

VOLUME

01

# Planning & Urban Design: Bring Back Main Street

A Pandemic Recovery Solutions Brief



BRING  
BACK

MAIN  
STREET



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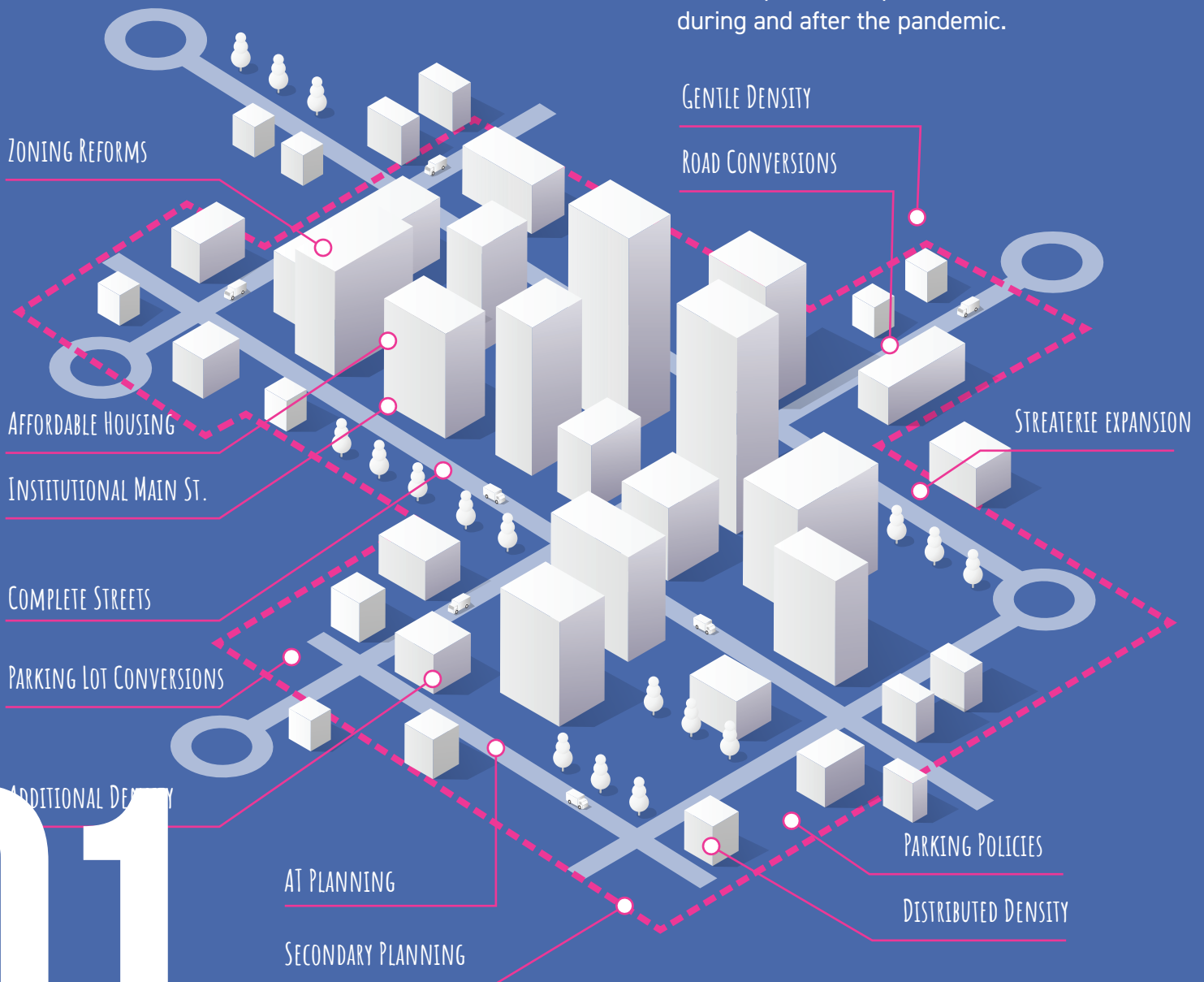
Ken Kelly, IDA Canada

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# PLANNING RESPONSE PLAYBOOK

Planners have a wide variety of tools at their disposal to improve Main Street during and after the pandemic.



