

# PHASE 2 SUMMARY REPORT

## *Preferred Downtown Concept*



PREPARED BY MODUS PLANNING, DESIGN & ENGAGEMENT INC. FOR THE CITY OF FORT ST. JOHN



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# PART I. INTRODUCTION

The downtown has always been the economic, social and cultural heart of Fort St. John and an important shaper of the community's overall identity. While downtown has seen some decline over the past few years, it is poised to revitalize. Driving revitalization is the significant growth anticipated for the city, the number of development opportunities in the downtown, Council's prioritization of the downtown for growth and investment, and, most importantly, the community's genuine passion and commitment to improving its downtown.

## DOWNTOWN IS A PRIORITY

The importance of downtown was reinforced by Council through the adoption of the 2011 OCP which positioned the downtown as the centerpiece of the City's overall growth management strategy. Acting on OCP priorities, Council initiated a comprehensive

three-phase process for Downtown Planning premised on enhancing the downtown as the social, economic and cultural heart of the community. This process acts on the sense of urgency to embrace the considerable economic opportunities and growth prospects Fort St. John is experiencing, and to create a healthy and economically vibrant downtown as the cornerstone of a sustainable and liveable community.

## FORT ST. JOHN ON THE RISE

Fort St. John has been one of the fastest growing municipalities in the province and the City is expected to continue to grow at an even faster pace over the coming years. This is in large part due to the significant growth in surrounding resource and energy sectors, including the Site C hydroelectric mega-project approved by the Province on December 16, 2014. With this resource and energy activity

comes jobs and people, many with young families wishing to find a great community to match great employment prospects.

A successful and vibrant downtown with a mix of opportunities to live, work, learn and play is a community's most important amenity, and is essential to attracting and maintaining Fort St. John residents, especially young families. It is also key to sustaining a vibrant and diverse economy over the long term, as the City becomes the economic heart of Northern B.C.

## THE DOWNTOWN HAS GOOD BONES

At present, downtown Fort St. John carries many aspects that reflect the economic, social and cultural heart of the community, and it has great potential to respond to the growing needs of existing and future residents. While the downtown has had its fair share of challenges, there still exists a lively daytime atmosphere, in part, due to the number of existing well-established offices, services and unique, locally-owned stores and cafes.

It will be important for the Downtown Action Plan to build on these existing business activities and successes in the downtown, and to differentiate them from, as opposed to compete with, the more auto-oriented and 'big-box' retailers on the periphery. The downtown also houses some of the City's key civic institutions, namely City Hall and the North Peace Cultural Centre, which provide a solid civic presence and foundation of activity in the downtown.

The existing grid street and laneway network and number of existing street-fronting and pedestrian-oriented buildings provide 'good bones' and a solid structural foundation for future growth and intensification in the downtown. The large number of vacant sites, such as the 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave and the former hospital site, represent significant opportunities to demonstrate the downtown vision through early wins. Together, all of these attributes provide significant opportunities for enhanced downtown vitalization and reinvestment.

Fort St. John is at an important crossroad. The City is undergoing rapid growth and this is expected to continue into the foreseeable future. Downtown is the centerpiece of the City's overall growth management strategy, and now is the time to plan this growth to achieve short, medium and long term community goals.

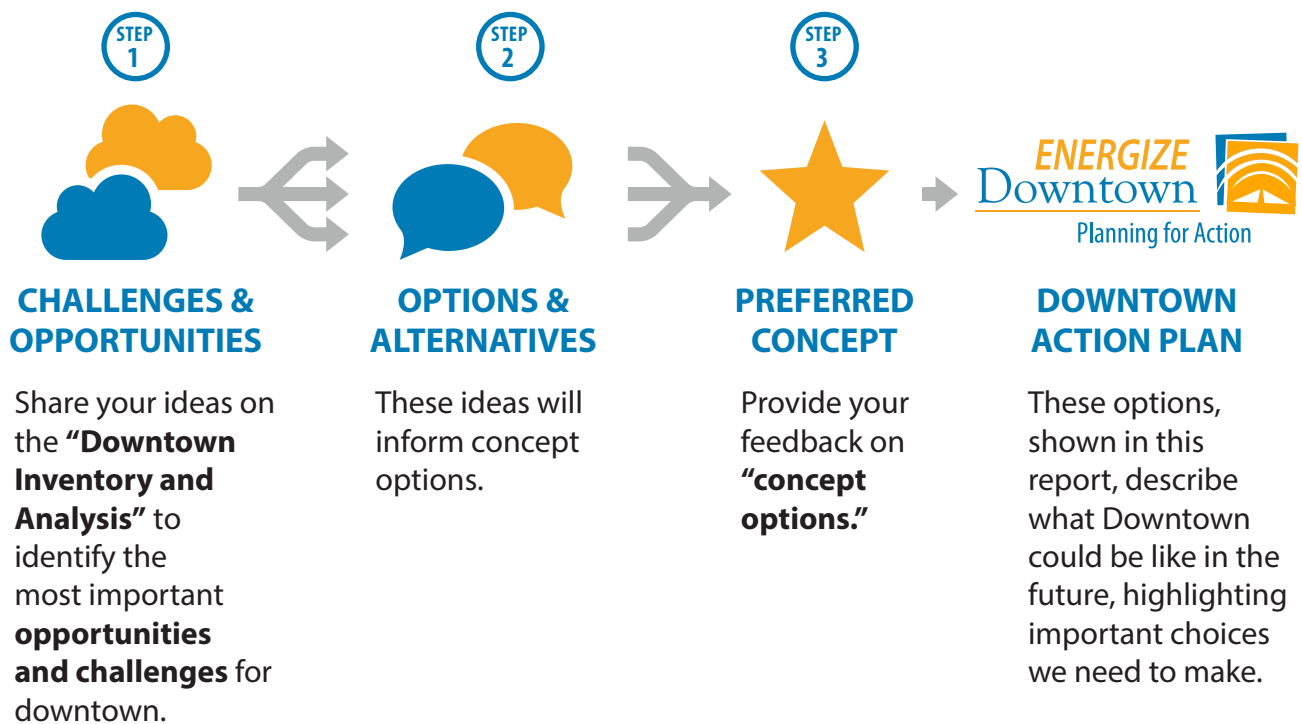
## PLANNING PROCESS

Energize Downtown is Phase 2 of a three phase community planning process to develop an Action Plan for the Downtown. This process acts on City Council's priorities to prioritize and enhance the downtown as the economic, social, and cultural heart of the city, as outlined in the 2011 Official Community Plan (OCP).

Phase 1 of downtown planning involved detailed technical baseline analysis of existing and future scenarios transportation, land use and development, infrastructure, urban design, population and demand for commercial and residential uses. This analysis is presented in detail in the Phase 1 Inventory and Analysis Baseline Report and forms an important reference document to the Phase 2 Preferred Concept Report.

Building on the vision and goals established by the 2011 OCP and the detailed technical work completed in Phase 1 of the process, Phase 2 identified a range of planning and design concepts for public and private realm development through extensive public

engagement, described in greater detail below. These concepts will form the basis for development of the Action Plan and By-law in Phase 3 - the development policies, design guidelines, priority capital projects and implementation framework.





## A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The focus of Phase 2 was **community and stakeholder engagement** which occurred through a series of design workshops and planning meetings as well as an online forum using the *PlaceSpeak* digital platform. Key components of Phase 2 engagement included:

- **Downtown Action Team Workshops:** a diverse group of community stakeholders worked closely with the planning and design team to share their local knowledge and ideas and provide input at key stages of the process.
- **Downtown Design 'Charrette' Workshop:** an intensive workshop attended by City staff and the Downtown Action Team developed a range of conceptual design options for the downtown.
- **Public Open House:** conceptual design options were presented and feedback was collected on a range of development concepts and options for private and public realm development including buildings, streetscapes, parks, plazas, open spaces, and transportation infrastructure.
- **Downtown Planning Booth:** Downtown design concepts were presented at the City's Canada Day Party and the Moose FM Block Party in September 2014. These were very well attended and generated significant interest, discussion and feedback.
- **Community Partner Workshop Series:** downtown design concepts were presented to a wide range of community stakeholders for input and feedback in a series of workshops.
- **Meeting in a Box and Online Survey:** a guided workbook used to host community conversations and gather input on the downtown design concepts and principles. The workbook was also available as an online survey.
- **Energize Downtown Website & Forum:** an online forum and website shared materials and engaged the community to provide their feedback and ideas throughout the process.





## COLLABORATION HIGHLIGHTS

A detailed summary of Phase 2 community and stakeholder engagement is provided in the third section of this report . Below is a synthesis of engagement highlights including community desires and key themes.

- Slowing and diverting commercial and other through traffic to make downtown streets safer and more comfortable for pedestrians;
- Supporting arts, entertainment and culture activities in the downtown year-round;
- Providing downtown public open spaces such as squares and plazas for a range of community events including festivals, markets, concerts and public gathering;
- Creating a unique downtown character and identity through high quality public and private realm development/design;
- Ensuring adequate provision and convenient access to parking both on and off-street;
- Creating more housing options including housing for seniors and families to live in or near downtown;
- Designing public and private realms developments for a *winter city* to ensure a practical response to Fort St. John's variable summer and winter climatic conditions;
- Developing vacant and underutilized sites in the downtown;
- Ensuring safe and positive behaviours and activities while enhancing social services and support for the disadvantaged; and
- Creating transportation choice.

## SPIRIT OF FORT ST. JOHN

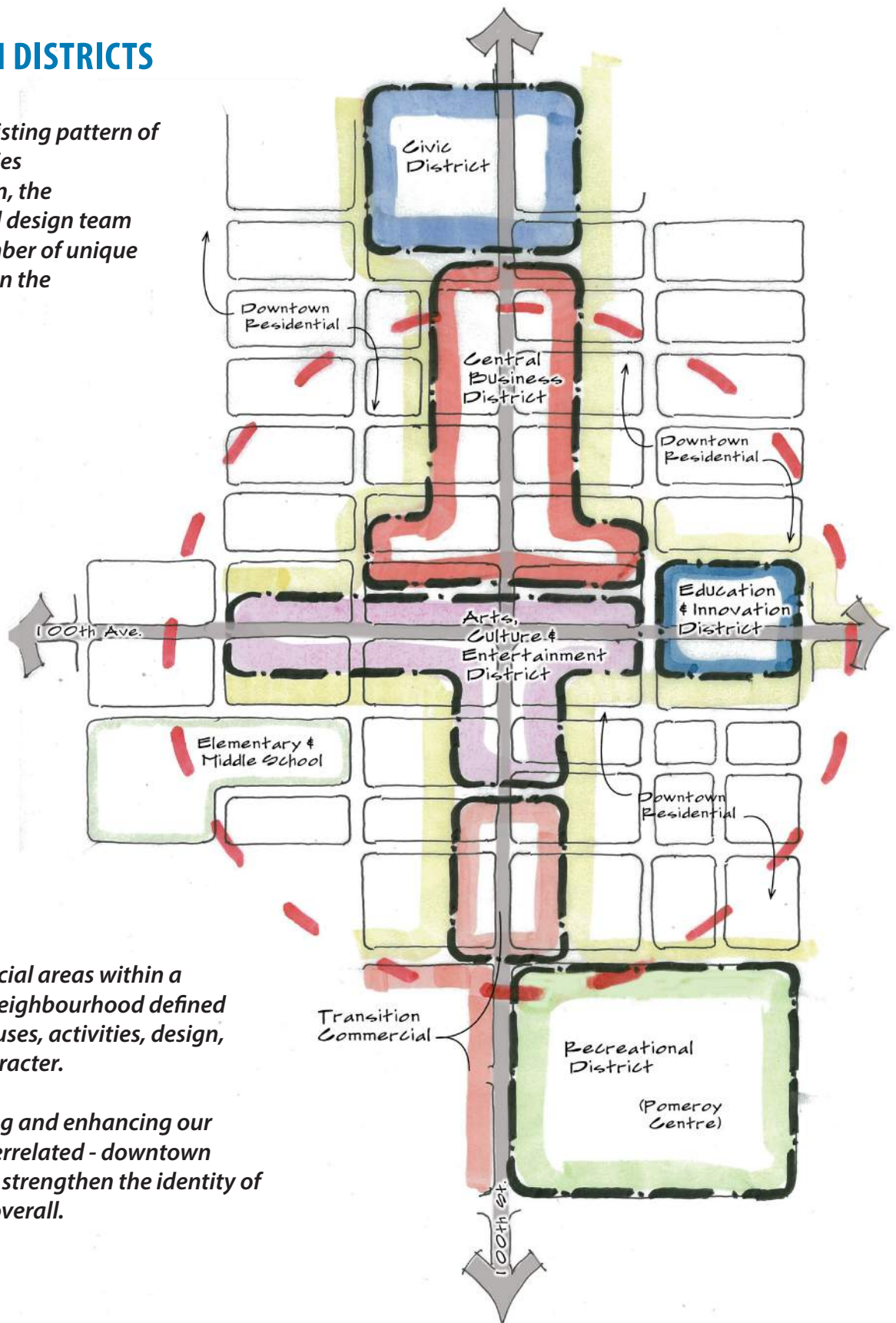
During the Downtown Design Workshop series, we asked, "What words capture the spirit of Fort St. John?" The following word bubbles show the responses received.





## DOWNTOWN DISTRICTS

*Based on the existing pattern of uses and activities in the downtown, the stakeholder and design team identified a number of unique districts shown in the diagram below.*



*Districts are special areas within a community or neighbourhood defined by their unique uses, activities, design, history, and character.*

*By differentiating and enhancing our unique - but interrelated - downtown districts, we can strengthen the identity of the downtown overall.*

## REPORT PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to present the ideas, opportunities and concepts identified and developed through the community and stakeholder consultation in Phase 2 of the process. These have been synthesized into:

**The 5 Fundamentals for a Successful Downtown** - the essential elements required to achieve a liveable, sustainable downtown.

**The 10 Big Moves to Energize Downtown** - a set of catalyst projects, public investments, design concepts and policy directions that together, will transform the heart of Fort St. John from good to great.

The 5 Fundamentals and 10 Big Moves, together with the summary of public and stakeholder feedback collected throughout Phase 2, form the foundation for development of the Implementation and Action Plan in Phase 3.



## PART II.5 FUNDAMENTALS

### *Of a Successful Downtown*

We all know a successful downtown when we see it – a bustling mix of people, brimming with excitement, a variety of shops and attractions, a choice of cultural entertainment, and a feeling of safety surrounded by others. Downtown should provide a unique set of services and experiences that people can't get elsewhere.

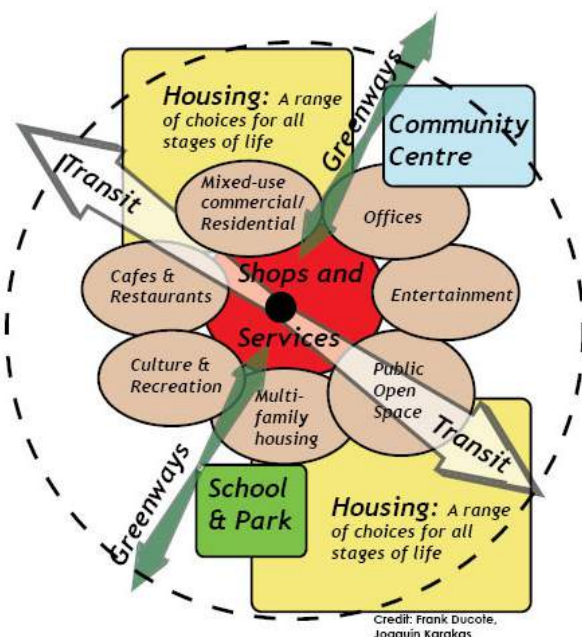
Improving economic conditions in the downtown is fundamental to the future success of the downtown and the City of Fort St. John as a whole. In fact, many of the other actions in this plan are geared towards improving the economic vitality of the downtown. Vacant sites and storefronts, unkempt properties, limited activity in some seasons, and decreased

variety in shops all lead to a decline in sales – undermining the charm and potential of downtown Fort St. John.

Success for the downtown comes down to one very simple thing – **lots of people on foot**<sup>1</sup>. A successful downtown is therefore geared to pedestrians and other human-powered modes of transport and what these people need and want. The following describes a fundamental set of related requirements for attracting those people in order to create a successful downtown in Fort St. John.

<sup>1</sup> This can also include cyclists, wheelchairs, elder scooters, and skateboards.





## 1. A COMPACT MIX OF LAND USES AND ACTIVITIES:

A successful downtown needs to attract plenty of people throughout the day and into the evening past usual business hours. Not only does this large number of people support business success and create vitality on the street but it also adds a measure of safety to the downtown because there are more 'eyes on the street.'

We can distinguish between the needs of two types of people downtown: visitors and residents. Visitors are attracted to the downtown because it is different from other areas of the City. It has a variety of shopping, entertainment and social activities. Some people are attracted to the downtown just to be surrounded by other people. This unique attraction of downtown spaces is created by the density of uses and activities that exist in a relatively compact area.

Residents are attracted to live in or near the downtown because of the variety of services, proximity to employment, lifestyle considerations and, perhaps, types of housing that are not available elsewhere. They must balance these advantages with considerations of safety, security, noise and limited space.

This mix of land uses and activities in a compact area means that walking or cycling between destinations is easy and it supports transit by supplying enough riders to make frequent transit trips feasible. It also means that downtown uses infrastructure and resources more efficiently because there is less pipe, wire and asphalt per person than elsewhere in the City.





## 2. A SAFE, INCLUSIVE AND VIBRANT DOWNTOWN:

A strong sense of community, safety and a vibrant culture are important factors for a thriving local downtown economy. A successful downtown attracts a diversity of people, both local residents and visitors. It is a place where community organizations want to host their events and where friends meet to shop, chat or read a book.

However the diversity of a successful downtown, while stimulating for some, can also be threatening to others. A perceived lack of safety and comfort has been identified as one reason that some people no longer shop, stroll or spend time in the City's downtown. These threats to safety include speeding vehicles, drunkenness and threatening, violent behavior.

Downtown provides essential services and support to a diverse population, including those who are suffering from poverty, addiction, mental illness, homelessness and near homelessness. The downtown should be able to address the needs of these people but must do so in a way that doesn't discourage others from living in or visiting the area.

Strategies for creating a safe, inclusive and vibrant downtown include:

- i. Increase the options for a greater diversity of people to come downtown.
- ii. Create a 'critical mass' of positive behaviours that drown out undesirable behaviours.
- iii. Ensure uses, programming and design attracts more positive activities and behaviour to the downtown while minimizing or preventing negative, unwelcoming or unsafe behaviour and activities.
- iv. Pursue meaningful partnerships: involve marginalized groups in positive downtown activities such as an Ambassador program, arts and culture programs and creating 'eyes on the street.'
- v. Ensure that groups involved in the downtown are included in idea generation and decision making.
- vi. Apply Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) Principles.
- vii. Attract families to live downtown and utilize the area.



### 3. A HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC REALM

Public streets and open spaces are the living rooms of the community. The public realm encompasses streets, parks, plazas and other open spaces, and forms an important relationship with the shops, restaurants, homes, offices, and other buildings. The public realm and its interface with adjacent development determines the identity and sense of place in a community, and plays a big role in supporting public safety and vitality. The quality and connectivity of the public realm also determines whether people feel safe and comfortable walking downtown, and without these pedestrians, there is little real activity downtown.

There are many ingredients that go into creating a high quality public realm. While there is no simple recipe, some key elements include:

- **Eyes on the street** – buildings with rooms and spaces that look onto public spaces and create an important form of surveillance that makes users feel safer.

