



# Downtown Forward

Secondary Plan for Downtown St. John's

May 2025

ST. JOHN'S

## **Land Acknowledgment**

We respectfully acknowledge the Province of Newfoundland & Labrador, of which the City of St. John's is the capital City, as the ancestral homelands of the Beothuk. Today, these lands are home to a diverse population of indigenous and other peoples. We would also like to acknowledge with respect the diverse histories and cultures of the Mi'kmaq, Innu, Inuit, and Southern Inuit of this Province.

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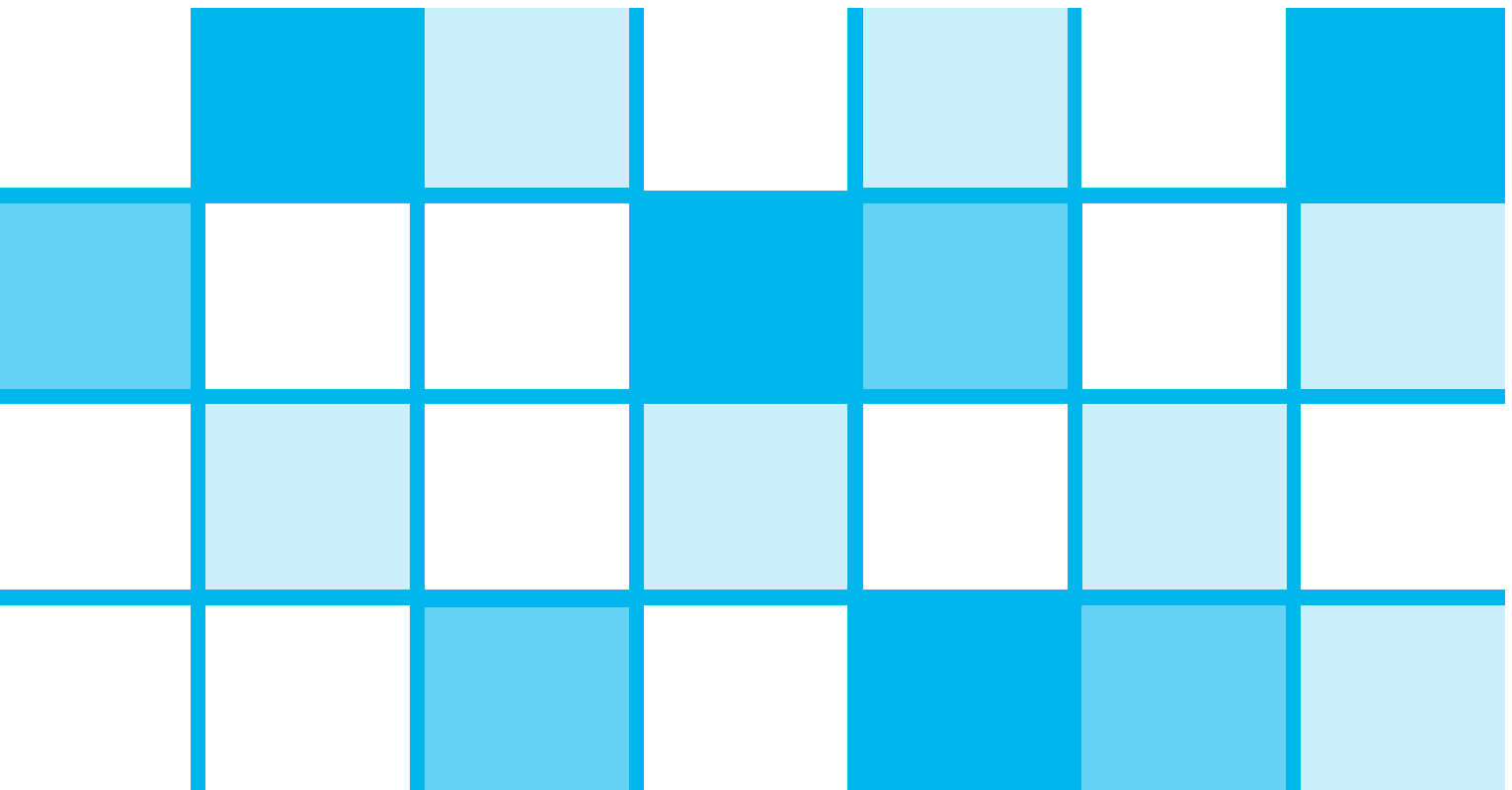
**Schedule 1: Transportation Network**

**Schedule 2: Character Areas and Corridors**

**Appendix 1: Implementation Plan**

**Appendix 2: Economic Analysis**





# 1 introduction

# 1 Introduction

A functioning and vibrant downtown is vital to the economic health and identity of a community. Successful downtowns function as civic and cultural amenities, tourist destinations, investment stimulants, and can contribute to the community's overall prosperity. Downtowns that are distinct and beautiful can be a tremendous source of civic pride and can shape the image of a community.

Over the past few years, the City of St. John's has undertaken a number of planning efforts to understand the community's desires and goals for future development in the downtown. Overall, the City is positioning itself to create a development-ready downtown that is vibrant, with a mix of uses, and with a range of transportation choices. There is also the need to ensure that the downtown can anticipate and prepare for the impacts of climate change.

The Envision St. John's Municipal Plan is the official planning document of the City establishing broad City goals, objectives, and specific policies to achieve those goals under five key themes:

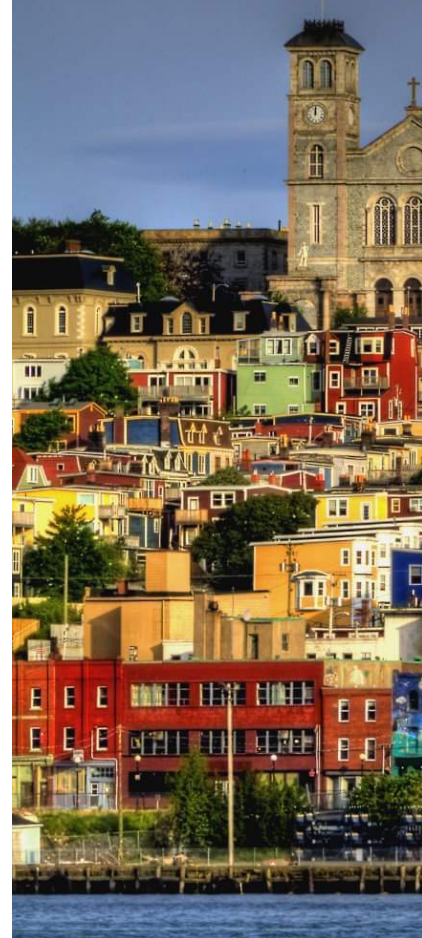
1. Valuing Environmental Systems
2. Healthy Neighbourhoods
3. Strong, Diversified Economy
4. Urban Design
5. Investment in Transportation and Service

The Municipal Plan and its policies establish the framework for planning at a neighbourhood level by creating Secondary Plans for Planning Areas, as shown in Municipal Plan Appendix A - Map P-2 (Planning Areas Map). Downtown is included in Planning Area 1. Neighbourhood planning creates area specific policies to improve the built environment for better mobility, improved access to goods and services, public open space, employment opportunities, and a variety of housing forms. To respond to the City's desire to spur urban development and encourage investment in the downtown, the City is setting the stage for future growth through the Downtown Forward Secondary Plan. To ensure alignment with the Municipal Plan, Downtown Forward will support the goals and objectives of the Municipal Plan.

Downtown Forward will also aim to align with the City's Strategic Plan and its four strategic directions:

1. A Sustainable City
2. A City that Moves
3. A Connected City
4. An Effective City

The Downtown Forward Secondary Plan (Secondary Plan) is a statutory document that will guide the evolution of the downtown for new development, redevelopment, and infill to ensure that downtown's heritage character is maintained while the commercial core and downtown neighbourhoods are revitalized to make it more attractive to business, residents, and visitors. This Secondary Plan forms part of the Envision St. John's Municipal Plan.





## 1.1 Intent of the Document

1. This Secondary Plan will serve as a 10-year land use plan for Planning Area 1 (Downtown) that addresses current challenges, defines appropriate growth opportunities, protects and enhances cultural and historic assets, responds to climate change, and provides a community structure reflective of best practices in downtown planning.
2. The Secondary Plan will also serve as an economic catalyst, fostering economic development in the downtown core through identifying opportunities for public and private sector investment, identifying potential areas for revitalization or renewal, improving access to goods and services, encouraging destination development, and ensuring a built form emerges that supports the downtown as being an ideal place to live, work, play, and invest.
3. The Secondary Plan builds on the existing policies of the Municipal Plan and establishes a framework within which the City will promote development and investment.
4. The Secondary Plan shall be read and interpreted as a comprehensive whole. The vision, guiding principles, and policies of this Secondary Plan must be considered together to guide its interpretation and determine conformity. Individual policies should not be read or interpreted in isolation from other relevant policies. Decision-making will be based on conformity with the policies of this document and supported by:
  - Schedule 1 - Transportation Network**
  - Schedule 2 - Character Areas and Corridors**Further, this Secondary Plan shall be read in conjunction with all of the applicable policies of the Envision Municipal Plan and the Envision St. John's Development Regulations.

### Demographics

Population of 4,870  
The downtown neighbourhoods retain the highest population density in the City (3,286 people per square kilometre, Stats Canada, 2021)

### Age Distribution

0-19	10%
20-44	52%
45-64	26%
65+	12%

### Businesses

- Special multi-use commercial area that includes residential, institutional, entertainment, and public space uses, as well as retail and service uses
- The primary economic generator for tourism in the region
- Big Five Canadian banks have operations in the downtown
- Creative industries, growing technology, ocean, and energy sector

### Housing

Variety of housing options including brightly coloured townhouses, single detached houses, condominiums, and apartments

### Institutional and Government

City Hall, Newfoundland and Labrador office for the regional federal minister, many Federal Government departments and agencies in the Sir Humphrey Gilbert Building and the John Cabot Building

### Heritage

- Water Street Historic District, designated a National Historic Site of Canada in 1987, one of the oldest thoroughfares in North America
- Designated Heritage Buildings and three Heritage Areas
- A portion of the Ecclesiastical District, a heritage precinct consisting of 19th and 20th century institutional buildings and spaces associated with the Roman Catholic, Anglican, United, and Presbyterian denominations

### Entertainment

George Street, Mary Brown's Centre, St. John's Convention Centre, hotels, restaurants, museums, galleries

### Mobility

- 28-kilometres of streets spread throughout the study area - local residential streets through to major arterials
- Provincial Route 2 (Pitts Memorial Drive) connects directly to the study area
- 50-kilometres of existing sidewalks and trails, including the Grand Concourse Trail system
- Several historic laneways providing critical north-south pedestrian connections
- Public transit - Metrobus



Figure 1: Downtown Forward Secondary Plan Area.

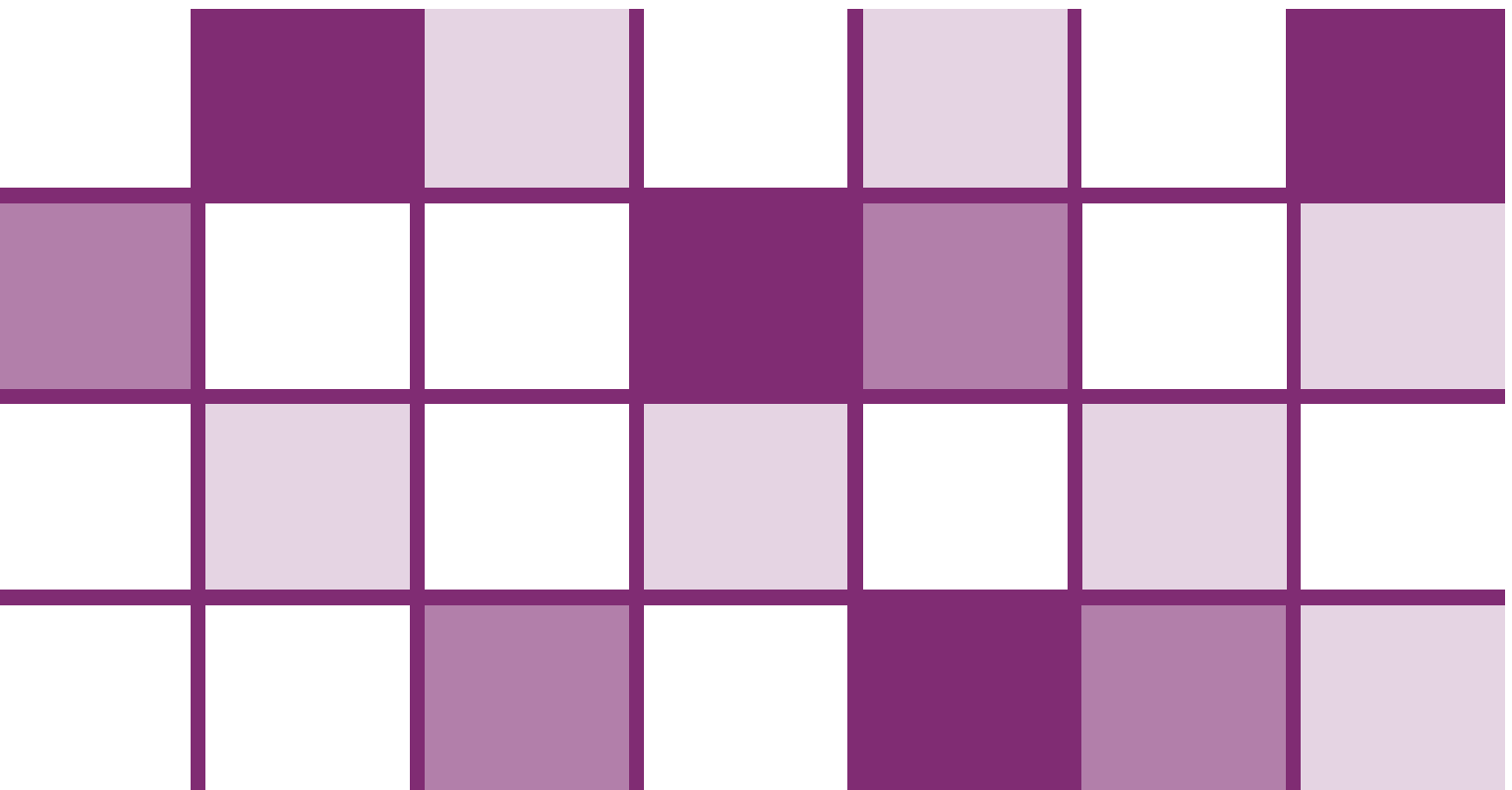
## 1.2 The Secondary Plan Area

The downtown is one of the oldest cities in North America and a centre for economic, artistic, cultural, and social activity in the city and the St. John's Urban Region (the Northeast Avalon Peninsula). It is a model for mixed-use development with a range and mix of land uses, including employment, institutional, commercial, arts and entertainment, and a variety of residential dwelling types with an eclectic mixture of buildings - different styles, different scales, and from different eras.

The historic downtown has many of the city's designated Heritage Buildings, while its skyline and views of the harbour, Signal Hill, and the Southside Hills define the image of St. John's. The downtown is a vibrant neighbourhood, recognized and appreciated by residents and visitors from around the world for its unique and colourful residential neighbourhoods; walkable business corridors along Water and Duckworth Streets; popular entertainment district on George Street; marine and transportation hub at the Port of St. John's; heritage churches and other buildings within the Ecclesiastical District; world-class culinary offerings; and burgeoning innovation and technology sector.

The Secondary Plan area encompasses approximately 130 hectares (Figure 1) and is generally bounded by Harbour Drive and St. John's Harbour to the south, LeMarchant Road, Harvey Road, Military Road, and Forest Road to the north, Patrick Street to the west, and Empire Avenue and Temperance Street to the east.





# 2

## vision + principles



## 2 Vision + Principles

The downtown St. John's Strategy for Economic Development and Heritage Preservation, 2001, sets out a vision for the downtown:

- An internationally recognized, historic port city in which residents, businesses, and visitors are welcome;
- Desirable residential neighbourhoods, with fully rehabilitated housing stock, looking as attractive as its original builders intended;
- An unforgettable commercial core featuring authentic, traditional buildings, well conserved and rehabilitated, which create a highly competitive retail sector along Water and Duckworth Streets;
- A desirable office/commercial location, with a solid supply of Class A and Class B office space to meet the needs and expectations of the corporate community;
- Low-rise buildings which do not obstruct the irreplaceable views of the Harbour;
- A vibrant entertainment area centered on George Street;
- A revitalized, pedestrian-friendly harbourfront; and,
- A "people place" which forms the soul of the city.

Over two decades later, this vision is still valid and the downtown is recognized as a significant defining feature of the city in regards to built heritage, unique residential neighbourhoods, culture, the arts, tourism, and a centre for employment and commerce.

The Secondary Plan is an opportunity to build upon past studies and policies to develop a comprehensive, long-term plan for the downtown that delivers a vision that is forward-thinking, economically-viable, and as wonderfully unique as the City itself. It establishes a vision and guiding principles which are implemented through policies and reflect the unique characteristics of the downtown and a direction moving forward.

The process for the preparation of the Secondary Plan included public and stakeholder consultation, as well as substantial feedback from the major businesses and landowners in the downtown. Methods included open houses, pop-ups, focus group meetings, one-on-one meetings, and a survey.

To ensure that the perspectives of the St. John's urban Indigenous community were meaningfully considered in the development of the Secondary Plan policies, the City worked closely with First Light, a registered non-profit organization that serves the urban Indigenous community, to host a Community Feast.

## Vision Statement

**The downtown is a vibrant destination that serves the residents of St. John's and draws visitors from around the world.**

**Through sustainable development, economic activity, and enhanced public realm initiatives, the downtown will continue to grow and offer an increasingly diverse range of places to live, work, learn, shop, be entertained, and enjoy community life in a unique setting that artfully integrates old and new development into a picturesque landscape.**

## Guiding Principles

### Principle 1: Adaptive and Resilient

Ensure an environmentally, economically, culturally, and socially healthy and resilient downtown by meeting the challenges of climate change and other environmental issues through leadership in sustainable forms of green building design and technology, the incorporation of green infrastructure and renewable and alternative energy sources, the responsible use of resources, and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

### Principle 2: Housing Options

Provide a range of housing options that meet the social, economic, and well-being requirements of existing and future residents, including the changing housing needs for an aging population.

### Principle 3: Healthy Living

Prioritize healthy living, safety, and well-being by ensuring connectivity, creating an accessible and well-designed system of public parks and open spaces, supporting access to healthy food, clean air and water, and by providing a safe and inclusive pedestrian-oriented environment that is designed to create opportunities for residents to be physically active and socially engaged.

### Principle 4: A Creative Place for Business

Ensure the continued economic vitality of the downtown. The downtown's special character, location, and mix of uses position it to attract a diversity of enterprises that thrive in urban settings.



### Principle 5: Connected

Establish an accessible multi-modal mobility network that provides choice through a network of interconnected streets, sidewalks, trails, and parks to balance the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles to ensure all persons have transportation options while reducing automobile dependence. The network will be safe, convenient, well-connected, attractive, and reflective of the city's unique topography and climate.

### Principle 6: Respecting History + Heritage of Place

Enhance and respect the unique identity and history of the downtown through clear direction that protects and enhances built and cultural heritage resources. A variety of beautiful spaces will be established that foster inclusiveness and appeal to a diverse population. These spaces will support social gathering, cultural events, festivals, Indigenous ceremonies, quiet contemplation, recreational use, and community life throughout the year.

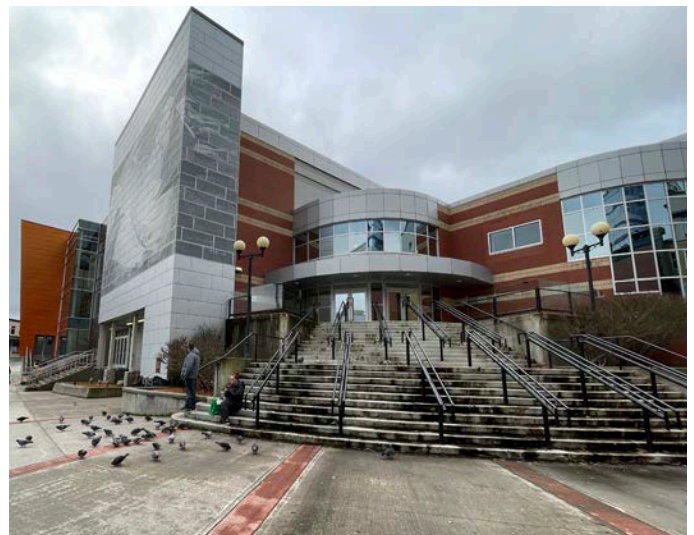


### Principle 7: Viable Downtown

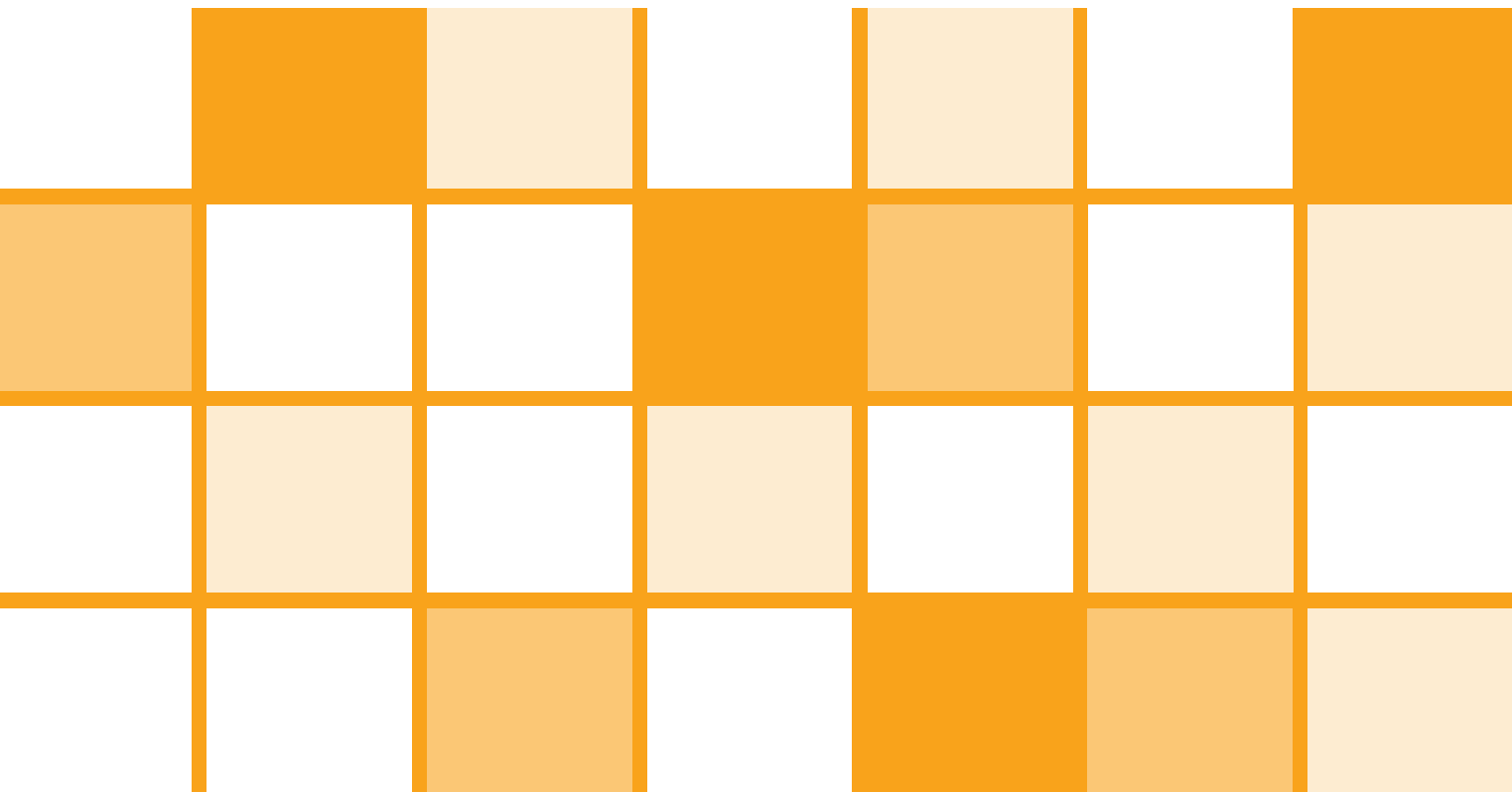
Maximize the efficient use of existing infrastructure investments and promote the coordinated, efficient, and cost-effective delivery of services and infrastructure. Plan for infill and intensification to take advantage of existing services and facilities, while ensuring that development has the flexibility to respond to change over time.

