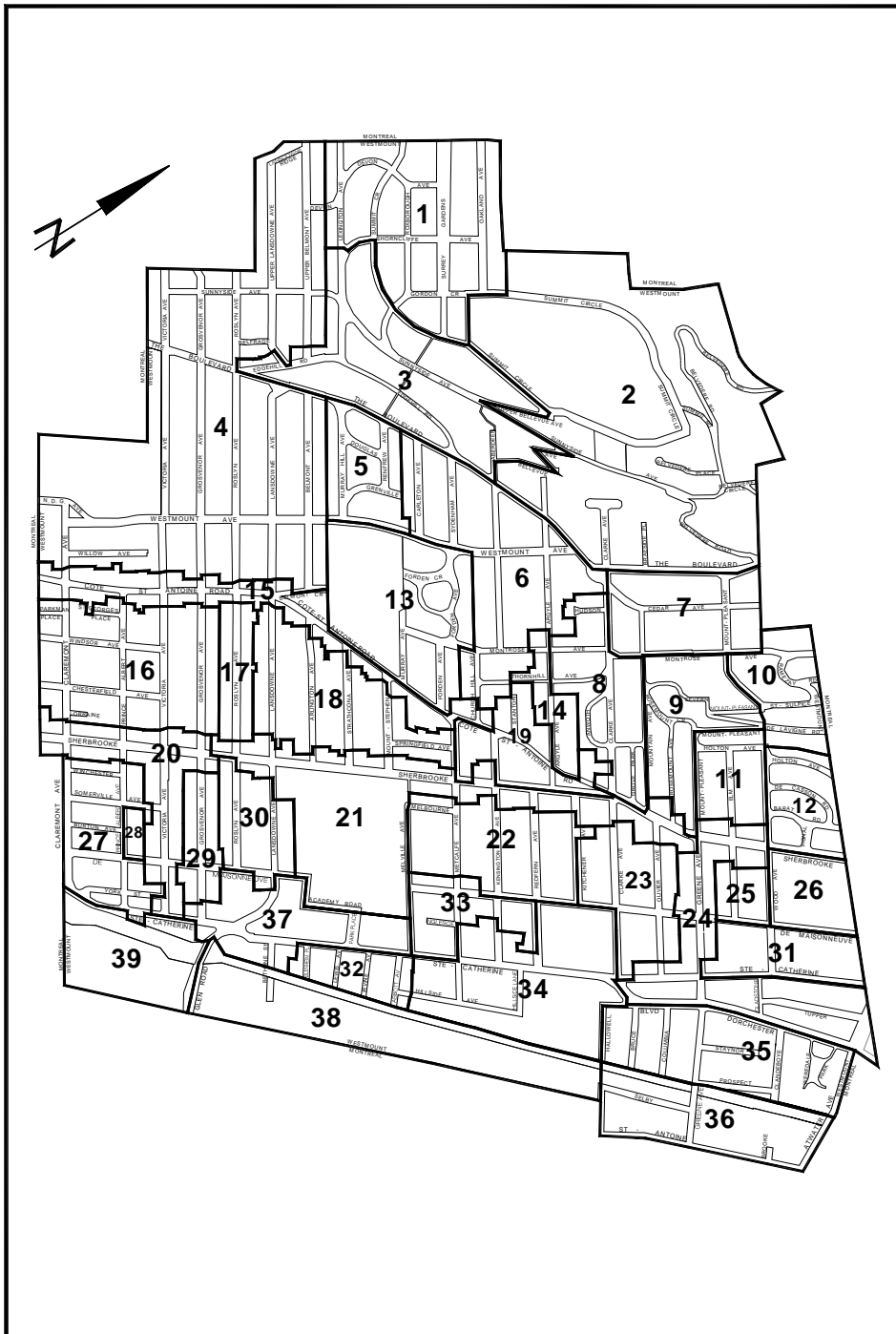
Step 4: Consult the design guidelines

Refer to pages 4-7 of this booklet as well as the specific guidelines relating to the type of work you are planning.

Step 5: Determine the defining characteristics of the Character Area and streetscape

If you are planning new construction, an addition or major modifications, the list of defining characteristics on the back of each Character Area Information Sheet describes some of the most important common features shared by buildings in your area. To ensure that a new building harmonizes with the area, its design should generally have the same main features.