- **Enclosure** – the framing of public spaces with buildings and street trees creates a sense of safety and security and a human scale connection with the city. Downtown buildings should be located close to the sidewalk and face the street.
- **Comfort and protection** – places to rest such as benches, and places to take refuge from the elements (snow, rain, wind, sun, cold, heat) are an important part of a comfortable downtown environment.
- **Beauty** - the design of buildings, as well as the texture and colour of materials in the public realm, attract us to want to spend time downtown.
- **Culture** - dynamic and functional public art, murals and dedicated graffiti walls, innovative street furniture, live arts, etc.

Another strategy for creating a quality public realm is to integrate programming, events and festivals in public spaces. Some examples include:

#### Festivals/Events

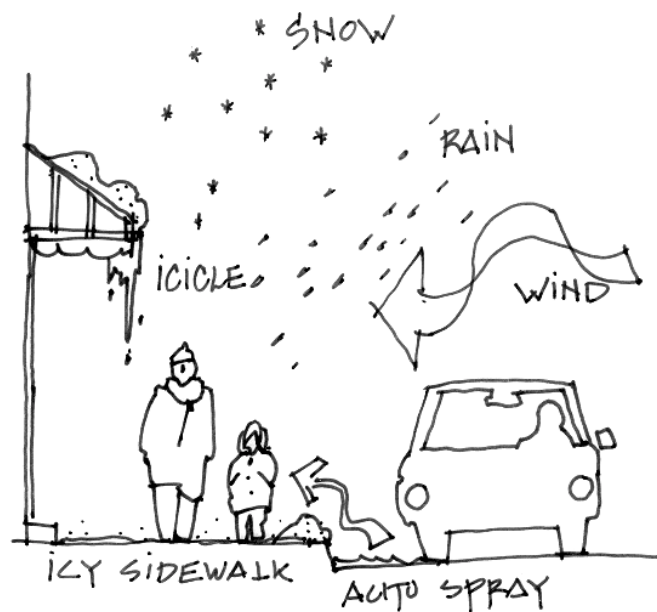
- Multi-cultural festival
- Multi-event/multi-venue festival
- Urban Design festival
- Downtown Revitalization Walk About
- ArtWalk
- Car Free Days/Block Parties to showcase and support downtown businesses
- Flash mobs/dance parties
- Health-related street events (i.e., yoga)

#### Services/Programming

- Adopt-a-Block program
- Critical Mass - a weekly/bi-weekly walking club that ends up at different restaurants
- Street buskers (with some City support)



- Facade improvement program
- Downtown arts and culture grants/funding
- Safe Walk programs
- RCMP bike patrols
- Airport shuttle service
- Community bulletin boards
- Use contaminated/vacant sites for parking

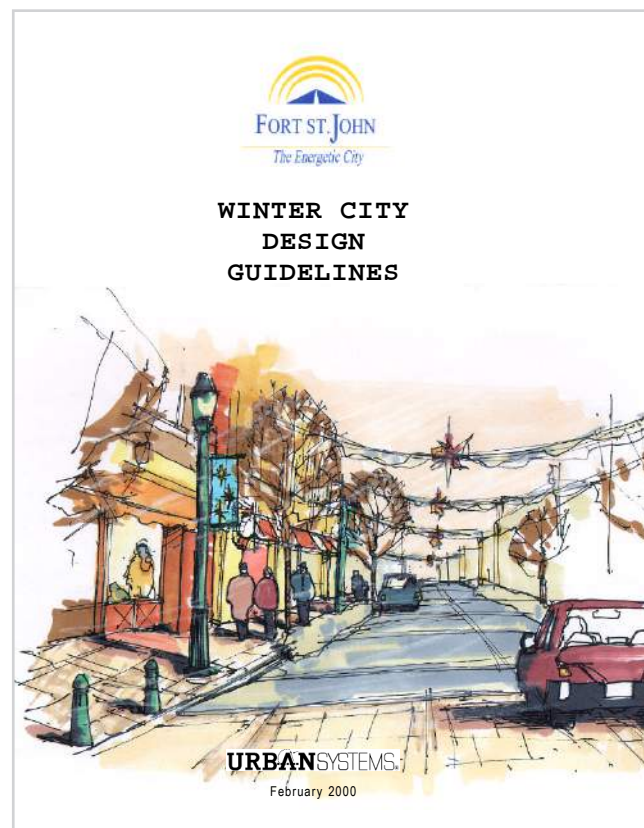


*Images (above and below): Fort St. John Winter City Design Guidelines (Urban Systems, 2000)*

## 4. WINTER CITY DESIGN

A successful downtown in Fort St. John must reflect its northern climate. To be successful the downtown needs to be an attractive place year-round. This requires careful attention to winter city design so that all modes (pedestrians, cyclists, transit users and drivers) feel safe and comfortable in winter conditions. This requires consideration of lighting, solar gain, wind, snow and ice management, pedestrian crossing distances, and sheltered spaces to keep warm.

Fort St. John's Winter City Guidelines, adopted in 2000, provide a good starting point for creating a vibrant downtown that is attractive and functional year-round.





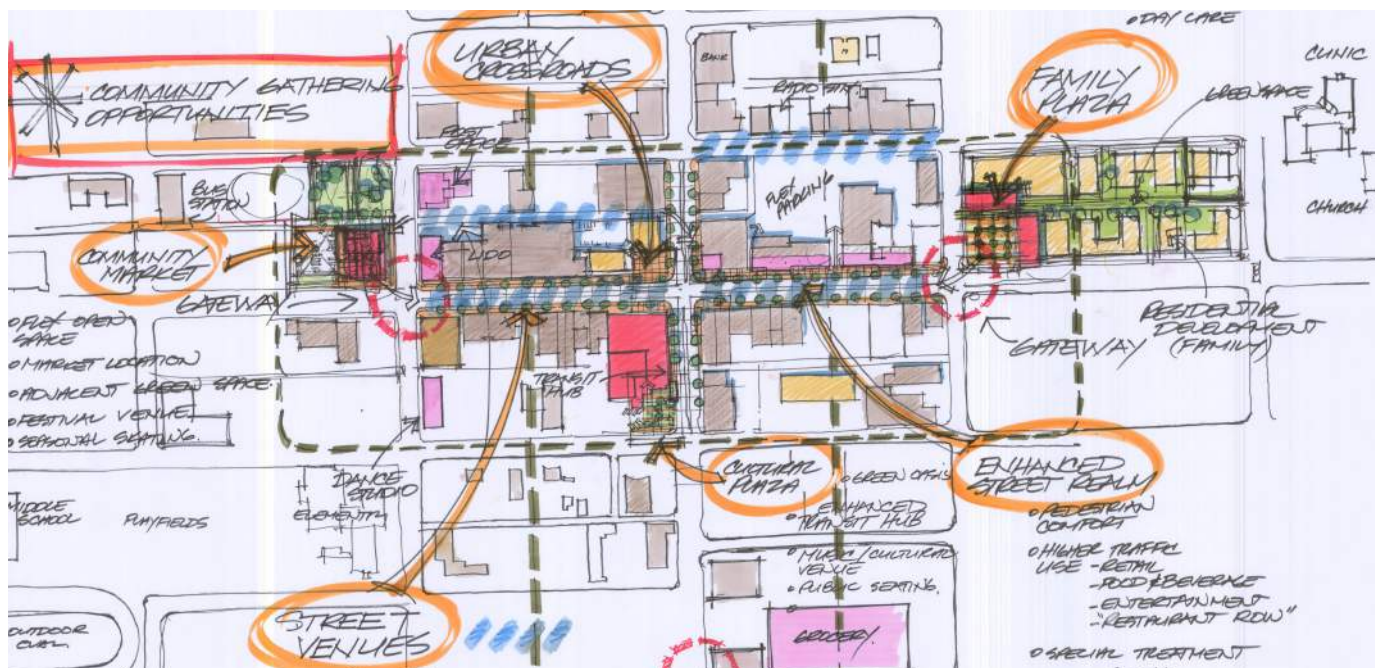
## 5. CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPMENT

Downtown Fort St. John currently has some of the components of a successful downtown. Supporting existing local businesses and amenities, such as the NPCC, library, and downtown banks, is critical. However, to realize its true potential, the downtown needs a variety of new development.

Developers often have numerous choices about where they can invest, and other commercial areas in Fort St. John and other cities compete with the downtown. Therefore, the downtown has to be attractive for developers and investors. Achieving this could include:

- Policy changes and incentives such as reducing or eliminating parking requirements for new development in Downtown;
- Providing temporary property tax reductions for certain types of desired development downtown;
- Providing incentives for façade improvements (including signage and awnings); and
- Reducing Development Cost Charges downtown to stimulate new development.

The five fundamentals for the downtown work together in a mutually reinforcing manner.



## PART III. 10 BIG MOVES

### To Energize Downtown

**Choice** was identified as an important principle by stakeholders: choice in housing, mode of travel, location of work, and opportunities for public gathering and shopping.

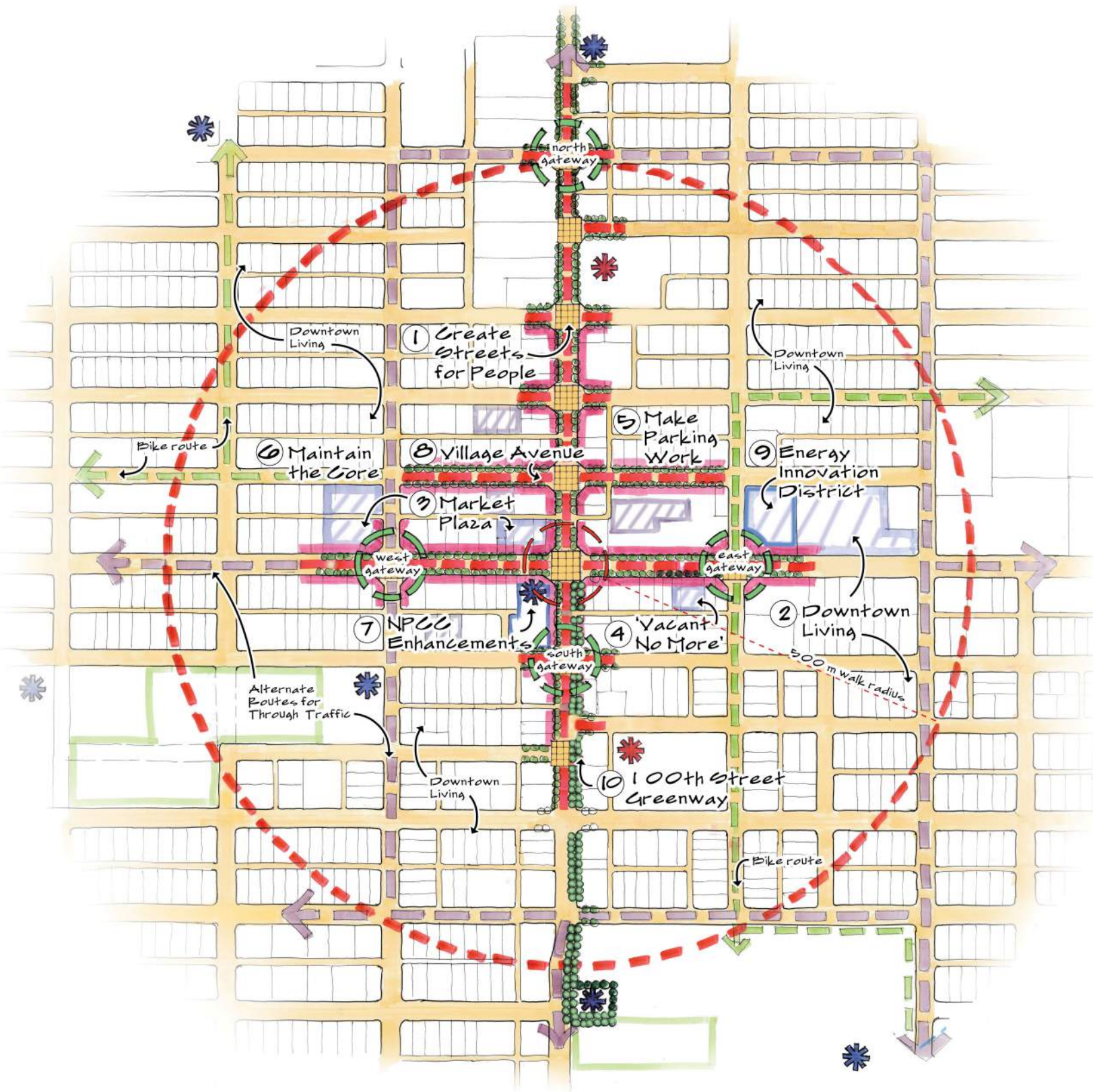
Stakeholders also identified the repositioning of the downtown **from a vehicle thoroughfare into a pedestrian oriented destination** as an overarching goal for the downtown. Specifically, slowing the pace of traffic in the downtown core to create a more comfortable, safe, and attractive pedestrian environment with vibrant streetscapes and opportunities for community gathering.

A lack of comfortable, safe, and attractive public gathering spaces in the downtown, and the prevalence of vacant sites and buildings, were among some of the key issues identified by stakeholders.

The design concepts, catalyst projects, public investments and policy directions identified in Phase 2 are synthesized into a set of 10 Big Moves which are presented on the following pages. These Big Moves, together with the 5 Fundamentals, will form the basis for the development of the Action Plan in Phase 3.



# 10 BIG MOVES TO 'ENERGIZE' DOWNTOWN



## 1 CREATE STREETS FOR PEOPLE

- Provide comfortable, safe, and attractive streetscapes and public gathering spaces in the downtown.
- Slow the pace of traffic in the downtown and create alternative routes for through traffic.

## 2 DOWNTOWN LIVING

- Create more opportunities for people to live in the downtown to support local businesses/ services and encourage vitality and more activity on the street past usual business hours.
- Encourage housing infill and redevelopment at higher densities including housing located on top of downtown businesses and services.

## 3 MARKET PLAZA

- Develop a mixed use urban plaza with programming and facilities for public events such as markets, festivals and concerts to be held year-round.
- Locate the plaza in a prominent location as a gateway feature and activate with adjacent active retail and high density housing.

## 4 VACANT NO MORE

- Encourage development of vacant sites, including City owned, contaminated and other prominent sites.
- Redevelop vacant sites with buildings and uses that showcase the future vision for downtown and implement interim uses/ improvements until such time as they are redeveloped.

## 5 MAKE PARKING WORK

- Ensure convenient public and private parking to maximize accessibility to downtown businesses, services, jobs and housing.
- Maximize on-street parking and access within each block.
- Allow flexibility in the provision of private parking to be responsive to market needs.

## 6 MAINTAIN THE CORE

- Maintain lanes in the core area to provide access to off-street parking and consider active uses and events like "art in the lane."
- Provide and maintain sidewalks on both sides of the street in the core area to ensure safe and convenient connections.

## 7 NPCC IMPROVEMENTS

- Incorporate a terraced plaza at the south entrance and increased glazing on the north east corner to enhance and better connect the North Peace Cultural Centre to adjacent streets and open spaces.
- Consider more substantial renovations or even redevelopment of the NPCC in light of new uses and programming envisioned for the Centre.

## 8 VILLAGE AVENUE 'FESTIVAL STREET'

- Undertake streetscape improvements and prioritize pedestrian oriented mixed use development on 101 Ave between 102 and 98 Streets.
- Incorporate design enhancements and programming to support 101 Ave as the City's 'festival street' and 'block party' venue.

## 9 ENERGY INNOVATION DISTRICT

- Encourage a mix of education and employment uses on part of the former hospital site to showcase local and regional energy and resource sectors.
- This could include a university satellite campus, energy sector offices, a mix of housing (including student housing) along with street level shops and services.

## 10 100<sup>TH</sup> STREET GREENWAY

- Create and maintain a direct, comfortable and safe pedestrian and bicycle 'greenway' connection between the downtown core and Centennial Park, along the east side of 100<sup>th</sup> St.





# 1. CREATE STREETS FOR PEOPLE

Creating a walkable downtown with vibrant streets and open spaces is a top priority for Fort St. John. However, community members identified **a lack of pedestrian safety and convenience** as one of the top challenges.

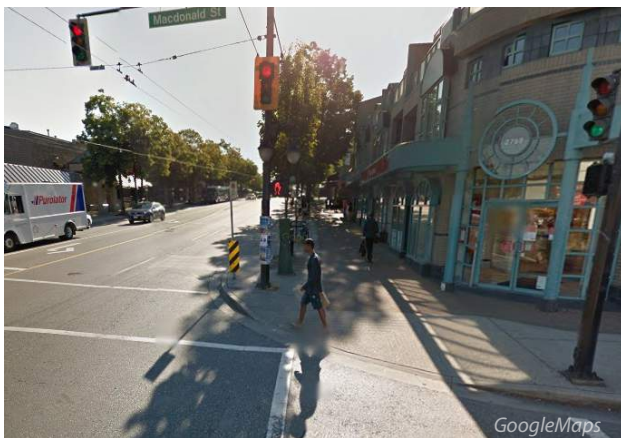
We heard that the speed and volume of traffic traveling through the downtown, combined with a lack of features to support pedestrian activity (such as adequate sidewalks and pedestrian crossings, and attractive plaza's and open spaces), are some of the reasons why people do not feel safe and comfortable walking downtown. We also heard that high volumes of fast moving traffic along 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave, as well as noise and dirt, make sidewalk cafes and other opportunities for public gathering undesirable.

To address these challenges the following strategies were identified:

- **Slow the pace of traffic in downtown** while maintaining convenient vehicle access to, from and through it;
- **Reduce driveway access** and encourage/ utilize lane access for vehicles;

- **Establish alternative route options** for through traffic that is travelling through the downtown to and from destinations that are outside of the downtown, especially commercial vehicles;
- **Create and maintain attractive streetscapes** by cleaning dirt and providing comfortable sidewalks, benches, street trees, pedestrian lighting, and other furnishings;
- **Encourage active, pedestrian oriented uses and activities** such as small shops and sidewalk cafes fronting on to 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave in the downtown area;
- Over time, **reconfigure 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave in the downtown core** area from its current four lane condition with no left turn lanes and narrow sidewalks, into a three lane condition with alternating left turn lanes, median snow storage and wider sidewalks.

These strategies are described in greater detail on the following pages.



## SLOW DOWN(TOWN) TRAFFIC

Slowing the pace of traffic to create a more comfortable and safe pedestrian environment in the downtown area could include the following:

- Incorporate additional pedestrian crossings with pedestrian activated signals;
- Incorporate additional signalized intersections in the downtown;
- Increase crossing times for pedestrians at signalized intersections;
- Enhance pedestrian crossings with better markings and signage;
- Reduce travel lane widths while designing for winter conditions;
- Reduce traffic speeds in the downtown core area;
- Consider a four-way stop configuration at some intersections;
- Maintain and enhance the street tree canopy downtown;
- Incorporate pedestrian lighting;
- Consider introducing dedicated on-street bike lanes on select downtown streets;
- Introduce other traffic calming approaches appropriate to downtown streets; and
- Reconfigure 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave in the downtown core area from a four lane condition to a three lane condition with alternating left turn lanes and median snow storage.



## CREATE ALTERNATE ROUTES FOR THROUGH TRAFFIC

Currently, through traffic and commercial traffic are encouraged to use 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave due to their designation as the City's two main arterials.

Providing alternative route options for commercial traffic and vehicles traveling outside of the downtown area, while also maintaining convenient vehicle access to, from, and within the downtown is essential to:

- Ensure convenient, efficient and safe travel by motorists and commercial truck traffic to, from, through, and within the City;
- Support the downtown as a pedestrian oriented urban place with vibrant streetscapes and community gathering places;
- Support downtown businesses and services, arts and culture uses, and downtown living; and
- Support alternate travel modes including walking, transit and cycling.

The existing grid street network pattern in the City provides great connectivity and route options and is an important asset and opportunity for enhancing the downtown.

The traffic assessment completed by Urban Systems Ltd. as part of Phase 1 (and presented in the 2013 *Phase 1 Downtown Planning Baseline Inventory and Analysis Report*) found that through traffic will naturally redistribute to other route options within this connected grid street network system outside of the downtown area.