# 01



## 01 Introduction

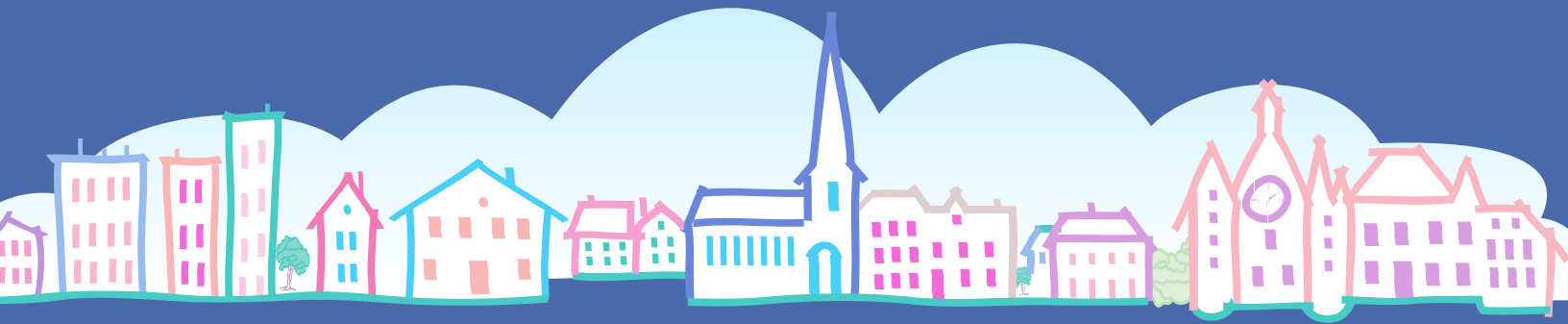
**Planning and Urban Design strategies are normally multi-year endeavours that require the consultation, engagement and jurisdictional coordination between a wide range of stakeholders.**

The negative impact of COVID-19 on economic, social and environmental conditions has been felt in communities and main streets across Canada and around the world. This has prompted policy makers, planners and activists alike to call for a re-think of how cities, towns and rural villages are planned and managed. This solution brief seeks to apply this philosophy to support the recovery of main streets.

Initial planning and design efforts to help main streets recover from the impact of the pandemic have so far been focused on short-term initiatives. These range from

road closures and temporary expansions of restaurant patio spaces that ‘borrow’ a lane of traffic from the road right of way to allow more customers to gather safely in the open air.

There is also an opportunity to think longer-term, about the policies and planning ideas that can help main streets recover and create long-term resilience. This is a good time to expand the toolbox of ideas and approaches to supporting recovery beyond the near term to include policy interventions and other initiatives that require a longer time-frame to be implemented. Planning and urban design strategies are normally multi-year endeavours involving extensive consultation, public engagement and coordination across different jurisdictions, so a key goal of this solution brief is to help sow the seeds for positive change.



## 1.1 About This Report

This solution brief focuses on planning and urban design strategies to help main street use the crisis of COVID-19 as an opportunity for change.

It was designed to provide ideas and inform decision making by policy makers, politicians and staff working in all orders of government, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), as well as urban practitioners with different areas of expertise who are looking for a way to help 'bring back main street.'

The report is organized and presented in two principal chapters: Planning and Policy Interventions, and Physical Design Interventions. It also includes a broad range of case studies and project examples.

## 1.2 Limitations of Reporting

The range of potential topics that could be explored in this report is extensive, but our team has prioritized some of the key ideas which we believe have the greatest chance of influencing the recovery of main street. The different scale and political contexts of main streets across Canada mean there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

## 1.3 Case Studies and Continuing the Discussion

Though many of the examples in the report are representative of the east coast of Canada, the ideas and concepts are derived from across Canada.

To contribute to the discussion, and share the lessons learned from your main street, please go to:

<https://bringbackmainstreet.ca/>

or

<https://citysharecanada.ca>

We also continue to assemble new articles on the topic of COVID and Urban Design from around the world at:

<https://fltp.it/.CZSM3>

## 1.4 Main Street Topologies

No two main streets are created equal, so it is difficult to generalize potential solutions broadly. But, by categorizing them into different topologies, we have a better chance of understanding the common problems and potential solutions for each type of main street. Generally speaking, there are three main street topologies including Business District Main Streets, Neighbourhood Main Streets and Rural Main Streets.



### 1. BUSINESS DISTRICT MAIN STREETS

Business District Main Streets are typically found in downtowns or secondary business districts of a city. These streets are home to a wide variety of commercial businesses, often with many chain stores, and some independent businesses.

The customer base for such main street is often drawn from clusters of office buildings, tourists and students attending nearby post-secondary institutions. With many continuing to work remotely, even after lockdown restrictions were eased, and visitation to downtown destinations such as stadiums and theatres severely curtailed, the economic and social impacts on these main streets have been devastating.

Dialogue and decision-making in Business District Main Streets tends to be dominated by corporate interests, which can leave independent business owners with less of a voice in recovery efforts, although business district Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) tend to be well-resourced and collaborate effectively with municipal officials.



## 2. NEIGHBOURHOOD MAIN STREETS

Neighbourhood Main Streets are usually located outside downtowns at nodes that service local neighbourhoods in a community.

Although still heavily affected by the impact of COVID, many Neighbourhood Main Streets have been able to draw on and benefit from local support from surrounding residents. Many neighbourhood main streets have organized 'rapid response' initiatives such as reorganizing street parking and turning 'private' vacant lots into temporary park space and small plazas to provide opportunities for local residents to gather while still physically distancing.

CREDIT: TJ MCGUIRE, ARGYLE ST PEDESTRIAN ONLY CONVERSION, HALIFAX







### 3. RURAL MAIN STREETS

Rural Main Streets are located in less populated rural areas across Canada and are usually anchored by just a few key businesses. Informal groups of businesses located on either side of provincially-owned highways work together to coordinate promotional and other activities with representatives of provincial Departments of Transportation.