### Principle 8: High Quality Design

Demonstrate high quality design in new development and incorporate best practices that respect and complement the character of the downtown. The historic context of the downtown presents an opportunity for outstanding urban design that showcases a desirable destination to both residents and visitors alike.







# 3

## planning for change

## 3 Planning For Change



### 3.1 Growth and Development in the Downtown

This Secondary Plan is an important step in the realization of the growth and development strategy of the Municipal Plan. Like all historic downtowns, the downtown is expected to continue to grow and to evolve well beyond the 10-year horizon of this Secondary Plan. The policy framework anticipates ongoing growth and the evolution of the downtown.

Several changes have been occurring throughout the province that influence growth and development. Understanding and anticipating how growth and change can affect the downtown has provided the context for the policies in this Secondary Plan.

- **Aging Population:** The population of the region is aging. The downtown is currently under-supplied with new market and affordable rental units. New developments need to consider the local aging population and both current and future demand for seniors housing.
- **Affordability Challenges:** Housing prices have risen sharply over the past decade and there remains a pressing need to develop more affordable housing options. There is a need to provide a variety of housing types to accommodate smaller families, singles, seniors, and students that want to live in the downtown.
- **Immigration:** Immigration is increasing in St. John's, adding to the population base and workforce, which are becoming integral to the downtown economy. Expanding and improving housing options and mobility choices provides all residents with greater choice.

- **Changing Preference:** Demand is shifting inwards towards the downtown, with younger residents attracted to the downtown and access to services and amenities, forsaking car ownership and utilizing ride share, transit, and active transportation.
- **Youth Attraction and Retention:** A pressing challenge for St. John's is the outmigration of young talent. Vibrant urban areas act as magnets for young professionals, fostering a sense of community, access to employment opportunities, and quality of life that appeal to the younger demographic. Proximity to Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) and its satellite institutes provides a direct link to educational resources, entrepreneurship, and workforce development.
- **Remote/Hybrid Work:** The shift to remote or hybrid work options has resulted in businesses with less in-person employee presence creating an excess of underutilized office spaces.
- **Climate Change:** A focus on sustainability and climate change adaptation is key for the downtown and the city as a whole. Supporting higher density development, intensification, and the adaptive reuse of buildings supports transit and active transportation and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, while also facilitating energy efficient buildings, district heating, and renewable energy systems.

## 3.2 Economic Analysis

An Economic Analysis was prepared for this Secondary Plan and is attached as **Appendix 2**. The analysis found that downtown St. John's is poised to benefit from positive socio-economic trends in the province such as continued growth in gross domestic product (GDP), employment, population, and visitor spending. To maximize the socio-economic impacts of these trends for the downtown area, increasing higher-density residential and commercial development, and quality of life infrastructure will result in positive effects on business, resident, and visitor attraction.

### Alignment with Regional Socio-Economic and Sustainability Goals

The Economic Analysis further identified that increasing higher density residential and commercial developments aligns closely with Newfoundland and Labrador's broader economic and social goals. A key outcome of this Secondary Plan is fostering economic growth, innovation, and resilience while building a livable community in the downtown. Key themes identified that are relevant to the success of the downtown include:

- Youth attraction and retention;
- Concentration of talent;
- Increased trade and export opportunities;
- Improving quality of life for residents; and,
- Sustainability.



Infill example of a low-rise apartment in an established residential area.

## Encouraging Investment

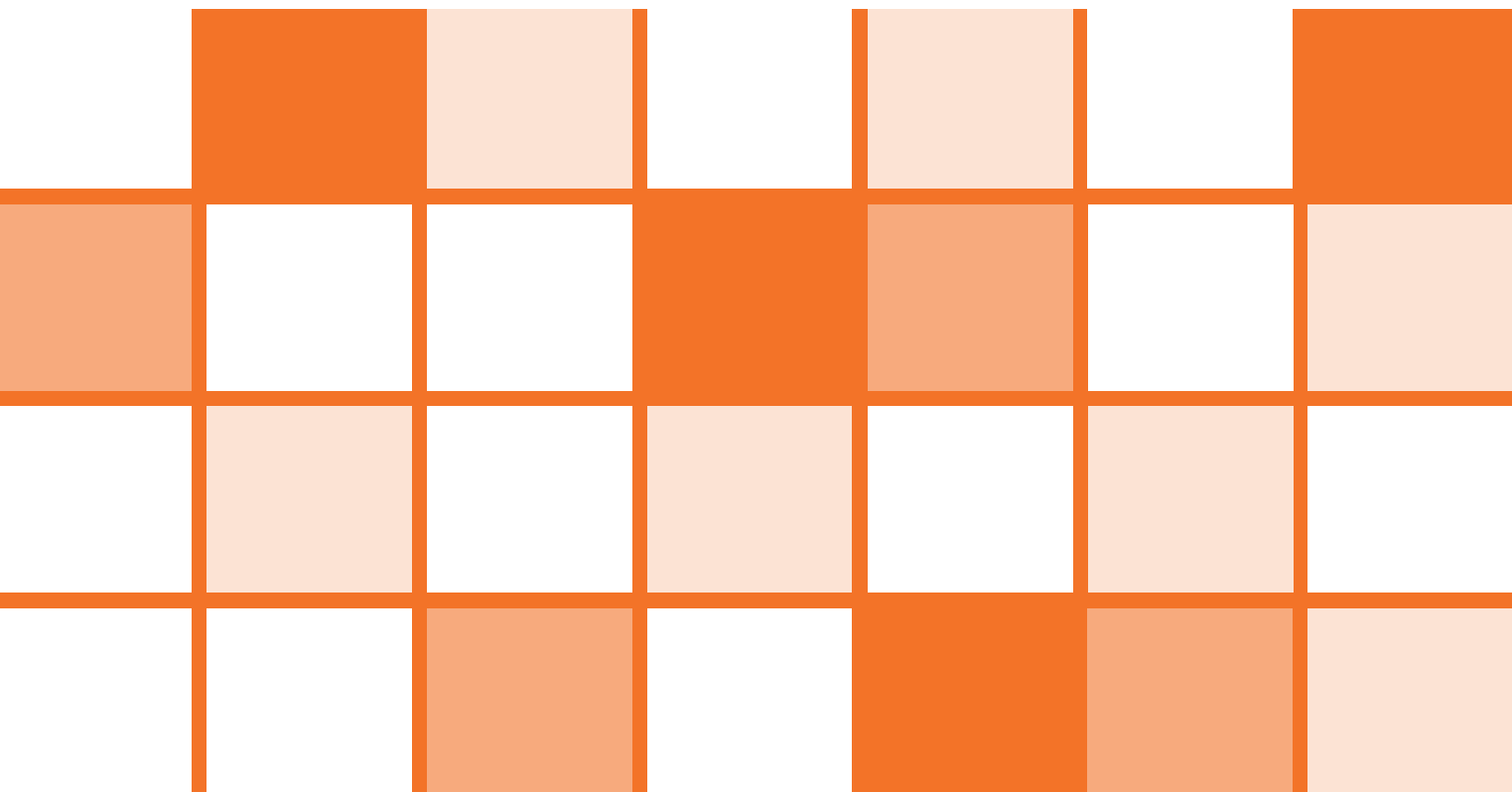
1. The following identifies the tools the City could leverage to create favourable investment conditions for the downtown:
    - a. Offering municipally-owned land at favorable rates or terms to encourage specific types of development;
    - b. Investigating the possibility for applying preferential tax rates to make completed projects more appealing to owners and operators;
    - c. Further leverage the City's grant administration capacity to revitalize vacant properties and reduce vacancy rate, e.g., by tying grant size to length of vacancy (to target the most under used properties), the economic impact of the new business or renovation, the scope of renovations, etc
    - d. Requiring measures to mitigate impacts on neighbouring properties, including set-backs, façade/design elements, and landscaping, among other guidelines;
    - e. Boosting demand capacity and encouraging spending within the downtown year-round by:
      - i. Embracing "winter city" principles in urban design (e.g., orienting buildings and seating to block winds, maximize exposure to sun, installing windbreak structures in open plazas).
    - ii. Boosting spending capacity for residents and directing spending downtown by developing digital currencies and gift card programs redeemable only downtown, such as Guelph, Ontario's successful "Downtown Dollars" program
    - f. Considering additional height, particularly in ways that affect the feasibility of multi-unit developments;
    - g. Streamlining the approval process, ensuring transparency in decision-making, and clearly communicating feedback, including any conditions (e.g., "Not approved" vs. "Not approved, but if...");
    - h. Implementing development charges or fees, such as those collected from building permits, to help the municipality fund the infrastructure necessary to support new developments; and,
    - i. Establishing specific design standards and requirements.
- These tools can be used to support implementation of the Secondary Plan, and to improve the business case for developers to invest in the downtown with the types of projects the community would like to see created.

## Potential Economic Impacts of Downtown Forward

A coordinated development strategy is needed to restore vibrancy, affordability, and economic vitality of the downtown. City documents, including the City's Strategic Plan, Envision St. John's Municipal Plan and Development Regulations, the Development Design Manual, and this Secondary Plan emphasize the potential to reinvigorate the downtown through infill development, heritage rehabilitation, public realm improvements, and better support for mixed-use and residential growth.

2. The downtown is expected to be a mixed-use area that supports a range of housing types, retail and service commercial uses, institutional uses, office uses, recreational uses, entertainment uses, cultural uses, and public service facilities to serve the local community and the city as a whole. To support the function of the downtown as a vibrant core, the following are encouraged:
  - a. Increasing higher density residential and commercial development;
  - b. Affordable housing that supports aging cohorts seeking to downsize, as well as younger individuals, and those for whom cost is a barrier to housing;
  - c. Supporting the night-time economy;
  - d. Supporting a diverse retail mix including independent businesses, pop-ups, and local makers;
  - e. Developing a place brand through consistent signage, heritage markers, street banners, lighting, public art, and digital storytelling; and,
3. The downtown has an important economic role in terms of generating jobs in conjunction with new population growth. To help attract diverse opportunities for employment generating land uses, the City will support a strong and healthy economy within the downtown by:
  - a. Constructing, upgrading, and maintaining high quality, universally accessible municipal service infrastructure systems and public service facilities;
  - b. Facilitating efficient and convenient transportation options for the movement of people and goods; and,
  - c. Planning for an appropriate range of housing to support the local labour force, home occupations, and home-based businesses.
- f. Supporting creative place-making through pop-up markets, temporary installations, and seasonal events. Incentivizing or partnering with local creatives and entrepreneurs to animate the downtown can complement bricks-and-mortar development.





# 4

## planning policies

## 4 Downtown Forward Planning Policies



### 4.1 Introduction

The policies of this Secondary Plan support the desire for the downtown to be a focus for investment and growth in the years to come. The policies are in line with the guiding principles and have the following objectives:

- a. Determine where new development activity should be focused;
- b. Provide clear direction that protects and maintains the unique character of the historic districts in the downtown;
- c. Support the sustainable design of buildings and the use of green infrastructure to contribute to low carbon design, energy use reduction, and natural resource conservation;
- d. Promote a range of housing forms that will facilitate the production of housing that is affordable to the residents of the downtown;
- e. Provide guidance on the various planning and design tools to be implemented to ensure compatible development, including appropriate transitions between different building types, heights, and land uses, taking into account both existing and planned context;
- f. Promote the downtown as a focal area for investment in commercial, institutional, cultural, entertainment, and residential uses;
- g. Enhance the active transportation network to ensure there are corridors between key destinations to promote walking and cycling to encourage daily physical activity;
- h. Ensure that public sector improvement projects are undertaken within a comprehensive design and implementation program that is consistent with the policy objectives of this Secondary Plan; and,
- i. Ensure that public health considerations are a crucial part of decision-making and are fully integrated with requirements for equitable access to a range and mix of housing opportunities, healthy food, clean air and water, and safe environments.



Bioretention planters assist with street greening and have stormwater management benefit.

## 4.2 Green Development and Sustainable Design

This Secondary Plan supports green development and sustainable design through:

- a. Leadership in sustainable forms of green building design and technology, including the incorporation of renewable and alternative energy sources;
- b. An adaptive and resilient downtown through the responsible use of resources, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, reduction of demands on energy, water, and waste systems, and the impacts of climate change; and,
- c. Low impact design and other site design strategies to mitigate environmental impacts and to create a more comfortable urban environment.

### Energy Conservation and Generation

1. To reduce energy consumption, the City shall provide provisions in the Heritage By-Law to support new developments that include energy efficient building design.
2. For new development and redevelopment in the downtown the following shall be encouraged:
  - a. Adaptive re-use of existing buildings to support waste reduction and embedded carbon in construction materials;
  - b. Renewable energy sources, such as solar; and,
  - c. Alternative roofing technologies, such as green roofs.

### Low Impact Development

3. This Secondary Plan supports, in accordance with the Development Design Manual, the use of low impact development (LID) and green infrastructure options in the downtown to increase stormwater infiltration into the soil, evapotranspiration, and filtration.

### Urban Agriculture

The creation of opportunities for local food production and distribution in the downtown is supported by the City to provide access to healthy foods. Martin's Meadow Park and Tessier Park have previously been identified as possible locations for community gardens, however access to water sources has proved a challenge.

4. Development plans and building designs are encouraged to incorporate opportunities for local food production through:
  - a. Community gardens;
  - b. Community orchards;
  - c. Private gardens;
  - d. Roof-top gardens; and,
  - e. Local market space (i.e., a farmer's market) within commercial or mixed-use zones.



The urban forest includes trees and shrubs in parks and open spaces that provide shade and mitigate the urban heat island effect.

5. The City shall investigate opportunities for a sustainable water source at Martin's Meadow Park and Tessier Park to further accommodate community gardens in public spaces.
6. Continue to work with community partners to facilitate community gardens within the downtown.

### 4.3 Urban Forest

The urban forest includes trees and shrubs on public and private lands, provides ecological benefits, improves air quality, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and supports natural carbon sequestration. Trees have also been found to offer a connection to nature in urban environments, provide a comfortable environment and have positive psychological effects.

Tree cover within the downtown is largely concentrated in the residential areas, with many trees located on private property.

1. Where possible, trees or other plantings shall be located throughout the downtown along sidewalks, and in parks and open spaces and other publicly accessible areas. To this end, the City shall:
  - a. Implement a tree replacement ratio of 1:1 where tree removal is unavoidable for new City projects and developments; and,

- b. Seek ways to add the planting of trees or shrubs in all major public works projects.
2. The urban forest shall include a variety of trees that are hardy, resilient, non-invasive, salt tolerant, drought resistant, and low maintenance to enhance the bio-resiliency of the downtown.
3. For new developments, to an extent reasonable and feasible, ensure on-site tree preservation and the incorporation of existing mature trees into the landscape design.

### 4.4 Parks and Open Space

There are several parks and open spaces within the downtown owned and managed by various levels of government. These include the Harbourside Park, War Memorial, Martin's Meadow Park, Tessier Park, and Veteran Square, among other smaller urban plazas or greens.

The St. John's Parks and Open Space Master Plan identified the need for a large urban plaza (a gathering space that serves as a focal point and provides opportunities for social interaction and public event space) within the downtown. The Plan recommended a plaza near the Courthouse, however due to security and accessibility provisions around the Courthouse, this would not be an appropriate location. The downtown currently has a number of small urban plazas that can be



Figure 2: Downtown plaza locations.

improved and further study is needed to determine an appropriate location for an urban plaza that meets the Parks and Open Space Master Plan design guidelines within Planning Area 1 (Downtown).

Consultation with the urban Indigenous community identified the desire to increase Indigenous representation in downtown's public open spaces. This would support Council's Declaration in Support of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to promote and strengthen mutually respectful relationships with the urban Indigenous community in St. John's and with all other First Peoples in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

1. The City shall protect and maintain existing public parks in Planning Area 1 (Downtown) for their continued enjoyment by the public.
2. Open spaces in the downtown shall:
  - a. Be inclusive, secure, and accessible to the public;
  - b. Be compliant with applicable provincial accessibility legislation;
  - c. Prioritize pedestrian comfort;
  - d. Include opportunities for public art; and,
  - e. Be appropriately linked with other elements of the open space system, such as trails.

3. New or redesigned urban plazas shall be located throughout the downtown to expand the number of park spaces and offer opportunities for passive recreation, such as seating (Figure 2). These spaces can be landscaped or hardscaped.
  - a. If the opportunity arises, the City shall acquire land in the following locations for the purpose of a new urban plaza:
    - i. Northwest corner of Duckworth and Prescott Streets, greenspace near Fred Gamberg mural; and,
    - ii. Duckworth Street and King's Road.
  - b. The following locations shall be reviewed and updated or redesigned as needed:
    - Prince Edward Plaza;
    - End of George Street at Queen Street;
    - George's Court (east end of George Street);
    - End of Victoria Street, near LSPU Hall;
    - Area in front of the Mary Brown's Centre;
    - Holdsworth Court;
    - Seating area at Queen Street and New Gower Street intersection; and,
    - Green islands such as along Ordnance Street or Plymouth Road.



War Memorial Park.

4. The City will undertake a needs assessment and feasibility study for a major urban plaza, public open space, or square within Planning Area 1 (Downtown).
5. The City may accept Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) as contributions to the required parkland dedication on a site by site basis through legal agreements where the following have been demonstrated, to the satisfaction of the City:
  - a. Design, programming, and maintenance of the POPS area to the City's satisfaction;
  - b. POPS shall be provided at-grade, shall be universally accessible to the public, and visually and physically accessible from public roads;
  - c. POPS shall have proper signage identifying them as publicly accessible places; and,
  - d. Developments are discouraged from having vehicular access, servicing, and loading facilities directly abutting or facing a POPS.
6. The City shall, in consultation with the local urban Indigenous community, identify spaces that can be used for ceremonies and/or private reflection as a way to increase Indigenous representation in downtown's public open spaces. The spaces may include, but are not limited to, Indigenous artwork, signage, flags, traditional plants, and/or place names.

#### **4.5 Affordable Housing**

The City encourages a range and mix of housing types, styles, tenures, and affordability characteristics in the downtown to meet the economic requirements and affordability needs of a growing and diverse population.

Affordable housing, including community housing, supportive housing, and other types of subsidized non-market housing units, are supported in the downtown through the following policies:

1. Affordable housing, where possible, shall be located in proximity to local community facilities and existing or potential public transit routes and active transportation facilities.
2. Further to Section 4.1 of the Municipal Plan, within Planning Area 1 (Downtown) the City will incentivize affordable housing: by
  - a. Reducing or waiving development and building permit fees, and/or exempting real property tax on real property for projects that are used as part of an affordable housing initiative that is funded, in whole or in part, by the Government of Canada, the Provincial Government or an agency of the Government of Canada or of the Provincial Government;



Downtown residential dwellings within a heritage area that aims to protect the built form and downtown vernacular.



- b. Promoting streamlined grant applications, financing, and project approval processes for affordable housing projects;
- c. Applying for government grants and/or subsidies; and,
- d. Continuing to provide funding to support affordable housing projects.

#### 4.6 Child Care Centres and Personal Care Homes

1. The City shall work with the province and child care centre operators to promote and coordinate the development of child care centres in appropriate locations within Planning Area 1 (Downtown).
2. To accommodate for an aging society within Planning Area 1 (Downtown), personal care homes shall be located in residential and mixed use areas in proximity to transit, amenities, and services.

#### 4.7 Residential Land Use District

The established residential neighbourhoods in the downtown demonstrate a unique historic block pattern of townhouse, semi- and single detached dwellings. In addition to the policies outlined in Section 8.4 of the Municipal Plan, the intent of the Planning Area 1 (Downtown) residential policies is to manage change with the following objectives:

- a. To protect the areas within the established downtown residential neighbourhoods from incompatible forms of development and, at the same time, permit these areas to evolve and be enhanced over time; and,
- b. Support the function of the Residential Mixed (RM) Zone as a transitional area between the established residential areas within the downtown and lands adjacent to the downtown.

##### Residential

1. Recognize and protect established downtown residential neighbourhoods through the retention, conservation, and rehabilitation of the historic block pattern of the established housing stock.
2. Encourage intensification and infill in a form that respects the scale and character of the neighbourhood to increase density to accommodate a changing population and diversity of housing needs.

3. The Residential Downtown (RD), Apartment Downtown (AD), and Apartment Harvey Road (AHR) Zones shall be established in the Development Regulations under the Residential Land Use District and shall be considered within Planning Area 1 (Downtown), which are reflective of existing development patterns, housing stock, lot size, and step backs.
4. Apartment Buildings and Cluster Developments are encouraged in residential neighbourhoods of the downtown and, where possible, located along public transit routes.

### **Residential Mixed**

5. The Residential Mixed (RM) Zone shall achieve a broad mix of commercial, residential, office, and service uses to support transit supportive development along the key transit route of LeMarchant Road, Harvey Road, and Military Road.
6. Revitalization, redevelopment, and infill in the Residential Mixed (RM) Zone shall respect the scale and character of the surrounding neighbourhood. Design strategies include building mass, scale, stepbacks, transition, building orientation, and landscaping. Additional design policies are included under Section 6 Urban Design Policies.