For example, additional volumes could either be carried by 108<sup>th</sup> St and/or 96<sup>th</sup> St, or by the East and West Bypass Roads to navigate around the city without going through downtown.

Other potential alternate route options for through traffic include:

- **Alternate North-South Routes:** 93<sup>rd</sup> St, 96<sup>th</sup> St, 102<sup>nd</sup> St, 104<sup>th</sup> St, and 108<sup>th</sup> St.
- **Alternate East-West Routes:** 93<sup>rd</sup> Ave, 96<sup>th</sup> Ave, 102<sup>nd</sup> Ave, and 105<sup>th</sup> Ave.

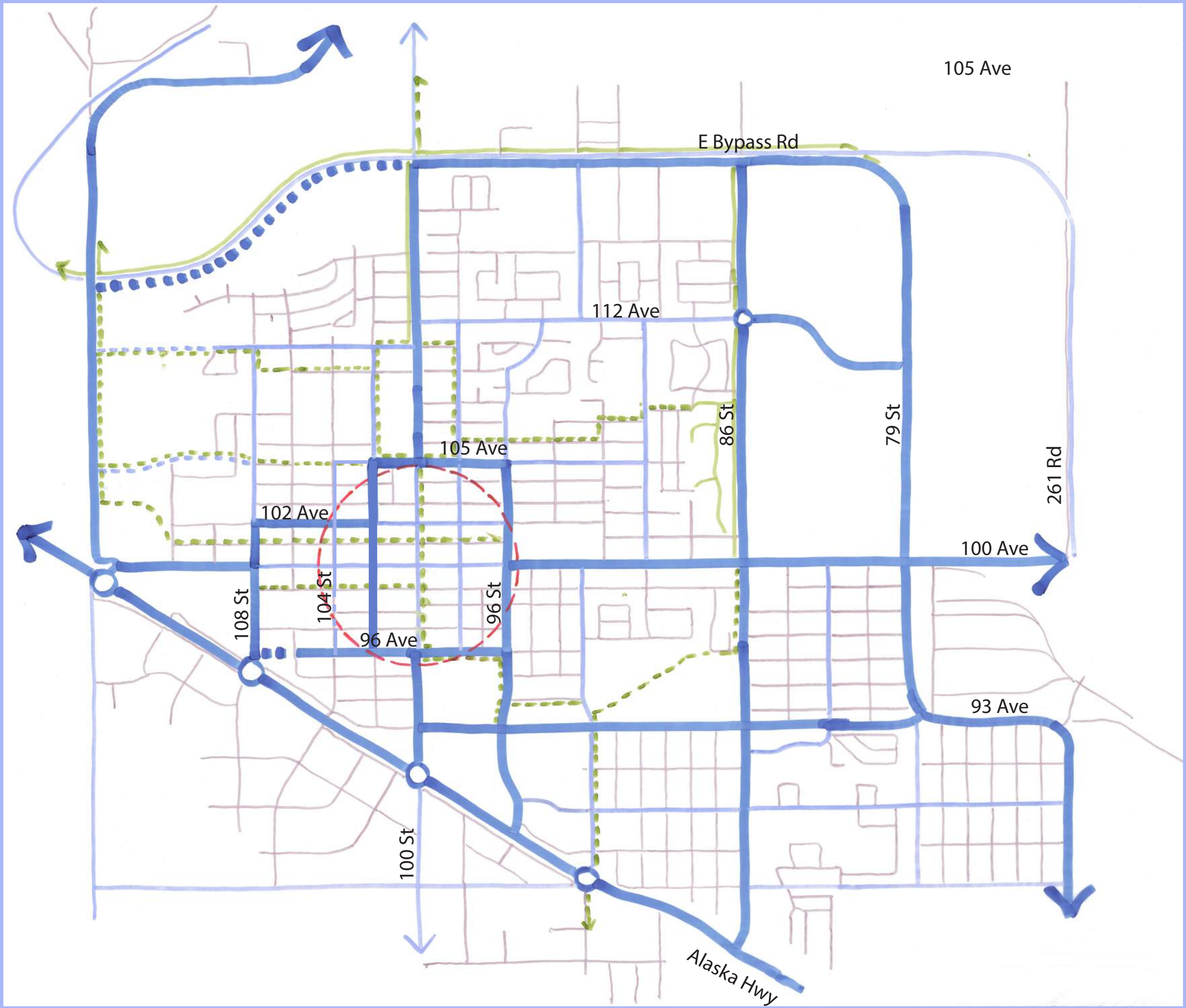
Community-wide alternative route options are identified in the diagram on the following page. These include major through route options (i.e., arterial and major collector designations), and minor through routes (i.e., minor collectors).

Alternate route options will need to be carefully analyzed to fully understand and minimize potential impacts on homes, businesses, schools, parks and other uses. The City has recently initiated an update of its city-wide Transportation Master Plan. This is timely, as one of the biggest challenges facing the downtown is related to the city-wide street network and traffic patterns.

As such, it is important to note that the alternate routes identified here represent a starting point for discussion on reconfiguration of the city-wide street network that will occur as part of the Transportation Master Plan update.

ALTERNATE ROUTE OPTIONS

- Major Through Routes
- Minor Through Routes
- Local Roads
- Multi-use Routes
- Study Area





## ACTIVE & ATTRACTIVE STREETSCAPES

Locating and designing active shop fronts at grade that are oriented towards, and even spilling out onto, streets and open spaces is essential to creating a walkable, unique and high quality downtown environment.

This can occur through the transformation of existing buildings and uses, and through new development, combined with strategic public realm investments and traffic management as illustrated conceptually below and on the following page.



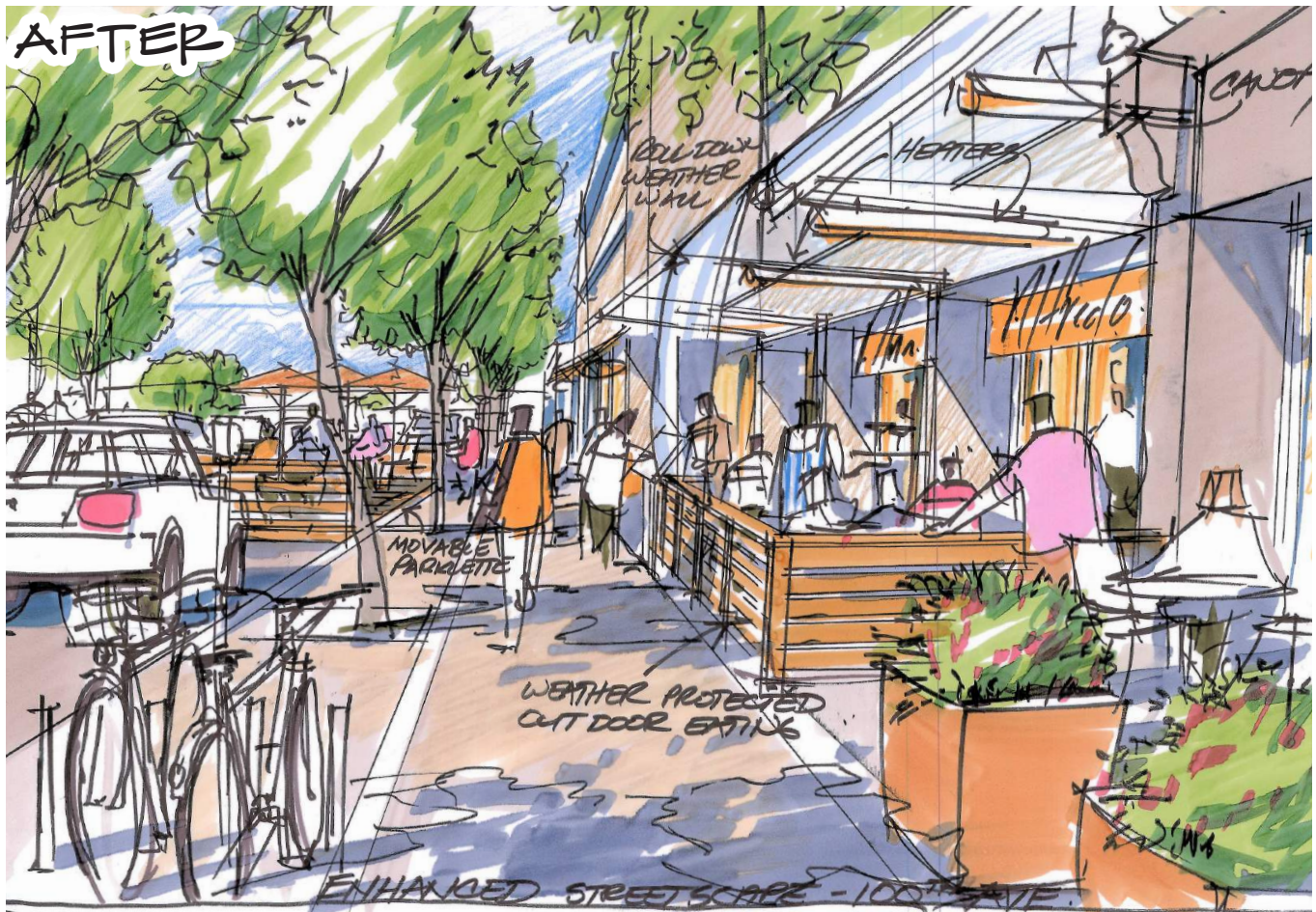




### 'Restaurant Row'

*'Restaurant Row' could be developed along this stretch of 100<sup>th</sup> Ave as part of an arts, culture and entertainment district.*

*To be successful, this and other downtown enhancements require the pace of traffic traveling within the downtown to slow down through streetscape reconfigurations, such as those presented on the previous page.*

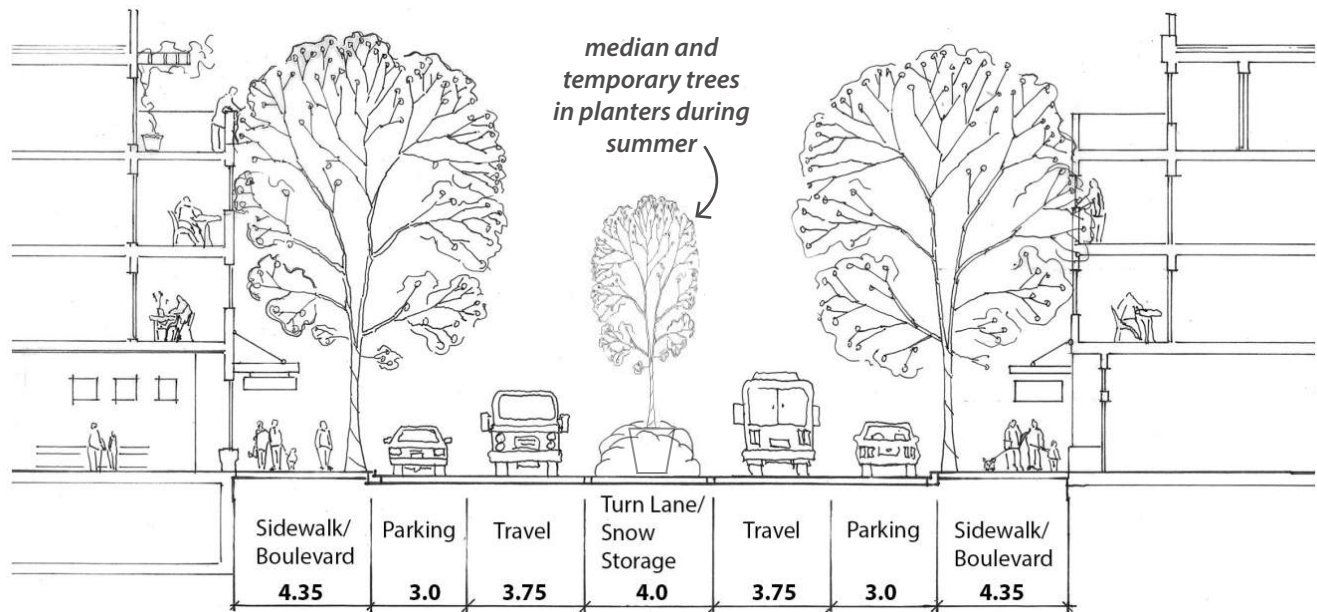




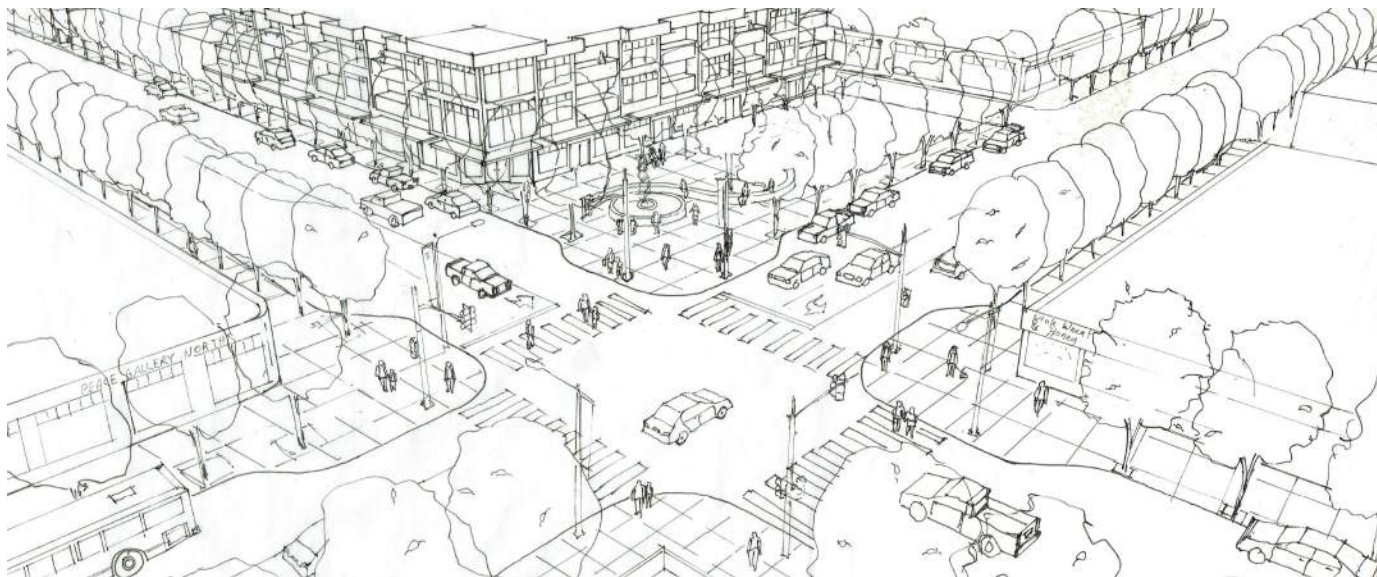
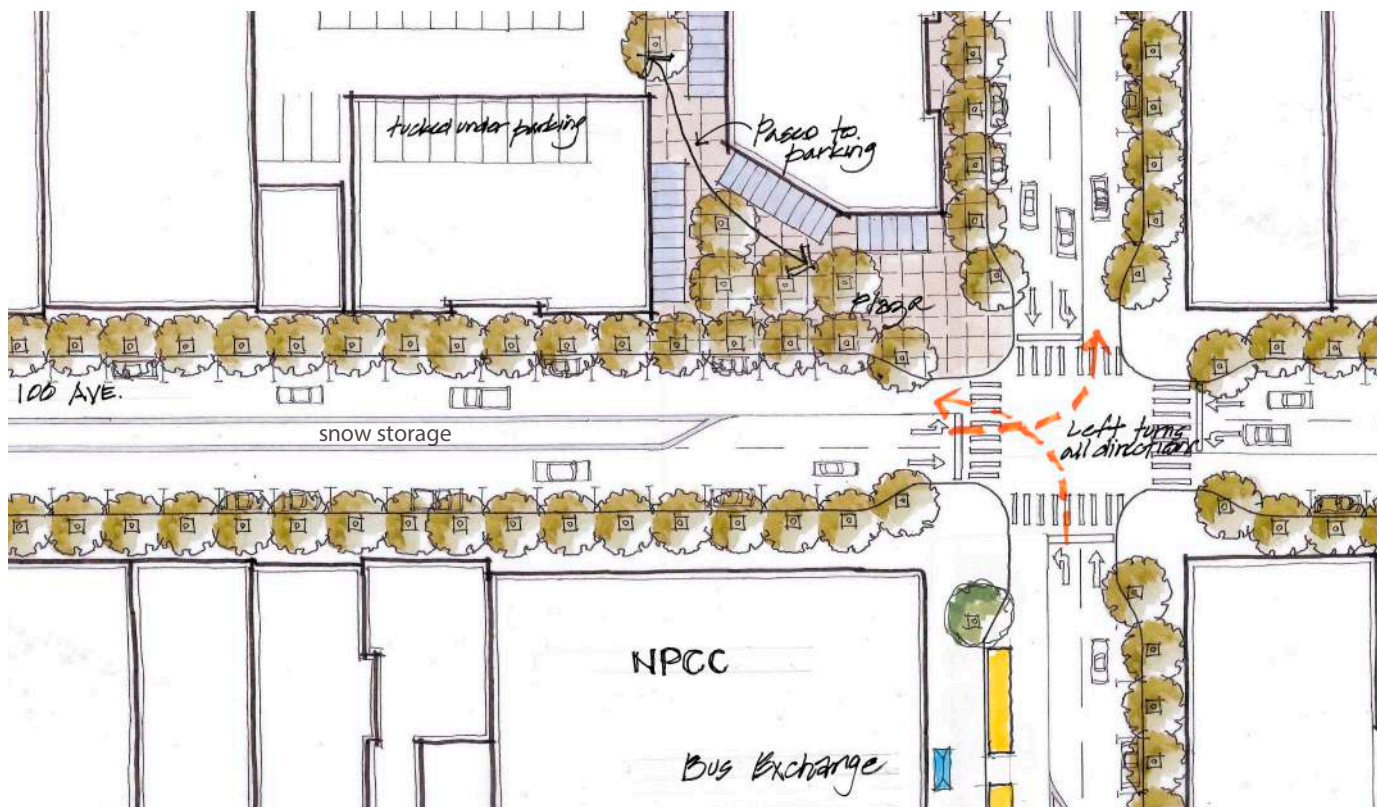
## RECONFIGURE 100<sup>TH</sup> AVE & 100<sup>TH</sup> ST

A reconfiguration from four lanes to three enables wider sidewalks and a center median with an alternating left turn lane and temporary snow storage. This would be a significant capital expenditure but of great

benefit to the downtown. This improvement would be coordinated with necessary infrastructure improvements, and phased with reconfiguration of the city-wide street network as discussed on pages 14 and 15.