Finding an acceptable balance between maintaining the primary goal of provincial highway managers to accommodate traffic volume with finding creative solutions that go some way to redraw lane widths to provide for active transportation measures has required tact and patience.

CREDIT: DEVIN LAKE, WOLFVILLE RURAL MAIN STREET





	BUSINESS DISTRICT MAIN STREET	NEIGHBOURHOOD MAIN STREET
OWNERSHIP/ ADMINISTRATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Street owned and administered by the municipality, coordinated by BIDs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Street owned and administered by the municipality, many with the help of a local BID</li> </ul>
COORDINATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Usually a high degree of coordination amongst all relevant municipal departments and BIDs.</li> <li>» Street and public spaces are usually well coordinated with land use planning, transit, and other services, etc.</li> <li>» Multiple objectives for the street and surrounding land uses can be planned in tandem.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» High degree of coordination amongst departments. Some competition with neighbouring municipalities.</li> <li>» May require involvement with provincial Transportation Departments</li> <li>» Multiple objectives for the street and surrounding land uses can be planned in tandem.</li> </ul>
CHALLENGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Many of these main streets have been some of the hardest hit during the pandemic as a result of loss of office workers, tourists, and institutional draws like museums, stadiums, libraries, galleries, colleges and universities.</li> <li>» Businesses here often rent so they are many steps removed from the decision making process.</li> <li>» Key markets for these streets (office workers, tourists, students) remain uncertain.</li> <li>» High land values, development complexity, competition for the finite street space mean that change takes longer.</li> <li>» Cultural and sporting events which drew large crowds are not possible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Many more independent and small businesses have less capacity to absorb the substantial losses than the chain stores in the larger urban centres.</li> <li>» Many neighbourhood main streets are part of the car-culture so they can be challenging to retrofit for more public uses.</li> <li>» The surrounding lower density homes tend to push back on higher density</li> <li>» Transit ridership is down impacting neighbourhood main streets.</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Opportunities for interdisciplinary municipal leadership for main street</li> <li>» Opportunities to reset for greater density and progressive planning controls.</li> <li>» Opportunities to adopt parking and transit reforms</li> <li>» Opportunities to experiment with pilot projects like Active Transportation lanes, expanded sidewalk cafes, parklets, parking lot conversions, transit priority streets,</li> <li>» Opportunities in some cities for new parks and high quality public spaces on main street.</li> <li>» Opportunities to work with developers on temporary site uses while developments are paused.</li> <li>» Opportunities for rapid urban placemaking initiatives.</li> <li>» Opportunities to engage stakeholders in re-imagining what main street could become.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Less reliance on office workers, institutional facilities, tourists and students so less impact from these reductions</li> <li>» Close proximity to surrounding residential communities who can support main street businesses</li> <li>» Many more buildings are owned by local independent businesses so they are closer to the decision making process than the urban main street businesses.</li> <li>» The more moderate land values provides opportunities for new infills, new density, and new retrofits.</li> <li>» Opportunities for increased neighbourhood density through gentle density initiatives (secondary suites, backyard suites)</li> <li>» Opportunities for rapid urban placemaking initiatives.</li> </ul>



## RURAL MAIN STREET

- » Usually owned by provincial Transportation Departments with some involvement by town. Business owners often self organize, and some have small BID organizations.
  - » Usually requires involvement and oversight with provincial DOT
  - » Main Street objectives tend to focus on traffic control and safety
  - » Less integration with other town planning or recreational objectives
- 
- » The process tends to be led by transportation engineers, (many single focused) without looking at broader community objectives
  - » Any proposed changes to traffic volumes or car reprioritization is often met with some resistance, and it may be more challenging for street reprioritizations.
  - » Broader planning and recreational objectives are not met and are not the focus due to ownership silos
  - » Business owners, many of whom own buildings, do not have the financial inertia to withstand a prolonged downturn.
  - » Many main streets don't have the luxury of a BID organization to help steer the recovery or to canvas for improvements.
  - » There are fewer businesses so the closing of just one can be felt greater on main street
- 
- » Opportunities to educate DOT on Complete Streets objectives so that broader goals can be met.
  - » Opportunities for improved coordination between province and towns which might not have been a priority without the pandemic.
  - » Low land values and reduced red tape make new development enticing.
  - » Opportunities for new mixed-use development
  - » Greater destination appeal for staycation tourists.
  - » Some of the typical rural main street businesses have had very little impact (grocery stores, pharmacies, doctors and lawyers, restaurants).
  - » Main street still serves much of the same audience as it did before the pandemic and so the clientele challenges are not the same as larger main streets.

There are an estimated 500 Business Improvement Districts (BID) in Canada helping to guide the growth and change of all types of downtowns. These organizations have different names (BID, BIA, BIZ, SDC, etc.) but they all have the same mandate for improving business on main street. 2020 is the 50th anniversary of the BIA (Business Improvement Area)- a Canadian invention, that now has blossomed around the world. For the purpose of this report we will refer to these groups as BIDs. There are likely many more smaller rural main streets that are loosely organized with business owners coordinating amongst towns and provincial Departments of Transportation (DOT) for improvements.

