

CHÂTEAU LAURIER URBAN DESIGN GUIDANCE



National Capital Commission
du Toit Allsopp Hillier Architecture | Landscape Architecture | Urban Design
Centre for Landscape Research University of Toronto

April 2008

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Prepared for :

The National Capital Commission

Prepared by:

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1. Château Laurier in Context circa 2003

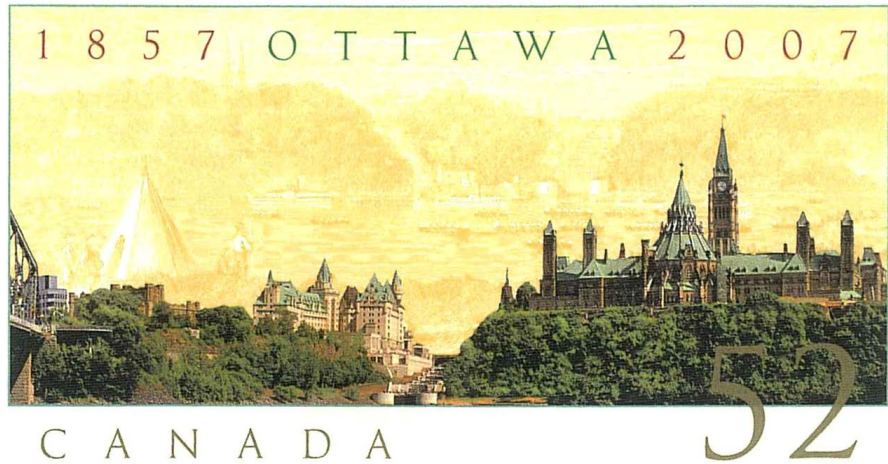
INTRODUCTION

The Château Laurier Hotel plays a pivotal role in the visual composition of Canada's Capital. The National Capital Commission wishes to ensure that any future addition to the building can only be considered if it can maintain the heritage and visual qualities of the composition. The building is also a major space-containing edge to Mackenzie Street and Majors Hill Park. If an addition is contemplated, it must also animate both park and street.

This report looks at the Château's place in the Central Capital Landscape, its essential character-defining elements, and the potential location of any future addition. It provides design principles to guide proponents, the NCC, and its Advisory Committee of Planning, Design and Realty (ACPDR) in assessing the merits of a proposed addition. It also presents a recommended approach for assessing visual impact, employing three-dimensional digital massing models and the analytical methods of the Views Protection Studies.



2. View of the Château Laurier from Sparks Street circa 1920's.



3. The postage stamp issued to commemorate the Capital's 150th anniversary paired the Château with the Houses of Parliament across the Rideau Canal locks to express the country's progress.



4. The Château Laurier as the quintessential Ottawa backdrop in promotional images.

THE CHÂTEAU'S PLACE IN THE CAPITAL

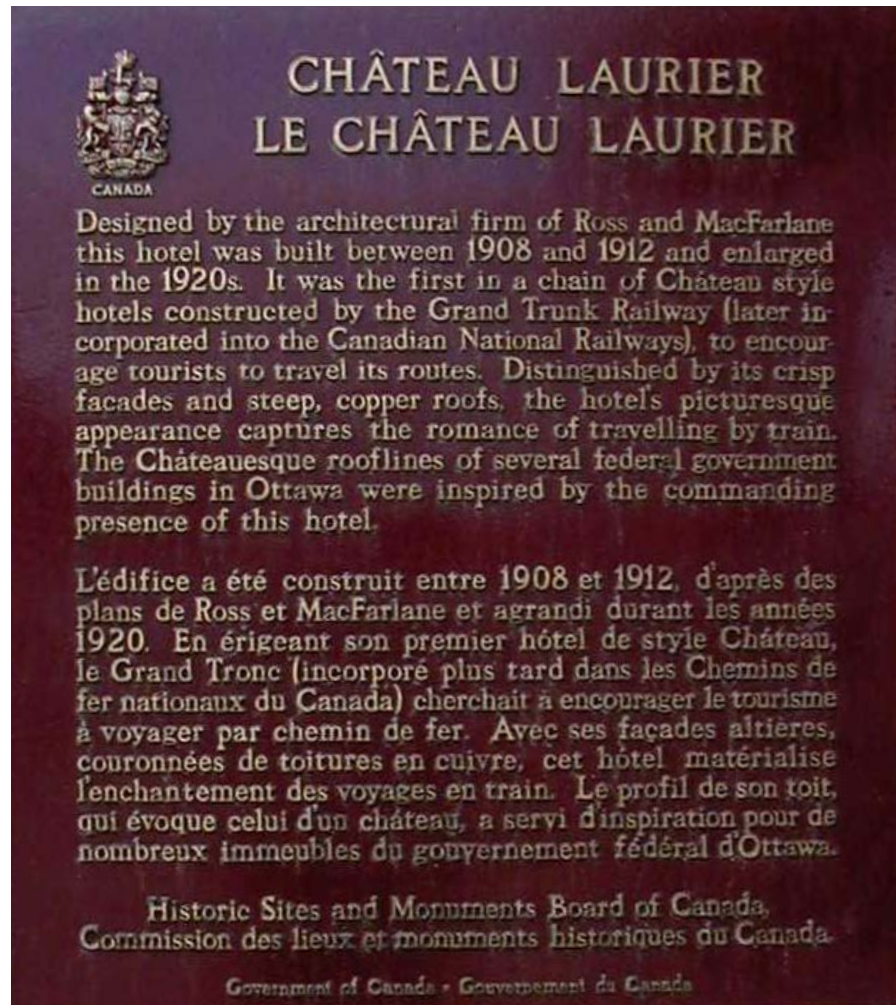
The Château Laurier is a provincially designated historic building and national historic site adjoining the Rideau Canal World Heritage Site. It is an important member of the family of national symbols contributing to Ottawa's memorable urban composition. It played a seminal role in establishing a "national style", most clearly but not exclusively represented by the nation-building railway hotels constructed across Canada. It forms the backdrop to images expressing the best of the "Ottawa experience". It is therefore both a national and civic icon of great importance. Any new building proposal should acknowledge this and be designed to protect the Château's place in and contribution to the visual composition of the core of the National Capital.

This role is regularly celebrated in the promotional literature of both the City of Ottawa and the Federal Government. It was commemorated in the country's dollar bill and the 2007 postage stamps marking the 150th anniversary of Ottawa's selection as our nation's capital. In both of these cases, the Château Laurier is paired with the Centre Block and Library of Parliament to express the essence of the Capital's landscape.