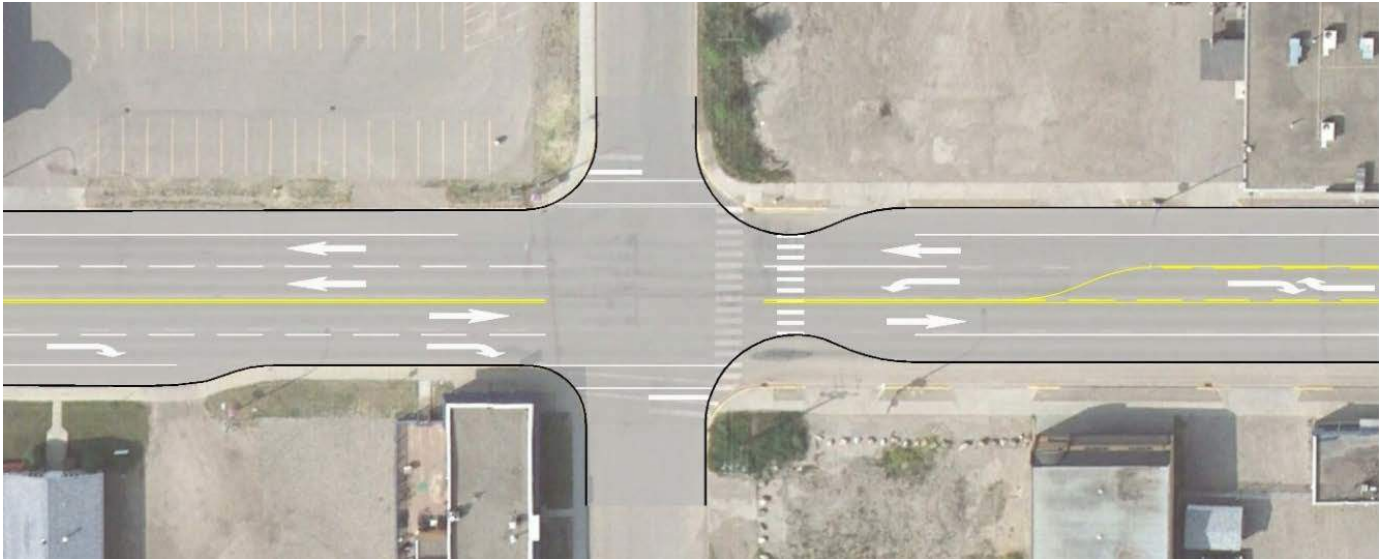


*Precedent 3 lane condition on Johnstone St, White Rock's main retail collector through the uptown area.*



**Plan and perspective views of 3-lane configuration at 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave intersection. This configuration would maintain significant through capacity and access while enhancing the pedestrian experience in the downtown core area.**





*Laning configurations from 4-lane to 3-lane cross-section. This configuration should be considered along 100<sup>th</sup> Ave, between 104<sup>th</sup> St and 96<sup>th</sup> St, and along 100<sup>th</sup> St between 105<sup>th</sup> Ave and 96<sup>th</sup> Ave. Lanes can be dropped at intersections by using dedicated turning lanes.*



*Precedent 3-lane condition on Johnstone St, White Rock's main retail collector through the uptown area.*



## 2. DOWNTOWN LIVING



Creating and encouraging a range of opportunities for downtown living will help generate a critical mass of energy or 'body heat' in the downtown past usual business hours. This will contribute to street vitality throughout the day and evening and support local businesses and services including local arts, culture and entertainment.

Opportunities for downtown living include housing on top of street grade commercial uses in mixed-use developments, and compact 'street-fronting' townhouses and apartments on 'infill' and redevelopment sites adjacent to the downtown core.



The Market Demand Study completed in 2012 as part of the *Phase 1 Downtown Planning Baseline Inventory and Analysis Report* forecasted a significant amount of residential growth for the city as a whole.



The study forecasted the City's population to increase from 20,340 in 2011 to 31,100 by 2031 and roughly 35,000 by 2036.

Housing demand associated with these population forecasts were as follows:

- **Single Detached:** 3,516 units or an average of 146 units/year.
- **Townhouses, Duplexes, Row-houses:** 1,200 units or an average of 50 units/year.
- **Apartments:** 1,151 units or an average of 48 units/year.

Development data from the past year indicates that these housing demand forecasts are currently being exceeded.

Established single detached residential neighbourhoods surrounding the downtown core are designated in the current OCP for a range of medium density (i.e., townhouses) to higher density housing (i.e., apartments). However, the financial viability of replacing existing single detached homes with townhouses and apartments is challenging due to the comparatively high market value of single detached housing, and the difficulty in assembling multiple adjacent lots.

Therefore, short term opportunities for residential development in the downtown area are anticipated to be primarily on vacant sites and sites that are significantly underused.

As housing demand continues to grow, and land supply becomes more constrained, the viability of redeveloping single detached homes into higher density forms, and the viability of redeveloping single storey commercial buildings into mixed-use residential projects, will increase.



***Compact mixed use buildings with shops and services below and housing above creates greater housing choices in the community and more 'body heat' in downtown.***





Given the constrained and complex nature of mixed use developments and redevelopment of existing housing into higher densities, stand alone residential uses on vacant sites are likely the most viable opportunity for increasing housing downtown over the short term. Stand alone residential uses should be encouraged while focusing and maintaining continuous active commercial frontage on key retail streets downtown (as shown in the Big Moves Diagram on pg 11).



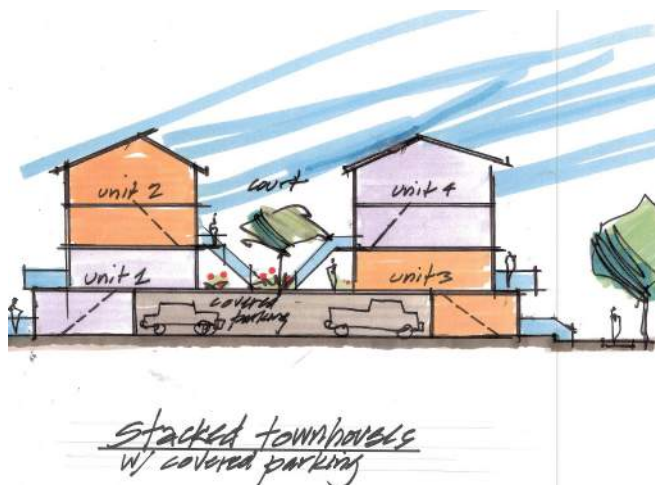
The provision of off-street parking associated with new development is a key determinant of its financial viability. Because underground parking is expensive, surface parking and tuck-under approaches (see Big Move 5) and lower scale buildings (i.e., 3-4 storeys), will be more viable over the short term.



Development tools and incentives such as tax exemptions, DCC holidays, parking relaxations and others can play a role in improving the financial viability of new housing development. These will be explored further in Phase 3 of the process.



**Apartments and townhouses should create a "friendly face to the street" and locate parking and other "back of house" uses behind or even underneath the building.**





## 3. MARKET PLAZA

Developing an outdoor community gathering place in the downtown was identified as a priority for the community.

A market plaza could include facilities and programming to support a range of community events and celebrations year-round such as markets, festivals and concerts.

The plaza could incorporate a large but simple structure for markets and other events in the spring, summer, and fall. In the winter a sheet of ice could be thrown down for skating and hockey, which could include a downtown venue for the celebrated High On Ice festival.

Surface parking for public use, and/or an apartment building overlooking the plaza, could also be incorporated.

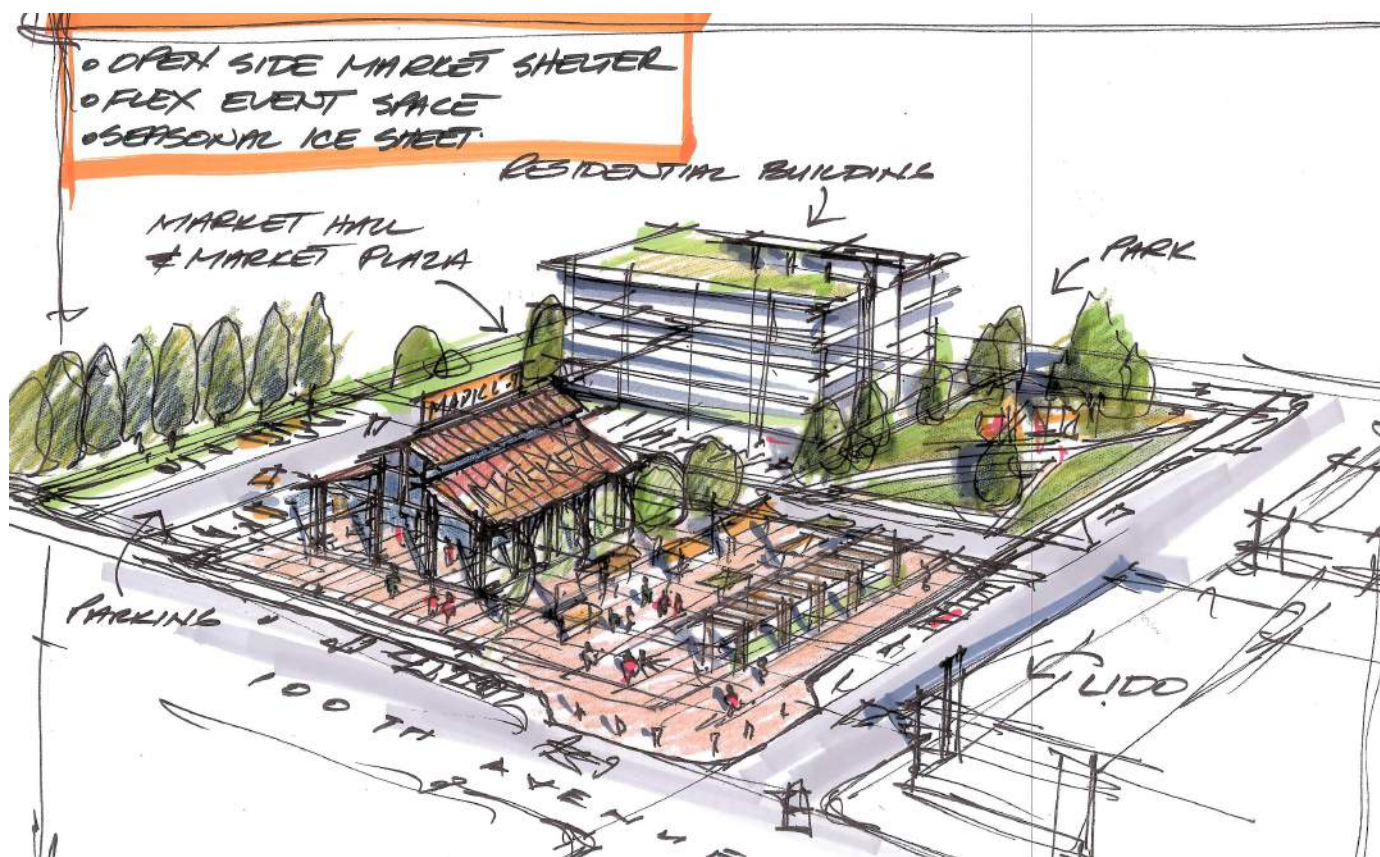
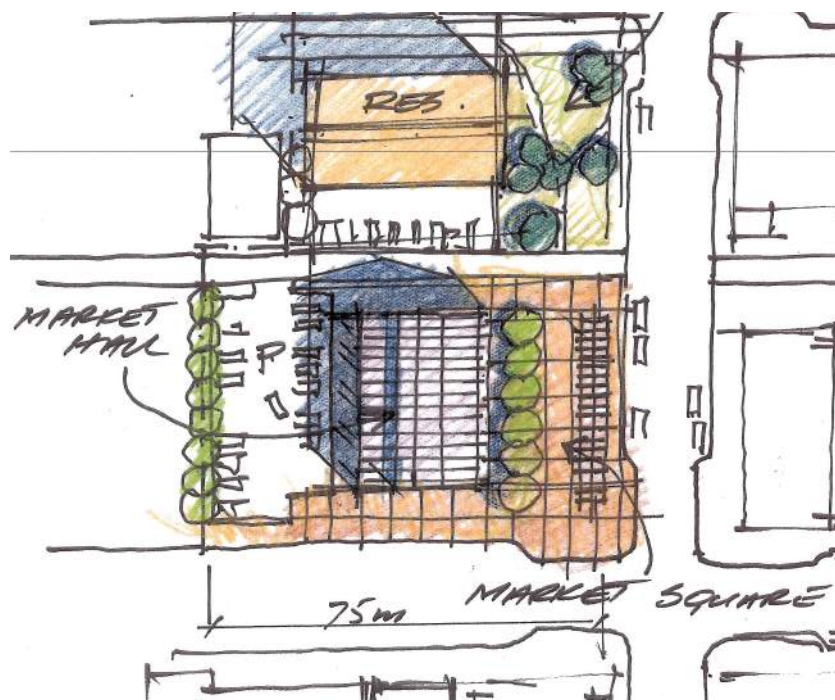
The market plaza would be located in a prominent location as a gateway feature and as a unique identifier for the downtown and the City as a whole.

Incorporating active uses such as housing or a restaurant and/or pub within or adjacent to the plaza would enhance and help activate the space.



Good locations for the market plaza include vacant city-owned sites at gateway locations such as; the old Fort Hotel site at 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave, the old Frontier Site at the west gateway at 102<sup>nd</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave, the former hospital site at the east gateway, and the former Visitors Information Centre at 100<sup>th</sup> St and 96<sup>th</sup> Ave. The market plaza design concepts illustrated here explore the old Frontier site.

The market plaza could be developed as a permanent use, and then moved or incorporated as part of a future development of the site.







## 4. VACANT NO MORE

The downtown has a significant number of vacant sites in prominent locations, such as the former hospital site, the old Fort Hotel site, and the old Frontier site. These, combined with a number vacant buildings, detract from the vitality, character and confidence of the downtown.

Vacant sites and buildings occur for a myriad of complex reasons, and have a lot to do with market conditions/dynamics. Perpetual vacancy along a street can lead to an increase in litter, blight, and crime. Surrounding properties are plagued with lowered property values and the cycle continues.

Whether vacant and contaminated sites are developed as public, private or public/private partnerships, and whether they are publicly or privately owned, the City has a role to play in developing and supporting implementation of short, medium and long term strategies for these sites. Rather than becoming a source of continual blight and community degradation, vacant lots, when properly cared for, have the

potential to become attractive parks, plazas, gardens, stormwater management features, and cherished community spaces.

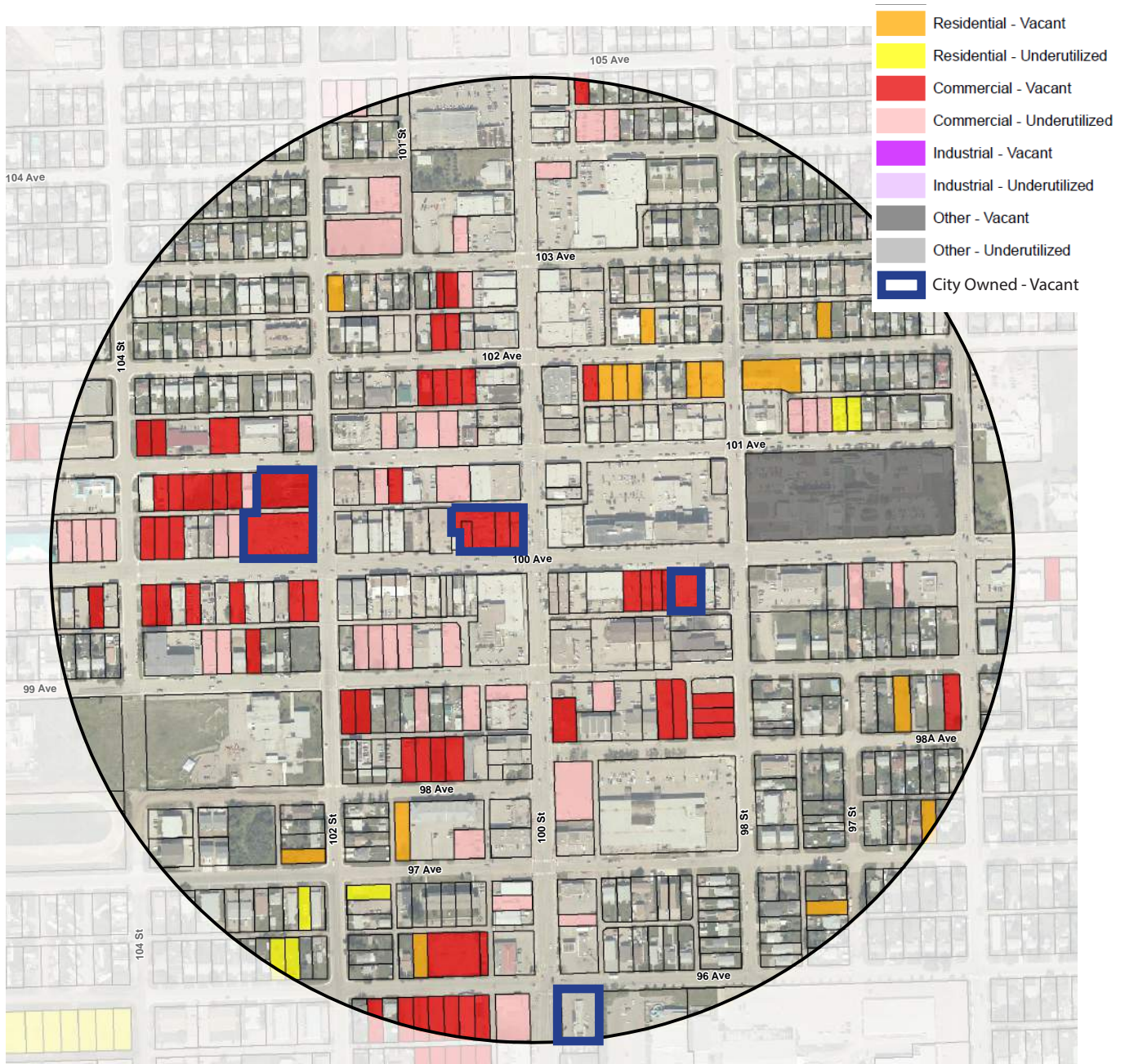
Until infill development becomes viable and downtown development becomes more desirable, there are a range of interim uses for vacant buildings and properties that could be implemented. Vacant buildings can be programmed with interim uses such as community art displays in shop fronts. Vacant lots including contaminated sites can be used for parking, public gathering and community events such as the Market Plaza (described in Big Move 3), community gardens, art displays, and other temporary uses.

Both interim and long term investments create a sense of intent, alerting others to the fact that someone cares. This creates a new narrative – one of purpose and hope for the future. Each vacant lot and shop front in the downtown is an opportunity for reinvention, creativity, and creation.

### City Owned Sites

The City owns a number of vacant sites in the downtown, shown in the figure below. The following pages identify a number of options for vacant and/or contaminated sites as well as:

- i. The old Fort Hotel Site located at 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave; and
- ii. The old Frontier Site located at 102<sup>nd</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave.





## THE OLD FORT HOTEL SITE (100<sup>TH</sup> ST & 100<sup>TH</sup> AVE)

100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave is the geographic centre of the city and has long been the community heart. Today, the North Peace Cultural Centre, Whole Wheat and Honey (the popular food, entertainment, arts and cultural hotspot), and the CIBC bank, anchor three of the corners of this prominent intersection. The northwest corner, where the former historic Fort Hotel once stood, has been vacant for several years. This site is owned by the City and is a priority for redevelopment.

Given the prominence of this site to the downtown and the community as a whole, it is intended to showcase and help catalyze the community's future vision for the future of the downtown. The site could incorporate a public plaza and have either offices, housing, civic or hotel/accommodation uses above ground floor commercial uses such as retail and restaurants. Alternatively, this site could be used for community and civic uses, such as a library or community policing office, integrated with

retail at grade with office uses above. This site has also been identified as a potential location for the Market Plaza (described in Big Move 3).

While private redevelopment of this site will be primarily market driven, the City (as the current owner) is intent on supporting private development to achieve the desired vision for the site.

Until this site is developed, either through public investment, private investment or both, the City wishes to see interim programming and uses for this prominent site over the short term.