A dedicated BID structure is tremendously beneficial in helping to lobby and implement improvements on main street (policy, administration, physical, maintenance, etc.) but their mandates vary considerably depending on the type and scale of main street.



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MEN'S WEAR

MLX



#LoveDowntown  
A PROJECT OF ST. JOHN'S

**Welcome**

- Pedestrians have the right of way.
- Drivers should yield to pedestrians.
- Pedestrians should use crosswalks.
- Drivers should use caution when turning.
- Pedestrians should use sidewalks.
- Drivers should use caution when driving on narrow streets.
- Pedestrians should use caution when crossing streets.
- Drivers should use caution when driving on narrow streets.
- Pedestrians should use caution when crossing streets.

## 1.5 Trends, COVID Impacts and Lessons Learned

Though the pandemic has brought major disruptions to main street, many view it as an accelerator of trends rather than a fork in the road. We describe some key trends that may impact planning and design decisions about main streets.

The first six months of living with COVID-19 has seen an increased focus on the benefits of activities that can be undertaken outdoors. Main street BID members have worked with their members and municipal staff to support initiatives such as:

- » Expanded patio facilities that 'borrow' space from roadways to facilitate outdoor dining.
- » Creation of temporary parks and plazas on vacant lots to provide for physical distancing.
- » Facilitation of 'pop-up' retail businesses in vacant properties to enhance active continuity at street level.

According to retail analysts working with 'Bring Back Main Street,' the pandemic has accelerated trends such as on-line purchases which affect retailers and other businesses on main street. These include:

- » On-line retail sales among millennials were already trending upwards before COVID-19 but there has been a dramatic surge in on-line grocery purchases by Generation X and to a lesser extent, baby boomers, as older consumers seek to limit in-person shopping trips.
- » Innovations such as scheduled deliveries of on-line groceries and 'click and collect' by the major chains have put pressure on smaller main street stores, many of which

have begun to take advantage of apps that ensure that on-line purchases are sourced locally wherever feasible.

- » Although main street retailers and businesses offering services that cannot be delivered on-line have enjoyed some success, the pandemic has prompted many stores selling consumer goods to expand their on-line presence by seamlessly integrating in-store and on-line marketing.

A key lesson learned as BIDs and their members adjust to the impact of lockdowns and other COVID-inspired restrictions has been that neighbourhood residents have responded favourably to the introduction of 'buy local' marketing campaigns. Examples include:

- » Initiatives that blend a 'lifestyle' message stressing 'authenticity' and 'uniqueness' with modest rewards or other incentives have proved to be popular with residents located within walking or cycling distance of Neighbourhood Main Street.
- » Surveys suggest that residents are receptive to 'buy local' campaigns because they understand that there are mutual benefits to be gained in helping local retailers sustain their businesses.
- » BIDs have also had success in organizing trade-offs on the allocation of space that limit parking with increased provision for bicycles and extra room to maintain safe distancing outside stores.

Many of the debates flowing from discussions about the impact of COVID-19 have pointed to the disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable communities. In the view of advocates promoting initiatives to address inequalities in society as well as to overcome traditional biases in space

planning, Canada's main street are the perfect place to initiate the conversation. Ideas include:

- » Concerns over how to achieve physical distancing and accommodate the desire to benefit from outdoor activities linked to active transportation have stimulated efforts to reprioritize main street in favour of people over cars, while also facilitating curbside pickup and other ways to support commercial activity.
- » Although many BIDs have been able to introduce short-term measures to temporarily widen sidewalk space, there is a growing appetite among committed urbanists to begin the process of making such moves more permanent.
- » Finding ways to reposition main streets as destinations rather than simply functioning as transportation conduits will require strong partnerships between municipal politicians and staff, BIDs and the community at large. A key element of these conversations is how to reduce the visual impact of parking while still providing necessary levels of convenience for customers.
- » In sparsely populated areas of Canada, where rural highways often provide the central spine for small concentrations of shops and businesses, local leaders are engaging with provincial officials to promote ideas for shifting the balance in favour of placemaking rather than simply supporting the efficient transmission of traffic.
- » Recognition of the importance of mental as well as physical health is spurring more attention to opportunities to maximize investments in open space, parks and other recreational initiatives, fostering a philosophy that open space is more than just 'window dressing.'
- » As BIDs prepare for the onset of fall and

winter, principles associated with the Winter City movement are moving to the front burner with businesses adjusting to how to sustain levels of pedestrian 'footfall' as colder weather becomes the reality.

## 1.6 Greater Density at Main Street

Main street corridors or districts offer an opportunity for a more compact, denser form of development, with greater walkability, better transit connections, bike lanes and trail connections and good connectivity to urban cores. They support many local independent businesses, commercial chains, and promote strong local economies and identities.

Proponents of increased density and affordable housing have seized the opportunity to step up lobbying efforts for introducing policies to develop new projects in proximity to main street. In some markets, advocates have also had to counter the arguments of individuals seeking to link higher density with the potential to spread the virus.