5. For many years the dollar bill featured the Château Laurier alongside Parliament Hill

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE



6. Historic Sites and Monuments Board plaque on the Château Laurier.

Excerpt from:

Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. Agenda Paper

The Château Style Railway Hotel in Canada

Marc de Caraffe and Janet Wright, 1980

"Even before the completion of the Empress Hotel in 1908, the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway (GTPR) had decided to get into the act with the construction of its own chain of château style hotels. In 1907, the GTPR commissioned well-known New York architect Bradford Lee Gilbert to prepare a design for a new hotel in Ottawa to be located directly across the street from their new railway terminal. For some reason Gilbert was dismissed from the project and the Montreal firm of George Allan Ross and David H. MacFarlane took over the project. Credit for the design however, should probably go to Gilbert for although Ross and MacFarlane submitted their own proposal, it closely adhered to Gilbert's original scheme.

The design of the Château Laurier borrows much from its CPR predecessors. The symmetrical front facade, defined by two octagonal pavilions vertically accented by a strip of oriel articulation of the Empress Hotel. Like the Château Frontenac, however, it employs an irregular, in this case L-shaped plan, and features a broad range of medieval detail in the form of turrets, machicolations, finialed and crocketed gables which impart a much livelier and picturesque silhouette than the more regularized sedateness of the Empress Hotel. The circular corner tower of the Château Frontenac has been applied to the Château Laurier but transformed into a tall slim form inset deep into the wall which gives it a flimsy toy-like appearance. The choice of a more fanciful expression of the château style was probably suggested by its rugged and romantic setting on top of the rocky banks of the Ottawa River where the Rideau Canal locks make their precipitous descent to the Ottawa River.

A GTPR Château Hotel can always be distinguished from its CPR counterpart by its pale Indiana limestone walls. In Ottawa this material was chosen to harmonize the newly completed railway station across Wellington Street which was designed by the same architects in the monumental classical mode of the Beaux-Arts tradition. The smooth finish and pale tone of the Indiana limestone lends a crisp coolness to the walls of the Château Laurier which contrasts sharply with the ornate quality of the detailing above the eave-line lending a slightly top-heavy quality to the design.

The Château Laurier was the first in a series of Grand Trunk Château hotels but its real importance lies in the influence it exerted on future federal architecture. As will be examined, as the château style began to evolve in the mind of the federal government as a distinctly "national" style of architecture the model they inevitably referred back to, because of its proximity, was the Château Laurier."



7. Indiana Limestone



8. Copper Roofs

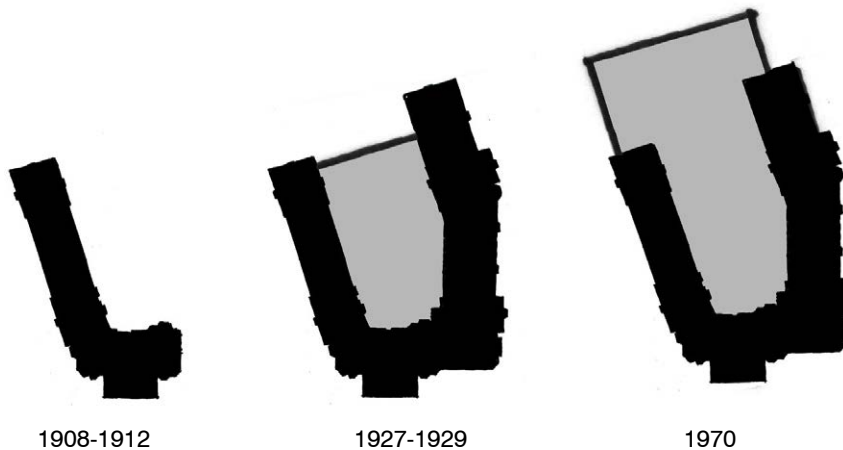


9. Ornamentation

Adaptable, Asymmetrical Balance

In the period between the original construction of 1908-1912 and the additions of 1927-1929, there was sufficient continuity of common architectural attitude and construction methods to allow the inherent flexibility of the Château style to form a coherent whole each time that the building was adapted and enlarged. The limestone walls are arranged as a series of vertical shafts and connecting pieces of varying heights, tightly packed along the entrance frontage and two wings. Each shaft is topped by a bracketed frieze supporting a top floor and a peaked and ornamental roof intersecting with adjoining roofs. The architectural composition has readily accommodated and been enhanced by asymmetrical additions in the same style.

The skill of contemporary architects in today's climate of contemporary craftsmanship and construction practices will be severely tested if further additions are attempted.