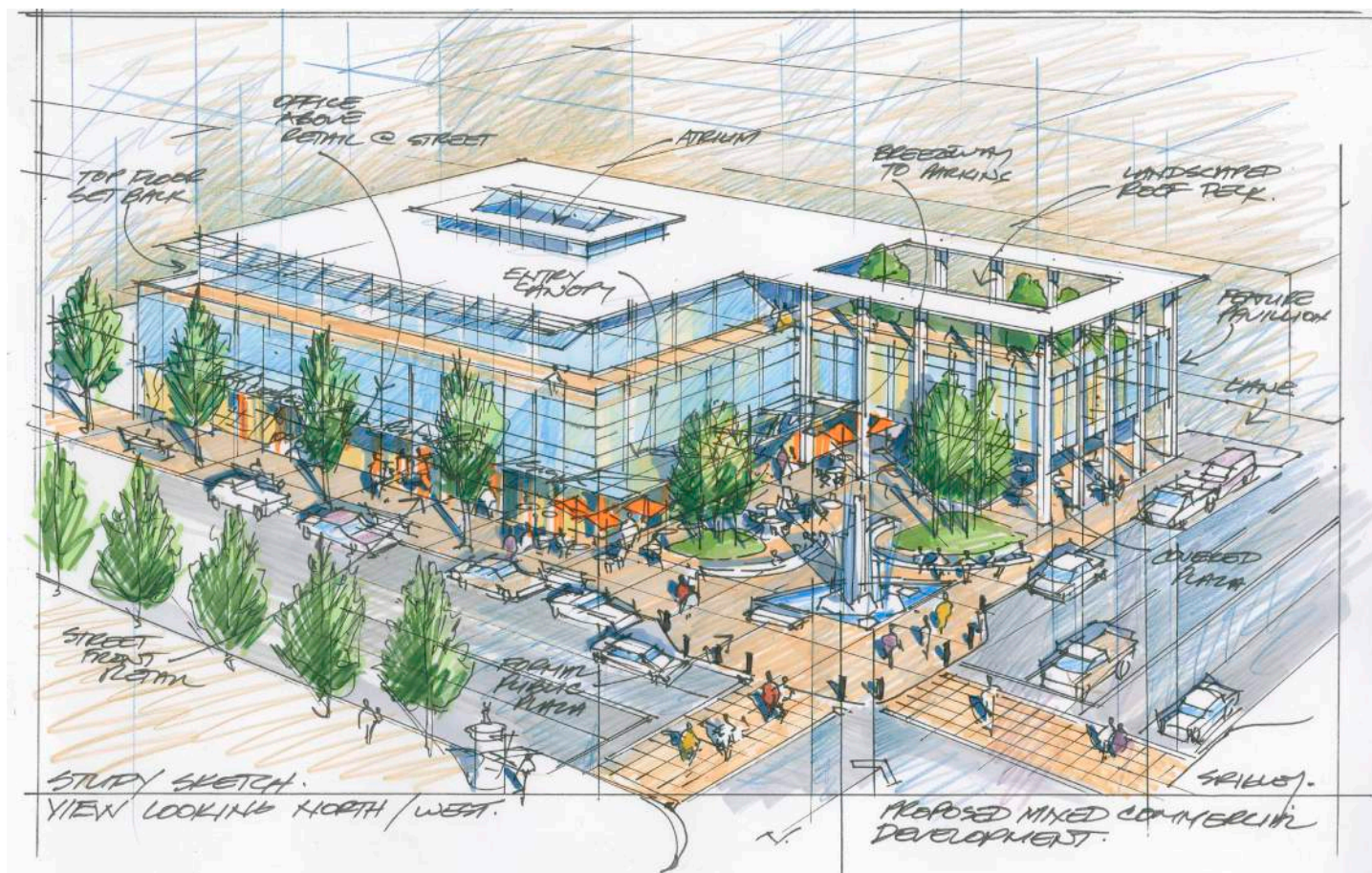
## MIXED-USE COMMERCIAL CONCEPT

As noted, whatever future development occurs on this site, it will incorporate a corner plaza oriented towards the intersection and integrated with adjacent active uses and streetscapes.

Given its central downtown location, this site is very well suited to commercial uses. This could include ground floor retail, with office and/or civic/institutional uses above (including a potential new location for the community library). This would also be an excellent location

for a satellite community policing office located on the ground floor fronting onto the plaza that could potentially be combined with a small satellite office (front counter) for City Hall.

The site's dimensions and lot depth make it very well suited for tuck-under surface parking (approximately 35 - 40 spaces) which could be wrapped with ground floor retail uses on two sides. The concept sketch below also shows a projecting second floor that could create a covered plaza space for weather protection.

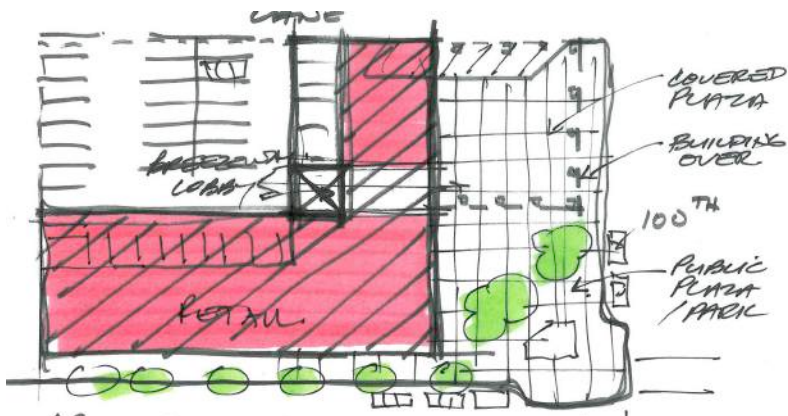
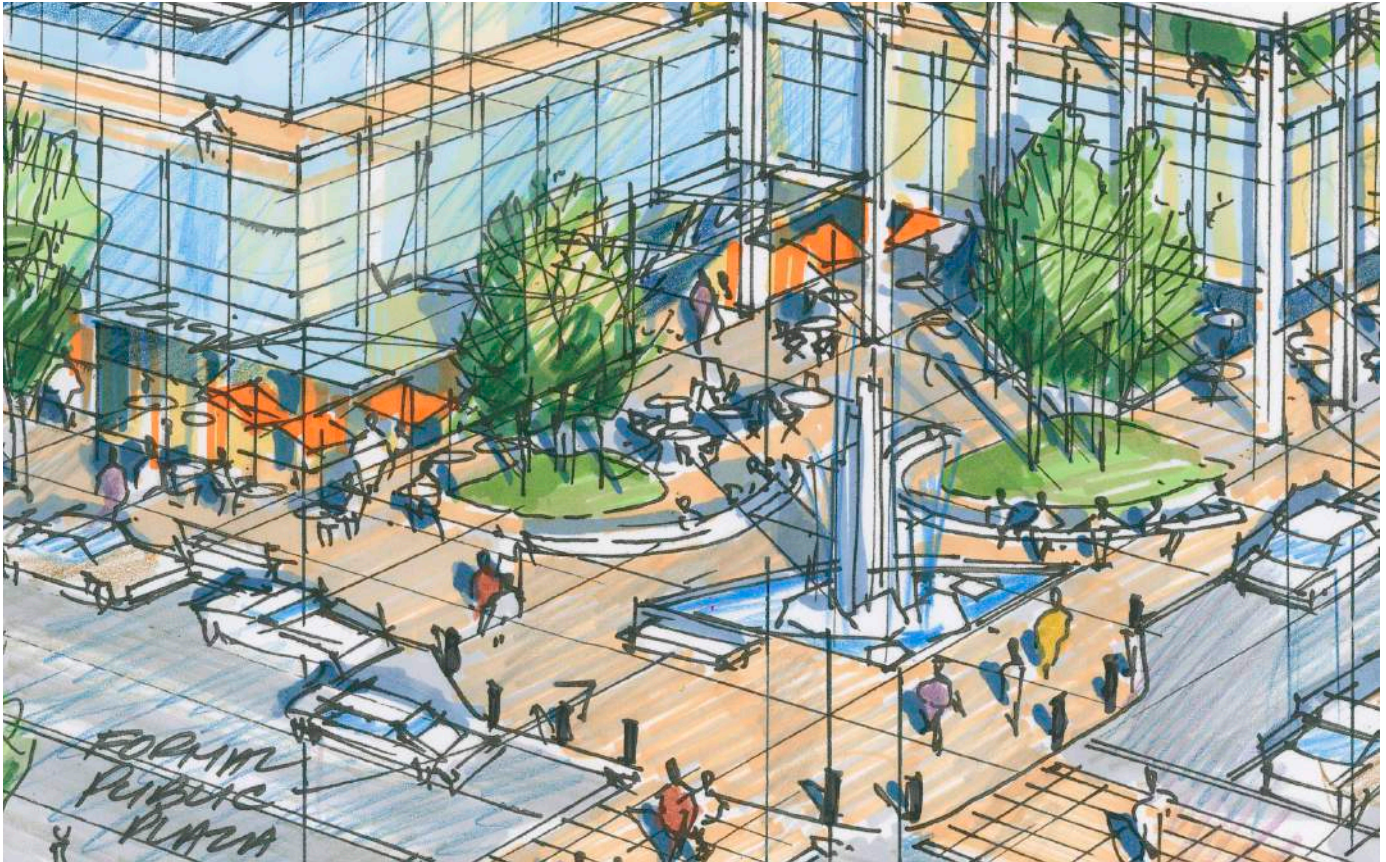


*Development concept integrating a corner plaza, central atrium, roof top patio, shops/cafes at grade, and office and/or civic (library) uses above.*

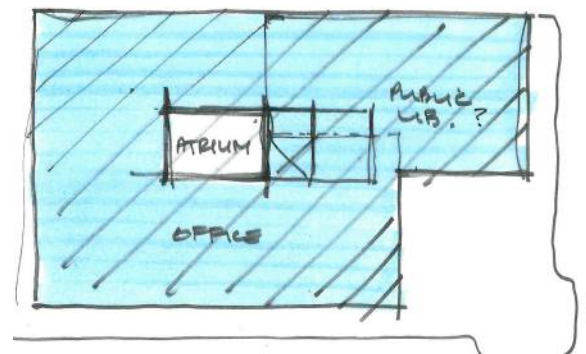


## MIXED-USE COMMERCIAL CONCEPT

*A corner plaza is desired in this location and could be built in advance of adjacent future development.*



Ground floor layout



Second floor layout



## MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL CONCEPT



*A range of mixed use residential concepts have been explored for this site, ranging from 3 - 8 storeys.*



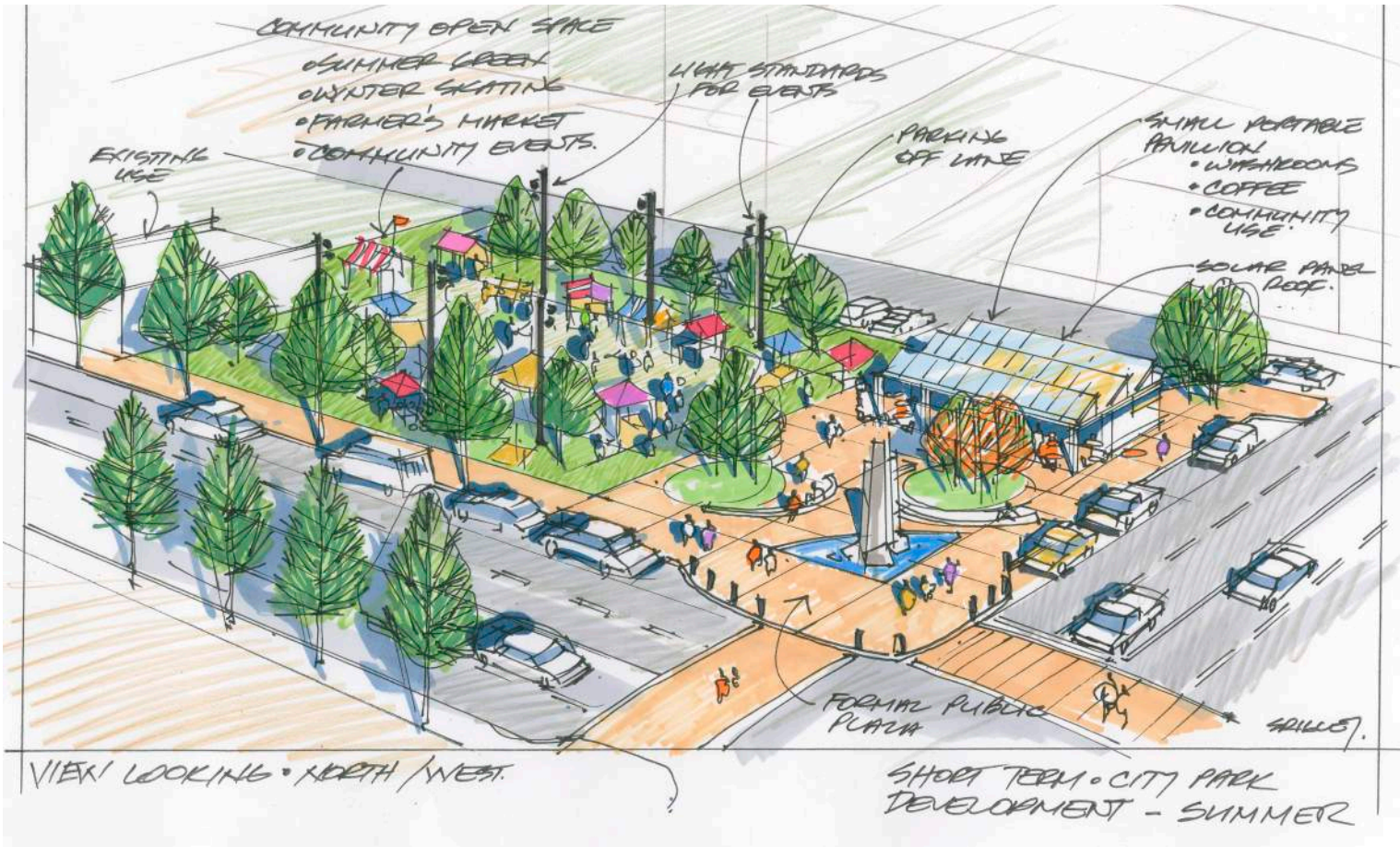
*Given the economics of underground parking in this location, a 3-4 storey concept is likely the most viable option over the short term with tuck-under surface parking (possibly combined with shared parking on adjacent sites).*



*Note that all concepts incorporate a corner pedestrian plaza with active uses fronting onto it.*



## INTERIM USES



Interim uses were explored to activate this site until a more permanent development is feasible. A corner plaza incorporating landscaping, seating and possibly a 'dynamic' or functional public art piece like a solar flower (see image to the right), could be built as a permanent feature and incorporated with future development when it occurs.

Interim design and programming of the site could include markets, festivals, concerts and other community events. A portable/temporary structure with a small cafe/restaurant, space for portable food trucks,

public washrooms, or a community use such as a day care, could also be incorporated, along with surface parking off the lane.

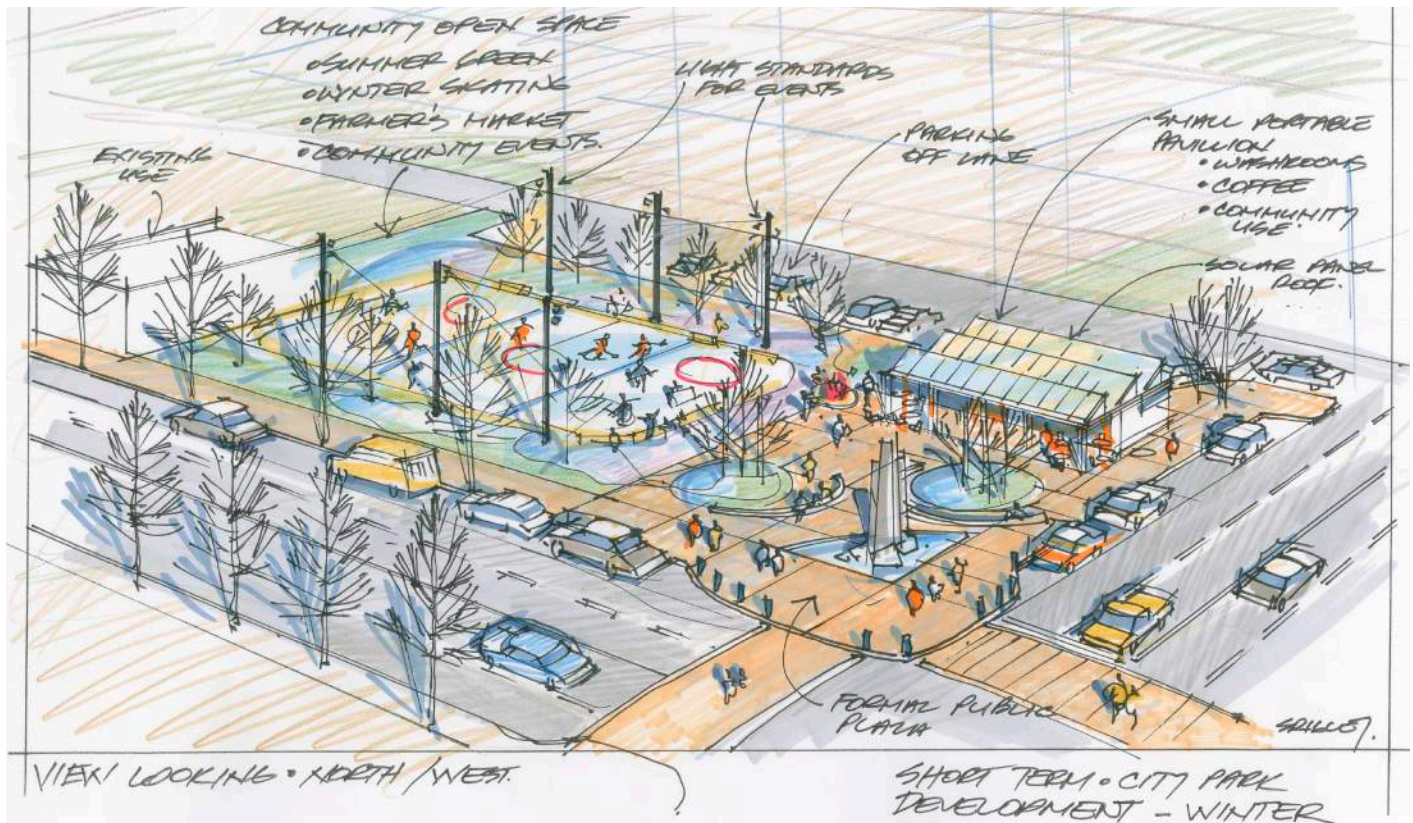


**Solar Flower**  
- Dynamic  
Public Art



## INTERIM USES

Winter programming could include skating, curling, and other winter recreation activities as well as seasonal public art such as ice sculptures and lighting.



Seasonal events and public art can support public activity in winter



## THE OLD FRONTIER SITE (102<sup>ND</sup> ST & 100<sup>TH</sup> AVE)

The old Frontier site is located on the northwest corner of 100<sup>th</sup> Ave and 102<sup>nd</sup> St. It is a large site extending north across the lane to 101<sup>st</sup> Ave and is prominently located at the west gateway to downtown. It is an excellent site for a public park/plaza like the Market Plaza (image to the right and discussed in Big Move 3). Should the Market Plaza be located elsewhere in the downtown, this would be a great site for a mixed use or stand alone residential project. The illustration below shows a three storey building with surface parking. A taller building at this site would be a more prominent gateway feature.



## CONTAMINATED SITES

Contaminated sites are often left vacant and undeveloped due to the high costs of remediation compared with the land's value. As a result, contaminated sites, which are often privately owned and located in prominent areas, are left vacant and unused for a very long time.

While the City can't force private owners to remediate their sites, there are a number of strategies that can be employed. These include lobbying the land owners to clean up their site and help make them aware of the programs and incentives that are available. This can also include working with land owners (and the public) to find appropriate temporary uses for the site that benefit the community until the site can be cleaned up and redeveloped.

Interim uses can include raised-bed community gardens, small parks or plazas, public art displays, or surface parking lots.



## VACANT STOREFRONTS

As with vacant, contaminated properties, vacant storefronts can be a detriment to a vibrant downtown. Aside from offering little interest to shoppers and pedestrians, empty storefronts send a signal that business is slow, which may deter other businesses from locating downtown.