Investing in housing is a long-term play, however, requiring patience and persistence. Businesses on main street generally support the introduction of additional housing, recognizing that 'good city building' takes time but well worth the effort as the net result will be an increase in potential customers in their neighbourhoods.

## 1.7 The Case for Investing in Main Street

In the last few decades, main streets across Canada have become increasingly diverse as many municipalities initiated '[Complete Streets](#)' and '[Complete Communities](#)' plans which encourage more diverse land uses, more holistic and safer road designs for a greater range of users, and greater density along growth nodes and corridors. Generally speaking, municipally owned main streets have been quicker to adopt these new planning ideas than provincially owned main streets because the ownership and administration of provincial roads rests mostly with a Provincial DOT, who are tasked with moving traffic safely and efficiently. Context sensitive road design and complete streets initiatives are making inroads at the provincial level but more work needs to be done to integrate other community planning objectives on provincial main streets.

Main street corridors or districts offer an

opportunity for a more compact, denser form of development, with greater walkability, better transit connections, bike lanes and trail connections and good connectivity to urban cores. They support many local independent businesses, commercial chains, and promote strong local economies and identities.

Many main streets are the historic centres of our communities and they contain many of the nation's heritage buildings. Most are usually good prospects for increased density because the traffic infrastructure, transit and walkability support it, and because people want to live close to where the goods and services are located.

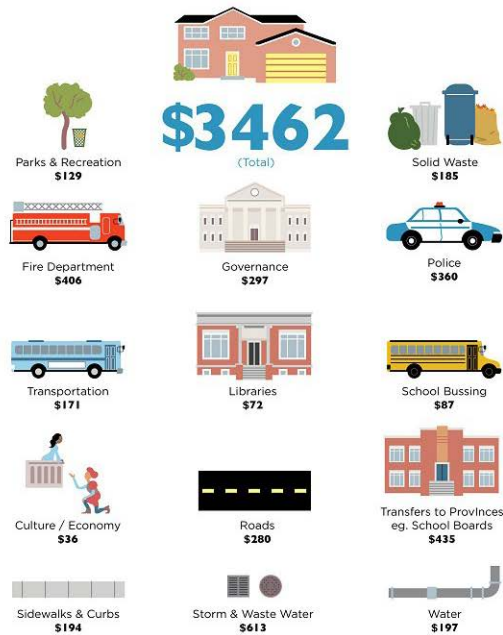
Small towns and cities across Canada are making a push for more housing near main streets by strategically investing in public infrastructure, making high-quality development easier, and by investing in public parks and open spaces.

COMPLETE STREETS, PORT HAWKESBURY



# Sprawl

City's Annual Cost per household



# Density

City's Annual Cost per household



SPRAWL COSTS THE PUBLIC MORE THAN TWICE AS MUCH AS COMPACT DEVELOPMENT. SOURCE: HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY, 2005

For most of them, it's a smart investment. Concentrating density reduces the cost of maintenance and operations for big-ticket services like roads, water and sewers by reducing sprawl into undeveloped areas.

Encouraging new urban density on and around our main streets can save municipalities millions (in some cases billions) over the years. Cities like Halifax, have gone so far to reduce sprawl as creating a regional plan to [target 75%](#) of new housing units in already serviced urban communities; restricting new suburban greenfield development to no more than [25% of the municipality's growth](#).

Encouraging growth in main street nodes will reduce long-term municipal servicing and maintenance costs over low density areas. For instance, Halifax [found](#) it could save up to \$3 billion over the next 18 years

if the city was able to get a handle on its sprawl. Instead, by concentrating density in smaller nodes and corridors in and around main streets, the lifetime cost of servicing and maintaining public infrastructure could be substantially reduced. Many main streets continue to be the symbolic and historic centre of the community and they reflect the prosperity, pride and image of its residents. Conversely, when main street suffers and when buildings are boarded up and dilapidated, it sends a strong message of neglect and it can be felt across every sector of the economy.





PARKING LOT INFILL WITH A MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT ON ROBIE STREET, HALIFAX.