10. An adaptable architectural style in the early 20th Century context.



11. The Château Laurier from Rideau Street in 2007.

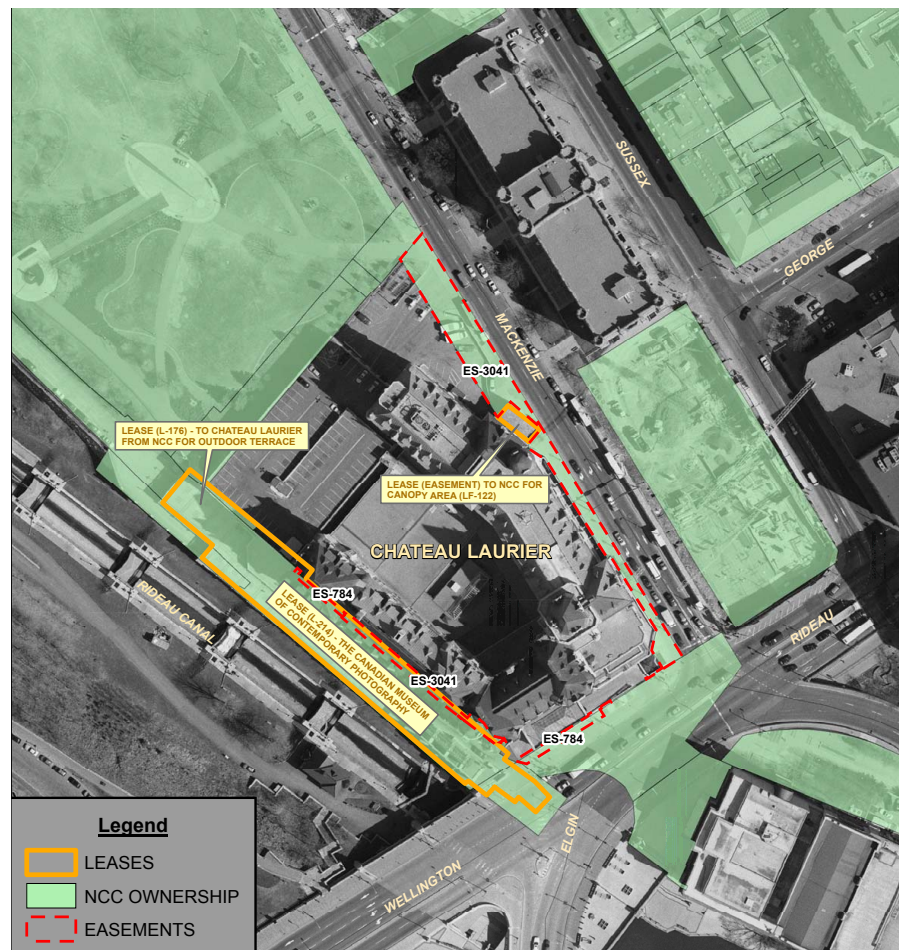


12. Château Laurier 1912.

SITE CAPACITY AND REGULATION

Opportunities for an Addition

Except for a small service area in the north-east, the Château is built right to the property lines on all four sides. It is also landlocked, surrounded by NCC lands on all sides. The only viable location for an addition is to the north, replacing or building over the parking structure, and possibly some redevelopment of the courtyard.



13. Site Plan showing the extent of NCC ownership and easements surrounding the Château Laurier.

Municipal Regulations

Expansion of the Château Laurier is controlled by the City of Ottawa's Central Area Official Plan, Zoning Bylaws, and heritage overlay, which together permit:

- Hotel, housing, office, restaurant and retail uses;
- A maximum density of 4.5 times the lot area;
- Wall heights and roof slope of an addition as per the existing building; and
- Side yard setbacks up to 30cm from corresponding existing walls.

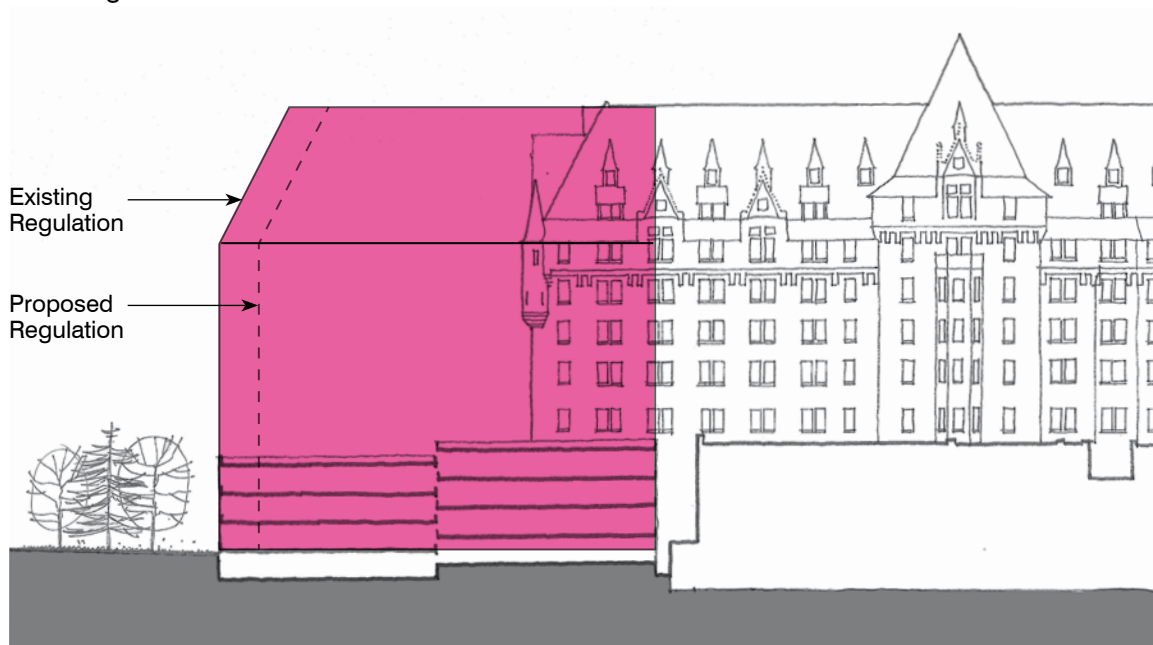
Draft Bylaws and heritage overlay now under review, if approved, would:

- Increase side yard setbacks to 60cm;
- Restrict gross floor area (GFA) to 30% of the existing GFA; and
- Establish a rear yard setback of 3.0 meters.

Preliminary visual analysis indicates that massing to the limits of either of these regulations would dominate the view of the Château from the north.



15. Maximum Footprint as per current municipal regulation



14. Schematic North-South Section of Existing Building, with regulated maximum envelope of an addition. (DTAH interpretation)

BUILDING ENVELOPE AND SITING

Silhouette

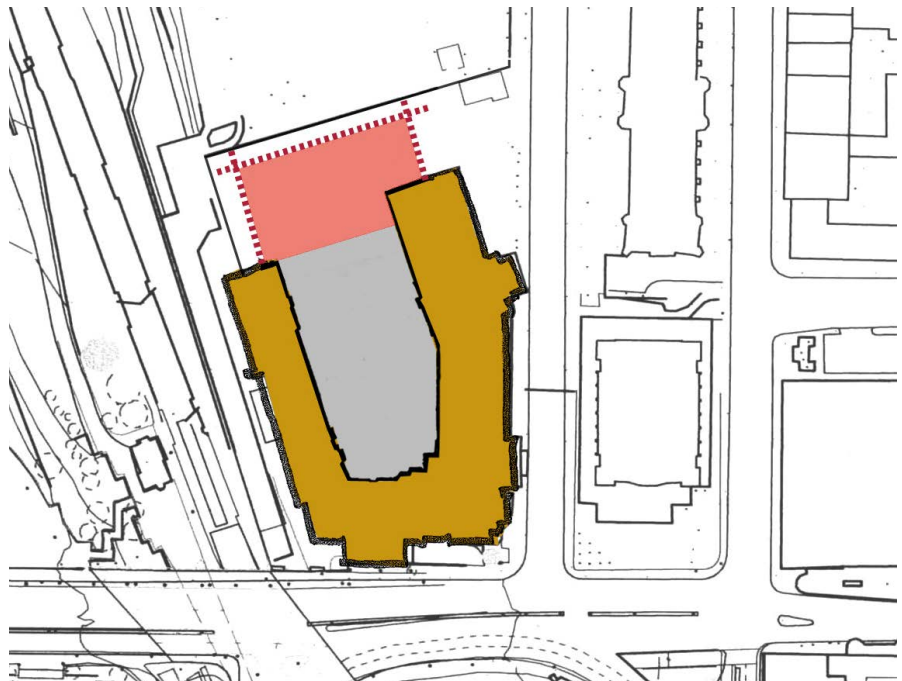
The peaked roofs, silhouette and wall edges of the existing Château should continue to be visible and dominant in order to maintain their role in the capital panorama.