However, interim uses such as public art displays can help to bring life and interest back to the space while it is not being used for commercial purposes.







## 5. MAKE PARKING WORK

Providing adequate parking in the downtown is a top priority to ensure convenient access to downtown businesses. Innovative approaches to off-street parking can also improve the economic feasibility of development and use the limited downtown land base more efficiently.

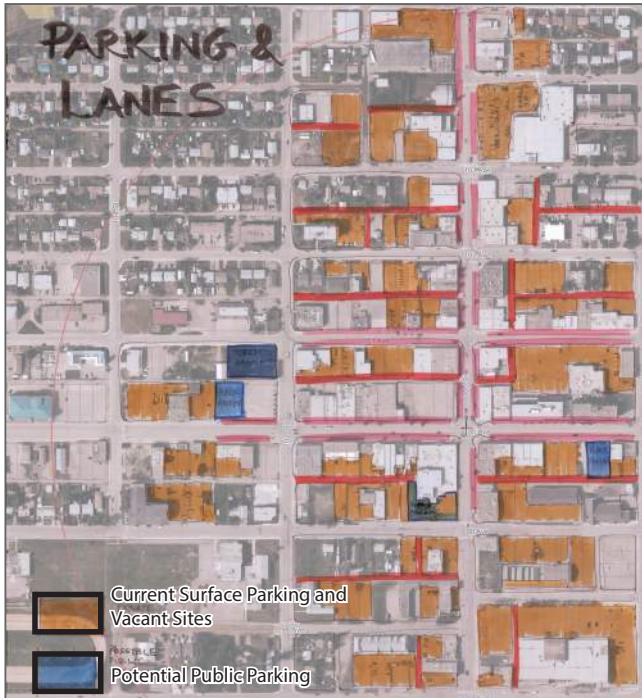
### ON-STREET PARKING

On-street parking should be maximized and maintained to provide convenient access and support traditional street-fronting businesses downtown. On-street parking also creates a physical barrier between pedestrians and moving traffic. Parking should be metered and monitored to ensure parking availability in key areas. Parking should be priced to ensure an occupancy rate of roughly 80% on any one block face.

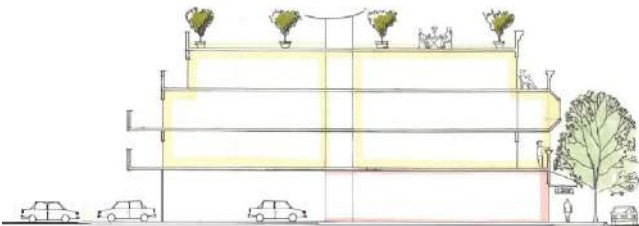
The provision and location of parking meters must minimize disruptions to snow removal and maintenance. This could be done by centralizing parking pay stations and using digital methods of payment and monitoring, for example, paying by license plate instead of by space.



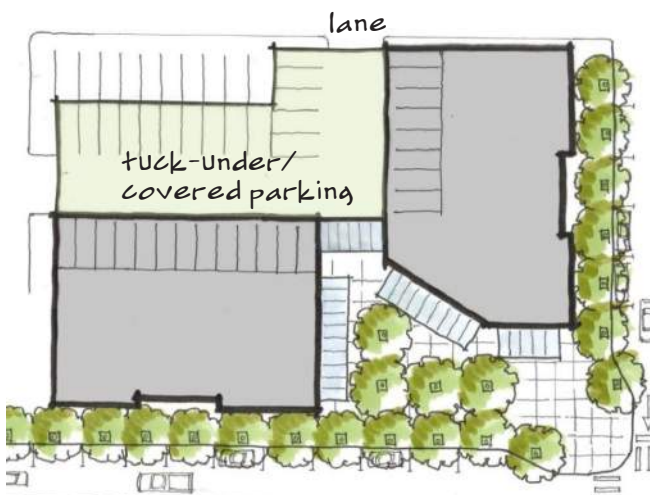
*On-street parking provides convenient access to businesses and provides a barrier between moving vehicles and pedestrians.*



***The downtown has a lot of underutilized parking***



***Tuck-under parking wrapped with active uses and accessed from the lane***



The provision of parking plays a big role in the economic viability of development projects. Innovative and creative solutions to parking should be explored to use land more efficiently and improve the viability of new residential and commercial development. This includes:

- Encouraging owners of private parking lots to share parking with neighbouring lots who need parking different times of day or week to reduce the overall amount needed;
- Using vacant sites for public parking as an interim use until development occurs;
- Provide some public lots, especially adjacent to new public developments;
- Use City owned sites for paid public parking, perhaps through a public/private partnership;
- Consider reducing or eliminating parking requirements for residential developments and allow it to be determined by demand;
- Consider reducing parking stall dimensions for high density residential developments;
- Allow/require lane access for off-street surface parking to minimize impacts to sidewalks/pedestrians and enable more efficient parking layout;
- Create pedestrian passage-ways (paseos) from the sidewalk through to parking behind buildings where possible;
- Landscape parking areas, especially when adjacent to streets and open spaces; and
- Use tuck-under parking located behind buildings and accessed from the lane to maximize development potential and screen surface parking from public view.





## 6. MAINTAIN THE CORE

### MAINTAIN CORE LANES

**Lane access is crucial to provide adequate parking and access to new downtown developments, while minimizing impacts on pedestrians and maximizing building frontage.**

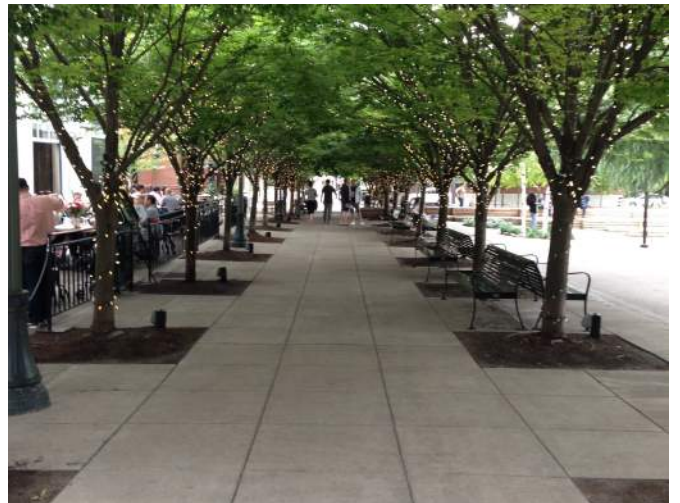
Core lanes could also be considered for active uses and events, like “art in the lane.”

### MAINTAIN SIDEWALKS

**Safe and convenient sidewalks are essential for pedestrians to want to visit the downtown.**

Public pathways/sidewalks should be provided on both sides of the street in the downtown core to provide access to downtown spaces and to connect to adjacent neighbourhoods. Pathways should be maintained with street cleaning year-round, and snow and ice removal in winter.

An “Adopt-a-Block” program where adjacent business owners or tenants take ownership of cleanliness and maintenance of sidewalks (such as the Lido block) would be of great benefit to the entire downtown core.



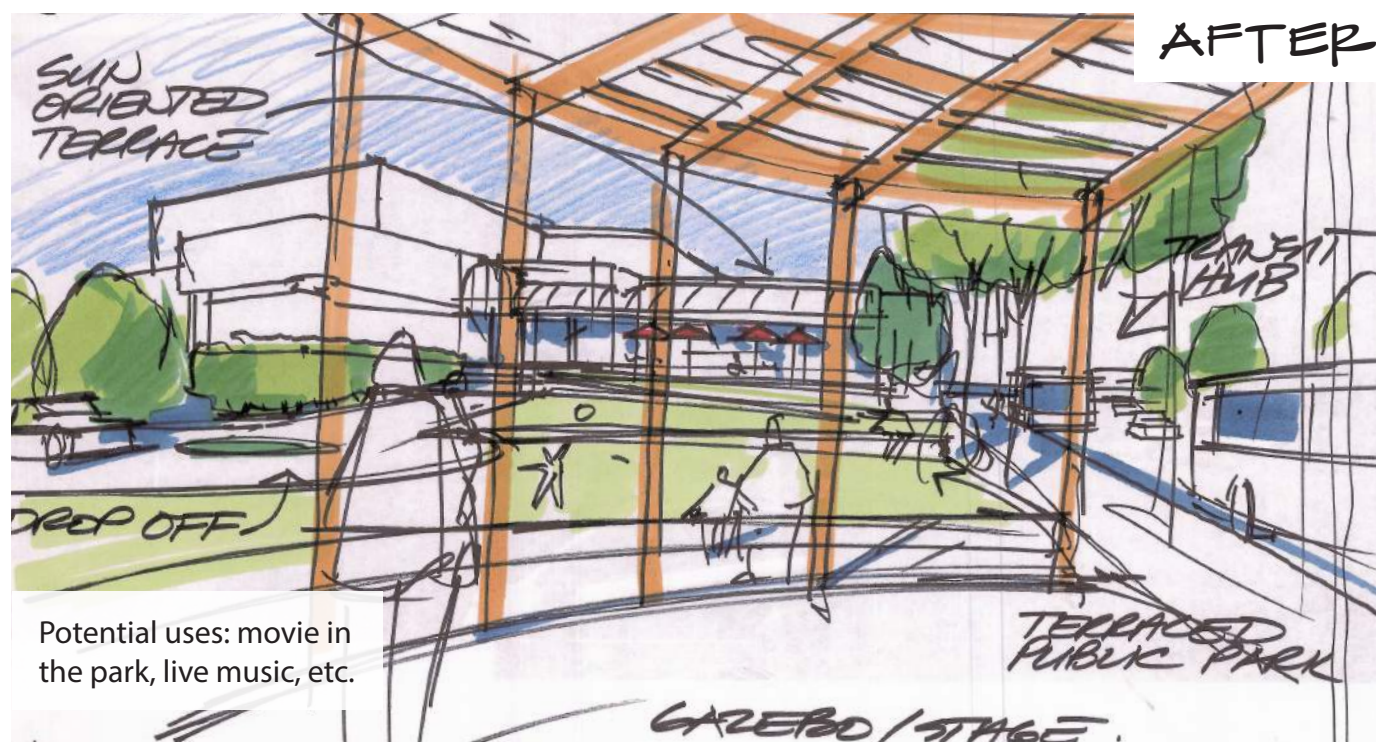




## 7. NPCC ENHANCEMENTS

The North Peace Cultural Centre is a wonderful community asset located right in the heart of downtown. However, its blank walls and lack of outdoor gathering spaces detract from its full potential in this key location. Practical and inexpensive retrofits could be undertaken to improve the Centre.

A terraced plaza facing south (and away from 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave) that utilizes the unique sloping geography, as illustrated conceptually below, would create an attractive public gathering place in the heart of downtown. An enhanced entryway and plaza would generate activity and “eyes” on the adjacent downtown bus exchange.



Potential uses: movie in the park, live music, etc.



Additionally, incorporating some large windows on the front facade, as illustrated conceptually below, would open up the building to the street and make it more welcoming, creating visual interest and more 'eyes on

the street.' More substantial renovations, or even redevelopment of the NPCC site could also be considered in light of new uses and programming envisioned for the Centre.



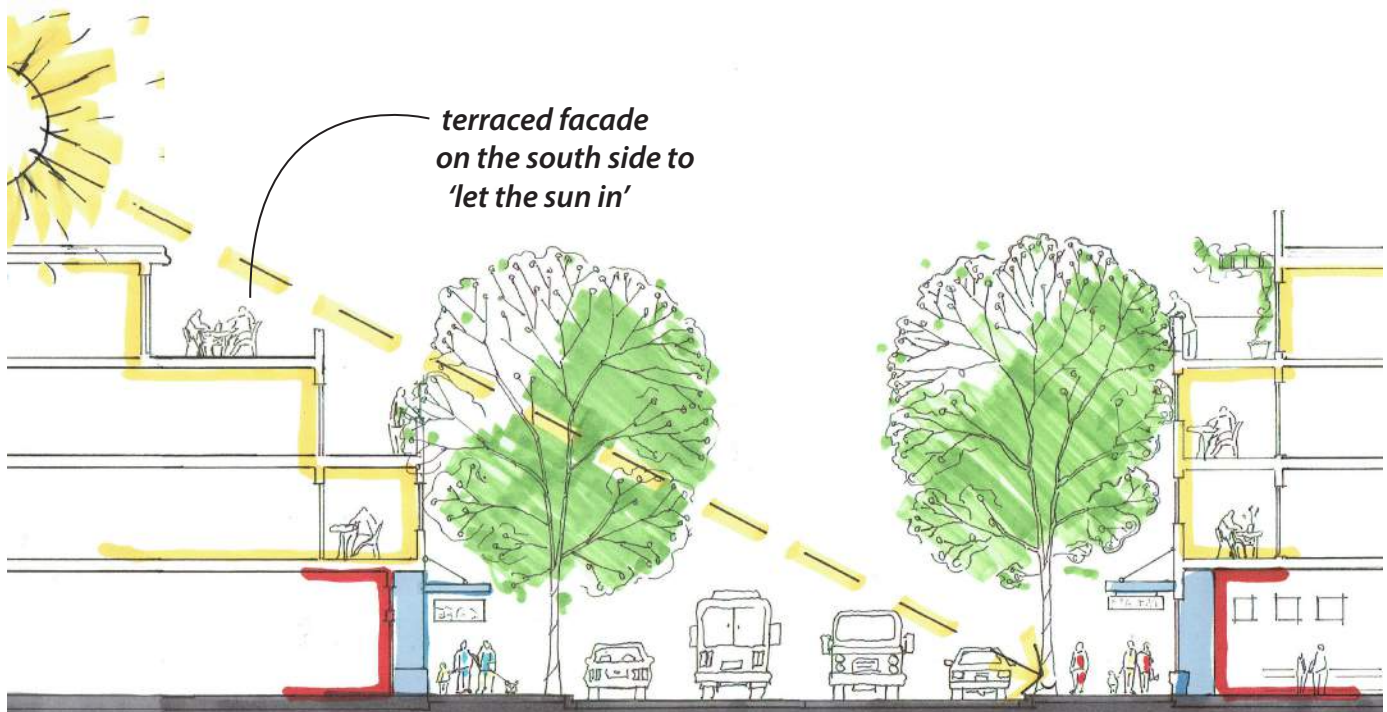




## 8. 'VILLAGE (101<sup>ST</sup>) AVENUE'

101<sup>st</sup> Ave is an opportunity to create a more quaint and pedestrian oriented village high street for two blocks between 98<sup>th</sup> St and 102<sup>nd</sup> St. In contrast to the busy arterials of 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave, 101<sup>st</sup> Ave has low traffic volumes and speeds and a mixture of small shops and vacant sites, making this street a

good short term priority for creating street level pedestrian activity and small scale mixed use projects with housing above shops. This two block stretch also makes a great location for street festivals, like the popular Moose FM Block Party held here in recent years.





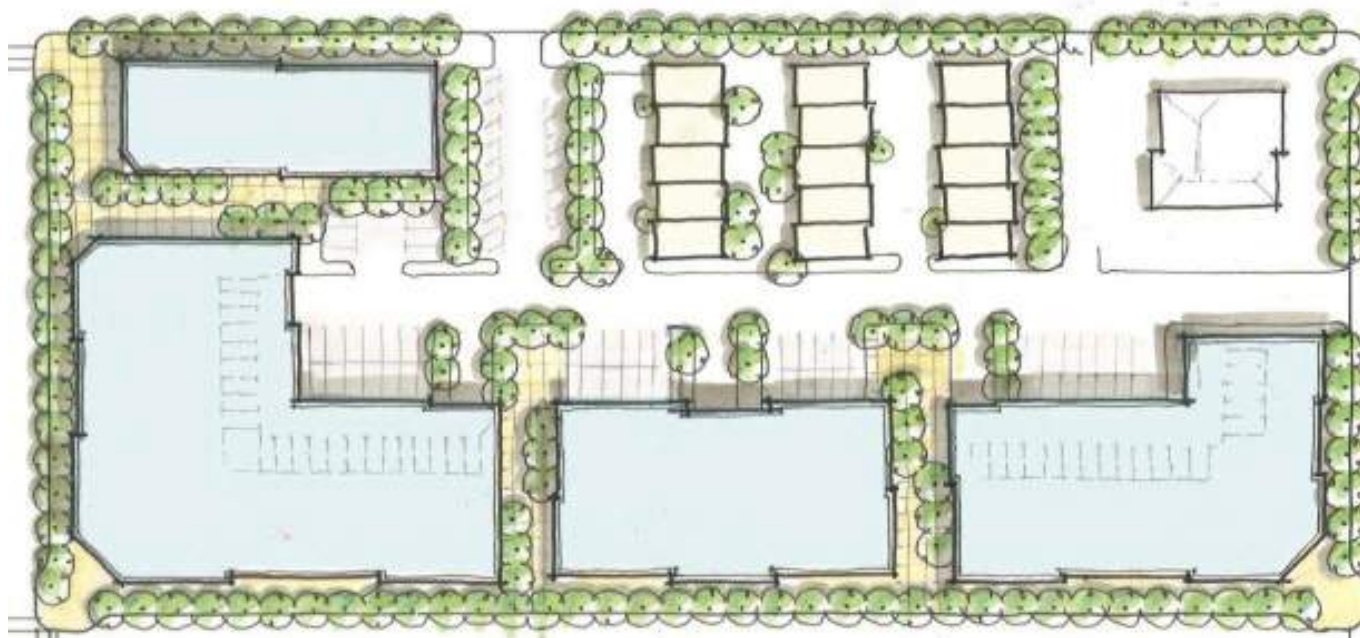


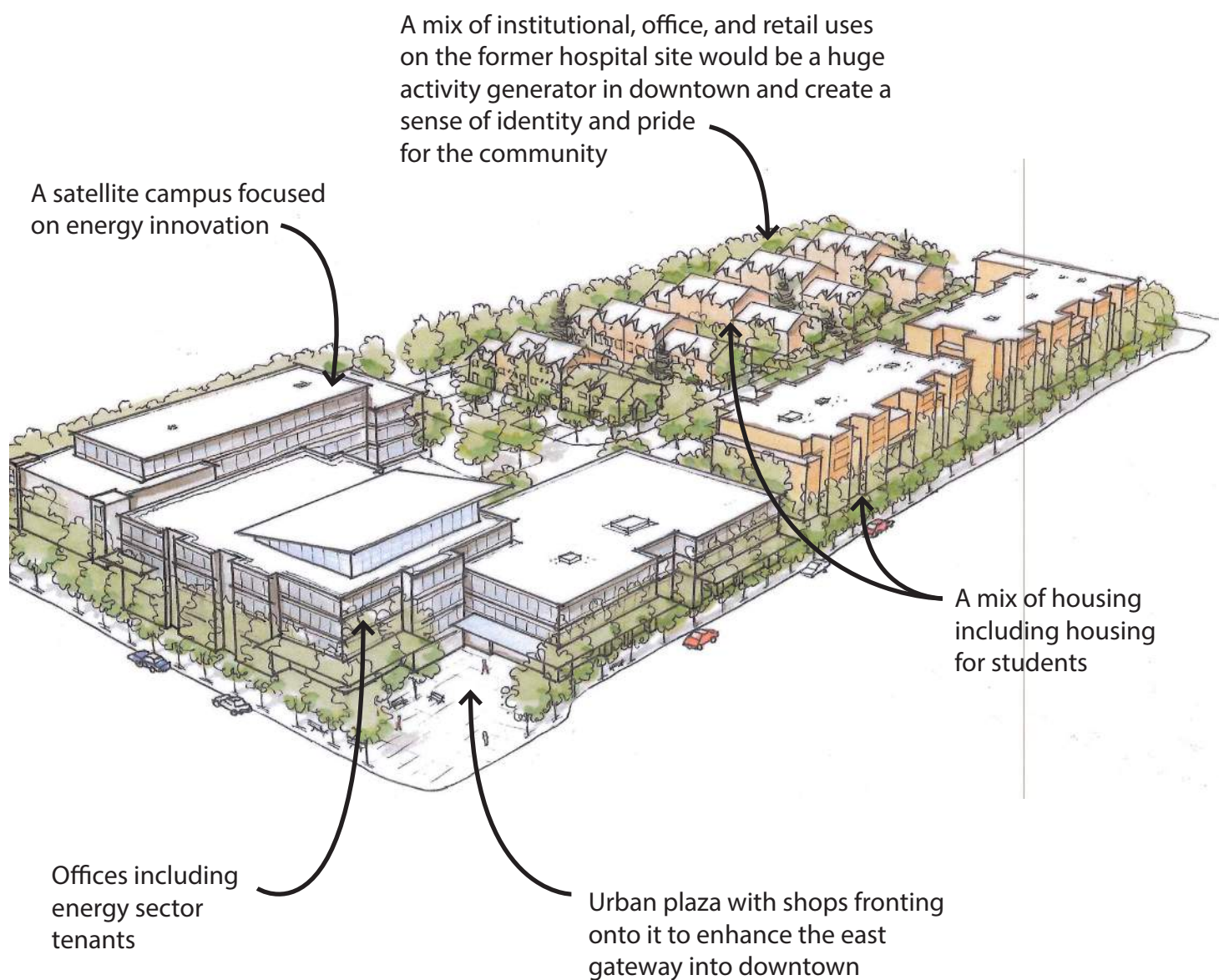
## 9. ENERGY INNOVATION DISTRICT

Establishing an energy innovation district downtown was identified by the community as a great opportunity for bringing activity into the area while showcasing the key economic driver for the city and region. The district could include a university satellite campus, energy

sector offices (and potentially sponsorship), a mix of housing (including student housing) and street level shops and services fronting onto an urban plaza. The former hospital site was identified as an ideal location.