## **4.8 Commercial Land Use District**

The Development Regulations establish a range of commercial and mixed use zones within the downtown. These zones permit a variety of uses to support the viability and livability of the downtown.

In the downtown, many studies conducted over the years have recommended that building height be limited to four (4) storeys to retain the historic character of the downtown, as well as views of the Narrows, Signal Hill, and the Harbour from various public vantage points. In other areas,

concerns about increasing the height and bulk of buildings revolves around the effect on privacy and shadowing on adjoining properties, and generally whether taller buildings “fit” into the landscape. In order to achieve a balance of protecting existing built forms and allowing some intensification, the downtown will be treated as two distinct areas: east and west, with Adelaide Street as the boundary for delineating height in the downtown.

The objective for the east end of the downtown (east of Adelaide Street) is to retain the existing urban form and human scale along the commercial corridors of Duckworth and Water Street, while allowing some additional height.

In the west end of the downtown (west of Adelaide Street), greater building height will be considered. The area’s lower elevation reduces the visual impact of taller buildings on the cityscape and surrounding properties, while the proximity to Pitts Memorial Drive is also key, as this main road brings large volumes of traffic in and out of the downtown daily. Consultation on this Secondary Plan identified the need for convenience shopping within the downtown, such as a grocery store. An increased population can serve as a catalyst to attract grocery stores and this in turn ensures that services and amenities are available to residents within walking distance.

1. Commercial Downtown Zones shall be established within the Development Regulations and considered within Planning Area 1 (Downtown), while the Commercial Downtown Zone shall only be considered in the west end (west of Adelaide Street).
2. The downtown is recognized as a special multi-use commercial area that includes residential, institutional, entertainment, and public space uses, as well as retail and service uses.



Retail along the historic Water Street corridor.

3. Within the Commercial Land Use District along Harbour Drive, Water Street, Duckworth Street, New Gower Street, and surrounding areas, the downtown will be treated as two distinct areas: east and west. Adelaide Street will be the boundary for delineating height in the downtown.
4. The City shall preserve and strengthen the role of the downtown as a major regional employment centre.
5. Support traditional retail shopping streets as centres of community activity by:
  - a. Encouraging good quality development that accounts for type, density and form compatible with the character of the area and adjacent uses;
  - b. Ensuring pedestrian-friendly street frontages; and,
  - c. Improving and maintaining infrastructure and public amenities such as transit and parking facilities, street furniture, and landscaping.
6. Ensure development in the downtown features unique, context sensitive designs, and promotes public safety and security.
7. Enhance downtown livability by increasing amenities to support a desirable urban community.

8. The City will undertake a Retail/Service Commercial Market Study to determine the viability of local serving uses such as a grocery store in the downtown.

### **Historic Main Streets (Water Street, Duckworth Street, and Surrounding Areas)**

It is an objective of this Secondary Plan to promote the economic vitality of the historic main streets of Water Street and Duckworth Street within a context of historic preservation, while at the same time encouraging adaptive reuse, redevelopment, and intensification, where appropriate. This area generally coincides with the Commercial Downtown Mixed (CM) Zone.

9. High activity uses that animate the street frontage and encourage foot traffic are required at-grade abutting Water and Duckworth Streets, and are encouraged at-grade along the side streets. Dwelling Units shall be considered in the second storey or higher.
10. New development must be designed to reflect the heritage character of these streets, and be compatible with existing development in accordance with the Heritage By-law.
11. The City will investigate alternative standards and regulations to seek ways to increase residential uses in upper storeys, with the



Mix of retail and office along the Water Street corridor.

option for live-work potential. This will allow the maximum conservation of a building in a Heritage Area while still ensuring the health and safety of the occupants and the public.

12. The City will conduct further study to determine where additional height may be appropriate along Water Street, Duckworth Street, and surrounding commercial side streets.

a. Council may consider additional height for properties currently within the Commercial Downtown Mixed (CDM) Zone through a rezoning process to the Commercial Downtown Mixed 2 (CDM2). In considering requests for rezoning, Council shall consider all appropriate policies set out in the Municipal Plan and this Secondary Plan, require a Land Use Report, and have regard for the following:

- i. Potential for restoration, rehabilitation, damage or destruction of historic buildings or sites;
- ii. The appropriate provision of building orientation;
- iii. Compatibility of the development in terms of height, scale, lot coverage, and bulk with adjacent properties. In accordance with the Heritage By-Law, the existing scale of buildings along the streetscape, along with the area's cultural and architectural significance, will

guide overall building design and will help with determining the appropriate scale and scope of new buildings and redevelopment.

- iv. Appropriate transition to adjacent low-rise built-forms and provisions for stepbacks, public space, and parking standards to retain the historic character of the downtown;
- v. Impacts on adjacent properties with respect to wind or shadowing; and,
- vi. Whether the proposal is in conformity with the intent of the Municipal Plan and this Secondary Plan.

### Commercial Downtown

The Commercial Downtown (CD) Zone is generally located west of Adelaide Street. This area is ideally suited for higher density uses due to the lower elevation, access to Pitts Memorial Drive, and development block sizes that can accommodate larger development opportunities.

13. To support the adaptive reuse of unused or underutilized commercial and office spaces in the Commercial Downtown (CD) Zone the City will consider rezoning these uses for residential uses. This will allow property owners to renovate for much-needed high-density housing in the downtown core.

14. Building height shall be subject to heritage requirements, the appropriate building orientation, setbacks, landscaping, and parking standards.
15. In accordance with the Heritage By-law and Section 6 of this Secondary Plan, the perceived mass of taller buildings shall be reduced through design measures which may include vertical articulation of the facades, building setbacks at the upper floors, and the use of a podium and tower built-form.
16. A Land Use Report shall be required for proposed developments within the Commercial Downtown (CD) Zone. The Land Use Report shall demonstrate mitigation of potential shadow or wind impacts on existing or proposed pedestrian routes, public spaces, and adjacent development, through technical studies including a wind study and/or sun/shadow study. The Land Use Report may also require analysis to provide angular plane guidance.

### **Pedestrian Mall**

The Pedestrian Mall is a cultural, tourist, and commercial anchor destination in the downtown. Water Street is a shared street during the pedestrian mall giving priority to pedestrians and expanding the retail uses onto the street.

17. The City supports the continuation of the Pedestrian Mall on Water Street as a seasonal summer event and will continue to evaluate the event on an ongoing basis.

### **George Street**

18. The City supports the vibrant entertainment area centered on George Street. This two block long area, as identified as the George Street Entertainment Area on Schedule 2: Character Areas and Corridors, will be maintained as an entertainment destination in the downtown.

19. The uses within this entertainment area will continue to function as a focal point for commerce and hospitality in the City. To support a wider range of activities and to attract users during the day the City will work with existing property owners and interested parties to allow small scale kiosks or market opportunities in George's Court, in accordance with the St. John's Mobile Vending By-Law.

### **Commercial Mixed Use**

Within Planning Area 1 (Downtown), the Commercial Mixed Use (CM) Zone is typically located along transit routes and supports mixed-use buildings with retail or office at the ground level and some areas with residential above.

20. The Commercial Mixed Use (CM) Zone will continue to support multi-storey mixed-use buildings with commercial uses at the ground level and residential above.
21. New development in the CM Zone shall act as a transitional use to the adjacent low-rise residential uses. Consideration must be given to setbacks, site landscaping, and parking.

### **Commercial Office Hotel**

The east end of the downtown includes office and hotel uses within the Commercial Office Hotel (COH) Zone.

22. The east end of Planning Area 1 (Downtown) will continue to support office, hotel, and similar uses as part of the business function of the downtown.

### **Commercial Atlantic Place**

23. Recognition of Atlantic Place development at 215 Water Street, where the City shall create a zone that acknowledges use of the existing development.



Industrial use along the harbour that supports its role as a working port.

### A.P. Parking Garage

24. Recognition of the Atlantic Place Parking Garage at 1 Clift's-Baird's Cove, where the City shall create a zone that acknowledges use of the existing development and other ancillary uses.
25. The future redevelopment of the Atlantic Place Parking Garage shall enhance the street edge along Harbour Drive.

## 4.9 Industrial Land Use District

This Secondary Plan recognizes the importance of the Port of St. John's and supports its continuation as a working port. Further, there has been an emergence of the ocean technology and energy sectors in St. John's. The Industrial lands around the harbour are recognized as an appropriate location to foster this sector. Space may be used for offices, training, workshops, research and development, and product testing.

1. The City will support the growing ocean technology sector in the downtown and around the harbour.

### The Port

2. Recognize the importance of the Port of St. John's as a marine industrial area and support its continuation as a working port within the City.

3. Work with the St. John's Port Authority to facilitate the continued operation of the Port catering to the fishery, offshore oil and gas industry, the movement of goods through the container terminal, ship repair facilities, Coast Guard operations, and a growing volume of cruise ship and recreational boating traffic.
4. Ensure that land use bordering land owned by the St. John's Port Authority is planned and developed in a manner that is compatible with a working harbour environment.
5. Support the functioning of the Port through access to municipal services and connections to the regional transportation network and work with the St. John's Port Authority to ensure that access to, and egress from the port, are protected.
6. Support continued expansion of the cruise ship industry by working with the St. John's Port Authority to continue to improve infrastructure, facilities, and services.
7. Continue to seek opportunities to acquire land along Harbour Drive for public waterfront access.

#### 4.10 Institutional Land Use District

Many of the Institutional lands are in transition and may become prime areas for redevelopment. New development, or opportunities for retrofitting, must be sensitively considered to ensure an appropriate fit within the existing context of well-established neighbourhoods.

1. The Institutional Downtown Zone shall establish those uses which are permitted and discretionary, as outlined within the Development Regulations, and considered within the Planning Area 1 (Downtown).
2. As existing buildings within the Institutional Land Use District are repurposed or redeveloped for new uses, the building shall retain the institutional character of the original building, unless otherwise approved by Council.

#### 4.11 Redevelopment

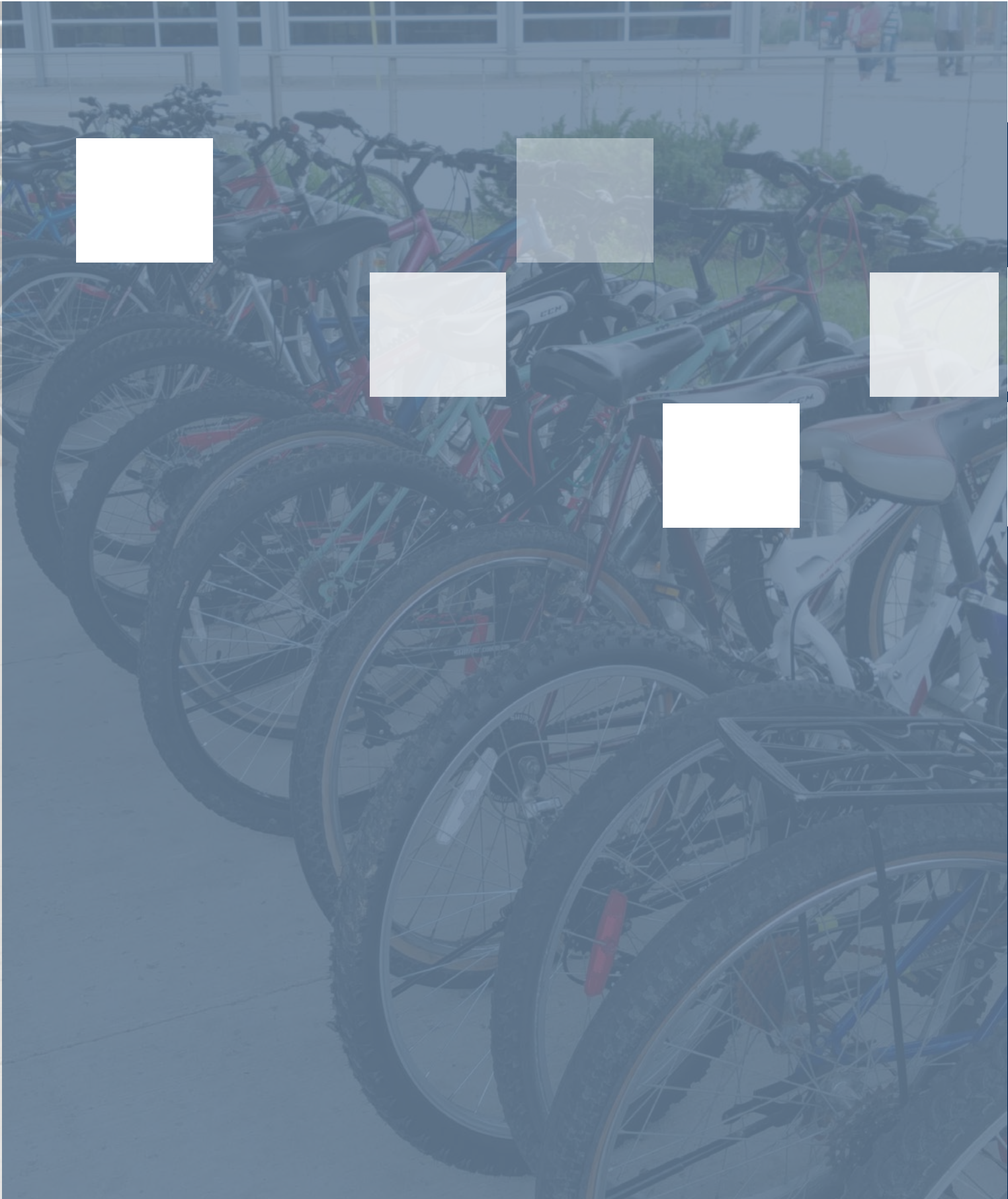
The downtown has limited undeveloped parcels available for development with the majority of redevelopment directed to the adaptive reuse or conversion of vacant or underutilized buildings, or demolition of vacant buildings.

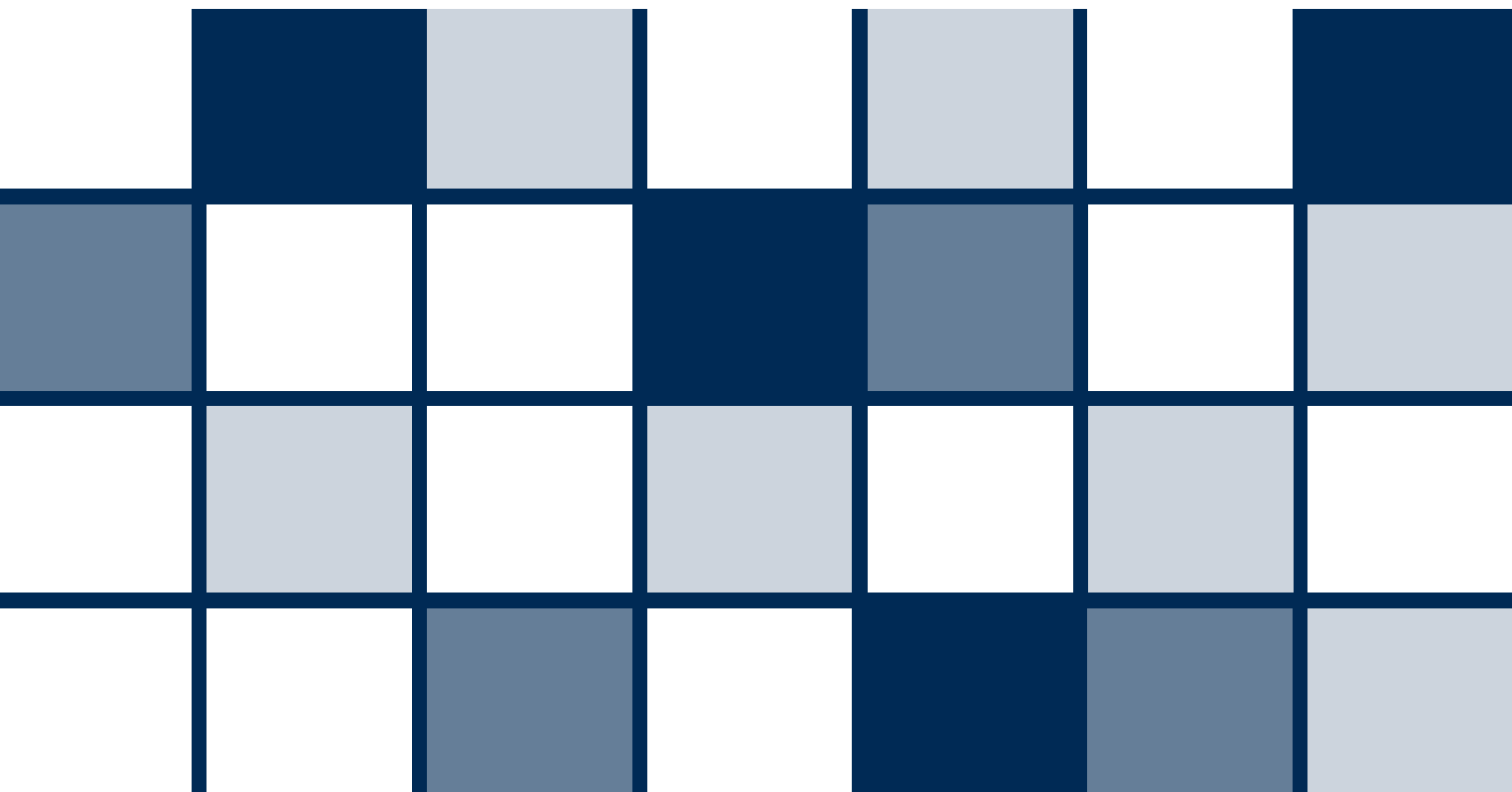
1. Development of undeveloped parcels or redevelopment of existing buildings shall:
  - a. Ensure that enhanced connections to the downtown's parks and trails are provided;
  - b. Enhance on-site pedestrian elements; and,
  - c. Incorporate appropriate conservation and integration of any on-site Heritage Building, in accordance with the Heritage By-law.
2. Adaptive reuse of existing vacant buildings for residential dwellings is encouraged to expand the variety of housing options, utilize existing structures to avoid demolition, and to support population growth in the downtown.

3. Land assembly within Heritage Area 3 is supported for intensification purposes to create viable development parcels.

#### 4.12 Service Infrastructure and Utilities

1. Develop necessary municipal service infrastructure enhancements and undertake improvements to the existing servicing infrastructure, where necessary, to support growth in the downtown.
2. In planning for the expansion of existing and planned transportation and/or infrastructure corridors, the City will encourage the co-location of linear utilities and communication/telecommunication facilities.
3. When infrastructure is upgraded or replaced, the City will update any affected streets to improve walkability and overall connections.





# 5

## mobility policies

## 5 Mobility Policies



### 5.1 Introduction

The mobility policies support a transportation network that enables the movement of pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, or drivers, in a manner that is accessible, safe, and inclusive. St. John's is one of the oldest cities in North America and the historic layout of narrow and winding streets in the downtown has remained. The narrow streets combined with steep grades, stairs, on-street parking, and inconsistent streetscapes creates many challenges for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as individuals with mobility challenges.

The policies of this Secondary Plan support the need to build a safe, multi-modal, and integrated transportation system, comprised of a road network, an active transportation network, and a transit network, that enables the safe and efficient movement of people and goods in the downtown.

In line with the City's strategic goals, mode share targets and Bike St John's Master Plan, this Secondary Plan highlights:

- a. The existing downtown street pattern and the challenges with grades and accessibility;
- b. The need to encourage active modes of travel - public transit, cycling, wheeling, and walking - and support a mode shift away from personal motor vehicle travel; and,
- c. The importance of facilitating goods movements and supporting business downtown.



Water Street with two lanes of traffic and lay-by parking.

## 5.2 Integrated Mobility Plan

Through the Secondary Plan public consultation, the public noted a desire for improved sustainable transportation and transit options. Downtown residents and users would like wider sidewalks, cycling infrastructure, improved accessibility, easier ways to move north and south within downtown, park-and-ride options, and reliable, convenient, and dependable public transit. As the City seeks ways to improve walking, cycling, and transit, this needs to be balanced with facilitation of goods movements including heavy truck traffic to and from Harbour Drive for the working harbour.

The Bike St. John's Master Plan guides opportunities for cycling in the city and identifies a network of citywide cycling routes outside of the downtown. A network of cycling routes needs to be developed downtown which balances the competing needs of personal vehicles, goods movement, emergency services, parking, transit and others.

Given the complexity of the transportation network downtown, it is recommended that the entire downtown transportation network and transit services be reviewed through an Integrated Mobility Plan. An Integrated Mobility Plan will address how people move throughout the downtown and integrates ways to travel, such as streets, trails, and transit, and guides future investment.

1. An Integrated Mobility Plan shall be prepared to plan for change and growth and to guide how people and goods move in and through the downtown. The Integrated Mobility Plan will:
  - a. Identify a network of connected cycling routes and facilities downtown that supports the vision and implementation of the Bike St John's Master Plan;
  - b. Identify actions to improve active modes of travel - public transit, cycling, wheeling, and walking - and support a mode shift away from personal motor vehicle travel;
  - c. Identify improvements for goods movement routes to/from and through downtown harbour and businesses; and,
  - d. Identify and work within the local downtown context, which includes constrained narrow rights of way, steep grades, heavy truck traffic, the annual Pedestrian Mall, and other elements.



Bike lanes expand the active transportation opportunities in the downtown.

### 5.3 Road Network

The following policies will apply until an Integrated Mobility Plan is developed.

1. The Road Network, as shown on **Schedule 1: Transportation Network** is fine grained and reflects the historic pattern of development in the downtown. Where possible, the existing downtown street pattern will be maintained as it contributes to the scale and character of the downtown.
2. Through consultation with George Street business and property owners, and the George Street Association, the City will work toward improving infrastructure on George Street. The City will investigate classifying George Street as a shared street with priority for pedestrians.
3. The Harbour Drive right of way is to be reviewed and rehabilitated to better accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, cruise ship visitors, and goods movement.

### 5.4 Active Transportation

The downtown is very walkable in terms of distance between destinations with the opportunity to expand the bicycle network and bike ridership. Downtown has the highest active transportation mode share in the city according to census journey-to-work data. This makes it an excellent place to further support pedestrian investments. Policies in this plan will provide for enhanced connectivity to maximize access to, from, and within the downtown to encourage walking and cycling and other non-motorized forms of transportation.

The following policies will apply until an Integrated Mobility Plan is developed.

1. The City shall improve accessibility of sidewalks and laneways.
2. Install pedestrian wayfinding throughout the downtown in accordance with the Northeast Avalon Wayfinding Program.
3. Where possible, streetscape improvements within Planning Area 1 (Downtown) shall be incorporated into the City's ongoing capital works projects.
4. Bicycle parking facilities, including secure indoor parking, shall be provided for at all major public destinations, for example, City Hall and cultural facilities.