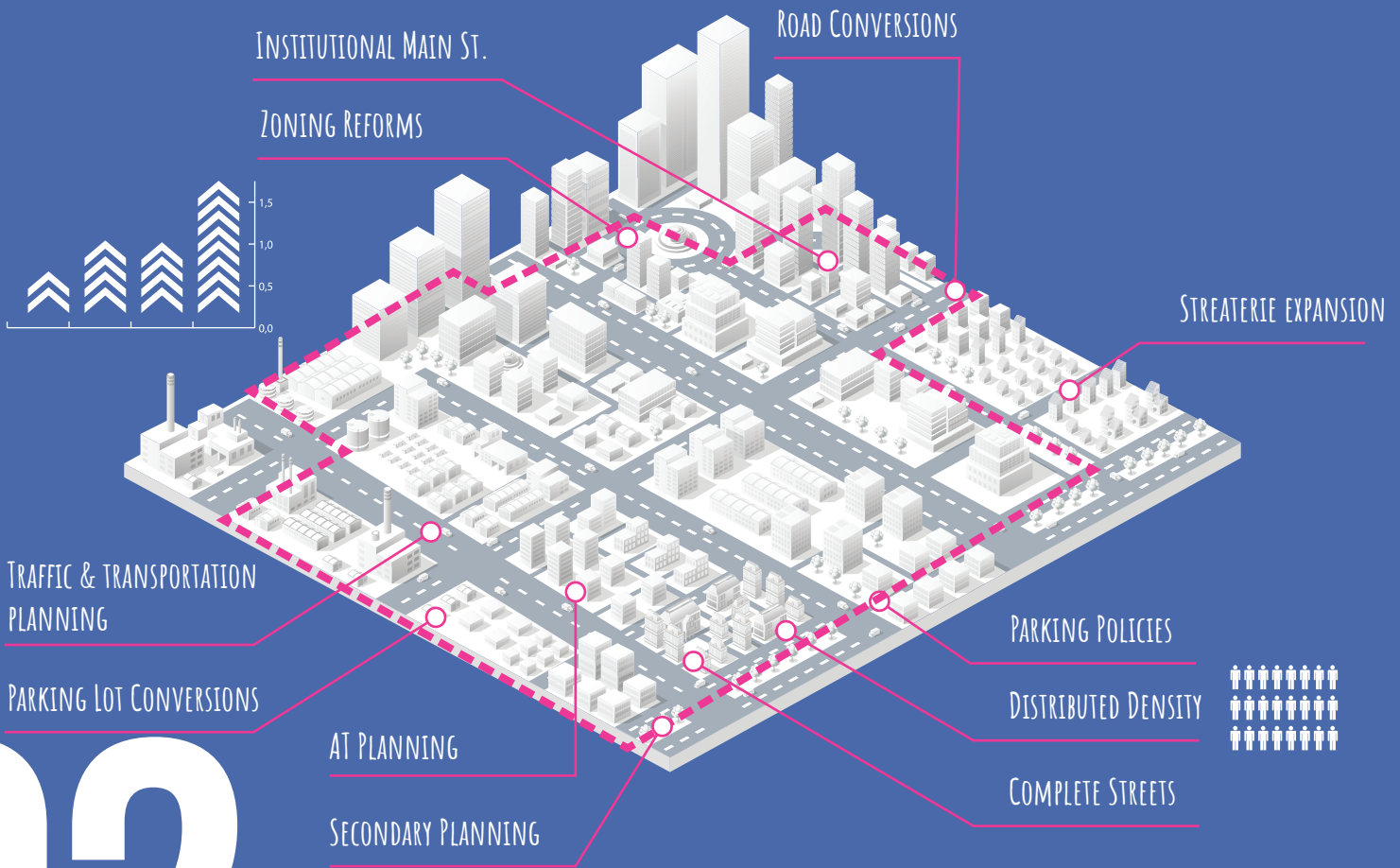
## 1.8 Reality Check on Funding and Resources

Traditional large-scale public works stimulus projects like highways, bridges and energy projects are in important part of government response to economic downturns. However, advocates suggest that these projects do not have the same reach or local economic impact as smaller, more local stimulus projects. Research suggests that selecting several smaller projects has a more substantial impact than attempting to fast-track larger more complex projects that may require lengthy environmental assessments and other steps in the approval process ([The Best Stimulus for the Money](#)).

It is also worth acknowledging that COVID-19 has stretched government and municipal resources to the limit – and in some cases beyond. Creative solutions that bring other funding sources to the table are needed in order to address the funding shortfall. The role of NGOs and organizations able to mobilize volunteers also becomes increasingly important. The leaders among BIDs of all sizes are learning new skills in terms of advocacy for supporting the recovery of main streets that will have short-term as well as longer-term benefits for main street recovery and resilience.

# PLANNING & POLICY

Under typical conditions, planning and zoning changes can take a years to implement. There is both an urgency and a momentum with the pandemic to implement changes that could improve main street.





## 02 Planning & Policy Interventions

### 2.1 Placemaking & Planning Initiatives

Many of the design interventions needed to reprioritize public space, modify land use designations and zoning during and after the pandemic are intimately linked to municipal and provincial policies, standards manuals, codes of practice, maintenance manuals and bylaws. What may seem like a simple, logical intervention requires coordination and agreement from many different departments and from the public. In most cases, council approval is required. This is why planning changes are notoriously time-consuming and complex.

But soon after the pandemic struck, provinces moved quickly to amend municipal approval timelines and establish regulations to provide for on-line

consultations and modifications to in-person public information meetings. With most municipal staff working from home, municipalities had to quickly adapt to incorporate online public engagement and to change review procedures. Some changes, particularly those affecting public health or the economy, were adopted within a matter of weeks or months. In this 'new normal,' there seems to be potential for implementation of planning solutions that will bring short-term and long-term stability to main street.

Though many of the plans in this section are long-term due to the nature of their complexity and degree of engagement, there are also some shorter-term planning initiatives that could yield quick wins.



PLANNING FOR PORT HAWKESBURY'S GRANVILLE STREET AND WATERFRONT DURING THE SUMMER OF 2020.