### *Conceptual site plan and layout*









## 10. 100<sup>TH</sup> STREET GREENWAY

Centennial Park is a major community activity node located just outside of the downtown area. A better connection from Centennial Park to the downtown could be created by incorporating a bicycle/pedestrian greenway along 100<sup>th</sup> St, located on the east side's

underutilized on-street parking lane. This greenway could, for example, provide bicycle and pedestrian connections to the downtown core from ample, free public parking at Centennial Park.





# DESIGN DIRECTIONS

## for Downtown

### PRIVATE COMMERCIAL AND MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT SITES

The following design directions for private realms were identified through a series of stakeholder design workshops in order to create a pedestrian friendly place with a unique identity.

#### 1. Present a friendly face to the street

- Each building should have a defined front that faces the adjacent street (or both streets for a corner lot).
- The main entrance of the building should be obvious and face the street.
- The building should generally be built to the front property line. If a seating area in front of the building is planned, a 1 metre bench seating area is permitted.
- Long blank (windowless) walls shall be avoided where they face a street.
- Glazing should cover at least 80% of the length of the front face of the building and at least 60% of the front face area. Tinted or reflective glass is not generally allowed.



## 2. Eyes on the street

Buildings should be designed so that building occupants can oversee the street from the main living and working portions of the building. This improves surveillance for pedestrians who then feel safer and more comfortable knowing that others are observing. Balconies overlooking the street are encouraged.

## 3. Keep the sunny side sunny

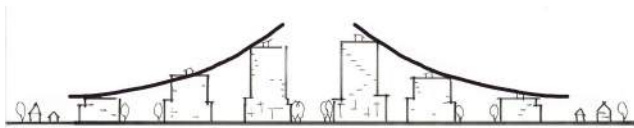
Buildings should be sited and designed to ensure that streets get plenty of sunlight throughout most of the year. This generally means keeping buildings on the south side of the street lower than those on the north side, stepping these buildings back from the street, and providing gaps between taller buildings.

## 4. Street Rhythm

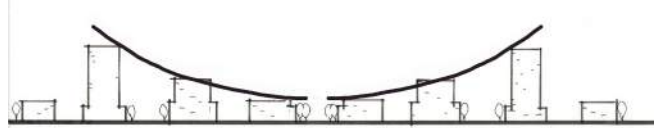
Avoid long, monotonous expanses of building forms and materials. Large buildings should be horizontally differentiated with windows, doorways and other vertical elements as well as articulation of the façade.

## 5. Tall Buildings

Locate and design tall buildings to mark gateways, landmarks, and important activity nodes, while minimizing visual and shadowing impacts, as well as negative impacts on the pedestrian realm.



*Higher buildings should be located at gateways and outside the core area (as show in the image above). This could include mixed-use or stand alone commercial or residential buildings.*



*Lower scale buildings (3-4 stories) are more appropriate on downtown retail streets within the core area (as shown in the image above).*



Photo: Picturebc.ca

## 6. Don't let parking dominate

Parking is a necessity but should not be allowed to visually dominate the downtown:

- Avoid parking at the front of a lot (i.e., do not allow off-street parking in front of a building);
- On-street parking is needed in front of most retail businesses as it provides easy access to the stores and buffers pedestrians from moving vehicles;
- On-site parking may be required depending on the use of the site and the availability of nearby public lots (see parking bylaw);
- Buildings should share parking requirements with other nearby uses that have different time of day or time of week requirements. For example, churches often need lots of parking on Sunday but less at other times of the week whereas schools and retail need more parking during the day; and
- Access to on-site parking lots should occur via a lane wherever possible.



## 7. Protect pedestrians from weather

Buildings must include awnings, overhangs, or canopies at least 6' deep (unless interfering with street trees) that cover at least 80% of the length of the sidewalk in front of the building. All entrances should be covered.



## PUBLIC REALM

The following design directions for the public realm were identified through the series of stakeholder design workshops in order to create a pedestrian friendly place with a unique identity. These principles apply to the design of public spaces (plazas, pocket parks and streets).

### **Tame the arterials**

Redesign the cross sections of 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave to create streets that are safe and comfortable for pedestrians.

### **Safe, comfortable streets**

Sidewalks should be separated from traffic. On-street parking and street trees help create this separation. Sidewalks should be wide in key shopping areas.

### **Sunny, protected public spaces**

Public spaces should be sunny and provide shelter and protection from the rain, snow, and wind.

### **Connected sidewalks and trails**

Downtown sidewalks should be continuous.

### **Maintenance is key**

The City should quickly remove snow, gravel, and dirt from the downtown public realm.

### **Use a limited palette of materials**

Variety is good, but too much variety creates the impression of a messy public realm. Consistent use of a few key materials maintains character.

### **Enliven public spaces and streets with art**

Use warm, bright colours and lights.

### **Use human-scale signage and lighting**

Provide human-scale signage and lighting and emphasize pedestrian activity and character. Discourage large, auto-oriented signage and lights.



# ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

## for Downtown

### ESTABLISH A BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

Business Improvement Associations (BIAs) work on improving the pedestrian realm, sidewalk clean-ups, public art, events and festivals, business networking, local business promotion, and many other initiatives within in an established Business Improvement Area.

#### **A BIA could coordinate private sector initiatives to improve the City's downtown.**

Funding comes from a levy on businesses within the area and is usually based on the square footage of the business. It is recommended that City Hall supplement this levy with grants. A budget is established each year.

### TAX INCREMENT FINANCING/ GRANT

This major grant would be available to building owners to offset unusual building costs, such as providing underground parking or adding floors to an existing building. The grant is based on the value of taxes that the City would collect over a five-year period calculated from the increased assessed value of the building.

### FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

This program would be designed to encourage business and building owners to invest in building upgrades, creating a more interesting and appealing streetscape to attract more people and business to Fort St. John's downtown core.

A set of guidelines would guide improvements to existing commercial building façades within a specified area of the downtown. Improvements could include removing blank walls, fixing deteriorating materials, painting, adding canopies and awnings, improving signage, etc.

The City could provide matching funds (grants or loans) to existing businesses to encourage façade improvements.

### ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Other potential strategies include DCC referrals, tax exemption bylaws, and other development tools and incentives.





## PART IV. WHAT WE HEARD

### AN OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Throughout Phase 2, the City engaged the community to create and refine downtown design and development concepts and options for both public and private realms.

Initial community feedback and ideas focused on issues and opportunities facing the downtown. This input was later used in stakeholder meetings and design workshops to develop 11 draft “Big Moves” for the downtown as well as draft Design Principles for the public and private realms.

Finally, to identify **key gaps and opportunities**, the City used an online public survey and “Meeting in a Box” (a guided workbook for community members to host conversations about the downtown) to gather community feedback on the draft Big Moves and Design Principles. Workshops were also held with City Councilors and senior staff as well as stakeholders from community organizations and local businesses.

The following section summarizes the public and stakeholder feedback gathered throughout Phase 2.

## INITIAL ENGAGEMENT: ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

The following represents a summary of initial public feedback from the June 2014 Public Open House, discussions at community events, and from the project website.

### WHAT IS WORKING WELL NOW?

- **Attractive sidewalks**
  - » Cobble stone sidewalks
  - » Brick work at corners
  - » Flower pot program/flags on lampposts
  - » Flowers and trees
- **Good bones**
  - » Permeability of road networks and lanes
  - » Back lanes
- **Variety of shops and services**
  - » Unique shops
  - » Banks, food stores, drug stores are central
  - » Diversity of stores
  - » Whole Wheat and Honey
  - » Good coffee
  - » Sushi
- **Cultural and Recreational Venues/Events**
  - » Recreation facilities
  - » Cultural centre
  - » Park and pool
  - » Lido
  - » Parades/Community events/Canada Day
- **Infrastructure and safety**
  - » Street lighting consistent
  - » Snow removal is great
  - » RCMP bike patrol (do more)
  - » Cross walk safety

- **Business Opportunities**
  - » Square foot rental rates are reasonable
  - » Current trend in façade renewal
  - » Long term business exist
  - » Solid businesses
  - » Two major roads coming into town
  - » Entrepreneurship
  - » Vacant lots

### WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES?

- **Lack of public spaces**
  - » No green space
  - » Places to sit and walk
  - » Lack of daycare space
- **Feels unsafe**
  - » Street crowd (vagrants)
  - » Speeding vehicles, two lane racetrack
  - » Ice and snow on sidewalks, uneven sidewalks
  - » Unsafe downtown on Friday nights
- **Underutilized spaces**
  - » Empty buildings and vacant lots
  - » Absentee property owners
- **Parking challenges**
  - » No parking
  - » Parking metres, paid parking only
  - » Cheap parking at metres, charge more

### WHAT SHOULD WE AIM FOR?

- **Downtown homes in mixed use buildings**
  - » Living in downtown core, Many rental and condo units
  - » Retail shopping with condos on second and third levels, loft apartments on top, retail below, retail with office above and housing on top



- **Shops/services with better hours and public spaces**
  - » Vibrant nightlife with options like lounges, coffee shops and theatre, Evening culture of shops, coffee shops, bistros, entertainment and vibrant
  - » Boutique shops and eateries
  - » Building fronts with welcoming stuff out front (couches, piano, benches)
  - » Sidewalk cafes, courtyards, rooftops
  - » Businesses are economically viable
  - » Winter outside patios, bistros, walkways – no slippery sidewalks
- **Well designed and maintained buildings**
  - » Look that is distinctly and uniquely FSJ
  - » Human scale, interesting buildings with pedestrian focus – canopy and windows, Clean and cozy look
  - » Buildings well maintained and kept up
  - » Adopt a block movement/adopt a lot
- **Atmosphere**
  - » Feeling safe no matter time of day or location
  - » Services, activities, pedestrians using downtown from early am until late night
  - » Should be a neighbourhood
  - » Feels creative and full of energy
  - » Clear identity
- **Easy to get around**
  - » Pedestrian friendly year round for young, aged residents
  - » Cross country ski all the way to downtown and trails, See kids biking to school (in the winter!)
  - » Great sidewalks, places that make you want to sit and stay
- **Attractive streets and public spaces**
  - » Full size trees and green space
  - » Ownership – involve schools, teens, kids in the process
  - » Street light standards in downtown core to help identify it
  - » Invest in outdoor seating with classy fireplaces and heaters
  - » Pride in appearance
  - » Green space, accessible for young, disabled and seniors
- **Streamline government services and use existing programs**
  - » Easier ways to make exterior improvements, development permits
  - » Provincial gov't grants and direct monies back
  - » Clear plan, this process – regulatory/fairness
  - » Planned road and infrastructure replacement over 5 years
  - » Implement housing requirements
  - » Investment incentives
- **Make downtown a destination**
  - » Vibrant evenings and weekend “to-dos”, Yearly historical celebration, streets shut down, Outdoor festivals
  - » A statue or centre piece that everyone who comes to town will want to see
  - » Interesting activities, festivals and markets to go to and interesting places to experience these activities in, Downtown centre with bandshell, community focus
  - » Destination due to amenities
  - » Family friendly spaces and businesses
  - » Parking solutions, green parking lot

## HOW DO WE GET THERE?

- **Support business**
  - » Incentives, tax breaks, bylaws for facade improvement, desired uses
  - » City licensing may be too restrictive
  - » Bring in a BIA to Fort St. John
- **Make streets people-friendly**
  - » Traffic calming by changing traffic patterns, two lanes instead of four, build bike lanes and pedestrian paths
  - » City have a trails master plan for accessibility/bike/walk/cross country ski connecting residential neighbourhoods to downtown
  - » Infrastructure replacement combined with consistent look/theme streetscape, widen sidewalks
  - » Create alternate main travel route to allow for traffic reduction in city core
  - » Plant and water and maintain trees
- **Prioritize ground-floor retail**
  - » Clearly define acceptable uses that should be on ground floor
  - » Move offices and gov't services off ground floor
- **Bring people downtown**
  - » Plan weekly street events (close street from 100<sup>th</sup> to 102<sup>nd</sup>) make downtown destination
  - » Encourage businesses to have patios on street, eateries with awnings
  - » Zoning bylaw that rewards mix use development to encourage seniors, students to live downtown
  - » Establish green parking area on existing city parking lot that is pay as you stay so it is self-sufficient, use solar powered lighting
  - » Create city centre park activity space
- **Involve many partners**
  - » Community activity co-ordination
  - » Engage big business, create partnership, provincial gov't, corporations and municipal gov't for development of community facilities – parks, cultural (Fort Mac rec)
  - » Involve absentee landlords
  - » Oil field and industry buy in (Site C and LNG should fund improvement projects – “we don’t get what we don’t ask for”)
  - » Community buy in to the process through current engagement including current and future mayor and council support and keep momentum going
- **Improve feeling of safety**
  - » New bylaw, fines to business owners who are aware of continuous crimes in their buildings
  - » Create unsightly business bylaw and enforce
  - » Collaboration between agencies to solve the homeless population and undesirables that frequent the downtown
  - » Crime prevention committee to reach out to those who use downtown, train them to take ownership
- **Use empty lots**
  - » City council come down hard on contaminated sites, triple their taxes
  - » Vacant lot, 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave – green space to sit and hold outdoor events, housing complex and retail
  - » Remediate/restore lots so they can be developed



## WHAT WE HEARD: PLACESPEAK

The following public comments were posted on PlaceSpeak, the City's online forum for the project.



### WHAT ARE YOUR BIG IDEAS TO ENERGIZE DOWNTOWN?

- Concern about 1 lane of traffic (7 votes/ comments supporting concern, 4 comments/votes against concern)
- Outdoor space for arts markets, music, and local vendors with covered stage in old Fort Hotel lot at 100<sup>th</sup> St & 100<sup>th</sup> Ave (5 votes/comments)
- Redevelop old hospital site with ice rink, condos, office, underground parking (5 votes)
- Fort St. John is a winter city! (5 votes/comments)
- Concerns about homelessness
- Concern about high taxes (3 comments)
- City should sell all its downtown property to let private entrepreneurs make the most of downtown (2 against).
- Make downtown a place where people, including mothers, will walk, linger, and visit (1 comment/5 votes)



### HOW CAN WE IMPROVE THE DESIGN QUALITY OF DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS?

- Add colour! Warm colours or local art (8 pro votes/comments, 1 against)
- Design guidelines with an architectural theme, like Qualicum Beach, Kimberly - something that evokes our history. Awnings at least. (7 votes/comments)



### WHAT LAND USES DO WE NEED TO ENERGIZE DOWNTOWN?

- Restaurants (6 votes/comments)
- Retail/Cafe with condos on old hospital site with underground parking and plaza/ skating rink (6 votes)
- Retail/office at 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave with a parking lot on 100<sup>th</sup> St and 102<sup>nd</sup> Ave (4 votes)



### WHAT WOULD IT TAKE FOR YOU TO LIVE DOWNTOWN?

- Apartments are good for newcomers, but we need affordable family-friendly housing downtown (5 votes/comments)
- Accessible, senior-friendly condo with view (3 votes)
- Safety, privacy, and peace and quiet
- Good parking, climate-control pedways, connecting condos to Enerplex, cultural centre, rec centre (1 vote)



### HOW CAN WE SUPPORT EXISTING AND ATTRACT NEW BUSINESSES DOWNTOWN?

- Coffee shops with year-round patios (5 votes)
- Technical and financial support for building upgrades, permits, and facade improvements (3 comments)
- Low taxes, little red tape, nighttime security.



### WHAT INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES WOULD ALSO ENERGIZE DOWNTOWN?

- Solar roadways (2 pro comments, 2 con comments)
- Snow removal and storage (7 comments)
- Fix potholes (5 comments)
- Bigger priority to invest in stormwater and water than beautification (1 comment pro, 1 against)



### WHAT PARK AND SIDEWALK UPGRADES WOULD IMPROVE DOWNTOWN?

- Remove gravel sooner because it creates dust
- Use vacant gas stations for greenspace and parks (3 comments)
- Public art integrated into furniture, like benches/bike racks (2 comments).
- Legacy project like an interpretive centre, black box theatre/conference centre on Cultural Centre (2 comments)
- Design guidelines for street furniture choices to give business flexibility. Trees. Tasteful street art.
- Concern that residents won't "own" improvements and beautification investments will be wasted (4 comments supporting concern, 1 comment/5 votes against)



### WHAT WOULD MAKE DOWNTOWN EASIER TO GET TO AND WALK AROUND?

- Off-street parking (10 comments/votes)
- Parking at hotel lot with covered pedway to cultural centre. Parking cost should include security, shelter, plug-ins, electric recharge (1 comments pro, 7 against)
- Bike lane on 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave that isn't next to parallel parking (2 comments). Bike lanes. Connect Meneos Trail to downtown and continue to rec centre.
- Streetcar that connects downtown destinations (2 comments)
- Better transit systems with more efficient routes, hours, and Sunday service (3 votes)
- Climate controlled/protected pedways (4 votes/comments)
- Bike racks (9 votes/comments), bike racks that reflect the character of businesses (6 votes)
- Street furniture (various comments for, 1 against)
- Sidewalks that are wide enough for strollers, safe for kids, separated from road with trees (3 comments, 3 votes)



### HOW CAN WE INCREASE ENERGY OPTIONS FOR DOWNTOWN?

- Require higher insulation for new construction, passive solar design
- Rebates for energy saving updates



## FOLLOW-UP ENGAGEMENT: GAPS & ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

*Note: the following feedback was provided for draft versions of the Big Moves and Design Principles (i.e., some details and wording have changed since then). This feedback was used to refine the concepts presented in this report.*

### ONLINE SURVEY

#### SURVEY PROMOTION & INPUT OPPORTUNITIES

The online survey and “Meeting in a Box” were available from August 26 to September 12, 2014. The online survey was intended for individuals, while the “Meeting in a Box” was designed to encourage community members to get together and discuss the future of downtown together. Both input opportunities asked the same questions about Big Moves and Design Principles for downtown planning.