Existing William's Lane entrance off Water Street.



Laneway improvements through public art, lighting, and seating.

## 5.5 Public Transit

The downtown is served year-round by Metrobus routes with bus stops located within, or directly adjacent to, the downtown.

1. The City will work with the St. John's Transportation Commission to support public transit service, including improving the frequency of service in the downtown and implementing the recommendations from the St. John's Transit Service Review, 2019.
2. The City shall improve transit service facilities, including bus shelters, benches, bike racks, and lay-bys, where feasible, at key destinations along the main transit routes, such as LeMarchant Road and Water Street.

## 5.5 Laneways

The downtown includes several historic laneways that provide critical north-south pedestrian connections between Duckworth, Water, and George Streets, provide critical servicing areas for businesses, and provide a visual and physical break between larger blocks. McMurdo's Lane, Solomon's Lane, and the Courthouse Steps are the most frequently used of the laneways. Less frequently used are Mahon's Lane and William's Lane, and several others.

Activating a laneway may include adding artwork, seating, or programming to create a sense of place. The benefits of enhancement and activation can support businesses, social and cultural expression, heritage and architecture, active transportation, and tourism. Any improvements should be completed in consultation with the community.

1. The City will maintain, enhance, and promote the existing pedestrian laneways and paths in the downtown. The City will create new laneways where needed to improve pedestrian connectivity.
2. Laneways shall be enhanced to make them welcoming, safe, and pedestrian-friendly.



Surface parking lot that includes parking courts, plantings, lighting, and pedestrian walkways.

3. To improve the visual appeal of the laneways, the City may consider the following:

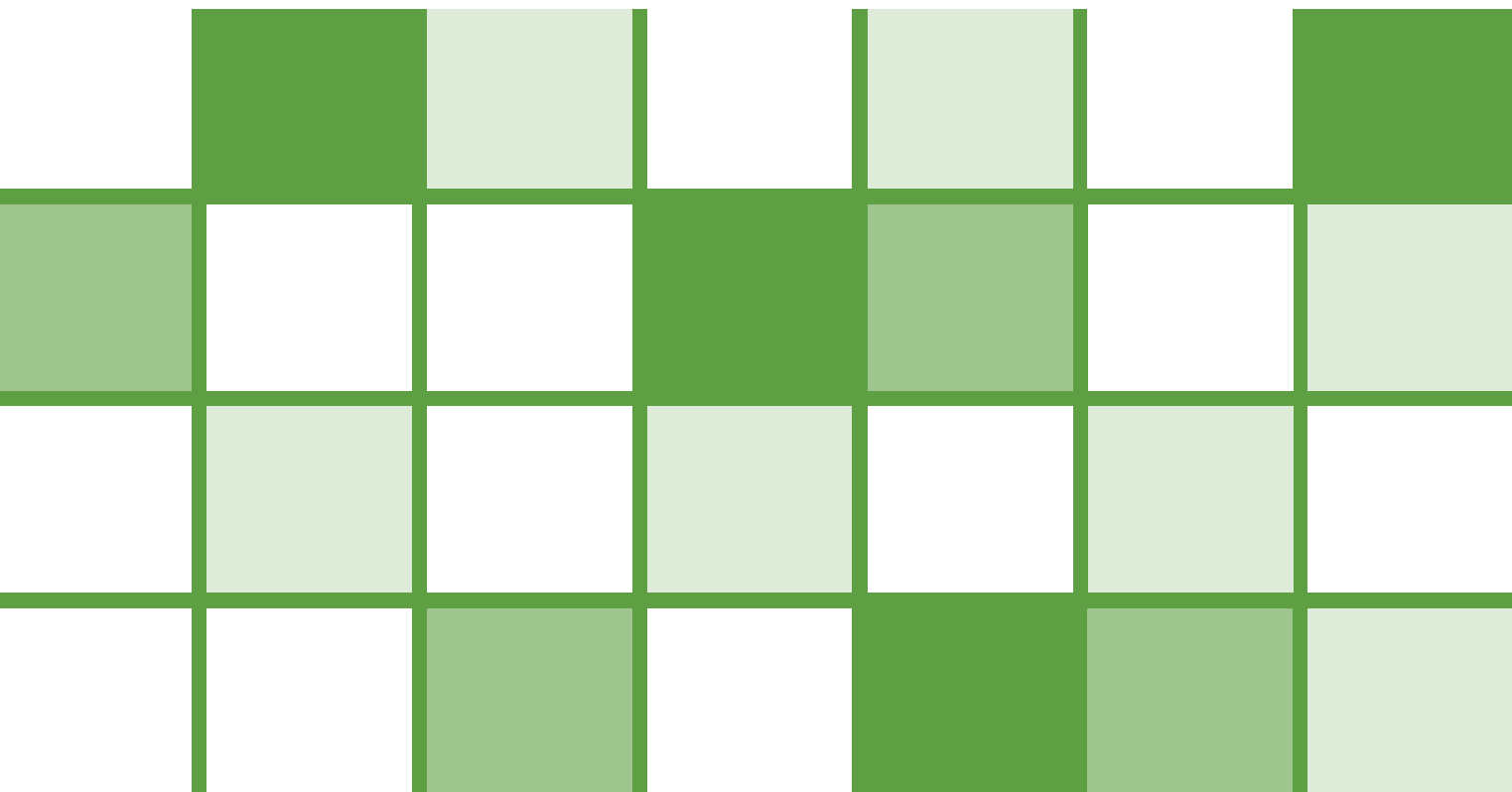
- a. Enhance laneway signage along the sidewalk, in addition to the existing arches, to invite people to use the laneways and direct users to other downtown assets;
- b. Improve visibility and safety through pedestrian-oriented lighting in the narrow laneways, such as McMurdo's Lane, Mahon's Lane, and William's Lane;
- c. Include container planting, raised planting beds, and/or vertical planting (green facades, living walls);
- d. Provide clear wayfinding signage in accordance with the Northeast Avalon Wayfinding Program, as well as messaging that the laneways are for pedestrian use;
- e. Provide consistent sidewalk markings along all laneways to assist with identifying entrances;
- f. Invite local Indigenous visual artists to illustrate the history of the downtown, honouring the first people to walk on this land; and,
- g. Where space permits, provide benches/seating.

## 5.6 Parking

1. The downtown shall continue to be served by a range of parking facilities, including but not limited to parking garages, small public and private surface parking lots, and on-street parking.
2. To reduce the impact of surface parking and to provide at-grade amenity areas, the provision of parking garages shall be encouraged for higher density forms of development, wherever possible.
3. Where feasible, surface parking shall be located to the rear of the main building and/or within the side yard.
4. Any parking garage located adjacent to a public street shall be designed in accordance with the Heritage By-Law to complement and integrate with adjacent buildings and the streetscape.
5. Along Water Street and Duckworth Street, above-ground parking garages shall incorporate commercial uses at the ground floor, excepting access to the parking garage.

6. The City shall improve wayfinding signage for parking along Arterial and Collector Roads to direct residents and visitors to downtown parking facilities.
7. All new development shall include parking for bicycles, in accordance with the City's Development Regulations and Development Design Manual.
8. The City will investigate appropriate locations for the installation of bike racks along sidewalks and streets in commercial areas.





# 6

## urban design policies

## 6 Urban Design Policies



### 6.1 Urban Design Intent and Objectives

This Chapter, in coordination with Section 4.7 of the Municipal Plan, establishes the framework for the St. John's Heritage By-Law.

The City of St. John's Heritage By-Law designates four Heritage Areas. Three of the four Heritage Areas, Heritage Area 1, 2, and 3, fall within the downtown (Figure 3).

It is the intent of this Secondary Plan to conserve significant heritage resources including buildings, streetscapes, and areas within Planning Area 1 (Downtown). Heritage Areas are to be protected and maintained in keeping with the provisions of the City's Heritage By-Law and associated Heritage Design Standards.

Further, the intent is to ensure an inviting and distinctive downtown that respects the integrity of the past, ensures sensitive integration of new development, and helps to revitalize the downtown. The policies in this section implement the guiding principles and intent, and have the following objectives:

- a. Ensure an attractive and distinctive downtown that has outstanding architecture that both respects the heritage character and fits well within the context of visual diversity, interest, and beauty;
- b. Promote sensitive integration of new development with existing development through the requirement for compatible development;
- c. Establish a variety of beautiful public gathering spaces; and,
- d. Create vibrant, safe, and comfortable pedestrian-oriented streets.



Figure 3: Downtown Heritage Areas.

## 6.2 Character Areas and Corridors

The City will guide development in Planning Area 1 (Downtown) by dividing unique areas into Character Areas and Corridors, as shown on **Schedule 2: Character Areas and Corridors**. Each Character Area and Corridor is linked to policies in this Chapter, which provide guidance on how to sensitively integrate renovations and new development within the Heritage Areas.

1. The City will define unique areas of the downtown as Character Areas and Corridors, as shown on **Schedule 2: Character Areas and Corridors** to guide development.



Duckworth Street historic retail character.

### 6.2.1 Duckworth Street and Water Street Corridors

Duckworth and Water Streets represent the City's historic Main Streets and are located within the Commercial Downtown Mixed (CDM) Zone.

The intent along these streets is to ensure that new buildings fit within the historic context and contribute to the main street character of these streets. Most buildings are located close to and parallel with the street, forming a streetwall that frames the sidewalk or street. The lot fabric is fine-grained, with small scale retail and restaurant uses occupying the ground floor of most buildings.

1. In accordance with the Heritage By-Law and Sign By-Law, development in the form of renovations, additions, and newly constructed buildings shall:
  - a. Be sensitively integrated with the existing context and character of the area.
  - b. Be complementary to the variety of design, colour, and construction materials that is found in the area;
  - c. Maintain compatible architectural expressions in the design of roofs, windows, doors, porches, and signs; and,
  - d. Maintain a pedestrian-scaled streetwall.

### 6.2.2 Downtown Core Area

The Downtown Core Area generally coincides with the Commercial Downtown (CD) Zone and represents one of the City's business districts. The area's lower elevation reduces the visual impact of taller buildings on the cityscape and surrounding properties. Buildings in the area are of differing architectural styles including some historic housing forms interspersed amongst newer office buildings, hotels, and entertainment facilities. Development parcels are typically larger in this area and can accommodate higher density development.

1. Ensure that new buildings contribute to a pedestrian-scaled streetscape and provide appropriate massing transition to adjacent residential neighbourhoods.
2. In accordance with the Heritage By-Law, development of buildings with a building height of 12 metres or greater shall:
  - a. Have buildings that have a defined base, middle, and top component;
  - b. Have building bases/podiums that are well articulated and animated;
  - c. Be oriented to the street, with main entrances and windows facing the street; and,
  - d. Locate parking away from the street frontage or in a parking garage, and where appropriate, be screened from public view.



Mixed-use development that incorporates a heritage building with active uses on the ground floor and residential above.

### 6.2.3 Mixed-Use Avenue

The Mixed-Use Avenue is focused on the south side of LeMarchant Road, Harvey Road, and Military Road, and extends along the northern boundary of the Planning Area 1 (Downtown). The Mixed-Use Avenue includes land in a variety of zones and is envisioned to have a mix of townhouse and apartment building forms lining the street. There is opportunity to have commercial uses in this area.

1. Ensure new buildings form a pedestrian-scaled streetwall that frames the public realm and provides opportunities for enhanced streetscaping including landscaping and trees that contribute to the urban tree canopy.
  - a. The streetwall shall have a building line setback that is compatible with the established properties along the street.
2. In accordance with the Heritage By-Law, development shall:
  - a. Have buildings oriented toward the street and located to frame the street;
  - b. Have main building façades, including main entrances and windows, facing the street;
  - c. Have well articulated building façades;

- d. Locate parking behind buildings, integrated into the building and accessed from the side/rear, in parking garages or located away from the street frontage, and be screened from public view; and,
- e. Provide appropriate transition to the Residential Neighbourhood Character Area in accordance with Section 4.4 of the Municipal Plan.

### 6.2.4 Residential Neighbourhood

The policies of the Municipal Plan ensure that the unique form of downtown residential neighbourhoods is retained and that building height is consistent with the existing built form and applicable Development Regulations.

1. Infill development shall be in accordance with the Heritage By-Law.



George Street Entertainment Area.

### 6.2.5 George Street Entertainment Area

George Street, between Becks Cove and Queen Street, is a unique destination that attracts residents, students, tourists, and the broader community to the downtown. The street is characterized by a concentration of restaurants, bars and entertainment venues. While George Street is a central part of the downtown entertainment area, upgrades are required to improve placemaking and enhance the downtown public space.

1. The City will investigate developing and enhancing George Street as a shared street giving priority to pedestrians.
2. In accordance with the Heritage By-Law, at grade façades along George Street shall incorporate main building entrances and window treatments at street level.
3. The City will prioritize the undergrounding of the electrical utilities on George Street.
4. The City will work with the George Street businesses and property owners to redesign the streetscape and public realm, as per the George Street Prince Edward Plaza & Main Stage Revitalization Report and subsequent designs.
5. Key elements for George Street improvements include:
  - a. Removal of any demarcation between pedestrians and the street such as curbs and bollards;

- b. Pedestrian priority for the entire right-of-way;
- c. Wayfinding signage;
- d. Accessible routes along building lines;
- e. Restricted loading times;
- f. Street furniture and landscaping; and,
- g. Pedestrian-scaled hardscape materials such as pavers.

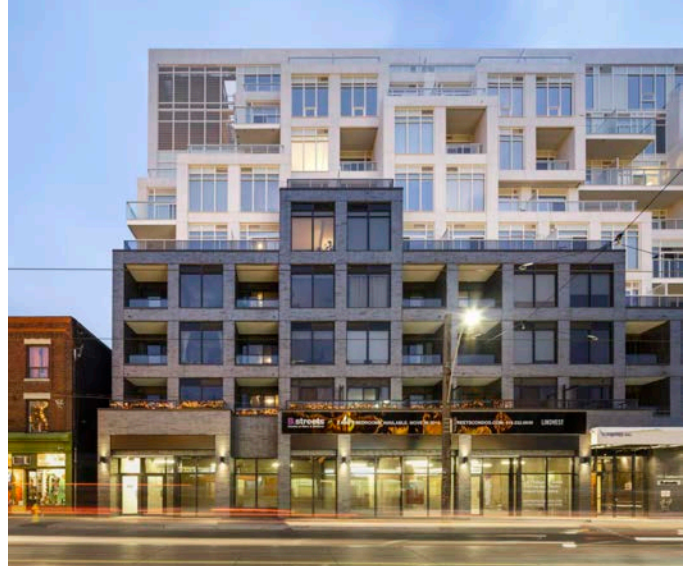
### 6.2.6 Harbour Area

The Harbour Area generally coincides with the Industrial General (IG) Zone and represents the City's industrial, working harbour. Buildings in the area are related to the working harbour and are encouraged to include semi-industrial services and clean industries.

1. In accordance with the Heritage By-Law, development shall:
  - a. Contribute to a pedestrian-scaled streetscape with articulated and animated ground floors that address the street;
  - b. Be oriented to the street, with main entrances and windows facing the street; and,
  - c. Locate parking away from the street frontage or in structures, and where appropriate, be screened from public view.



Low-rise building with articulated architectural features.



High-rise building with a stepback and change in materials between the podium and the tower.

## 6.3 Design Policies for Buildings

An array of building types are encouraged throughout the downtown. It is the intent of this Secondary Plan that built form be the key consideration in renovations and new developments. The following policies outline design considerations based on building height.

### 6.3.1 Low-Rise Buildings

1. For the purpose of this Section, Low-Rise Buildings have a building height between 8.0 metres to 12.0 metres.
2. In accordance with the Heritage By-Law, proposals for Low-Rise Buildings shall:
  - a. Be orientated toward the street with setbacks that are compatible with the adjacent properties along the street;
  - b. Have a main entrance clearly visible from the street. Front porches are encouraged as features that increase the prominence of the front entrance; and,
  - c. Ensure driveways and/or garage doors do not dominate the front façade of the primary building or the view from the street.

### 6.3.2 Mid-Rise and High-Rise Buildings

1. For the purpose of this Section, Mid-Rise Buildings are considered buildings with a building height between 12.1 metres to 27.0 metres, and High-Rise Buildings have a building height between 27.1 metres to 54.0 metres.
2. In accordance with the Heritage By-Law, Mid-Rise Buildings 18.0 metres or greater and High-Rise Buildings shall have a podium element and a tower element.
3. The City will encourage, where appropriate, roofs and terraces as spaces for private and communal outdoor patios, decks, and gardens. Green roofs are also encouraged.



Streetscape enhancements including special paving, plantings, and separation from traffic provide welcoming and safe public spaces.

## 6.4 Design Policies for the Public Realm

The successful design of the public realm relies on creating diverse, welcoming, safe, and accessible public spaces.

The public realm is made up of streetscapes and their component elements, public art, gateways, and viewscales. In the downtown, the comprehensive and coordinated design of these elements is key to providing a high-quality, well-functioning public realm that creates a sense of place.

### 6.4.1 Streetscapes

Streetscape design places an emphasis on creating comfortable and convenient facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. Streets can be engaging and safe outdoor places with trees and plants, seating, shade, and public art.

Streetscapes are composed of sidewalks, street trees, street furnishings, signage, landscaping, utilities, lighting, and other elements in the street. The intent of streetscape design is to arrange and coordinate these elements.

1. The City shall take a coordinated approach in the planning and design of streetscape improvements, including but not limited to, coordinating signage, sidewalks, cycling pathways, tree planting, lighting, parking areas, landscaping, and adjacent public spaces, as applicable.
2. When undertaking infrastructure upgrades on George Street and Duckworth Street, the City shall incorporate streetscape improvements.
3. The City shall place priority on streetscape elements that enhance the pedestrian realm and improve pedestrian safety, such as crosswalks, mid-block connections, and access to transit.

### 6.4.2 Harbour Drive

St. John's Harbour is a defining feature of the downtown and integral to its image and identity. Although access to the water is restricted, views and vistas to the harbour are afforded by way of Harbour Drive and the many streets that connect to it.

Harbour Drive is a public street that runs parallel to St. John's Harbour, providing access to the port and industrial lands that are located along the water's edge. The intent for Harbour Drive is to improve the



Examples of improvements to Harbour Drive that could include public art, paving, planters, benches, and lighting.

pedestrian environment, enhance the streetscape, and provide designs that are unified with the rest of the downtown. It is recognized that Harbour Drive is a busy road with heavy vehicle/transport truck traffic but enhancements can be made to balance the needs of all users.

1. Provide an enhanced pedestrian zone along the north side of Harbour Drive, including, where appropriate:
  - a. Widened sidewalks, seating, street trees, and landscaping;
  - b. Wayfinding and interpretive signage;
  - c. Special paving at intersections with north-south streets;
  - d. Special paving to identify the on-street parking lane;
  - e. Pedestrian oriented lighting;
  - f. Opportunities for public art; and,
  - g. Landscape buffering between parking, loading, back-of-house areas, etc., and pedestrian zones.

### 6.4.3 Public Art

Public art will be an important element of downtown’s public realm, adding beauty and interest to streetscapes, as well as parks, open spaces, and buildings.

There is a desire for Indigenous representation in the downtown public realm. Further, public consultation identified the need for a Residential School Survivors Monument. Proposed locations for the monument included areas within Planning Area 1 (Downtown), areas peripheral to the downtown, and some beyond.

1. For the purposes of this Secondary Plan, public art is defined as visual art that exists in the public realm of the downtown, either outdoors or indoors, and builds a visually rich environment. It is accessible to the community and encourages interaction between residents, visitors, and people who work in the area.
2. Significant public projects, including but not limited to, streetscape improvements, transit facilities, new public buildings, and new open spaces, shall include or provide for a public art element.

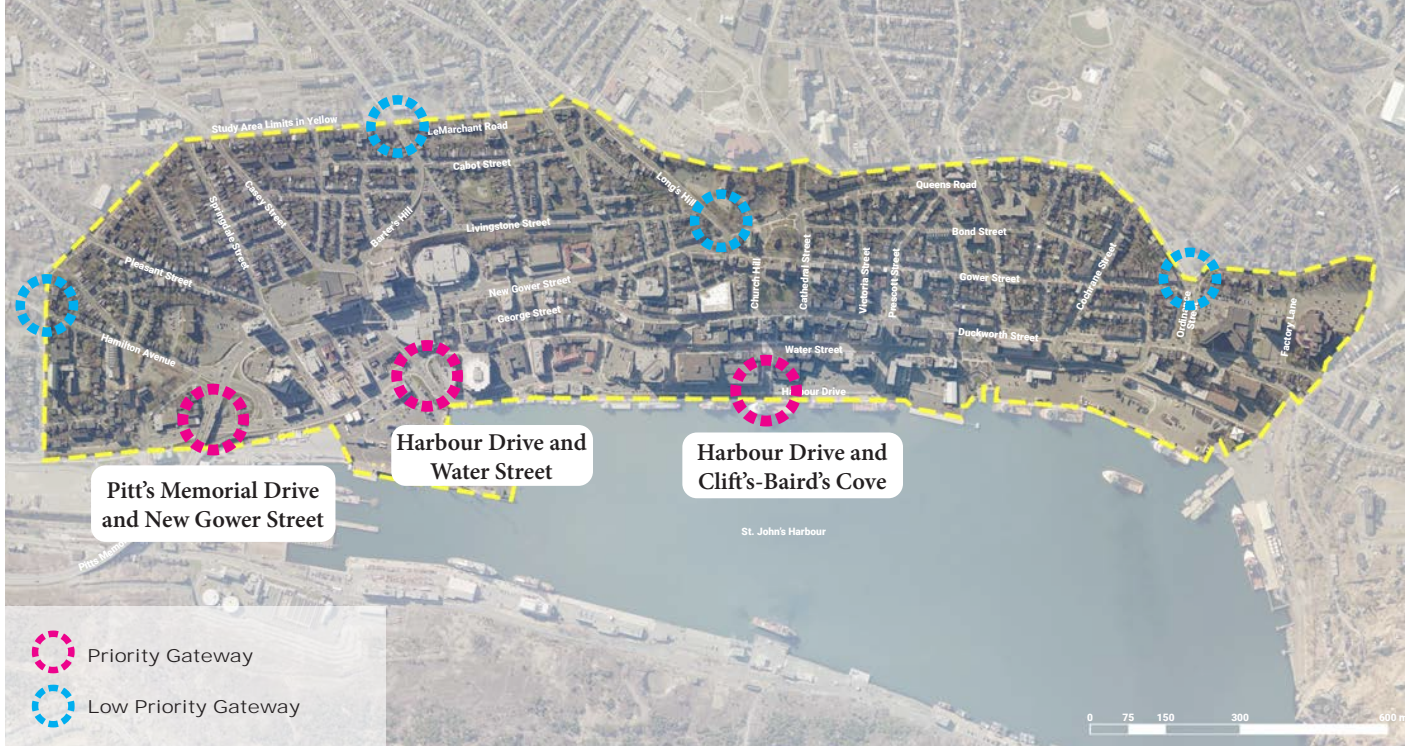


Figure 4: Downtown gateway locations.