Volume

Any addition should be lower in height and volume to ensure that the original building prevails as the principal symbol.

Corner Integrity

Any proposed building footprint should be set back to expose the north-east and northwest corners of the existing building, at least to the first range of windows.



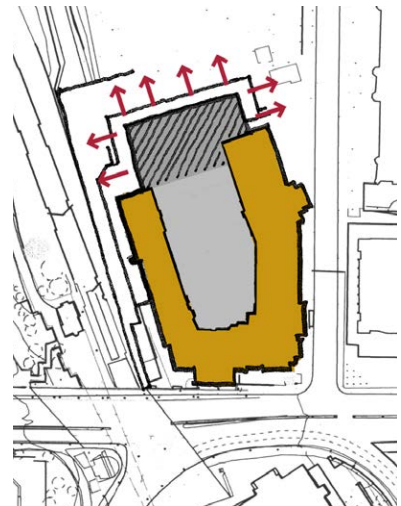
16. An addition should be subsidiary to the original building.

Frontages

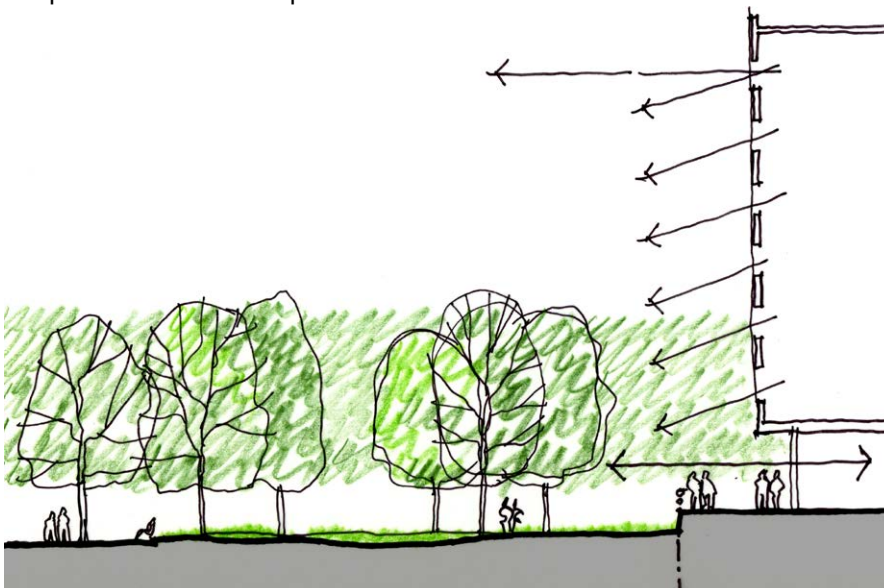
A distinguishing feature of all the national symbols is that they are seen as picturesque pavilions in a landscape setting; that is, the buildings have noble façades in all directions. The new building should have an animated “face” in its three directions.

Interaction with Majors Hill Park

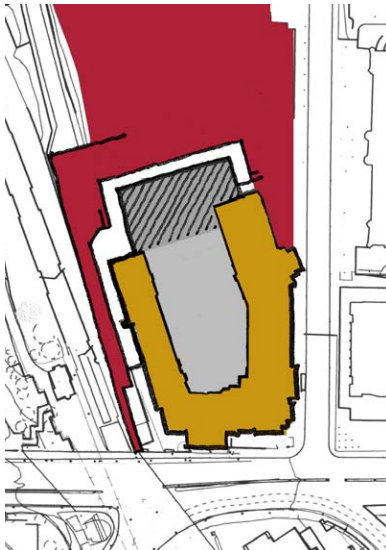
The face of the building should be set back from the edge of the park. The set-back area should be appropriately landscaped, fenced, and raised above park level. There should be no direct access from building to park. Above-grade parking should be removed or invisibly embedded in the body of the addition. An addition should present a transparent and animated face to the park, backed by uses occupied by people, not vehicles. The lower levels should contain common uses with visual connection to the park through outdoor decks or other treatment. The façade should contain fenestration, elements and materials scaled to fit the public nature of the park.