Westmount Character Areas



1. Vicinity of St. Joseph's Oratory
2. Westmount Mountain
3. Sunnyside and Edgehill Road
4. West of the Mountain
5. Douglas and Grenville
6. Aberdeen Ave. and Vicinity
7. Cedar Avenue and Vicinity
8. Clarke Avenue and Vicinity
9. Rosemount
10. Saint Sulpice and Ramezay
11. Holton Estate
12. Priest's Farm
13. Forden and Murray Park
14. Argyle Avenue
15. Côte Road
16. On the Hurtubise Farm
17. Roslyn Avenue
18. South of Murray Park
19. Vicinity of City Hall
20. Victoria and Sherbrooke
21. Sherbrooke and Westmount Park
22. The Mansions of Lower Westmount
23. Vicinity of St. Leon's Church
24. Greene and Ste. Catherine
25. Wood and Elm Avenues, below Sherbrooke
26. Dawson College
27. Somerville Area
28. On site of the Old Bakery
29. Grosvenor Avenue
30. Lansdowne and Roslyn, below Sherbrooke
31. The Towers of Westmount
32. Vicinity of Blenheim Place
33. De Maisonneuve, near Westmount Park
34. Around Westmount High School
35. Hallowell-Weredale
36. St. Antoine Street
37. Around Park Place
38. Vicinity of Glen Yards
39. Glen Yards

Architectural Significance and Categorisation

In these guidelines, the term "architectural significance" encompasses design, historic and contextual considerations. The greater the architectural significance of the building, the more careful one must be in preserving the particular features that give it its character...its defining characteristic.

The significance of a building depends on:

- **Architectural design**

What is the quality of the design? Is it unique in some way? Is it the work of a well-known architect or builder?

- **Historical significance**

Is the structure associated with an important individual, organisation, event or type of activity?

- **Context**

What is the building's role in establishing the character of its area? Is it a visual landmark?

The architectural significance of a building, whether derived from the quality of its design or from its association with people or events from the past, is not limited to the oldest and most remarkable few, typically labelled "historic". The charming and attractive streets and neighbourhoods that make up Westmount are made up of fine buildings and, although they may not all be outstanding, they are nevertheless vital to the City's character.

With the assistance of leading experts and under the supervision of The Planning Advisory Committee, the City has established four categories based on different degrees of architectural significance to help determine what type of work is appropriate and acceptable. The category of each building is shown on the maps of the character area information sheets. The categories and their descriptions can be found on the facing page.

General Principles and Standards

1.1 Preservation

Preserve those distinctive features and materials important in defining the character of a building, a property, a streetscape or a character area.

The degree of preservation appropriate for a building is proportional to its architectural significance as specified in the table of acceptable interventions on the facing page.

1.1.1 Compatible use

Continue to use a building for its original use. If the existing use is no longer viable, choose a new one that requires minimal change to its defining characteristics.

1.1.2 Maintenance and repair

Protect and maintain distinctive features in good condition with proper maintenance. Whenever possible repair deteriorated features rather than replacing them. Do not use inappropriate repair techniques including surface cleaning methods, such as sandblasting, which cause damage to older, fragile materials.

1.1.3 Restoration and Replacement

If possible, restore original defining features or materials that were removed. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a character-defining feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, colour, texture, detail and wherever possible, materials.

1.1.4 Historical accuracy

To avoid creating a false sense of historic development, base the restoration of missing elements on *exceptional* buildings in category I on historical, pictorial or physical evidence. In other cases, replacement elements with form, colour, details and materials similar to other buildings of the same style are acceptable.

1.1.5 Building evolution

Many buildings have been changed over time. Retain modifications that have acquired significance in their own right.

1.1.6 Reconstruction after a fire

If a category I or II building is damaged by fire, the exterior walls are substantially intact, and the City has determined that it is allowed to be rebuilt according to the zoning and building by-laws, the building should be rebuilt in conformity with its original design.