3. Public art shall be located in areas that are publicly accessible, highly visible, and that have cultural significance. City-owned public space with these attributes may include, but is not limited to, parks, road allowances, boulevards, streets, courtyards, squares, and bridges, as well as building exteriors, foyers, concourses, and significant interior public areas of municipal buildings.
4. Through further input from the St. John's urban Indigenous community, the City will consider locating a Residential School Survivors Monument in the downtown. The location for the monument shall:
  - a. Consider decolonizing the place name of any location chosen;
  - b. Ensure the space is accessible and welcoming for everyone;
  - c. Ensure the monument is visible, prominent, and easy to find; and,
  - d. Incorporate Indigenous elements such as art, plants, ceremony spaces, and storytelling.

#### 6.4.4 Gateway Locations

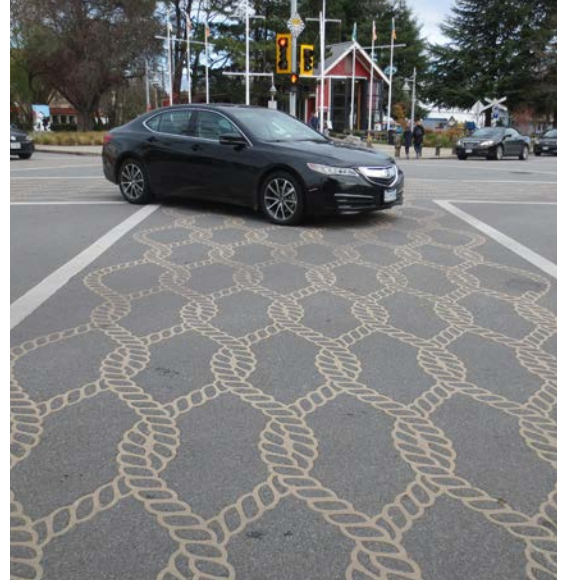
Gateway Locations are prominent places in the Planning Area 1 (Downtown) that mark entry to the downtown. These locations are typically major intersections, highly visible sites, landmarks sites, or transitions from one distinct area to another. Gateway Locations are identified symbolically on Figure 4.

Harbour Drive and Clift's - Baird's Cove serves as the entrance to the downtown for the tourists that arrive by cruise ships. This is the first impression from this vantage point and should include a gateway identifier that welcomes people to the City.

1. Gateway Locations shall be comprehensively considered and include coordination of built form and landscape elements, and the private and public realm, with respect to layout, configuration, materials, design features, and design details.
  - a. Built features and landscape elements may include public art, signage, architectural features, landscape structures, street furnishings, special pavements, and plantings (both permanent and seasonal).



Example of a gateway feature.



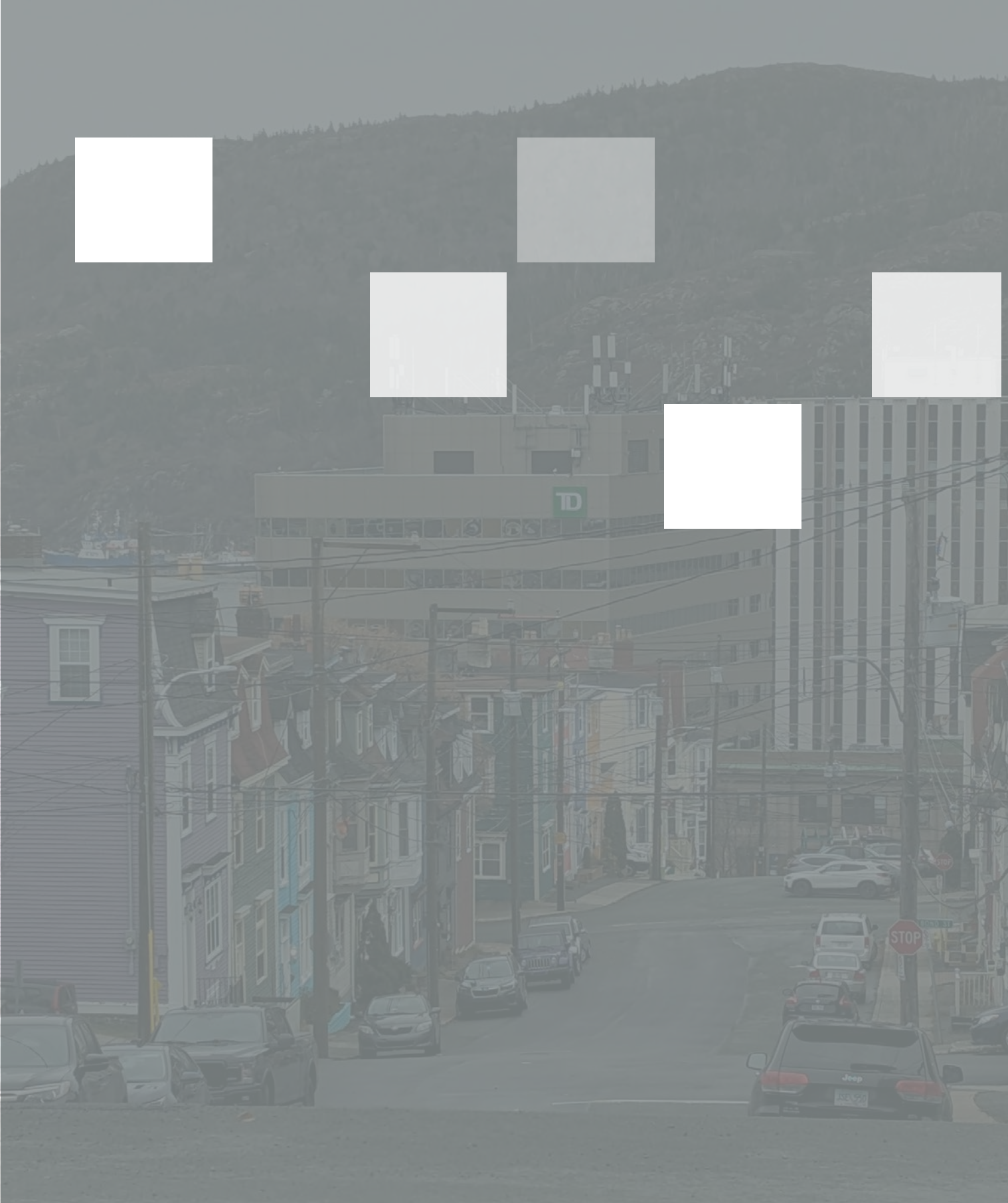
Special pavements to identify crosswalks at gateways.

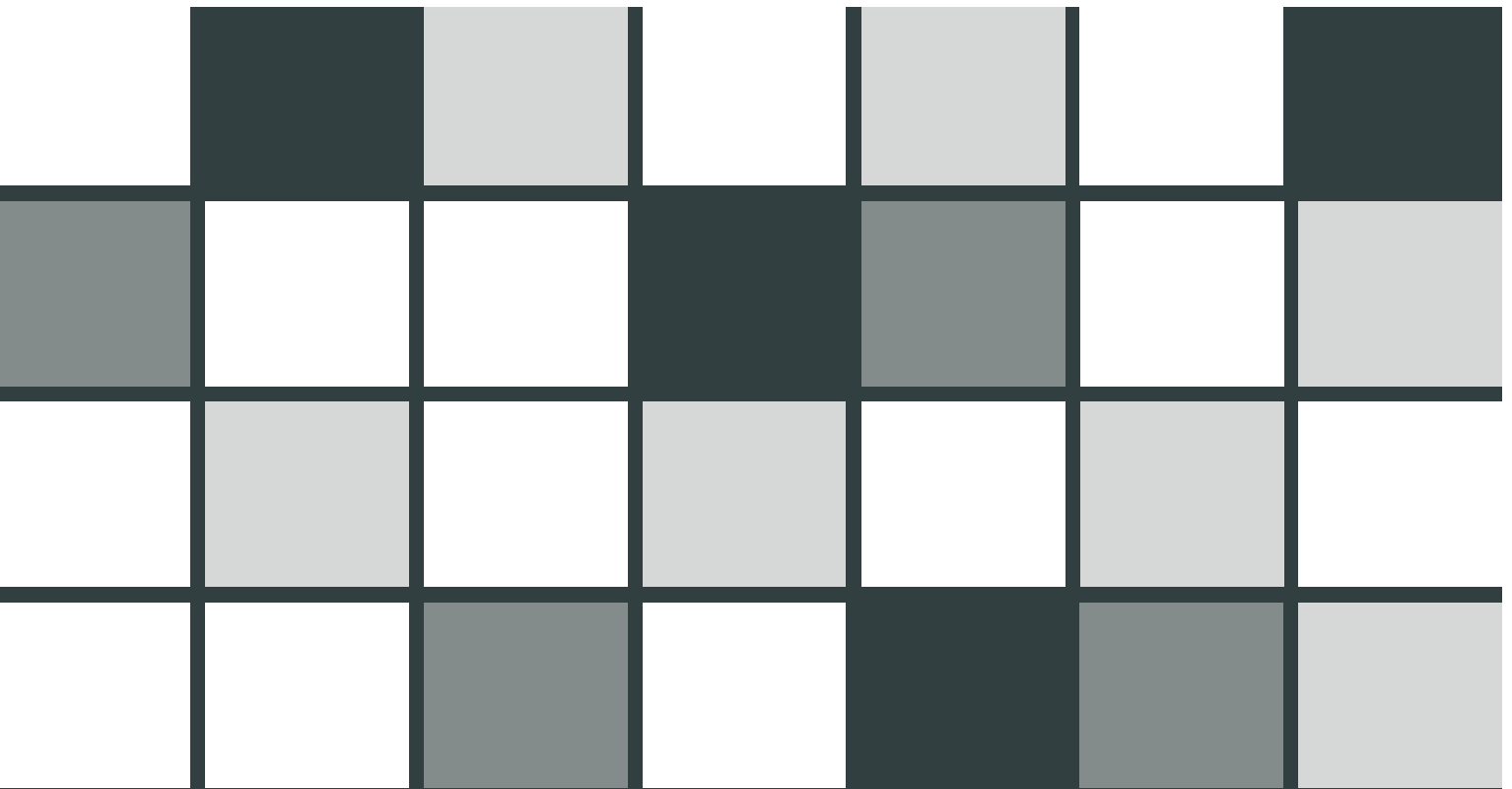
2. Gateway Locations shall be designed to:
  - a. Enhance the sense of arrival and wayfinding;
  - b. Strengthen the identity of the downtown;
  - c. Be proportionately scaled, relative to the location, context, and visibility; and,
  - d. Complement the historic character of the downtown.
3. The intersection of Harbour Drive and Clift's-Baird's Cove shall incorporate streetscape improvements into the gateway design to present a welcoming entry point for cruise ship tourists.
4. The City shall undertake consultation and detailed design prior to the implementation of the Gateway Locations. Priority will be placed on the design of the Pitts Memorial Drive and New Gower Street intersection, Harbour Drive/ Water Street intersection, and Harbour Drive and Clift's-Baird's Cove. Lower priority will be placed on Gateway Locations along the outer boundaries of Planning Area 1 (Downtown).

### 6.4.5 Lighting

Lighting is an essential consideration to ensure safe pedestrian, cyclist, and vehicular movement.

1. Pedestrian scale lighting shall be provided adjacent to streets, walkways, urban squares, pedestrian routes, in laneways, within parks, and along trails.





# 7

# implementation

# 7 Implementation



## 7.1 Implementation

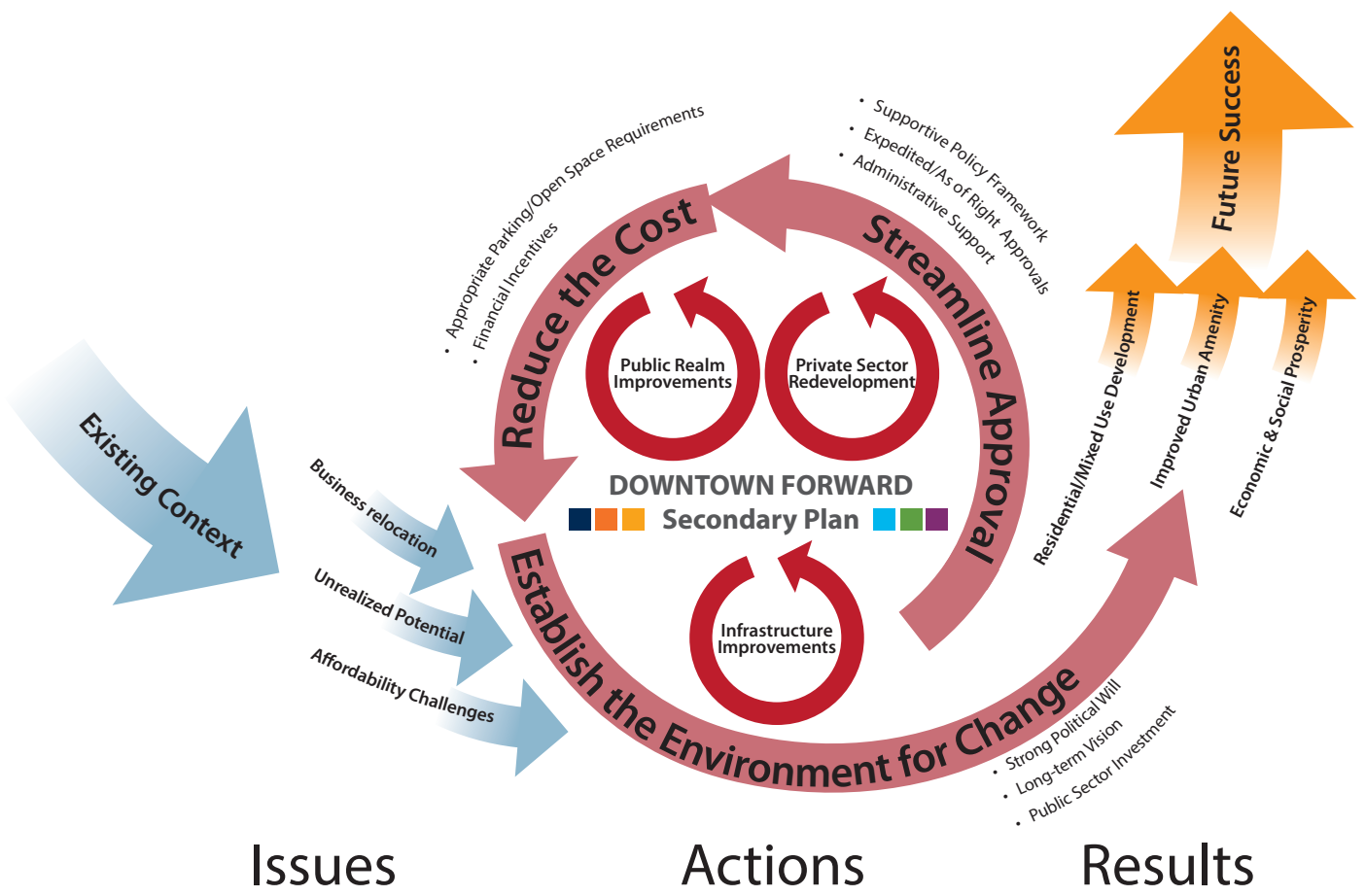
The implementation of the vision for the downtown, and sustaining its successful evolution, requires that the City lead the way.

The private sector will respond only when a clear and substantial level of commitment is established by the public sector.

There are three crucial elements of public sector commitment that are required:

- 1. Establish the Environment for Change**
- 2. Streamline the Development Approval Process**
- 3. Reduce the Cost of Development**

The Implementation Plan is further described in Appendix 1.



Implementation

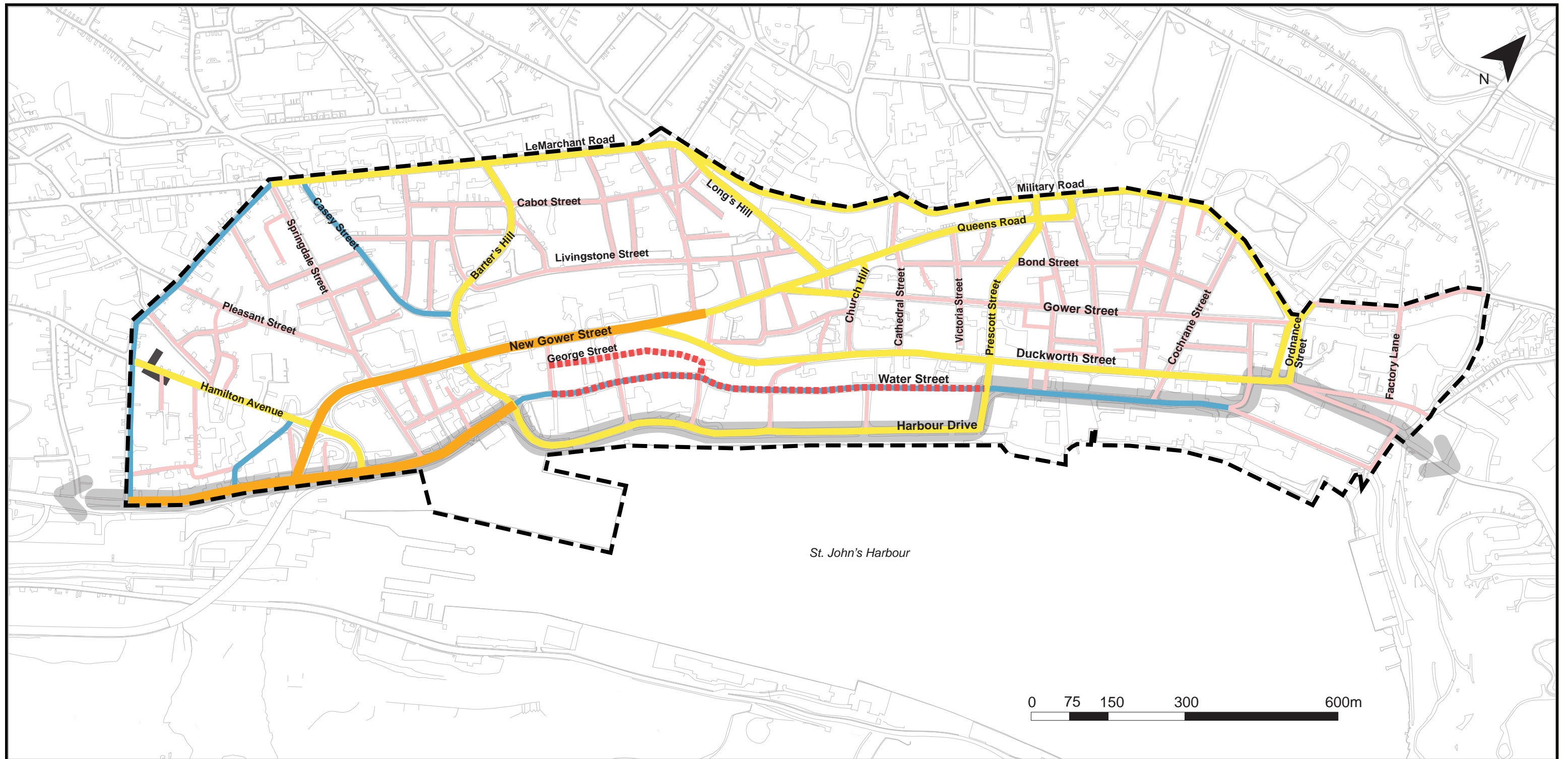


# Schedules

**Schedule 1: Transportation Network**

**Schedule 2: Character Areas and Corridors**

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Downtown Forward Boundary



Major Arterial Road



Minor Arterial Road



Collector Road



Residential Street

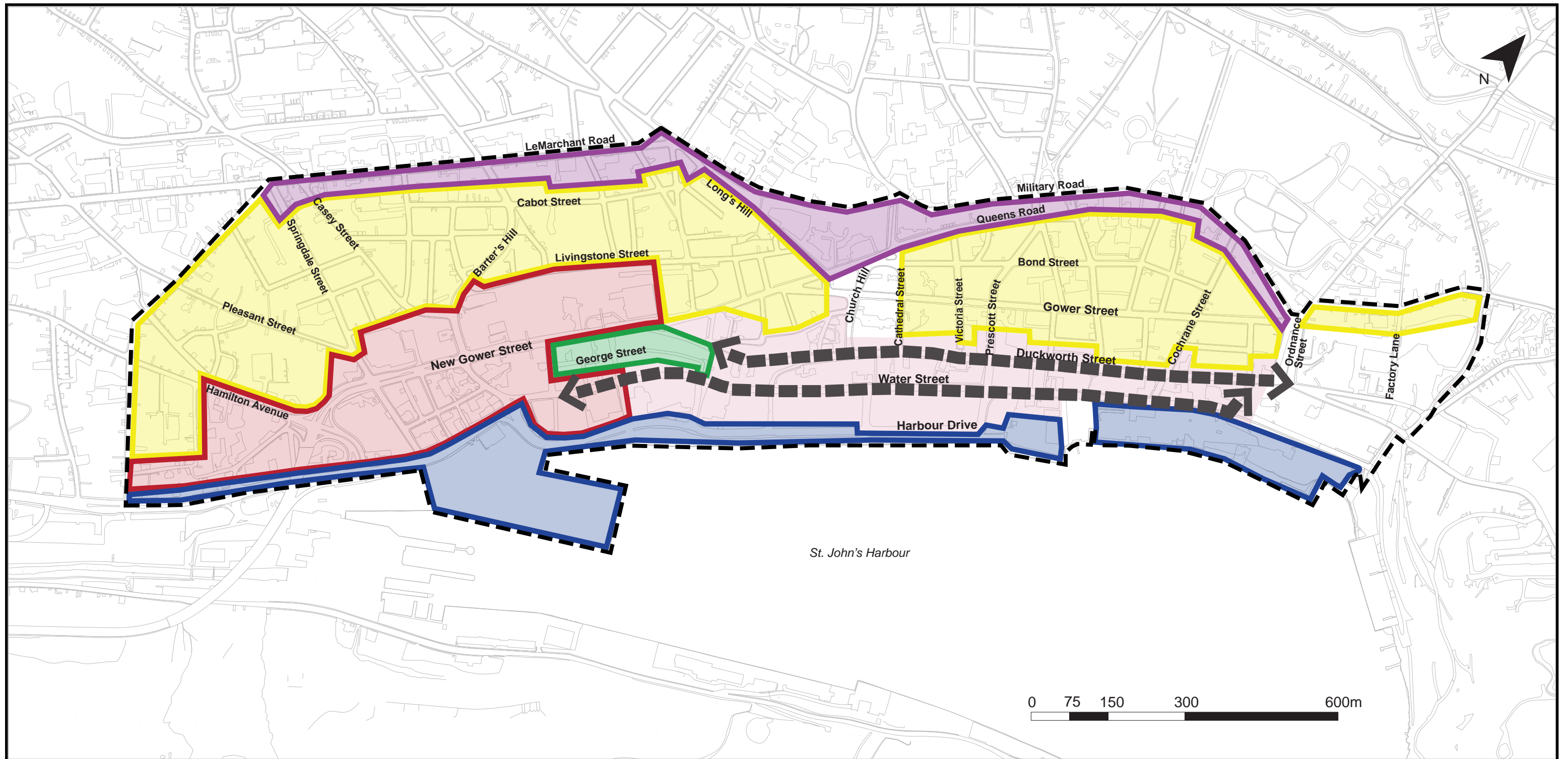


East-West Bicycle Route



Shared Streets:  
George Street (permanent)  
Water Street (temporary)

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- Downtown Forward Boundary
- Residential Neighbourhood
- Downtown Core Area
- George Street Entertainment Area
- Mixed-Use Avenue
- Harbour Area
- Duckworth Street/Water Street Corridors

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# Appendix

**Appendix 1: Implementation Plan**

**Appendix 2: Economic Analysis**



# Appendix 1: Implementation Plan

## 1. Establish the Environment for Change

### Establish the Vision

Establishing the environment for change begins by having a clearly stated and supported “vision” for what the City is seeking to achieve. The Downtown Forward Secondary Plan (Secondary Plan) will serve as a guiding document to inform public and private investments.