18. The building should face three directions



17. An addition should animate the Park.



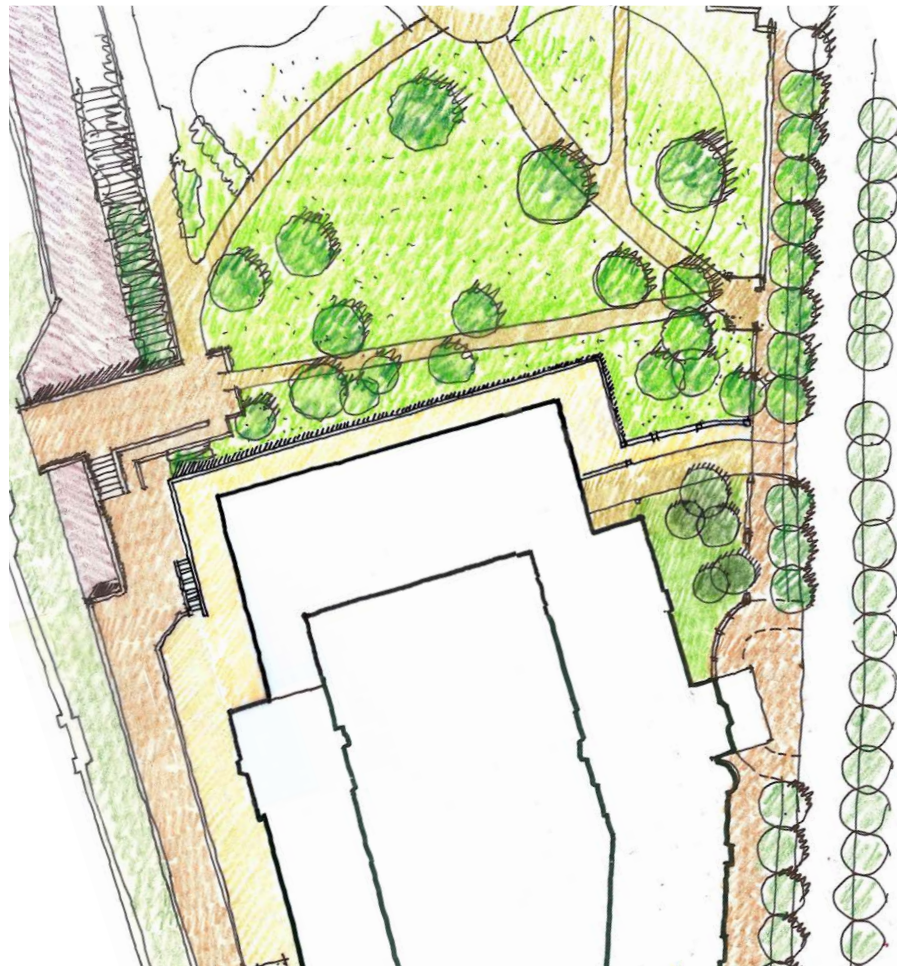
19. Extend the Sense of the Park

Park extension

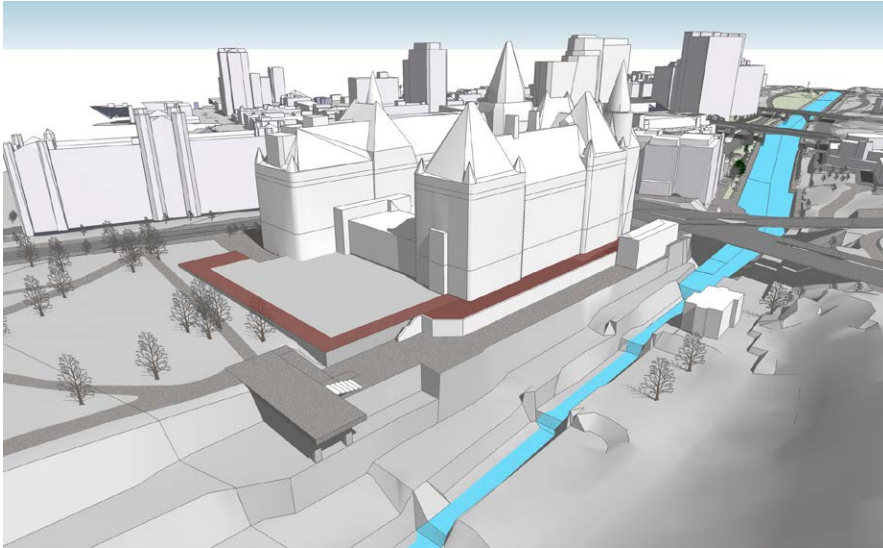
Extend the sense of the park around the west and east sides to reinforce the reading of a pavilion in the landscape.

Canal Terraces

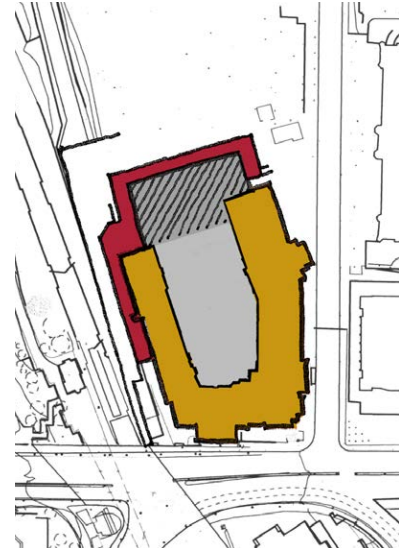
Extend the hotel terraces around the north face to establish a transition with the park. Extend the public terrace to firmly engage with Majors Hill Park.



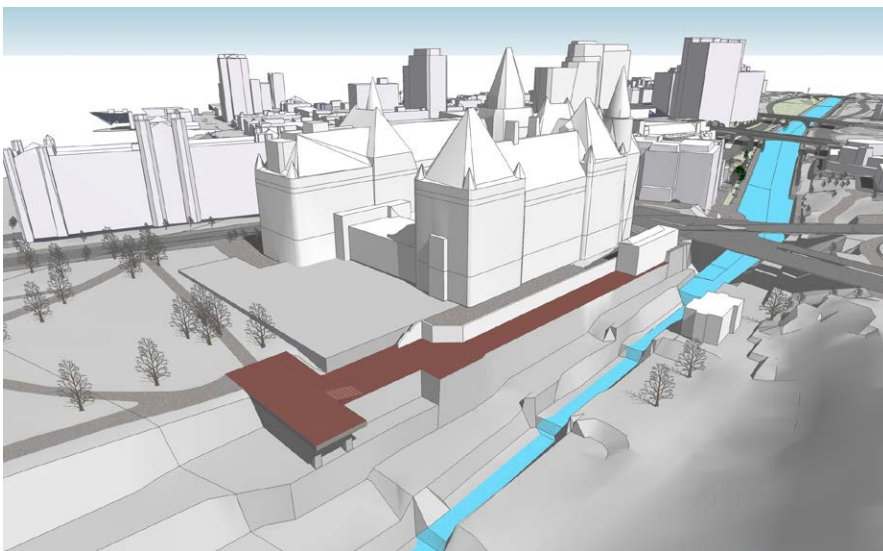
20. Demonstration of expanded Canal Terrace and relationship with park



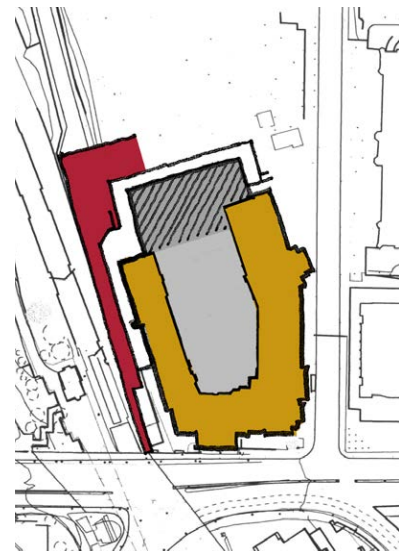
21. Demonstration of Extended Hotel Terrace.



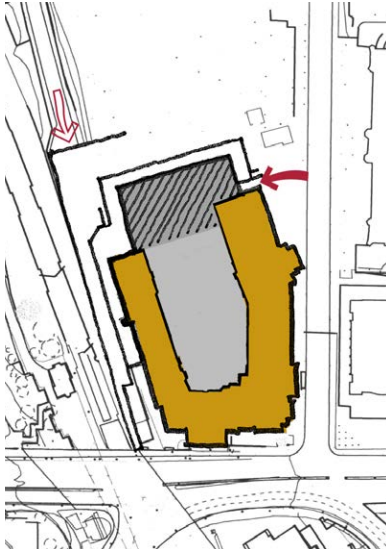
23. Extend the Hotel Terrace



22. Demonstration of Extended Public Terrace.



24. Extend the Public Terrace



25. Site vehicular entrance away from Park Edge

Vehicular Access

Replace the existing exposed loading dock and garage entrance with a more elegant solution, sited away from the park edge. Consider the potential for some service vehicle access from the old rail terrace.