Table of Acceptable Interventions

Category	Description of Categories	Acceptable Interventions
<p>Category I* Exceptional</p>	<p>This category encompasses Westmount's most notable buildings. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> historically significant buildings, exceptional works by notable architects and builders, exceptional examples of a particular style, buildings of fine construction, detailing and materials, buildings that make up an important architectural ensemble. 	<p>Category I* buildings are to be kept in perpetuity. These buildings should be maintained and restored to the highest standards of these guidelines. Alterations to character-defining features and additions affecting these features are generally unacceptable.</p> <p>Demolition or modification of major defining characteristics are not permitted. Modifying minor defining characteristics are generally unacceptable.</p>
<p>Category I Important</p>	<p>This category encompasses Westmount's notable buildings. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> historically significant buildings, important works by notable architects and builders, important examples of a particular style, buildings of fine construction, detailing and materials, buildings that make up an important architectural ensemble. 	<p>Category I buildings are to be kept in perpetuity. These buildings should be maintained and restored to the highest standards of these guidelines. Alterations to character-defining features and additions affecting these features are generally unacceptable.</p> <p>Demolition or modification of major defining characteristics are generally unacceptable. Modifying minor defining characteristics are also generally unacceptable.</p>
<p>Category II Significant</p>	<p>This category encompasses Westmount's other significant buildings. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> buildings that are notable in their own right but not at the level of category I buildings more modest buildings that contribute to the overall character of the city due to scale, materials, and age. 	<p>In general, Category II buildings should be preserved while maintaining the integrity of those features that define their character. Sympathetic alterations and additions may be allowed provided they do not adversely affect the essential character of the building.</p> <p>Demolition or modification of major defining characteristics are generally unacceptable. Modifying minor characteristics is also not generally acceptable but might be considered in certain circumstances in keeping with the guidelines.</p>
<p>Category III Neutral</p>	<p>These buildings have less architectural significance than buildings in category II.</p>	<p>There is no particular requirement to preserve the existing features of Category III buildings.</p> <p>Demolition is generally not acceptable but might be considered in certain circumstances. Modifications to existing buildings are acceptable provided they are visually coherent and harmonize with the streetscape.</p>

Definitions: See the complete definitions of defining characteristics on page 7.

Definitions

Architectural ensemble

A group of buildings that were designed and built as a single venture (e.g. a pair of semi-detached houses, a row of identical houses, a group of buildings forming one overall composition).

Architectural (heritage) significance

In these guidelines, the term architectural significance is not only used to refer to the design value of a given structure but it also encompasses historic and contextual value. (See also page 4.)

Character area

An area in which the buildings and properties share similar physical characteristics based on topography, street layout, history and age, building typology, building siting, and/or architectural style.

Degree of homogeneity

For a Character Area or a Streetscape, the degree to which buildings share common characteristics (based on the number and precision of defining characteristics identified for the area and the proportion of buildings sharing these characteristics).

Major modification

Projects that would substantially alter the defining characteristics of any given building.

Public view

Visible from a street, park or other public space excluding lanes.

Streetscape

The collection of buildings and landscaping features that define the urban street.

1.2 Alterations, additions and new construction

Ensure that alterations, additions and new construction harmonize with the building and surroundings.

1.2.1 Preservation of existing features

Ensure that alterations, new additions, and new construction do not destroy the defining features of a building or property.

1.2.2 Harmony with existing building

Design new work to be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features of the building to which it is attached or is adjacent to on the same property.

1.2.3 Harmony with surroundings

Ensure that a new building or an addition to an existing building conforms to the defining characteristics of the streetscape and character area in which it is located. This requirement also applies to major modifications to existing buildings.

Note that the previous criterion takes priority over this one (e.g. it is more important that an addition harmonize with the building to which it is attached than to the streetscape).