### Lead by Example

Public sector investment in streetscape improvements, park spaces, and the building or improvement of public buildings / facilities sends an important message of commitment to the community. Public sector improvements can be a catalyst for private sector investment.

### Cultivate Awareness and Support for the Plan

A supportive administrative structure and strong political will are also important in supporting the environment for change. The Secondary Plan is a policy and a guiding document and an essential decision-making tool. This can only be achieved with the support of Council.

### Reward Excellence in Public Realm Design

This plan aims to pursue a higher quality built environment that will elevate the downtown. The City has a role in advocating for and rewarding those who have taken steps to ensure development contributes to the greater public good. This will incentivize good place-making and design, foster a discourse on the importance of civic design, promote design that provides community benefits, and encourage a high quality built environment. The City will expand the City Awards program to include public realm design.

## 2. Streamline the Development Approvals Process

The City shall promote and champion private sector development that achieves the Secondary Plan vision. The City will prioritize development applications within Planning Area 1 (Downtown) and work with applicants to ensure their proposals conform with the vision and policies of the Secondary Plan.

## 3. Reduce the Cost of Development

Following are some examples of tools the City will consider to reduce the cost of development within the downtown.

### Relaxing of Fees, Taxes, and Other Charges

For proposed development within the downtown that aligns with the overall vision, the City may use the tools and incentives permitted by legislation to reduce the cost to the private sector.

Consider ways to reduce application fees and development charges; reduce or rebate taxes; or provide financial incentives such as grants.

### Incentivize Public Realm Investment

The City shall find opportunities to incentivize the type of development envisioned for the downtown. For example, funding could be awarded to projects that make a substantial public realm improvement, such as investing in a street-facing patio, street trees, public art, new trails, or street furniture, such as benches or bike racks.

## 4. Priorities for the Downtown

### Short Term (1-2 years)

#### 1. Develop a Pre-Application Process

To support appropriate development that meets the intent of this Secondary Plan, and the City's vision for the downtown, the City will introduce a Pre-Application process. This process is designed to provide all stakeholders engaged in development with consistent information and level of service across City divisions.

This will allow the applicant to review the development checklist, discuss potential site-specific issues and opportunities, and ask any questions that require clarification.

Pre-Application meetings:

- Clarify the application process;
- Support collaborative and productive working relationships between the applicant and City staff; and,
- Improve application quality.

#### 2. Actively Pursue Funding Opportunities

There are sources of outside funding that are available at federal, provincial, and local levels of government that may provide funding assistance to offset capital project costs.

Such programs may include:

- Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (Infrastructure Canada)
- Innovative Communities Fund (ACOA)

- Municipalities for Climate Innovation Program (FCM)
- Green Municipal Fund (FCM)
- Community Healthy Living Fund (TCAR)
- Regional Development Fund (TCAR)

#### 3. Expand the City Awards Program

The City has a City Awards program in place that recognizes a variety of achievements. The City shall expand the program to include a category for public realm design that supports place-making and provides community benefit.

#### 4. Expand Community Marketplaces

Seek opportunities to enhance the presence of a community marketplace/kiosks in the downtown. Marketplaces support local food and products, celebrate multiculturalism, encourage social cohesion, and contribute to the vibrancy of a city.

#### 5. Gateway Study

The City will undertake a Gateway Study and consultation to gain feedback from the public on gateway design features that would best represent the downtown.

## Medium Term (3-5 years)

### 6. Prepare an Integrated Mobility Plan

The City will undertake an Integrated Mobility Plan that will set forth a balance of innovative policies, active programs, and capital projects that will guide how St. John's builds and operates a sustainable transportation system city-wide.

### 7. Downtown Retail/Service Commercial Market Study

Undertake an Downtown Retail/Service Commercial Market Study and associated Recruitment Strategy to address gaps in the offerings of the downtown. This study will provide an inventory and assessment of businesses in the downtown to identify retail/service commercial needs that will effectively support local community needs and how to attract these uses to the downtown.

### 8. Downtown Office Strategy

Undertake an Downtown Office Strategy to address high vacancy rates within commercial office buildings. The study will review office space needs in the downtown through validation of current and anticipated future market conditions, as well as to gain an improved understanding of potential policy directions that could help yield the ideal type and scale of commercial/employment uses in preferred locations.

### 9. Prepare Urban Design Guidelines

Urban Design Guidelines will complement the Secondary Plan and provide guidance on qualitative features. The guidelines will provide performance standards for both the public and private realms related to parks and public spaces, streetscape, site design, and buildings. The guidelines are non-statutory but will work in tandem with the Heritage Design Standards providing a broader set of guidelines for development in the downtown, outside of heritage built form.

The guidelines provide City staff with the tools to prescribe development in the downtown and assess development applications.

## Long-Term (6-10 Years)

### 10. George Street Redevelopment

The City will develop partnerships to encourage the redevelopment of George Street and identify opportunities to enhance on-street programming. Improving the infrastructure and programming on George Street will enhance the visitor experience of an already iconic tourism asset.

Further, the City shall investigate the undergrounding of the electrical on George Street.



# Appendix 2: Economic Analysis

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- 3.3 Economic Analysis ..... 2**
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- Overview of Current Commercial Operations and Existing Industries..... 9
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### 3.3 Economic Analysis

This section represents the socio-economic impact assessment of the *Downtown Forward* Plan. The evaluation was completed in May 2025 using the information available at that time.

#### Economic State of the City

The most recent State of the Economy released in July 2024 by City of St. John’s illustrates an optimistic picture for 2024. While not specific to Planning Area 1 (Downtown), the data indicates the general region is anticipated to experience economic growth by a variety of measures as shown in Figure 2 below (the table shows the change from the previous year).

	2023	2024f
Real GDP (2017\$M)	15,648	16,144
% Change	-2.1	3.2
Retail Trade (\$M)	4,695	4,842
% Change	2.4	3.1
Household Income (\$M)	12,263	12,953
% Change	5.4	5.6
Consumer Price Index (2002=100)	157.9	162.2
% Change	3.7	2.7

Figure 2: Economic Indicators for City of St. John’s Census Metropolitan Area: Source: City of St. John’s “State of the Economy 2024”

The City of St. John’s has reported that the economy of the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)<sup>1</sup> was expected to grow in 2024 due to stronger oil production, population growth and construction activity generating greater spending activity within the City’s service industries<sup>2</sup>.

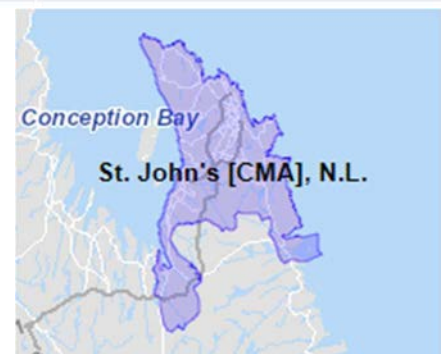


Figure 1: Geographic boundaries of census area “St. John’s Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)”

<sup>1</sup> Census Metropolitan Area is a geographic are defined by Statistics Canada for the purpose of census data collection. See Map figure.

<sup>2</sup> “City of St. John’s, “Economic Outlook 2024,” May 2024, <https://www.stjohns.ca/en/business-investment/resources/Documents/Economic-Reports/Economic-Outlook-2024.pdf>

The CMA is a geographic area defined by Statistics Canada census boundaries. The CMA geographic area is depicted in Figure 1.

In 2024, it was estimated that **real GDP in St. John’s CMA will have increased by 3.2%** over the 2023 total to \$16.1 billion. Excluding oil and gas, real GDP was anticipated to grow by 1% in 2024<sup>3</sup>.

Another key indicator of economic growth and level of economic activity is **permitting for demolitions and new construction**.

These markers help to explain and nuance changes in GDP over time and assess in which urban areas economic activity is most dynamic – in this case, it helps to consider downtown economic activity vis-à-vis the rest of the city and clarifies whether GDP growth might continue in the long term. The data in Figure 3 illustrate several trends.

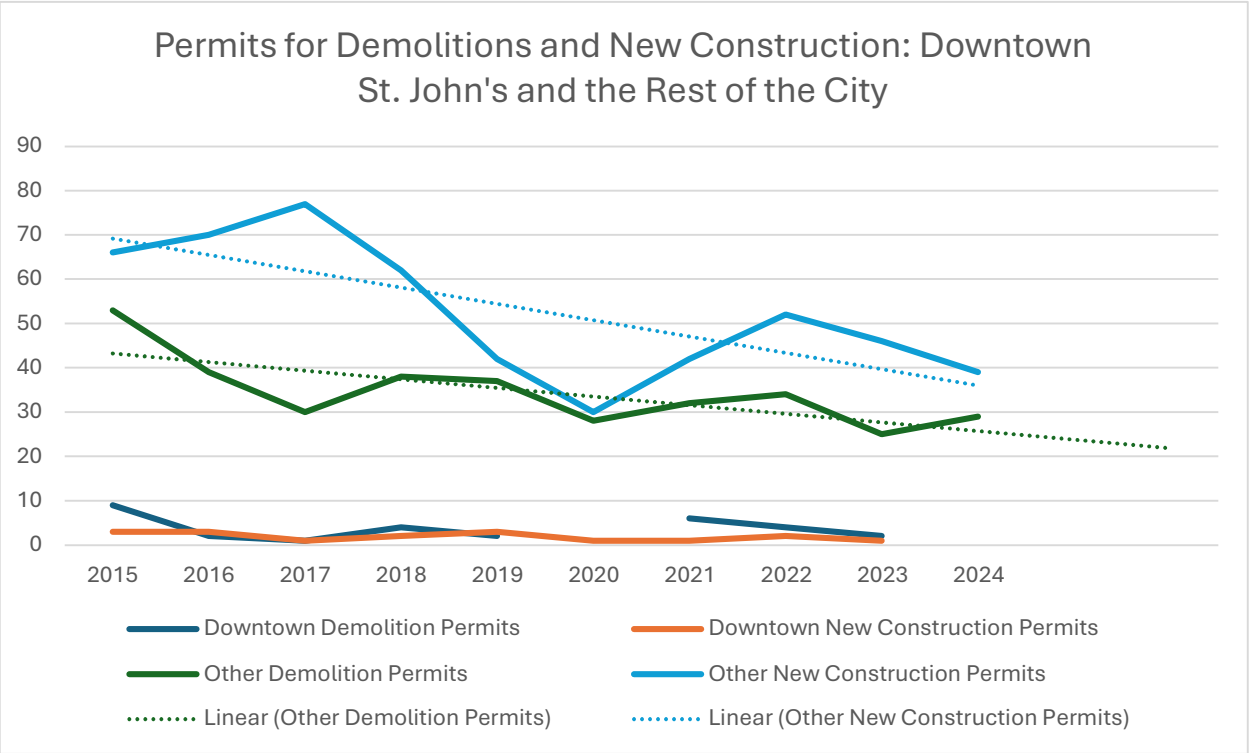


Figure 3: Permits for Demolitions and New Construction: Downtown St. John's and the Rest of the City ("Other")

**First**, it shows that the anticipated growth in GDP was driven in part by a surge in new construction permits between 2020 and 2022. In the subsequent two years, however, the number of permits dropped, which deepened a negative trajectory developing since 2015 (**Figure 3**). This may suggest that projected GDP growth is not a long-term trend.

<sup>3</sup> City of St. John’s.

**Second**, the data shows that permitting for demolitions and new construction within Planning Area 1 (Downtown) has also declined marginally, and that such permits normally comprise between 1-3% of all permitting (reaching as high as 6.5% in some years).

At first glance, this appears low. As a historic area of the city that has been developed and renovated for a long period, there are likely fewer greenfield and brownfield sites available for investment compared to newer retail outlet districts.

However, when assessed by permits per squared kilometre (i.e., factoring in the downtown area’s small size), the disparity is less prevalent, and the Downtown area figures much stronger. Between 2015 and 2024, Downtown St. John’s averaged 1.3 permits/km<sup>2</sup>, compared to the 0.12 permits/km<sup>2</sup> in the rest of the city (**Table 1**)

Year	Downtown Area	Other
2015	2.26	0.15
2016	2.26	0.16
2017	0.75	0.17
2018	1.50	0.14
2019	2.26	0.094
2020	0.75	0.067
2021	0.75	0.094
2022	1.50	0.12
2023	0.75	0.10
2024	0	0.087
Average	1.3	0.12

*Table 1: Permits per km<sup>2</sup>*

**Third**, the data shows that very few permits allocated for new construction are for commercial buildings in Planning Area 1 (Downtown) (5 permits over a ten-year period between 2015 and 2024 – less than 30% of all permitting in the downtown area and less than 1% of all City permits.).

This may be a sign of economic contraction – that there is insufficient demand for space in the Downtown area to warrant new construction. Vacancy rates for office space downtown are very high, and there is less incentive to build new commercial buildings if existing spaces remain empty.

However, other data shows that despite these challenges and long-term decline in permitting, the City of St. John’s and the Downtown continue to be a desirable location for commercial enterprises. This is illustrated by the number of businesses approved by the City Council since 2024. (**Figure 4**). Between January 2024 and March 2025, approvals were steady within and without the Downtown area, where on average 13-15% of approvals were granted during this period.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> City of St. John’s Economic Snapshot monthly newsletter.

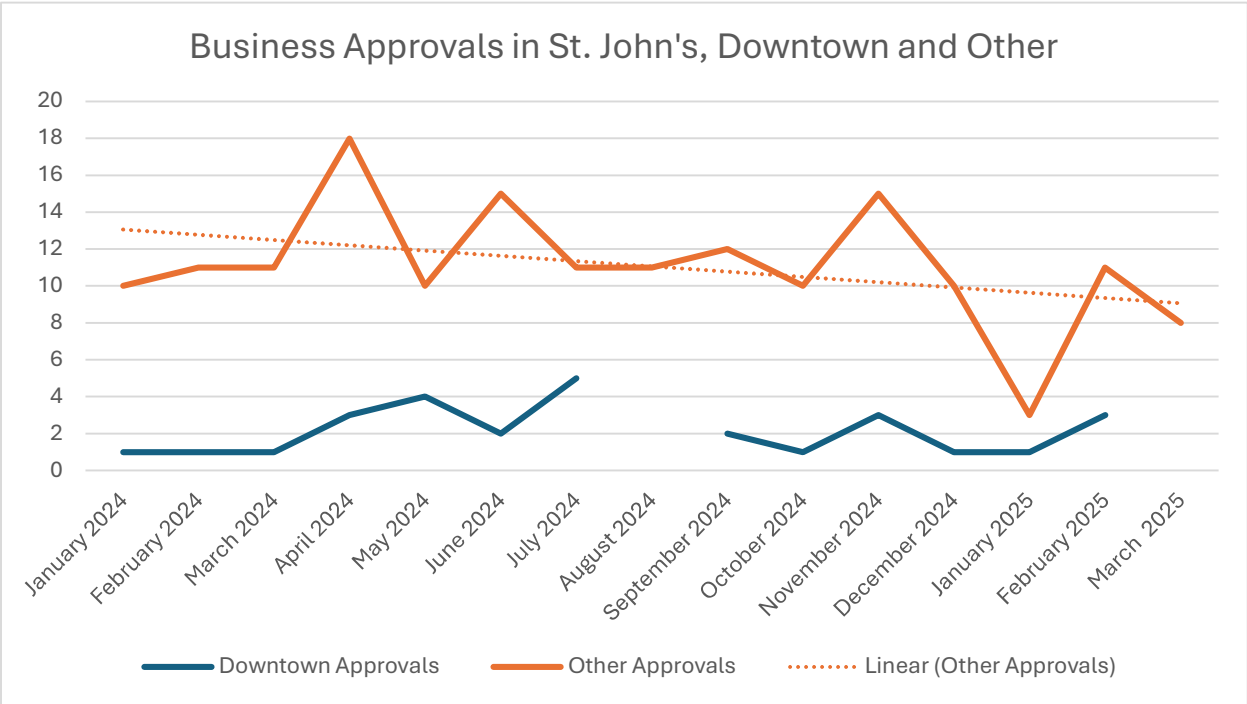


Figure 4: Business Approvals in Downtown St. John's and Rest of the City

## Demographic Profile

Data collected on demographics for the purpose of this report is based on analysis by Environics Analytics and Esri Inc., which defines the downtown area of St. John's as 1.33 km<sup>2</sup> - smaller than the 3km<sup>2</sup> area used by Statistics Canada in its survey of primary downtown areas.

Based on this data, Planning Area 1 (Downtown) has the following demographic characteristics:

- **Population growth in downtown St. John's is currently outpacing the province.** St. John's experienced a population increase of 3.5% between

2019 and 2024. Meanwhile, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador experienced a population decline of about 3.3% over the same period. Moreover, although both jurisdictions are expected to face population decline between 2024-2029, the province is projected to experience a larger drop.

- The population of downtown St. John's is younger than in Canada. The median age as of 2024 is 36.8, compared to 40.3 at the national level.
- The difference is greater at the provincial level, where the median age as of 2024 is the highest in Canada, at 47.8 years.



*Planning Area 1 (Downtown) Boundary*

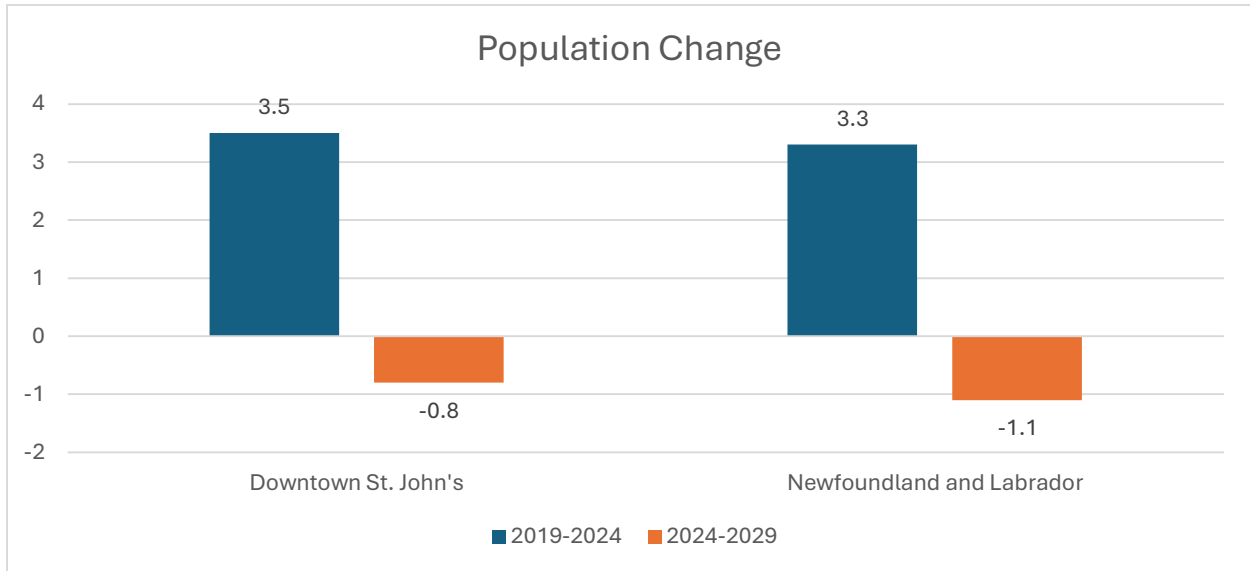


Figure 5: Population Change, Downtown St. John's and NL: Esri Inc.

- **The population in St. John's became younger between 2019 and 2024.** The median age fell from 37.3 to 36.8, and the proportion of residents aged 15-34 rose from 38.28% to 39.56%.
  - **However, this trend is not projected to continue through to the end of the decade.** By 2029, the median age is expected to rise to 38.3, and the proportion of residents aged 15-34 will drop to 36.25%, emphasizing the need for newcomers to the city to offset the aging labour force.

## Immigration

- **Immigration is increasing in downtown St. John's.** The number of immigrants as a percentage of total population rose from 8.32% in 2019 to 11.98% in 2024, representing a 49% increase in the immigrant population over this period
  - Immigrants' contribution to total population is projected to reach 17% by 2029.
- The number of non-permanent residents increased at an even faster rate – 4.51% to 10.78% between 2019 and 2024, or a 140% increase in total.
- **Growing immigration is critical to the economic success of the province and St. John's,** given the aging workforce and the need to fill critical labour gaps as people retire or leave the area.

## Housing:

- As of 2024, the most common dwelling in the downtown St. John's area are row houses (Townhouses) (37.5%) and units in apartment buildings below five stories (36.7%). This is distinct from the City as a whole, where (based on data from Census 2021), single-

detached houses are the most numerous (42%), with most of these in turn comprising three bedrooms (39%).

- The average number of persons living in downtown households is 1.8, with 1-Person households comprising the majority of dwellings. Households are slightly smaller in the downtown area than in the city, where there are an average of 2.2 persons per dwelling.