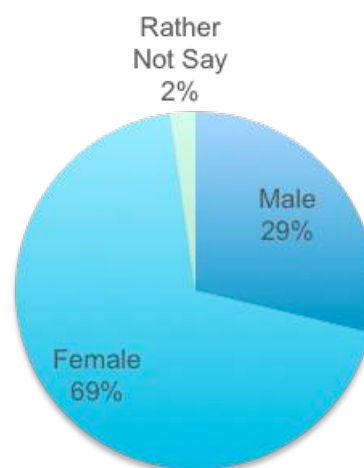
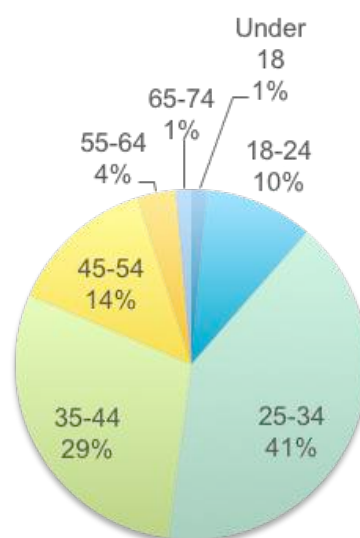
The survey was promoted through the Downtown Action Team and Community Partners, at the Moose FM Block Party, and online on the City’s website, social media pages, and via PlaceSpeak.

The City included a \$25 gift certificate to Good Ole’ Dayz in each “Meeting in a Box.” All survey respondents who left their name and contact number were also entered into a draw to win a \$500 gift certificate to Ferris Fast Cycles.

### SURVEY RESPONDENTS

A total of 424 survey responses were received. This included 11 “Meeting in a Box” groups and 443 individuals.

Of the survey respondents who shared information about themselves, over two-thirds were aged 25 to 44 (70% of 140) and the vast majority (69% of 132) were female.



## SURVEY RESULTS

Respondents shared many ideas and concerns about the Big Moves and Design Principles. This section summarizes the results of all “Meeting in a Box” conversations and online survey input received through September 12, 2014.

*Note: Because some comments addressed multiple topics, the number of comments presented below may exceed the total number of people who answered a particular question.*

### TOP 3 “BIG MOVES”

Respondents were asked, “Which are your top 3 Big Moves? Why?” 193 respondents selected their top 3 Big Moves and 115 commented on why they felt that way.

“Make Parking Work,” “Market Plaza,” “Design Streets for People,” and “Downtown Living” were the top priorities for respondents, with at least one third of respondents selecting one or more of them as their top 3 Big Move.

“Education & Innovation District” and “Village Avenue” were selected least often, with around 10% of respondents selecting these as one of their top 3 Big Moves.

### BIG MOVES COMMENTS

Comments received focused on parking, street connectivity and routes, pedestrian safety, the mix of uses, and atmosphere/aesthetics. Other comments addressed concerns with the process/plan, concerns about tax spending, and comments related to facilities such as the NPCC, entertainment options, and educational facilities/centres.

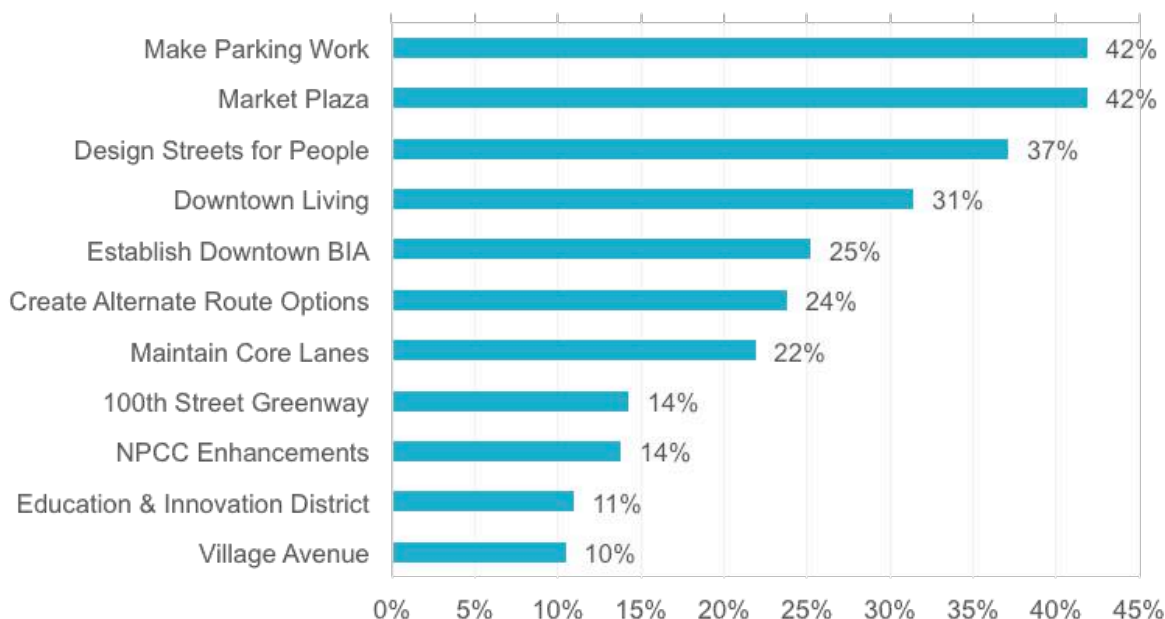
The following summarizes the major themes that emerged from respondents’ 102 comments on the Big Moves:

- **Make Parking Work:** very difficult to find convenient parking downtown, parking is needed for people to shop and enjoy the downtown, add a parkade and free parking options **(43 comments)**
- **Streets/Traffic/Routes:** ensure proper snow removal and fix potholes, do not narrow streets, concerned about traffic congestion, narrowing streets a great way to integrate green/pedestrian space but make sure travel time through the City remains consistent, heavy/industrial traffic shouldn’t go through downtown - need alternate routes, consider one-way streets or pedestrian-only core area, add bike lanes **(39 comments)**
- **Mix of uses:** encourage a mix of shops (including the market plaza), entertainment options, offices, and housing (including seniors housing) to make the downtown more vibrant and attractive to people of all ages to spend time (and money) in, encourage people to use the space outside retail hours, the downtown must remain the financial hub of the community – not big box stores on the highway **(33 comments)**
- **Pedestrian Environments/Safety:** need awnings for winter weather, looking forward to a pedestrian-friendly downtown, walking downtown currently doesn’t feel safe (particularly with children or for people in wheelchairs) because of large fast-moving traffic, few other pedestrians around, unsafe sidewalks/crossings, and social issues (prevalence of homelessness, people with mental health issues, and/or addictions) **(33 comments)**



- **Atmosphere/Aesthetics:** greenery will help improve air quality and atmosphere, small aesthetic changes will make a big difference, a more welcoming downtown core, a Business Improvement Association would make the downtown more attractive, want to live in a fun, cool, walkable downtown, cultural hub, local produce/arts at the market, balconies and awnings would improve downtown's appearance **(33 comments)**
- **Process/General comments:** we don't need a vision - let developers decide what to build on vacant properties, work with what we already have and improve it instead of starting new, consider the climate - its too cold for parks/walking, this is an oil town – not urban, downtowns are outdated – people want strip malls, make sure it can be implemented, top priority should be business **(17 comments)**
- **Facilities:** the NPCC is essential (but outdated) and should be improved, education centre makes sense but need more information, satellite campus not needed – just expand the existing campus with student housing - would help draw young people/young labour, need indoor play spaces for kids and spaces for people of all ages, concerns about maintaining outdoor ice rink, shared projects/spaces make sense for limited budgets **(13 comments)**
- **Cost/taxes:** this will cost too much, spend tax money on roads instead **(12 comments)**

#### WHICH ARE YOUR TOP 3 BIG MOVES?



## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Respondents were then asked, “What do you think of the design principles?” 105 respondents answered the question.

The following Design Principles were presented:

### *Private Commercial & Mixed Use*

1. Present a friendly face to the street
2. Eyes on the street
3. Keep the sunny side sunny
4. Street rhythm
5. Tall buildings
6. Don’t let parking dominate
7. Protect pedestrians from weather

### *Public Realm*

1. Tame the arterials
2. Safe, comfortable streets
3. Sunny, protected public spaces
4. Connect sidewalks and trails
5. Maintenance is key
6. Use a limited palette of materials
7. Enliven public spaces and streets with art

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES COMMENTS

Comments generally supported the design principles and the process. Participants identified the importance of addressing parking and designing appropriate outdoor spaces that can be used and maintained in winter.

Other comments identified the need to slow traffic, address social issues downtown, connect destinations with sidewalks, parks, and trails, and create family-friendly places. Eleven comments expressed concern about reconfiguring traffic patterns downtown. About 9 of the 103 comments expressed a lack of support for the project.

The following summarizes the major themes that emerged from respondents’ comments on the Design Principles:

- **Support:** Looking forward to a place that feels like a “real city,” need to address our city looking dirty and unwelcoming, need to improve building appearance, principles seem attainable, sounds “planned rather than haphazard,” looks “amazing,” just need to “get it done.” *(42 comments)*
- **Plan for Winter:** Walking not feasible because winter is so cold, need more parking because of winter, snow removal must be a priority, canopies not appropriate with wind and snow, design concepts more appropriate for a warmer climate, need clear responsibility for maintenance *(25 comments)*
- **Address Parking:** Already not enough parking downtown, parking needs to be appropriate for large trucks, need a public parking lot *(21 comments in favour of more parking)*, don’t let parking dominate downtown *(2 comments)*
- **Focus on Implementation:** The City and businesses need to implement the plan, some principles might conflict when implemented, plan needs to have tangible benefits, just get it done, Would businesses having uniform appearance? How awnings would work? How the city would maintain it? What happens to existing buildings? Building materials? *(15 comments)*
- **Don’t Change Traffic Patterns:** Cheaper to install turn signal at 100<sup>th</sup> St and 100<sup>th</sup> Ave, reducing lanes will make traffic worse, fix potholes instead, not worth changing traffic patterns for short walking season *(11 comments)*



- **Don't Support:** Better use of money to build indoor sports facilities like swimming pools, "you got nothing right," "waste of money," "waste of time" (8 comments)
- **Recreational Facilities and Trails:** Enhance green space in Centennial Park or market area, connect trails to existing trail network and residential areas, include bike lanes in town, include more bus routes and benches (8 comments)
- **Address Social Issues:** Area near Condill feels unsafe, "putting lipstick on a pig," only pedestrians are "drunks and homeless," don't feel comfortable spending time near "dirty old bar and strip club," how do we keep "vagrants" out of parks and trails? (7 comments)
- **Slow Traffic:** Important to slow traffic, walking/sitting downtown feels unsafe because of traffic, slowing traffic will make downtown safer and more appealing (5 comments)
- **Building Heights:** keep streets sunny, 5 storeys is too high, need lots of green space, define building heights for developers (4 comments)
- **Design for People:** Have a car-free block party, water stations for dogs, spaces for youth, family-friendly spaces, encourage family-friendly businesses and discourage businesses that make me feel unsafe (4 comments)

## GENERAL COMMENTS

Finally, respondents were given the opportunity to provide general or "other" comments. 69 respondents provided comments. The most common topics were roads/traffic and downtown vibrancy, followed by climate-related comments and concerns about taxes. Comments about the plan/process were split quite evenly between those who supported the plan and those who had concerns. Concerns about social issues related to perceptions of safety and services for people facing homelessness, mental health issues, and/or addictions. Other topics that were raised included entertainment options, pedestrian environments/accessibility, affordable housing, parking, and arts and culture.

The following summarizes the major themes:

- **Roads/traffic:** fix potholes and road issues, concerns about traffic and emergency vehicle access with regards to the proposed changes, safety concerns (i.e., turning lights and lanes), do not widen sidewalks, pedestrians don't want to walk downtown (expand walking trails instead) (21 comments)
- **Downtown Vibrancy:** address vacant spaces and bring life back to the downtown, create a welcoming atmosphere, fix up older buildings, bring in well-established businesses, clean up garbage/dirt in the streets, create a local identity/history to draw tourists (e.g., first 'fort' in BC), add greenery/rooftop gardens, businesses should be responsible for maintaining good storefronts (18 comments)

- **Climate:** plan must address the harsh winter climate in Fort St. John, need indoor activities, consider plowing and snow storage, consider enclosed/heated patios, ensure greenery will survive year-round, shelter for pedestrians is critical *(12 comments)*
- **Taxes:** concern over spending tax dollars on downtown improvements, newer buildings don't need to be changed, spend money on other things first (such as roads, parking, parks/trails, entertainment facilities, affordable housing) *(11 comments)*
- **Concerns with the plan/process:** do we have the staff to implement the plan and maintain the downtown? hire locals to do the job, plan lacks emphasis on current problems (services, parking, old age, social services, maintenance of facilities/infrastructure), what about the rest of the City?, we did not have a majority vote to proceed with this plan, would like to see an example of where this has worked in places with similar climates *(10 comments)*
- **Support for the plan/process:** a good project, a high priority for the community, looking forward to an improved downtown, glad to see a long-term vision rather than piecemeal projects, ensure that the plan is implemented *(10 comments)*
- **Social issues:** address homelessness and perception of safety in public spaces, provide adequate services and housing for people suffering from homelessness, mental health issues and/or addictions *(10 comments)*
- **Entertainment:** provide entertainment options for all ages and safe play spaces for children, spray park/outdoor swimming, skate park, a better leisure centre and a place to host concerts/shows *(4 comments)*
- **Pedestrian environment:** address the amount of fast-moving traffic that flows through the downtown, improve accessibility of key locations *(3 comments)*
- **Affordable housing:** it would be great to have affordable housing options in the community, build apartments downtown *(3 comments)*
- **Growth:** concerns about how population growth will impact traffic, parking, school capacity, housing, etc. *(2 comments)*
- **Parking:** parking downtown is terrible, we need a parkade *(2 comments)*
- **Arts:** more arts and culture in the community and downtown *(2 comments)*



## WORKSHOP RESULTS

Several workshops were held with City Councilors and senior staff as well as community stakeholders from organizations including the Salvation Army, library, hospital, Chamber of Commerce, Arts Council, and local business owners. Participants looked closely at the Big Moves and identified key gaps and opportunities.

### BIG MOVES TO ACHIEVE THE CITY'S VISION & GOALS

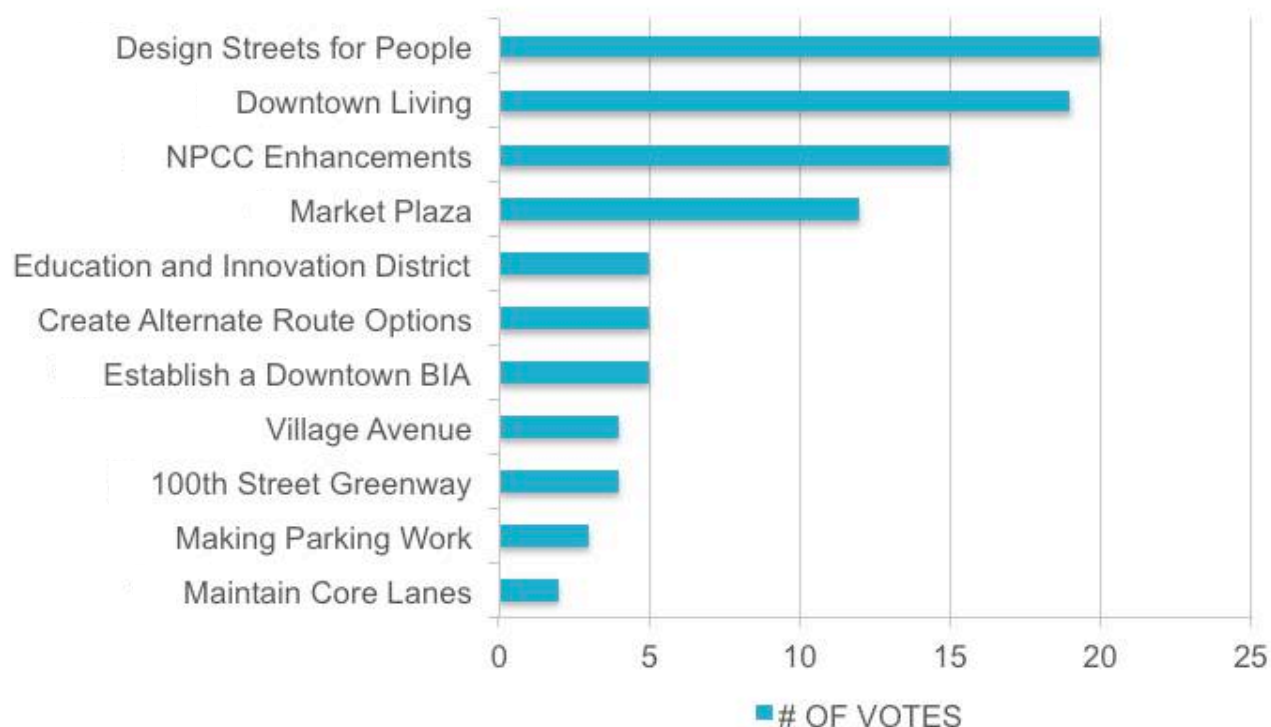
Rather than asking *"Which are your top 3 Big Moves?"* as in the public survey, workshop participants were asked, *"Which Big Moves best achieve the City's vision and goals for the Downtown? Why?"*

Workshop participants identified "Design Streets for People," "Downtown Living," and "NPCC Enhancements" as the top priorities for the City to achieve its vision and goals for the downtown.

City staff were also asked a follow-up question: *"Which Big Moves will be the most challenging to implement? How can these challenges be overcome?"*

"Making Parking Work," and "Design Streets for People" were voted as the most challenging to implement, followed by "Create Alternate Route Options," "Downtown Living," and "Maintain Core Lanes."

### WHICH BIG MOVES BEST ACHIEVE THE CITY'S VISION & GOALS FOR THE DOWNTOWN?



## BIG MOVES COMMENTS

Participants' comments focused on: affordable/seniors housing, vacant sites, downtown aesthetics and identity, community events/festivals, designing for a winter city, safety, social services, public art, funding, and transportation.

**Designing for a winter city** was an important theme and participants stressed the need for both indoor and outdoor activities. Comments emphasized the importance of the NPCC as well as a year-round market space that could double as a venue for events and festivals. Encouraging restaurants and other local gathering places was also identified as important.

Participants stressed the need to **utilize vacant sites and enhance the public realm** with things

like lighting, public art, signage, and benches. A number of comments noted the importance of getting businesses on board to create a successful Downtown Business Improvement Association that would help to enhance community aesthetics and identity.

**Social services and support for homelessness and people with addictions** was raised as an important consideration as was social support and housing for seniors.

Participants identified the need for **transportation options** including pedestrian enhancements (wide sidewalks, lighting, safe crossings), bike lanes, sufficient parking, and efficient vehicle access and movement.







## PART V. CLOSING & NEXT STEPS

### PROCESS TO DATE

Fort St. John's Official Community Plan identified a vibrant and healthy downtown as a key component of the City's growth strategy.

To achieve this vision, the City undertook a 3-phase downtown planning process. Phase 1 began with a detailed technical review of key challenges and opportunities facing the downtown. Phase 2 involved a collaborative community-based process to develop innovative and practical ideas to enhance and revitalize the downtown core. Phase 3, the next and final phase of the project, will refine the Big Moves developed in Phase 2 and identify policies, guidelines and actions for implementation.

### PHASE 3: ACTION PLAN & IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Phase 3 will result in:

- **A set of detailed plans to guide investment priorities, detailed design and construction of new public realm projects** including: a Downtown Mobility Plan, a Pedestrian Realm and Public Open Space Plan, and a Community, Culture and Arts Strategy including programs and partnerships.
- **A set of policies and design guidelines that can shape new private investment in the Downtown** in a way that strengthens the public realm including: a Land Use and Development Plan, a Development Permit Area Design Guidelines, and economic development strategies and policies.
- **An implementation framework** identifying priority actions including high level costing, phasing.