Materials

The addition should use enough of the same materials as the Château to give a sense of integration with the whole.

Mechanical

Equipment must be fully integrated with the architecture of the building and not visible as a separate element.

Illumination

Night time lighting should be subtle and limited, in accordance with the principles of the Plan for Canada's Capital.

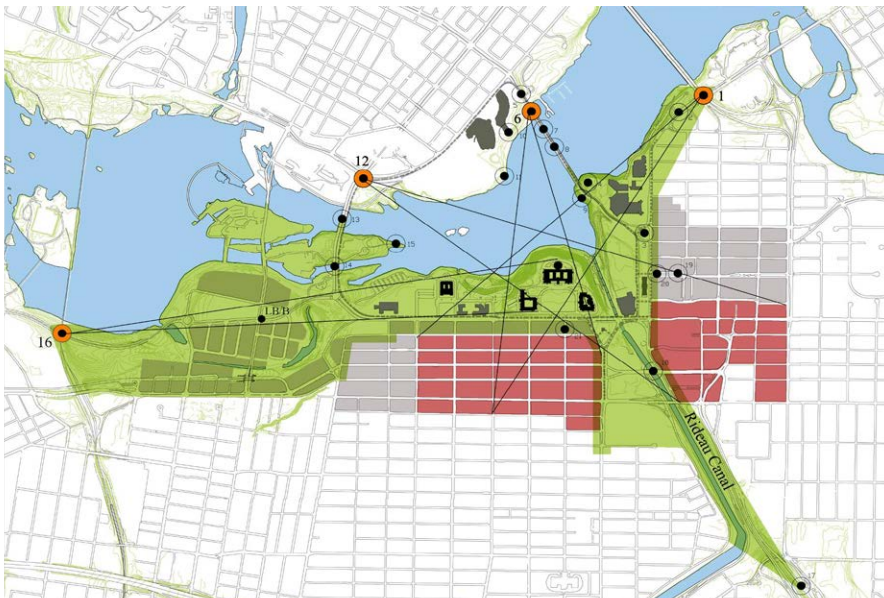
Signage

Illuminated or attached signage will not be permitted. Modest integral names, if allowed, must be discrete and only visible at short range.

VIEWS PROTECTION

Proposed buildings which will be seen behind the National Symbols are controlled In Ottawa's Official Plan by "*Background height limits*" in order to protect the silhouette of the symbolic buildings.

Proposed buildings or other constructions, which will be seen in front of the National Symbols, are controlled by "*Foreground height limits*" in order to avoid obstructing views of the symbols.



26. The subjects of views protection and key control viewpoints, and the areas subject to Background and Foreground Controls in the Official Plan.

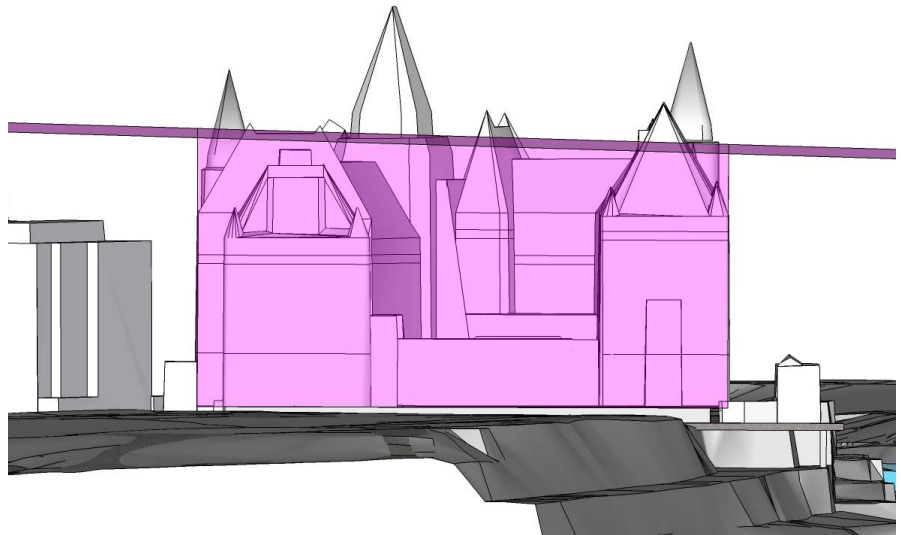


27. Background Height Control Plane from Viewpoint 12

Background View Controls

The background height limits have been established by projecting Height Control Planes from Controlling Viewpoints, through Benchmarks (such as the eaves line of the Centre Block) and extending over the area where the background controls apply.

Viewpoint 12 establishes a height limit to protect the upper silhouette of the Centre Block for buildings behind it in the vicinity of the Château. As can be seen below in a view taken from O.P. Viewpoint 6, It provides roughly the same level of height control as the heritage overlay of the Official Plan. Like the O.P. Regulation, the background control plane provides very little foreground protection; an addition within it's limits would almost completely obscure the original façade.



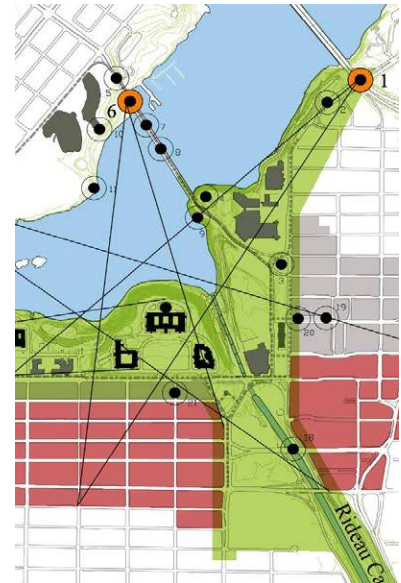
28. Height control from Official Plan Viewpoint 12.

Foreground View Protection

While the preceding Building Envelope and Siting guidance would mitigate the potential blockage discussed above to some extent, they will not be enough to establish how appropriate any given design will be. Detailed foreground view analysis taking actual proposed shape and character into account will also be required.

The areas subject to foreground control are established in the Official Plan, but the precise controls are not predetermined, as they are in the case of background control. They are established through special study, usually at the time a proposal for construction is made.