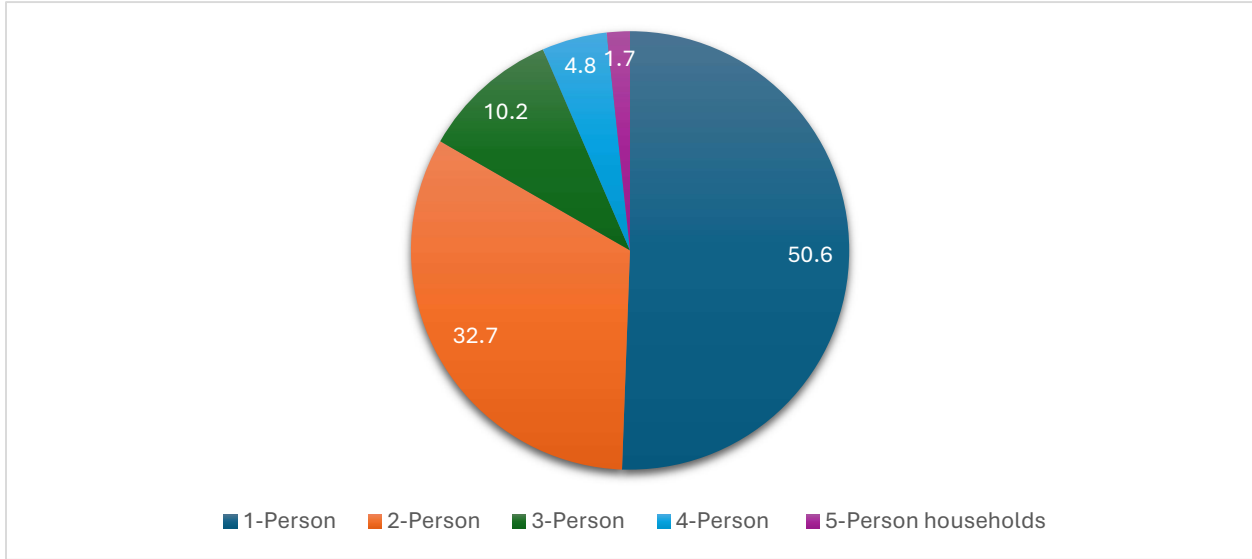


Figure 6: Household Size: Percentage Total

## Overview of Current Commercial Operations and Existing Industries

Key economic features of downtown St. John include a mix of large corporations (mainly focused on mining/energy and marine/offshore industries), small businesses, innovative start-ups, government services, and service industries such as food and drink, entertainment, accommodations and cultural experiences.

The downtown area benefits economically from the downtown workforce and their employers that provide jobs and tax revenues to the city. The downtown workforce contributes spending on meals, retail, personal services, and entertainment before, during and after work.

The ten most common commercial operations in downtown St. John's according to the Downtown St. John's Business Membership list in August 2024 are provided in **Figure 7**:

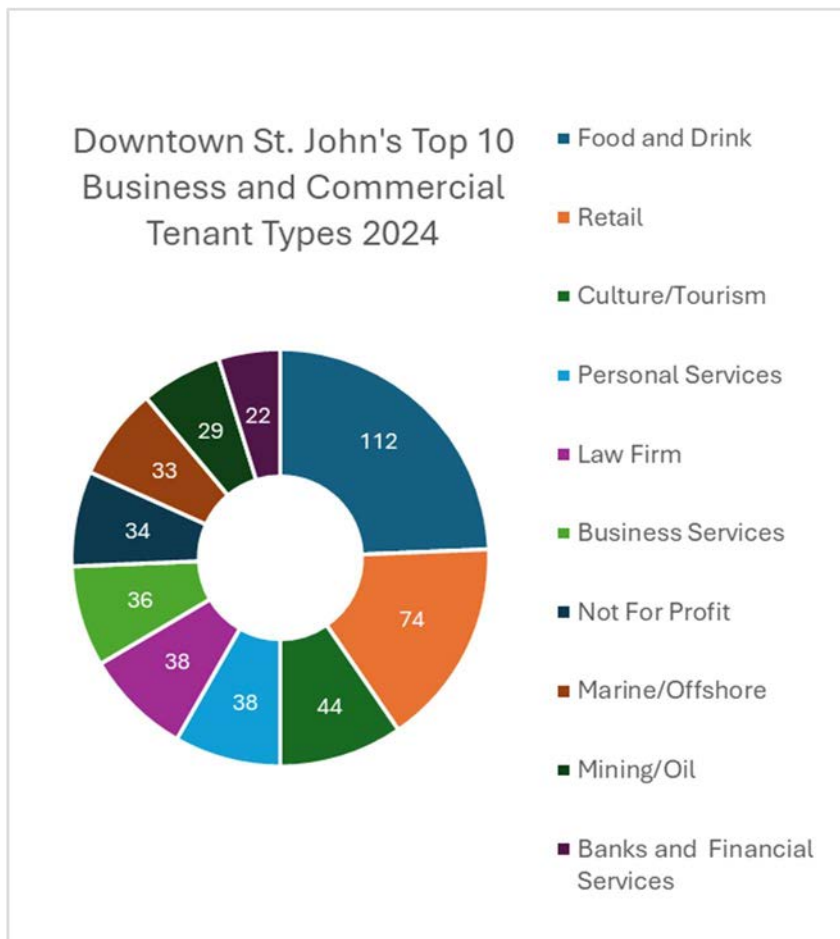


Figure 7: Business and Commercial Types in Downtown St. John's

residents and visitors.

Other common key business and commercial tenants of downtown St. John's include personal services such as spas and hairdressers, law firms, business services for a range of industries, not

**Food and drink establishments** are the most common business type in downtown St. John's and include restaurants, cafes, bars and take-out establishments.

**Retail** is the second most common business type in downtown St. John's and includes a range of merchandise stores that sell books, sporting goods, and clothing among other items.

**Culture and Tourism** businesses, non-profits and attractions form the third most common business type in the area. These include museums, art galleries and tour companies among other attractions for both

for profits, marine/offshore companies, mining/energy companies, and banks and financial services.

**Innovation and Technology** is a growing business type in Downtown St. John's. A niche in ocean technology companies is developing in the area with the support of technology association techNL, ocean technology industry support association Oceans Advance, several ocean-focused training institutes in the province such as the Marine Institute providing a talent pipeline, and several research and development institutes and initiatives. Memorial University's engineering and other relevant programming also contribute to the ocean technology sector, offering adjacent research and development support for tech companies and contributing to the region's broader status as a centre of ocean technology. This development will increase traffic through the downtown area as more businesses locate downtown and as more events, conferences, etc., are hosted in downtown conference spaces.

These businesses, government offices, non-profits and cultural attractions draw visitors, residents, and commuters to the downtown where spending occurs on food and drink, retail, cultural experiences, entertainment and personal services.

### **Spotlight on Art and Culture**

St. John's features a strong arts and culture market that is a key anchor of the economy and of regional employment. The direct annual economic impact of culture products in 2022 was \$254.3 million, in the St. John's CMA or \$2,300 per capita (compared to the national rate of \$1,783 per capita).<sup>5</sup>

"Audio-visual and interactive media" and "Visual and applied arts" were the two single greatest contributors, at \$35.3 million and \$21.5 million, respectively.

Among workers in the culture industry in that year, the single largest employment category was live performance (11.29%), followed by visual and applied art (9.14%) and written and published works (8.15%).

The downtown region is the core of this ecosystem, housing many businesses and other arts and culture assets that draw in visitors and generate offshoot spending and economic activity.

**Within the downtown boundary, there are 44 "Performance and amusement destinations" that are central to the identity and tourism economy of the city.** Key categories and destinations include, among others:

- **Live music venues**, such as Sláinte, the Ship Pub, Bannerman Park (which lies adjacent to the Planning Area 1 (Downtown) boundary of Military Road, and which hosts the

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<sup>5</sup> City of St. John's Economic Snapshot, February 2025. Also reporting by Statistics Canada and Canadian Heritage

annual Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival), the Soundhouse at the JAG Hotel, and the outdoor Prince Edward Plaza on George Street, in the heart of downtown, which hosts concerts throughout the year.

- **Theatre Performance**, such as Spirit of Newfoundland Productions, the Majestic Theatre, the Resource Centre for the Arts (which operates from the historic LSPU Hall), and the Kittiwake Dance Theatre.
- **Museums and Art Galleries**, such as the Screech Room, Newfoundland and Labrador Pharmacy Museum, Newman Wine Vaults Provincial Historic Site, and the Peter Lewis Galley.
- **Heritage Buildings**, with majority of designated buildings being within Planning Area 1 (Downtown).

# Overview of Industry and Labour Force Characteristics

## Current Indicators

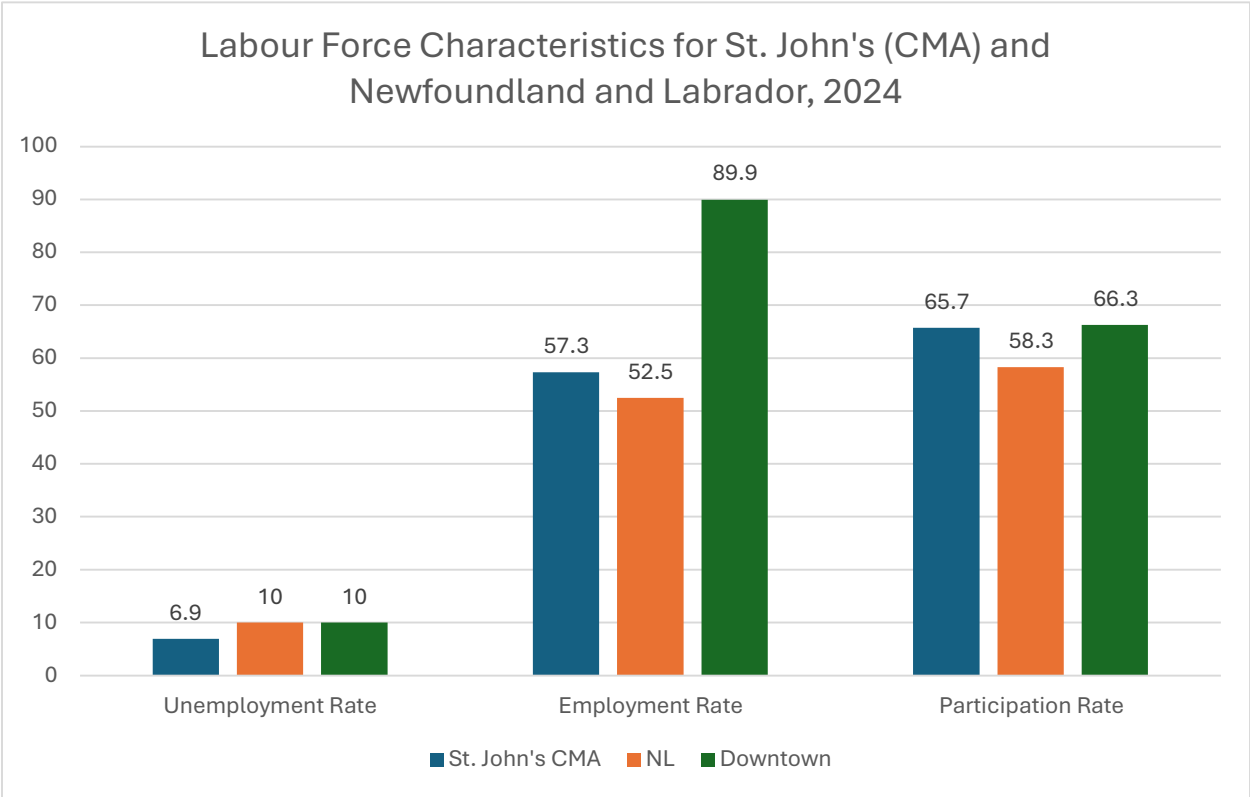


Figure 8: Labour Force Characteristics: 2024

The downtown has a much higher employment rate than either the province or St. John’s (CMA), suggesting that employment is more consistent downtown than it is elsewhere in the province. It also has a higher labour participation rate than the CMA and province (reflecting a younger population on average) and an unemployment rate consistent with Newfoundland and Labrador. The rate of unemployment is over 3% lower in the CMA (6.9% vs. 10%).<sup>6</sup> By 2029, all three metrics are projected to improve in the downtown region.

- **Participation Rate:** 66.3% to 66.6%
- **Employment Rate:** 89.9% to 91.5%
- **Unemployment Rate:** 10.0% to 8.5%

The most prevalent employment opportunities are in the service sector. The largest employment category based on the National Occupation Classification (NOC) system is in Sales and Service, which in 2024 comprised 26.7% of all occupations. The next largest categories are:

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada. [Table 14-10-0327-01 Labour force characteristics by gender and detailed age group, annual; for Data](#) and City of St. John’s “Economic Outlook 2024,” St. John’s Census Metropolitan Area,

- Education, Law and Social, Community and Government Services (18.4%)
- Business, Finance and Administration (12.3%)
- Art, Culture, Recreation and Sport (10.3%)

By industry (i.e., the North American Industry Classification Services), the workforce is distributed across four principal sectors: healthcare, education, accommodation and food services, and professional services. Public Administration and Retail Trade comprise a “second tier” (i.e., below a double-digit percentage of employment but higher than the remaining sectors).

Although there is overlap, the employment focus in the downtown urban core differs marginally from the province. Both jurisdictions demonstrate employment strength in the broad service sector, especially healthcare and social assistance, but where the downtown also emphasizes education, professional services, and accommodation and food, the province is stronger in Retail Trade and Public Administration.

Downtown employment figures are also significant for what they do not say. They provide insight into industries employing the greatest amount of people living in the downtown core, but they do not show the economic strengths of the **mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction** industry in NL, which will likely support the downtown economy by encouraging population and GDP growth (i.e., increase the circulation of peoples and money throughout the province as well as traffic through the downtown area).

The oil sector accounts for almost one-fifth of total economic output in NL - the most of any province – and total oil production is expected to advance this year as the Terra Nova oil field gradually ramps up production after a three-year hiatus<sup>7</sup>. Production momentum at the White Rose oilfield is also anticipated to contribute to an increased GDP for the province in 2025. The province’s 2024 budget also highlights substantial capital investments for offshore oilfields, (as well as new large-scale wind-hydrogen developments) that will inject further growth in the sector beginning in 2025<sup>8</sup>, as well as in related sectors that contribute to capital projects related to oil and gas and offshore operations– such as construction, transportation and warehousing.

The mining sector is anticipated to grow in the province as global central banks move into less restrictive policies, which is expected to increase global demand for metals – namely iron ore and copper<sup>9</sup>. Spending within the mineral sector on exploration is also increasing due to provincial support funnelled through the government’s Critical Minerals Plan.

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<sup>7</sup> [TD Economics, “Provincial Economic Forecast”](#)

<sup>8</sup> [TD Economics “Provincial Economic Forecast”](#)

<sup>9</sup> [TD Economics](#)

## Resident and Visitor Spending Impacts

Encouraging local spending that might otherwise go to other regions or outside the province amplifies the impact of more people living, working and visiting downtown. By enticing residents to spend within the community, opportunities for local wealth accumulation increase, and outflows of money to external areas are minimized. Similarly, the plan's ability to attract and retain non-residents from other parts of Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as from outside the province, will play a crucial role in this effort.

### Resident Spending

People living in downtown St. John's contribute to the area's economy by spending in retail, personal services, dining, and entertainment sectors. Local spending is influenced by day-to-day needs, social activities, and participation in community events and festivals. TD Economics reporting has shown strong retail sales in the first quarter of 2024 and the beginning of second quarter – with NL leading all provinces. in terms of gains in outlays.<sup>10</sup>

St. John's CMA has also demonstrated strong sales figures in 2024. Retail sales total \$6,000 million – 6.7% higher than in 2023 “due to both higher prices and a large volume of sales.”<sup>11</sup>

Renters contribute to the success of downtown rental units and developments, while homeowners downtown contribute to the tax base and real estate sector. As of 2024, **61.4% of residents in the downtown own their homes, while 38.6% rent.**

Demographics of downtown residents reportedly include a mix of families, young professionals, and retirees. **5,088 people live downtown, or slightly more than 4% of the total population living in City**<sup>12</sup>.

Average expenditures per household in 2024 in the province totaled \$80,509, including food, shelter, household operations, household furnishing and equipment, clothing and accessories, transportation, health care, personal care, recreation, education, taxes, insurance, gifts, and other miscellaneous expenditures<sup>13</sup>.

Total household spending does not itself convey or signify total spending in the downtown area nor how this compares with other jurisdictions. Other factors should be considered to nuance the discussion.

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<sup>10</sup> TD Economics “Provincial Economic Forecast”

<sup>11</sup> City of St. John's, “2024 Economic Review,” February 2025

<sup>12</sup> The City refers to the St. John's City (CY) census area determined by Statistics Canada, which had a total population of 110,525 in 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Statistics Canada Table 11-10-0222-01

First, overall spending levels in the downtown area are considerably lower than the national average.<sup>14</sup> The only spending category above the national average was in Tobacco Products, Alcoholic Beverages (which exceeded the national average by 50% and was greater than 95% of all Census Subdivisions).

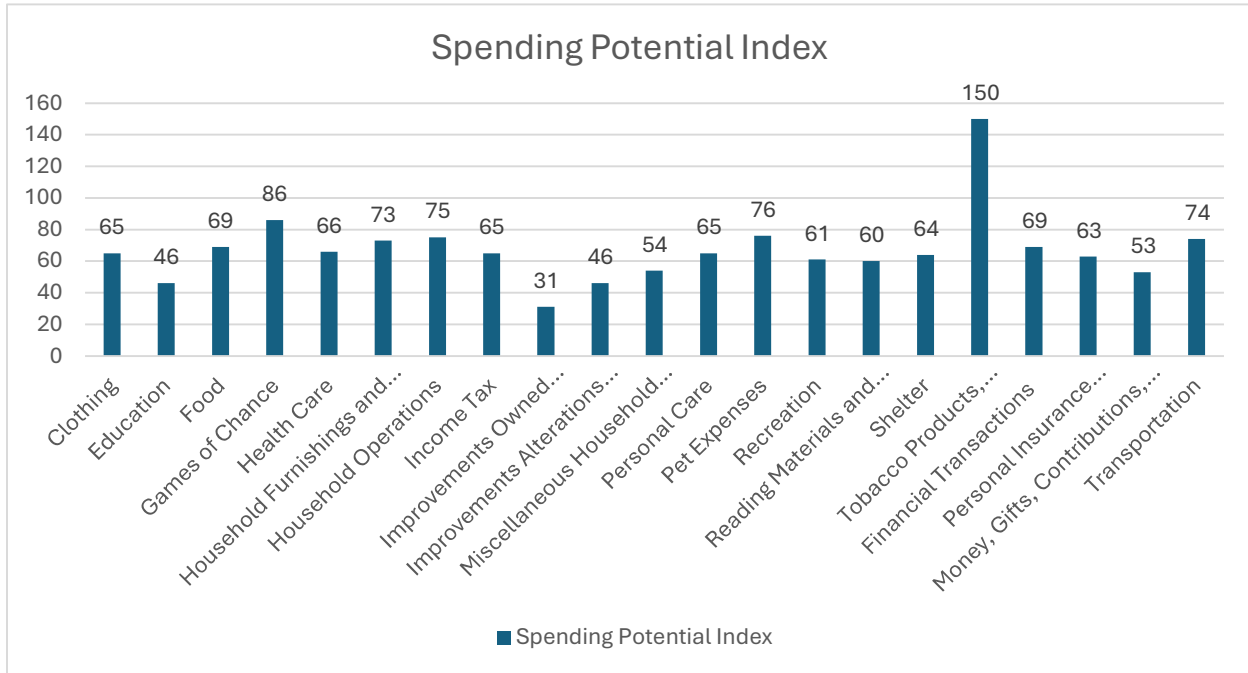


Figure 9: Spending Potential Index in Downtown St. John's: Esri Inc.

Second, while there is little data available indicating where residents and households are spending their money, it's possible that key elements of household expenditures are not made in the downtown core itself. Consumers may travel outside the downtown area to larger supermarket and department stores for weekly groceries or other household furnishings, clothing, and other needs.

Finally, household spending does not reveal all monies that may be going into local businesses. The daytime population of the downtown core almost doubles during the day when employees commute into the area for work, likely exceeding 10,000. This translates into spending in restaurants, stores, transportation, recreation, and other spheres not revealed in annual average household spending.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Esri, "The SPI compares the average amount spent locally for a product to the average amount spent nationally; an index of 100 reflects the average. An SPI of 168 indicates an area where spending on a product is 68 percent higher than the national average; a local value of 78 indicates consumer spending that is 22 percent lower than the national average for a product." Esri, "Essential Vocabulary," <https://doc.arcgis.com/en/esri-demographics/latest/reference/essential-vocabulary.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Esri, "Daytime Population and Housing Report," February 11, 2025

## Immigration and Newcomers

The growing immigrant population in St. John's adds to the diversity of spending patterns. As noted above, as of 2024 there were:

- **1,138 immigrants and non-permanent residents living in the downtown, 54% of whom arrived between 2019 and 2024.**

Newcomers often spend on establishing their households, including housing, furniture, and everyday necessities. They also contribute to the cultural and social fabric of the downtown area, supporting a diverse range of restaurants and shops.

## Student Spending

Memorial University contributes significantly to the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador, including \$627 million in economic output and 9,922 jobs (direct and indirect) throughout the province. The incremental impact of student expenditures alone (of the university's 18,896 students) is \$210 million to provincial GDP and 3,095 jobs.<sup>16</sup>

There is regrettably no data that specifies the number of students living, nor the percentage of spending made, in the downtown area.

However, the contribution of students to the downtown economy as consumers and patrons of businesses that focus on nightlife and entertainment in the evenings and weekends, as well as of cafes, bookshops and shops during the day, is likely significant. **Such speculation can only be corroborated, however, through close engagement with downtown businesses and a formal investigation into patron demographics.**

## Tourism Impacts and Visitor Spending

The province is currently in the process of implementing a Tourism Strategy: **Transition, Transform, Thrive. A Tourism Vision and Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador**, also known as Vision 2026 to support sector recovery from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including a 76% decrease in total in-province tourism-related expenditures between 2019-2021.<sup>17</sup> The province committed \$20 million to support tourism recovery initiatives related to Vision 2026, including investments in air access capacity, enhancing tourism research and visitor surveying, reviewing and investing in the province's marketing strategy, creating tourism experiences through a new fund, and investing in signage and themed routes throughout the province<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> KPMG LLP, "Memorial University Economic Impact Assessment," April 2021, [Microsoft Word - Memorial University Economic Impact Assessment Report Final - updated\[4\].docx](#)

<sup>17</sup> TCAR, [Strategic Plan 2023-2026](#)

<sup>18</sup> TCAR, [Annual Report 2023](#)

Recovery efforts have seen success, with non-resident visitation increasing to more than 431,000 people in 2022 that spent nearly \$492 million – representing a rebound to 90% of pre-pandemic levels<sup>19</sup>. Pre-pandemic, the tourism sector in the province contributed consistent tourism expenditures of \$1 billion or more to the economy and supported about 20,000 jobs annually between 2011-2019<sup>20</sup>.