## TOOLS & APPROACHES



QUICK WIN

### Host a Main Street Visioning Block Party

As part of the recovery process, community groups or BIDs could host main street visioning block parties to bring together unique skillsets like artists, business people, musicians and entrepreneurs to identify challenges, opportunities, and new ideas. The relationships established through this kind of activity can facilitate new connections and forge alliances. Online engagement tools and surveys are now available to build on ideas from the block party.



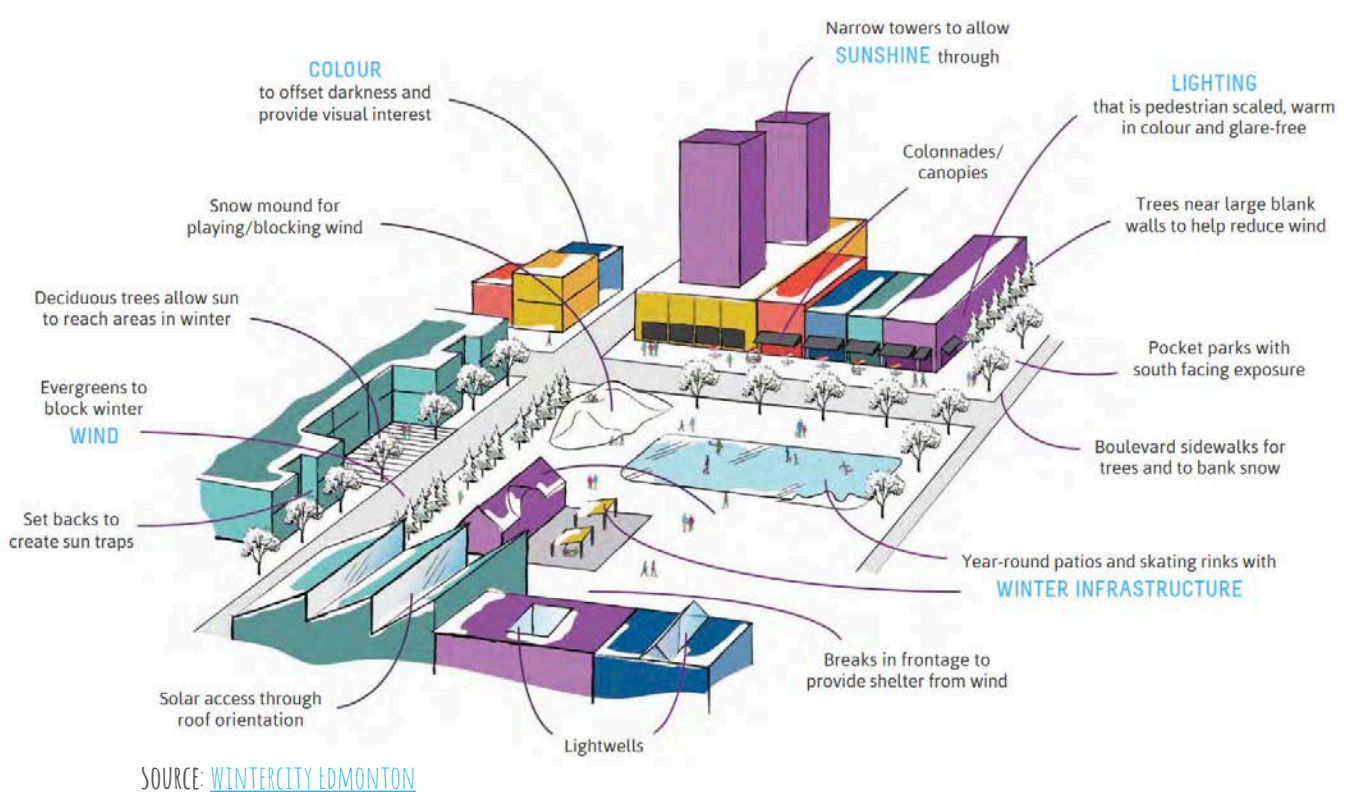
QUICK WIN

### Promote Winter City Placemaking and Planning

Bringing the inside outside has been a goal for many businesses on main street during the pandemic. As the Canadian winter sets in, we must find ways adopt [winter design principals](#) for main street.

The Winter Cities concept is part of a northern latitudes movement that first appeared in Edmonton in the 1980s. The goal is to create reasons for people to be outside in the winter, and to improve their thermal comfort using microclimatic design solutions. The pandemic has helped Canadians focus on the health benefits of staying outside, so Winter Cities, which combine physical design with innovative programming are a good combination.

Wintercity plans can address every scale from individual to outdoor patio design (coverings, heaters, blowers, thermal seating, etc.) up to larger main street microclimate improvement plans (wind breaks, winter events and programming, colour on main street, warm-tone lighting, etc.). Wintercity design principals maximize human thermal comfort on main street and to attract residents and day-trippers during all 4 seasons.