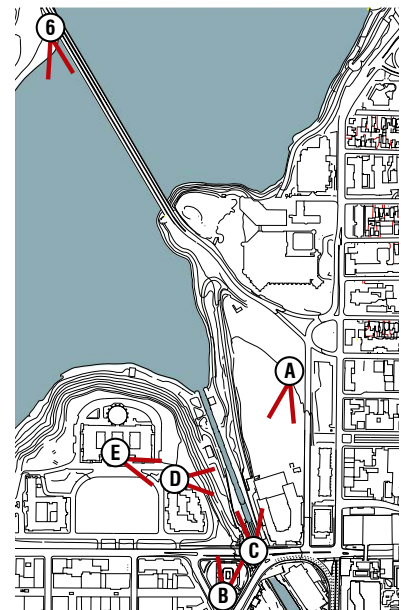
This report establishes a series of key viewpoints in advance of any proposals. Future proponents will be able to use them in developing their design to limit foreground impact, and the NCC will be able to use them in assessing such impact.



29. Area of foreground control shown in green.

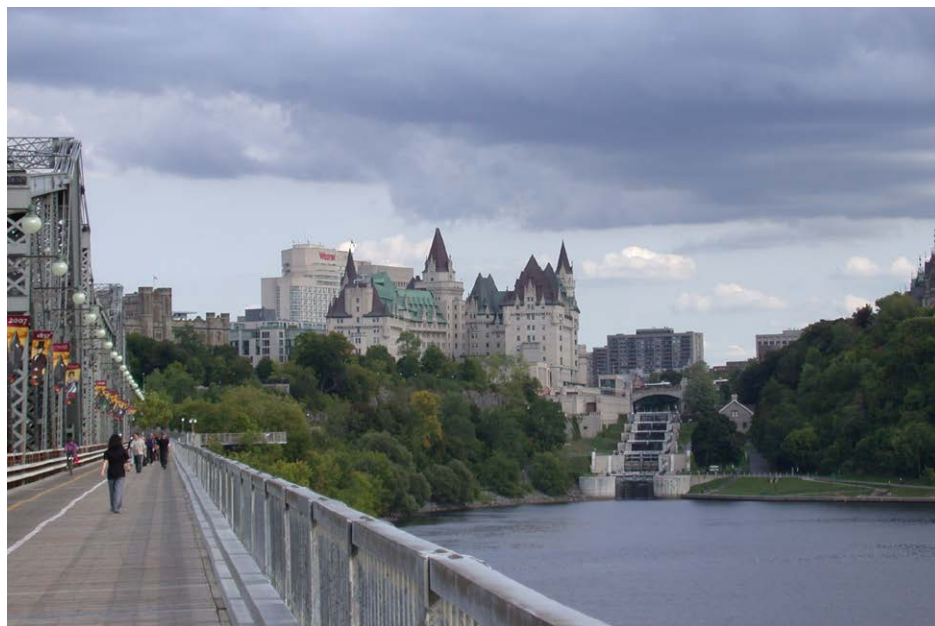
Selection of Key Views

As can be interpreted from Figure 29, an addition will directly block at least part of the foreground view of the original building from many of the key viewpoints of the Official Plan, including Control Viewpoint 6. It is therefore selected as one of the viewpoints for foreground control. A new Viewpoint A is proposed from Major's Hill Park for similar reasons. Additional viewpoints are also proposed, encompassing the canal side from Confederation Square (B), obliquely from Plaza Bridge (C), frontally from Parliament Hill (D), and aerially from the Peace Tower (E) because the Château forms an important part of the visual composition from each.

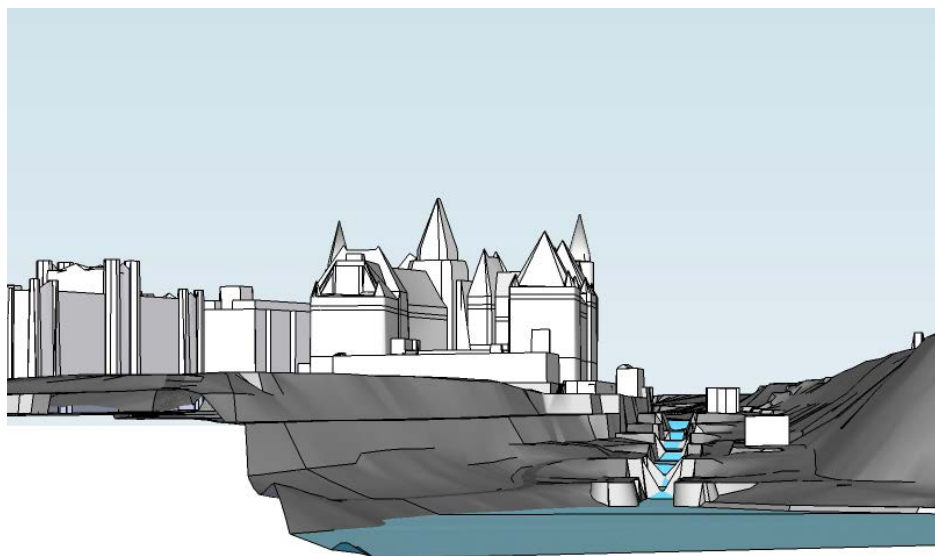


30. Viewpoint Locations.

KEY VIEWS



31. Viewpoint 6 from Alexandra Bridge.



32. Digital Simulation from Viewpoint 6.



33. Viewpoint A from Major's Hill Park.



34. Digital Simulation from Viewpoint A.



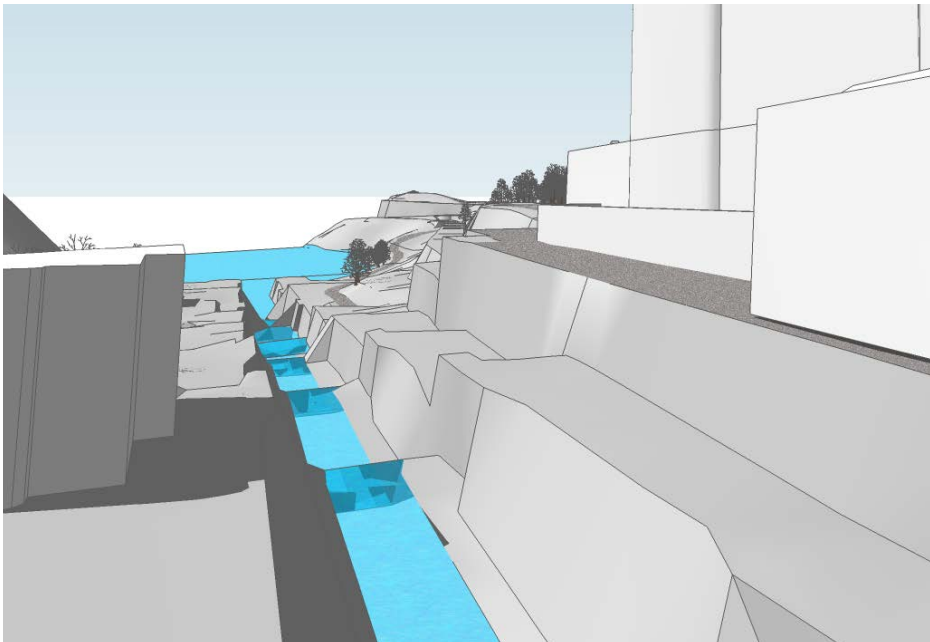
35. Viewpoint B from Confederation Square.