**In 2023, recovery continued with key tourism indicators exceeding 2022 numbers and edging or surpassing 2019 results.** As noted in the Figure 10 below, Non-resident visitors to NL reached 487,000 in 2023, a 13% increase from 2022 and 8% less than 2019.

**2019 – 2023 Non-resident Visitors by Mode of Transportation**

Non-resident Visitors	2019	2022	2023*	Year-over-Year Change 2023 / 2022	Year-over-Year Change 2023 / 2019
Non-resident visitors – air	384,300	276,300	304,300	10%	-21%
Non-resident visitors – auto	93,800	110,600	113,600	3%	21%
<b>Sub-total (air &amp; auto)</b>	<b>478,100</b>	<b>386,900</b>	<b>417,900</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>-13%</b>
Non-resident visitors – cruise	52,400	44,500	69,100	55%	32%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>530,500</b>	<b>431,400</b>	<b>487,000</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>-8%</b>

Figure 10: Number of Non-Resident Visitors to NL 2019-2023. Source: Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, “2023 Tourism Performance.”

Other notable tourism trends in NL include:

- Accommodations had an occupancy rate of 58% in 2023, an increase of 7.3 percentage points from 2022 and an increase over pre-pandemic levels in 2019 by 11.8 percentage points. Notably, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation leveraged empty accommodation rooms for temporary housing solutions – which is affecting occupation rates. Data on visitors vs. resident occupation of accommodations is not currently available.
- \$266.8 million was spent on accommodations across NL in 2023, a 22% increase over 2022 and a 39% increase over pre-pandemic spending in 2019.
- An average of \$158 was spent daily on accommodations in NL in 2023<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> TCAR

<sup>20</sup> Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Vision 2026

<sup>21</sup> Government of Newfoundland and Labrador “2023 Tourism Performance”

Non-resident visitor spending in 2023 shows expenditures are on par with pre-pandemic levels. The following figure shows non-resident visitor spending in NL by mode of transportation in 2019, 2022 and 2023 respectively:

**2019 – 2023 Non-resident In-Province Expenditures by Mode of Transportation (\$ million)**

In-Province Expenditures	2019	2022	2023*	Year-over-Year Change 2023 / 2022	Year-over-Year Change 2023 / 2019
Non-resident expenditures – air	\$438.6	\$348.4	\$396.5	14%	-10%
Non-resident expenditures – auto	\$106.8	\$139.2	\$147.7	6%	38%
<b>Sub-total (air &amp; auto)</b>	<b>\$545.4</b>	<b>\$487.6</b>	<b>\$544.1</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>0%</b>
Non-resident expenditures – cruise	\$4.9	\$4.6	\$7.4	59%	51%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$550.3</b>	<b>\$492.2</b>	<b>\$551.6</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>0%</b>

*Figure 11: Non-Resident Visitor Spending by Mode of Transportation 2019-2023. Source: Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, “2023 Tourism Performance”*

Total non-resident visitor spending increased by 12% in 2023 over 2022, and there was a 0% change between 2019 and 2023 spending.

The dynamics of spending has shifted, however, with non-resident visitor spending by those who travel by automobiles increasing 38% over pre-pandemic levels, while spending among those who travel by air is 10% behind 2019 numbers. Spending in the province by cruise passengers is significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels: In-province spending by cruise passengers was 51% higher in 2023 than 2019, and 12% higher than 2022.

Although 2024 statistics are not yet available, it has reportedly been a strong peak season for the downtown core, with multiple highly attended music events and festivals bringing thousands of visitors into the area.

These statistics show that the tourism sector is on a positive trajectory towards pandemic recovery. **Tourism is an important economic driver for the downtown. As tourism grows, improved public spaces and infrastructure would support the downtown in capturing the tourism growth the province is experiencing, and in leaving positive impressions on visitors – encouraging return trips.**

## Challenges for the Downtown Economy

Despite these positive projections and trends, stakeholders engaged raised the following challenges for the downtown:

- Economic and business activity downtown has wavered.
- Many companies have relocated to other parts of St. John’s, leaving behind large, empty office spaces.
- Retail storefronts are struggling to compete with online shopping, hybrid retail and big box development.
- Businesses in general have less in-person employee presence as more people adopt work from home or other alternate live/work scenarios.

*“Fewer people working downtown means fewer people supporting businesses in the area during the day. The relocation of ExxonMobil Canada, for example, moved 400 employees to the east end of St. John’s in 2020”*

Moore, 2023.

The rise of remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic has endured in St. John’s. The federal government’s recent in-office mandate may catalyze a change in workplace relations and commuting patterns, but there is insufficient data to make this conclusion.

Remote work has removed the requirement for office spaces for many businesses in the area. Incentivized by the reduced overhead, many businesses have opted to forego office space for

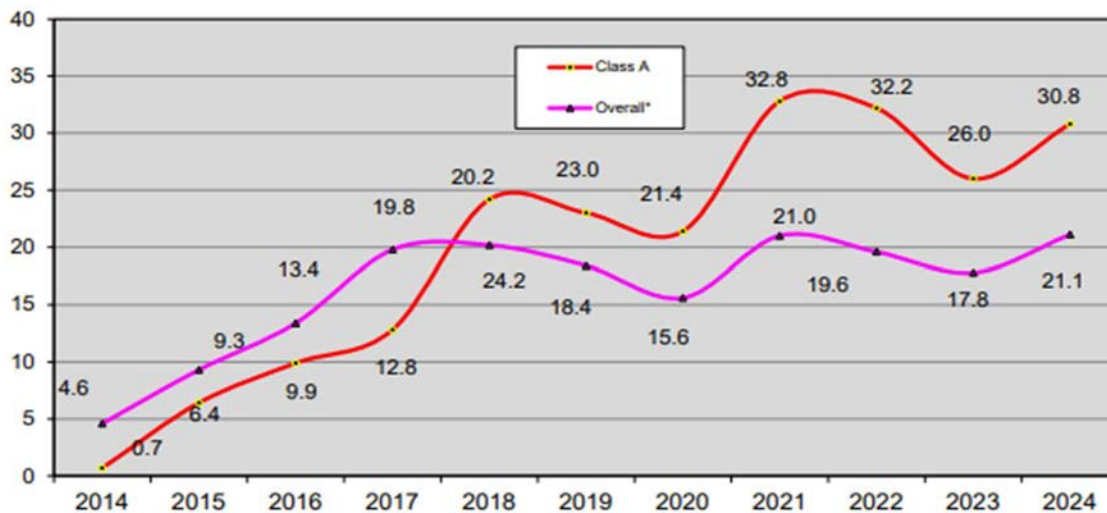


Figure 12: Office Vacancy Rates in City of St. John’s 2024. Source: City of St. John’s. \* Class A buildings in St. John’s are: Baine Johnson Building, Fort William Building, Cabot Place, Ill Fifty One Water St., Fortis Place, Scotia Centre, and KMK Place. Source: Cushman & Wakefield Atlantic cited in City of St. John’s State of the Economy 2024.

fully remote operations. Compounding this issue, some of the downtown area's largest employers recently exited the area for new locations<sup>22</sup>.

This is reflected in 2024 office vacancy rates for the St. John's which increased to 21% from 18% in 2023, as shown in the Figure 12.

This has resulted in underutilized office spaces and buildings that require new commercial tenants or renovations to be converted into housing units.

2022 commercial rent in St. John's was \$34.47 per sq ft<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, each empty commercial space represents significant lost potential rental income for landlords in the downtown core. For example, for every 1000 sq ft office space that sits empty, landlords in the downtown core miss out on an average of \$34,470 in rent per month.

Vacancy issues are more pronounced in the downtown. Vacancies for office buildings surged in 2020 when ExxonMobil Canada and its 400 employees relocated to the east end of St. John's, and it peaked at 41% in 2021 at the height of the pandemic.<sup>24</sup> Although it has since declined, vacancy rates remain well above the 2018 rate of 22.15%. In its June 2024 report on vacancy, Turner and Drake noted that declining rates were driven by rising provincial GDP, but their analysis suggests demand for space will slow in 2025. (**Figure 13**).

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<sup>22</sup> Mike Moore, "Despite slight dip in vacancy, downtown St. John's still full of buildings sitting stubbornly empty," *CBC News* June 13, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> City of St. John's "State of the Economy, St. John's Metro 2023"

<sup>24</sup> Mike Moore, "Despite slight dip in vacancy, downtown St. John's still full of buildings sitting stubbornly empty," *CBC News* June 13, 2023; Vacancy rates are reported by Turner Drake in market surveys released annually in December and June, and they are broadcast in periodic media releases.

This is already apparent in recent news media. According to a February 2025 story by CBC, at least 12 businesses in the downtown area (including six on Water Street) had either closed or announced an impending closure in the previous six months.

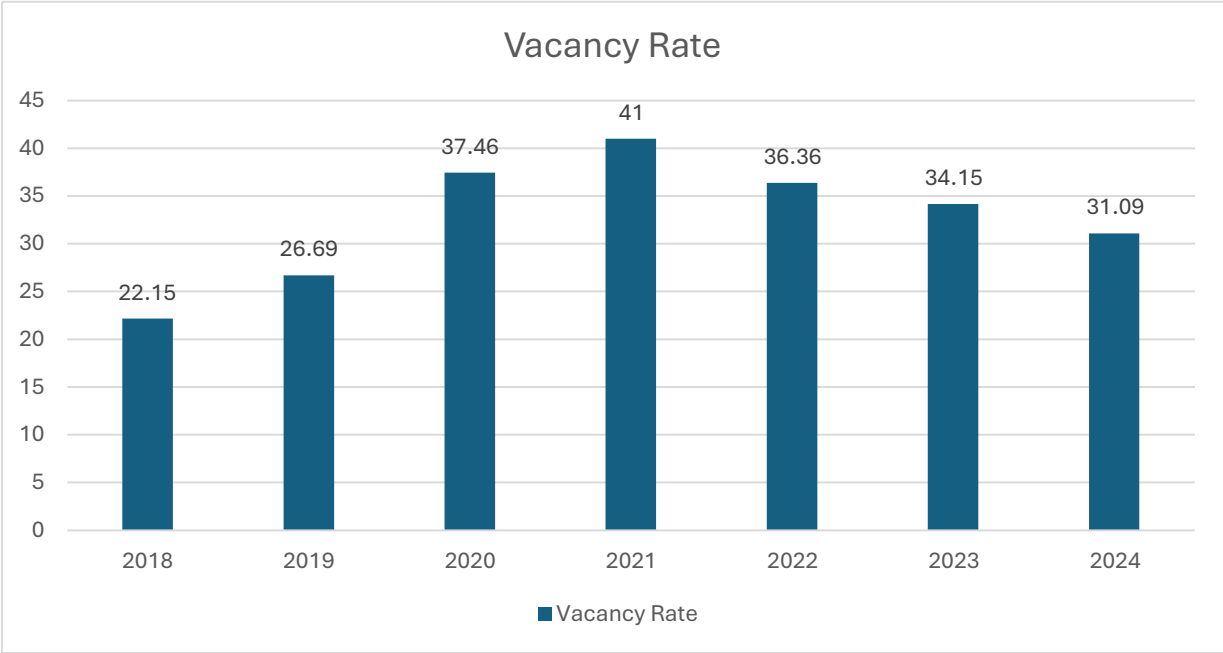


Figure 13: Vacancy Rate for Office Spaces in Downtown St. John's: Source: Turner Drake & Partners: Market Survey

This has significant implications for opportunity costs related to the almost 450,000ft<sup>2</sup> of vacant downtown office property (approximately 90% of which is Class A property), especially in terms of property tax, rent and the broader circulation of monies through spinoff commercial activity.

In June 2024, for example, gross rent was \$33.00/ft<sup>2</sup> - an increase of 9% from the year before.<sup>25</sup> Total realty taxes and Common Area Maintenance (fire insurance, repairs, cleaning, garbage removal, etc.) were \$10.60/ft<sup>2</sup> - illustrating the significance of the Downtown's 1,427,051ft<sup>2</sup> to the city's coffers as well as their potential value that is currently unrealized because of high vacancy rates.

The City could consider renovation grants for adaptive reuse and converting unused or underutilized commercial and office spaces to high-density housing. This would boost the downtown population, bringing household spending into downtown businesses with positive effects on the downtown economy.

<sup>25</sup> Turner Drake & Partners Ltd. "Market Survey: St John's NL Offices & Warehouses," (June 2024), <https://www.turnerdrake.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/June-2024-St.-Johns.pdf>

In addition to direct economic challenges facing downtown, social challenges also contribute to the economic picture of downtown St. John's. The social challenges outlined by stakeholders engaged for the plan below present potential barriers for attraction and retention of businesses and residents in the downtown core:

- Perception of increased criminal activity<sup>26</sup>
- Lack of security presence at night
- Limited public transportation options<sup>27</sup>
- Lack of accessibility
- Perceptions of limited parking
- Short-term rentals dampening the housing supply downtown
- Perception of a growing number of derelict buildings and vacant properties – corroborated in part by high vacancy rates in the downtown
- Limited number of childcare centres
- Quality of life challenges for residents living near the port (noise, odours, view obstruction)<sup>28</sup>.

Stakeholders in the downtown region are also facing a challenging labour market. The labour replacement ratio in the downtown region is much lower than in the province as a whole – 0.39 compared to 0.54, meaning the area is struggling to replace workers who leave the workforce, whether for retirement or mobility.

These challenges could be deterrents for companies looking to invest in the downtown and potential residents considering living downtown. Further, many of these issues may affect perceptions of downtown St. John's as a safe place to visit, which may affect tourism and attraction of festivals/events that are currently large contributors to the downtown economy.

Addressing these social challenges through strategic investments, policies and initiatives will be important to growing the downtown economy with increased business and resident spending activity in the area. Commercial and residential tenant attraction will also be critical to optimizing economic outcomes of adaptive reuse of underutilized buildings. Some efforts are already underway to improve downtown safety, such as the formation the Downtown Safety Coalition.

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<sup>26</sup> While statistics are not available for incidents of criminal code violations in the downtown core, incidents tracked by the St. John's RCMP have increased every day from 2020 to 2023, punctuated by an 18% surge in the rate of violations per 100,000 population in 2022. In total, the rate of violations per 100,000 increased from 5,272 in 2020 to 6,767 in 2023. Statistics Canada. Table 35-10-0178-01 Incident-based crime statistics, by detailed violations, police services in the Atlantic provinces

<sup>27</sup> John Weber, "Metrobus: the good, the bad, and the ugly," *The Independent* March 10, 2025

<https://theindependent.ca/commentary/making-connections/metrobus-the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly/>

<sup>28</sup> City of St. John's "What We Heard: Downtown St. John's Neighbourhood Plan"

While the economic trends affecting the City of St. John's are optimistic, the downtown core is facing serious challenges affecting its economic success. Finding adaptive reuse of underutilized or empty buildings to address the housing shortage and encourage more residents to live downtown would inject thousands of monthly household spending into the downtown economy.

Enhancing social conditions that improve quality of life, and the overall appeal of downtown will generate significant economic benefits, both locally and across the broader region. These improvements are especially timely, as the economy is poised for growth in emerging sectors such as green hydrogen, onshore and offshore wind, and technology. Creating a downtown that is attractive to businesses and residents that will be part of that growth presents significant economic opportunities for the downtown core.

## **Encouraging Investment**

When it comes to factors that influence development, market conditions—such as the dynamics of supply and demand for residential, commercial, and industrial spaces, pricing trends, absorption rates, and the availability and condition of existing properties—play the most critical role in determining the timing and location of developments

For developers, a clear business case is essential — they require a target return on their investment within a specific timeframe. If the necessary conditions are not in place, development may be postponed or not pursued until the environment becomes more favorable for investors.

While municipalities generally have limited control over the factors that drive development, they do possess various tools to foster a more conducive atmosphere for growth. The municipality can help create conditions that strengthen or encourage a viable business case for development. Conversely, whether intentionally or not, they may also slow down, postpone, or deter investment.

The City has a variety of tools available to create favourable investment conditions for downtown. The City shall continue to use, or seeks ways to improve the following tools:

- Offering municipally owned land at favorable rates or terms to encourage specific types of development.
- Advocate for the province to change legislation to allow the possibility for applying preferential tax rates to make completed projects more appealing to owners and operators.
- Further leverage the City's grant administration capacity to revitalize vacant properties and reduce vacancy rate, e.g., by tying grant size to length of vacancy (to target the most under used properties), the economic impact of the new business or renovation, the scope of renovations, etc.

- Requiring measures to mitigate impacts on neighbouring properties, include set-backs, façade/design elements, among other guidelines.
- Boosting demand capacity and encouraging spending within the downtown year-round by:
  - Embracing “winter city” principles in urban design (e.g., orienting buildings and seating to block winds, maximize exposure to sun, installing windbreak structures in open plazas).
  - Boosting spending capacity for residents and directing spending downtown by developing digital currencies and gift card programs redeemable only downtown, such as Guelph, Ontario’s successful “Downtown Dollars” program.
- Further investigating appropriate building heights in the downtown.
- 
- Streamlining the approval process, ensuring transparency in decision-making, and clearly communicating feedback, including any conditions (e.g., “Not approved” vs. “Not approved, but if...”).
- Implementing development charges or fees, such as those collected from building permits, to help the municipality fund the infrastructure necessary to support new developments.
- Setting specific design standards and requirements.

These tools can be used to support implementation of the plan, and to improve the business case for developers to invest in the downtown area with the types of projects the community would like to see created.

### **Alignment with Regional Socio-Economic and Sustainability Goals**

A key outcome of this plan is fostering economic growth, innovation, and resilience while building a livable community in downtown St. John’s. High-density development supports several key themes relevant to the future of St. John’s and the region, including:

- **Youth Attraction and Retention:** One of Newfoundland and Labrador's most pressing challenges is the outmigration of young talent. High-density, vibrant urban areas act as magnets for young professionals, fostering a sense of community, access to employment opportunities, and quality of life that appeal to the younger demographic. Proximity to Memorial University and its satellite institutes provides a direct link to educational resources, entrepreneurship, and workforce development. Leveraging Memorial University as a center for innovation and research can promote an ecosystem that encourages start-ups and attracts talent.

- **Concentration of Talent:** A thriving downtown core can foster a critical mass of talent necessary to support the province’s priority sectors such as innovation, technology, and sustainable resource-based industries. Newfoundland and Labrador’s economy has historically been anchored in natural resources and their associated supply chains. As we move towards sustainable practices in industries such as fisheries, oil and gas, and clean energy, there is a growing need for the workforce to continue evolving, building on its existing innovation, skills, and adaptability. High-density commercial developments, such as mixed- use higher rise buildings or intentional clustering in a business district, provide the collision spaces for industry professionals, researchers, and innovators to collaborate. Further, a more vibrant urban core with increased housing options and thriving businesses encourages talent to choose to live and work in downtown St. John’s.
- **Creating conditions for increased trade and export development:** The plan also supports the province’s continued focus on expanding trade and export opportunities by improving the City’s reputation as a gateway to global markets and its role as an economic hub by providing modern, commercial spaces for St. John’s growing trade, logistics and export-focused industries. A well-connected downtown with strong transportation links and commercial spaces will support this province-wide goal.
- **Improving Quality of Life of Residents:** Increasing density, beautification, and walkability of the downtown core can further develop St. John’s reputation as a cultural and tourism destination while also providing residents with enhanced access to amenities, social spaces, and the arts, thus improving the overall quality of life. These factors are increasingly recognized as determinants of health. High-density, walkable communities promote physical activity, reduce vehicle congestion, lower municipal servicing costs per unit, and improve air quality. St. John's can enhance its residents' social well-being by integrating green spaces, community hubs, and public amenities into its high-density developments. This contributes to mental and physical health by fostering a sense of community, safety, and accessibility.
- **Sustainability:** The province’s focus on sustainability and climate change adaptation is also supported by the plan. High density development results in concentration of services, reducing the per-capita cost of infrastructure development and maintenance. Additionally, compact, well-designed urban areas are more conducive to sustainable transportation options like public transit, cycling, and walking, which in turn help lower greenhouse gas emissions.

**Ultimately, well designed and well planned higher-density developments in downtown St. John's can support the province's overarching goals of economic diversification, environmental sustainability, and social well-being while ensuring that the city remains an attractive, livable space for both residents and visitors alike.**

## **Summary of Potential Economic Impacts of Downtown Forward**

Downtown St. John's is experiencing increasing homelessness, concerns over crime rates, business closures, and declining perceptions of safety. A coordinated development strategy is needed to restore vibrancy, affordability, and economic vitality of the downtown.

The Envision St. John's Municipal Plan emphasizes the potential to reinvigorate downtown through infill development, heritage rehabilitation, public realm improvements, and better support for mixed-use and residential growth. This Secondary Plan furthers that goal.

Downtown St. John's is poised to benefit from the positive socio-economic trends the province and the city is experiencing related to anticipated continued growth in GDP, employment, population and visitor spending.

To maximize the socio-economic impacts of these trends for the downtown area, **increasing higher-density residential and commercial development and quality of life infrastructure through this plan will result in positive effects on business, resident and visitor attraction.** It may also help the city control servicing costs through densification in existing serviced areas.

Implementation of this plan will also decrease the pressure on transportation infrastructure, by increasing the number of people who can walk, rather than drive, to work, stores, restaurants, and essential services in the downtown area.

An injection of new and thoughtful developments and improved public infrastructure can also lead to increased property values, real estate sales, and can contribute positively to the overall taxable assessment, helping the City cool pressure on property tax rates, which will have positive economic impacts on the municipality and its ability to invest in plan implementation.

To truly anchor downtown in the minds of residents and visitors alike, a clear and compelling **place brand** should be developed—one that reflects the area's unique identity as the historic, cultural, and economic heart of the city. This could be expressed through public realm elements such as consistent signage, heritage markers, street banners, lighting, public art, and digital storytelling.

Creative placemaking—through pop-up markets, temporary installations, live music, and seasonal events—can turn underused spaces into destinations, drawing foot traffic and

building emotional connection to place. Incentivizing or partnering with local creatives and entrepreneurs to animate the downtown can complement bricks-and-mortar development.

A focused strategy and policy initiative to support the **night-time economy** could help extend foot traffic beyond 9 to 5, boost spending in food, retail, and hospitality businesses, and increase perceived safety by keeping the area active and welcoming into the evening.

Supporting a diverse retail mix—including independent businesses, pop-ups, and local makers—will help reinforce downtown as a destination for unique experiences not found in chain-driven shopping centres.

Downtown revitalization is not solely about buildings—it's about experience. A vibrant core must feel cohesive, creative, and magnetic. By pairing thoughtful residential growth with branding, placemaking, and cultural expression, Downtown St. John's can become a place where people don't just live and work—but linger, explore, and belong.

**Overall, this plan supports a more vibrant downtown core, which will have positive effects downtown businesses and cultural institutions, enhancing overall quality of life and contributing to the long-term economic vitality of downtown St. John's.**

ST. JOHN'S