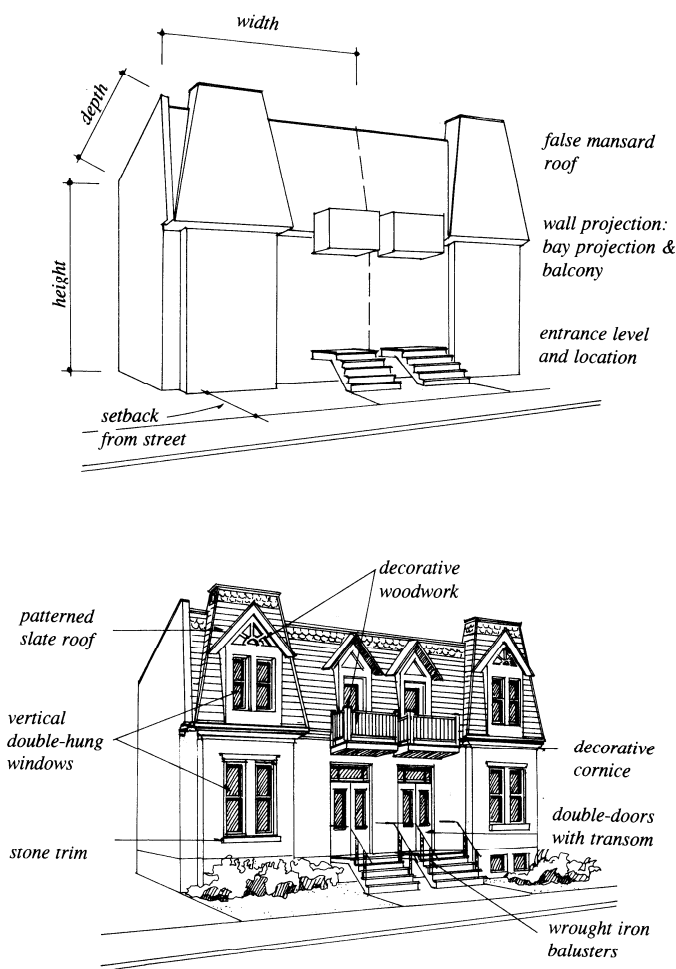


The character of a building (left) can be destroyed with a build-up of insensitive and incoherent changes such as inappropriate changes to window openings and window styles and the removal of original details (wood gingerbread, balusters, upper balcony, original front door) (right).

1.3 Unified treatment

All elevations and storeys on a building, including multiple ownership buildings, must have unified, coherent treatment. Also, all character-defining features in buildings that are part of an architectural ensemble must be treated in the same manner.

Free-standing buildings in Westmount were normally designed with a consistent approach on all facades. However, in attached buildings where the rear facades were isolated from the front, although windows were generally consistent, other features were often treated in a more informal way. This can be taken into consideration when undertaking alterations.



*A building's or ensemble's overall character is derived from its **siting and basic form** (see top illustration) as well as its **facade treatments and materials** (see bottom illustration).*

Definitions (cont'd)

Defining Characteristics

For a Character Area, a Streetscape, an Architectural Ensemble or for an individual building or property, the defining characteristics are those distinctive features that give it its particular character. Characteristics include, but are not limited to:

- **building siting and relation to the landscape**
setback from street; site coverage; space between buildings; topography; natural and man-made landscaping features (trees and other vegetation, retaining walls, fences, hedges, driveways, etc.); car access (from street or lane) and parking (garage in main or accessory building; parking apron);
- **building form**
building typology (detached, row house, apartment etc.); height; width; shape of building; recesses and projections; ground floor level in relation to sidewalk or natural elevation; entrance design (level, front or side location, presence of stairs); roof shape (sloped, flat with parapet or decorative sloped roofs, etc.); other volumetric features (porches, bay windows, balconies etc.);
- **facade treatment and building elements**
composition, scale, rhythm, balance and proportion of various elements; the size, proportion and location of window and door openings as well as the specific design of windows and doors; architectural details and decorative features (cornices, roof ornaments etc.);
- **materials**
primary and secondary wall and roof materials; colours, textures, scale of elements, etc.

Major defining characteristics

Include the overall building and roof form, facade materials, window and door openings, entrance location, etc.

Minor defining characteristics

Include roof materials, window and door divisions and materials, design of other secondary elements such as railings, steps, etc.

See also the definitions in the zoning and building by-laws.

Where to Get Help

The Westmount Urban Planning Department can advise on the legality and advisability of planned renovations at the earliest stages. A copy of the Character Area Information Sheet for your area can be obtained as well as specific Guideline Booklets.

They also have archives that contain plans of most buildings. This can provide an indication of how the building was originally designed, its structural system, and how it evolved over time. Only the owner of the property, or authorised representative, may consult these documents.

Westmount Library

The library has several books that describe the history of Westmount, such as:

- *Westmount Heritage Study*, by Beaupré Michaud Architects, the complete results of the study including profiles of individual buildings.
- *Westmount: A Heritage to Preserve*, by the City of Westmount; a summary of the Westmount Heritage Study; can also be purchased at City Hall.
- *Montreal's Little Mountain - A Portrait of Westmount* - by Aline Gubbay and Sally Hooff;
- *History of Westmount* - (a pamphlet);
- *Old Westmount* - by the Old Westmount Club of Westmount High School.

Books

There are many excellent books and magazines on all aspects of renovation. In addition to the Westmount Library, wide selections of books, magazines and catalogues are available for consultation at the McGill and the Université de Montréal Architecture Libraries and at Héritage Montréal.

Courses

Several courses are available on building renovation including one from Heritage Montreal. The adult education departments of various school boards and some private schools offer do-it-yourself courses.

Architects and contractors

To find an architect or contractor, it is useful to talk to friends and neighbours who have had similar work done. The Order of Architects of Québec and the Association of Architects in Private Practice in Québec have a directory of their members which is accessible to the public. The latter also lists the architects according to their specialities.



Westmount City Hall

The Guidelines for Renovating and Building in Westmount are also available on the internet at:

<http://westmount.org>

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