36. Digital Simulation from Viewpoint B.



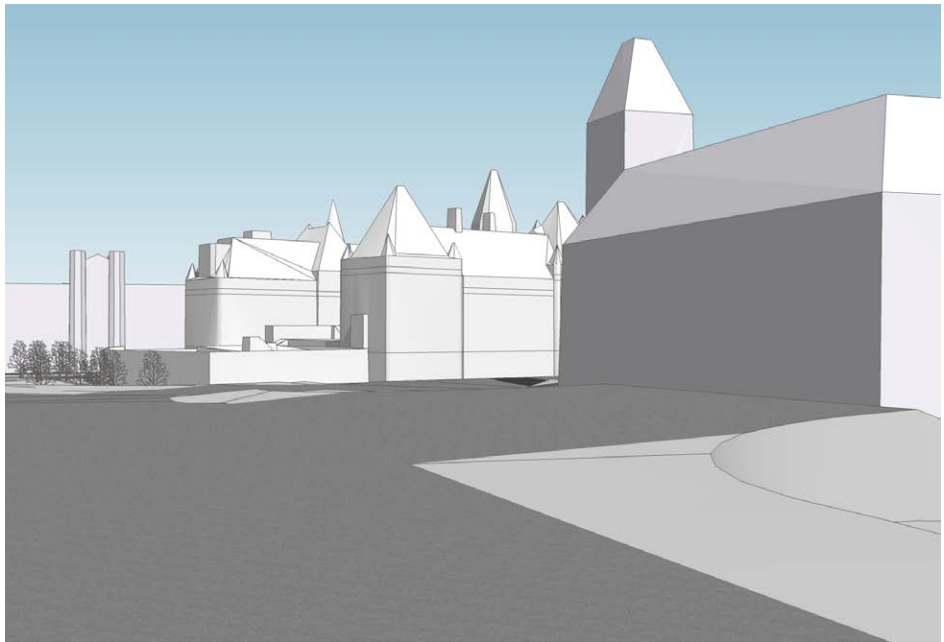
37. Viewpoint C from Plaza Bridge.



38. Digital Simulation from Viewpoint C.



39. Viewpoint D from Parliament Hill.



40. Digital Simulation from Viewpoint D.



41. Viewpoint E from the Peace Tower.



42. Digital Simulation from Viewpoint E.

APPENDIX A: NCC PARAMETER PRINCIPLES; FEBRUARY 2006

Parameters - Principles

The design of any addition to the Chateau Laurier should arise from a careful analysis of this context of pavilions in a landscape, of views and Control points, sequences and foregrounds, and of the War Memorial and Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Therefore,

- The proposed addition must be considered and analyzed from the key viewpoints and sequences. It should convey the image of a subsidiary building with respect to the Chateau Laurier Hotel. The peaked roofs and skyline of the original Chateau should continue to be visible and dominant in order to take their appropriate place in the panorama from these points.
- Views must be considered not only towards the addition and the Chateau in the context described above, but also past them, as part of the broader Capital experience. Particular attention should be given to the view of the addition from the entrance plaza to the National Gallery of Art and from the esplanade of Confederation Boulevard – Mackenzie Avenue.
- The addition should ‘read’ as independent and should be lower, in height and volume, than the Chateau, so as to ensure that the latter continues to prevail as the fundamental symbol.
- The addition should convey a residential character through the treatment of the podium and by implementing a truly contemporary architecture that also recognizes and is compatible with the heritage character of the hotel without falling into a historicist or stylized architecture seeking to replicate the original building.
- Along the Major’s Hill Park edge, the addition should involve interior uses and design that is responsive and compatible with the public nature of the park. The new building should not present a parking structure or blank face towards the park. The lower levels of the building should contain common use areas, and the building should continue the concept of a podium and upper body that follows those of the Chateau Laurier. The podium’s façade should include fenestration, elements and materials properly scaled to fit the public nature of the park edge.
- The building should include a setback that allows for a transition space between the park and the addition. This area should be landscaped and fenced in a manner that reflects and gives continuity to the landscape character of the park.
- The addition should consider using the same materials as the Chateau in the composition of its façade, articulated in way that reflects the particular context of a residential architecture. In terms of its morphology, the addition should be responsive to the mainly rectilinear geometries of the context and to the steep, pitched roofs of the Chateau.

- The addition should read as a separate building to the existing Chateau Laurier and should complete the internal courtyard of the Hotel.
- Pedestrian and vehicle access to the addition must not impinge upon the continuity, quality and public experience of Confederation Boulevard, nor of the West Terrace alongside the Rideau Canal. Current agreements between the NCC and the Chateau Laurier cover only access to the hotel use itself. The handling of the Mackenzie Avenue frontage will require an elegant resolution and screening of the existing, exposed loading dock and garage entrance.
- No additional encroachments will be permitted onto Confederation Boulevard.
- Any damage to the Boulevard's materials or landscape as a result of the addition's construction or operation shall be repaired to the satisfaction of, and without cost to, the Commission.
- The NCC is prepared to consider alternative servicing and loading to the addition, and to the Chateau Laurier by means of access to the lower roadway between the West Terrace and St. Patrick Street. This is subject to a formal agreement with the NCC following verification of road and carrying capacity and the resolution of ingress and egress from St. Patrick, and also to the provision of additional pedestrian stairs between the West Terrace and lower driveway and protection of the interest and present rights of the Canadian Museum of Photography.
- The Plan for Canada's Capital, as well as the City of Ottawa Official plan includes illumination policies for the Parliamentary Precinct and nearby escarpment areas, which includes the Chateau Laurier. In general terms, these policies state emphasize the subtle night time visual experiences of Parliament Hill, the War Memorial, and other national symbols, by limiting the night time illumination of the surrounding context, including the Chateau.
- Mechanical equipment must, of course, be very carefully handled in this location, and be fully integrated with the architecture of the building. It must not impact nor be visible from adjacent public spaces and streets.
- The design and contractual sale condominium agreements for the addition must fully resolve noise generated by continuing events in Major's Hill Park, and avoid any possibility of complaints by residents of the new addition.
- In addressing the above planning, urban design and architectural aspects and questions, the consultants should develop options in order that the NCC's Advisory Committee on Planning, Design and Realty may provide productive assistance on the design.