Quebec City and Montreal host [festivals and events](#) that draw tourists in all four seasons. Northern latitude cities from Winnipeg, to Sudbury, Ottawa, and Charlottetown host popular winter festivals and activities. [Edmonton](#) and [Saskatoon](#) have both recently crafted winter city strategies to proactively design comfort into their downtowns and main streets to draw people out of the warmth of their homes out onto main street. They encourage the use of colour to enliven winterscape, create interest with light at night, incorporate microclimatic design strategies such as blocking the wind with canopies, maximizing solar exposure, mechanically warming the outdoors and provide warm food and drinks, with the goal of keeping people active and moving.

In the immediate term, local governments, business associations, and community groups can focus on planning outdoor events on main street. Another immediate priority is to ensure sidewalk cafes and

commercial street extensions are permitted throughout the winter for very little cost and begin coordinating winter maintenance with municipal officials. As part of this, there is a need to explore ways to make outdoor heaters and temporary canopies/enclosures more cost effective for main street businesses. These could include sponsorships, go-fund-me campaigns, or even working with a local university to develop new efficient heating technologies. New infrastructure can also be added to parks to maximize their use in winter (e.g. warming huts, fire pits, windbreaks, winter activities like skating or tobogganing).

Over the longer-term, local governments and other main street stakeholders can develop winter city plans and design principles.



YARMOUTH FACADE PROGRAM

## ENHANCING DOWNTOWN

Improving Business through private and public investment



### FACADE PROGRAM OPEN HOUSE PRESENTATION

The open house is open to all commercial building owners within the designated program boundaries. Come hear about the program and sign up for the first phase.

- NEW HORIZONS SENIORS CENTRE
- December 4th
- 2PM - 3PM

Investing in our downtown with 50 cent dollars

### Municipal Investment in private commercial buildings downtown...what's the catch?

There have been over a dozen municipal facade programs in Nova Scotia over the last 5 years and in 2019, Anichat is about to embark on the first Facade Incentive Program. The program is geared towards making downtown Anichat a better place to live, shop and visit. To that end, the Municipality of the County of Richmond will be spearheading this new facade program and will manage its contribution of the \$145,000 program to oversee the program.

The program will cost share 50% of the exterior facade improvements up to a maximum share of \$20,000. That means if you spend \$40,000 on improvements, the Municipality will reimburse you \$20,000. If you spend \$60,000 the Municipality will only reimburse you \$20,000 per property.

Wait a second, 50 cent dollars...what's the catch? There's really no catch, we're trying to improve the business climate downtown and the best way to do that is to invest in our businesses and buildings. Of course, there are some eligibility requirements to ensure that we are funding projects that will enhance the overall appearance of downtown. Those requirements will be spelled out during the process. Come out to the first Facade Open House and hear about the program and how it has helped many other communities. We hope to convince you to join the program and make downtown Anichat the place to do business.



## Establish or Expand Facade Incentive Programs

Facade incentive programs, which have a long successful track record associated with main street reinvestment strategies, are established by municipalities (sometimes with participation from other orders of government) as a cost-shared incentive for building owners to improve the aesthetics of their storefronts.

In Atlantic Canada, the programs have been shown to have a municipal payback of 7-10 years. For every dollar invested by the municipality, the programs typically generate roughly \$3 dollars in spending by the property owners. The result is a win-win: the municipality benefits from increased assessment, the owner gets a more attractive building and main street is improved.

Added value comes through creation of a facade incentive master plan to ensure facade improvements are coordinated and

supportive of the broader vision for improvements to signs, windows, façade design, and even window displays.

If one doesn't already exist, municipalities could create a facade incentive program to entice building owners to improve the exterior of their buildings.

## Prioritize Main Street Secondary Planning

Main streets benefit from detailed planning policies put in place to ensure their vitality and relevance as destinations and business centres. While official plans establish Council priorities for the municipality as a whole, secondary plans – which can take many different forms – contain a range of detailed policies that determine land use designations, provide guidance for zoning by-laws, establish rights of way and many other factors that affect the character and function of the built environment.

Secondary plans, which can be prepared for entire downtowns, individual main streets

PREPARE FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOPS

ITERATIVE PROCESS OF GATHERING INPUT TO INFORM DESIGN

PREPARE DOCUMENTS FOR HRM APPROVAL



The SGW team reviews input from stakeholder engagement work sessions and prepares for the public engagement sessions.



Based on feedback, Ekistics develops initial massing and explores design concepts in preparation for the first public engagement session.



Tim Merry launches communications campaign for the public engagement sessions.



At each session, the team shares its progress with the public: they present findings from previous sessions/workshops, and present refined concepts.



Tim Merry facilitates the sessions, collects the public's comments, and live compiles the findings by theme. Input from this session is shared with team members for discussion.



Dexel and Ekistics ensure that each comment from the public is given a response.



Tim Merry posts summaries of comments and replies and shares the architectural presentation online.



After each engagement, Ekistics reviews the results, and the design is adjusted to reflect feedback.



After the public engagement series, Dexel and Ekistics refine the design and prepare for the Development Agreement addendum.

02 PLANNING & POLICY



COGSWELL TRANSFORMED SECONDARY PLAN.

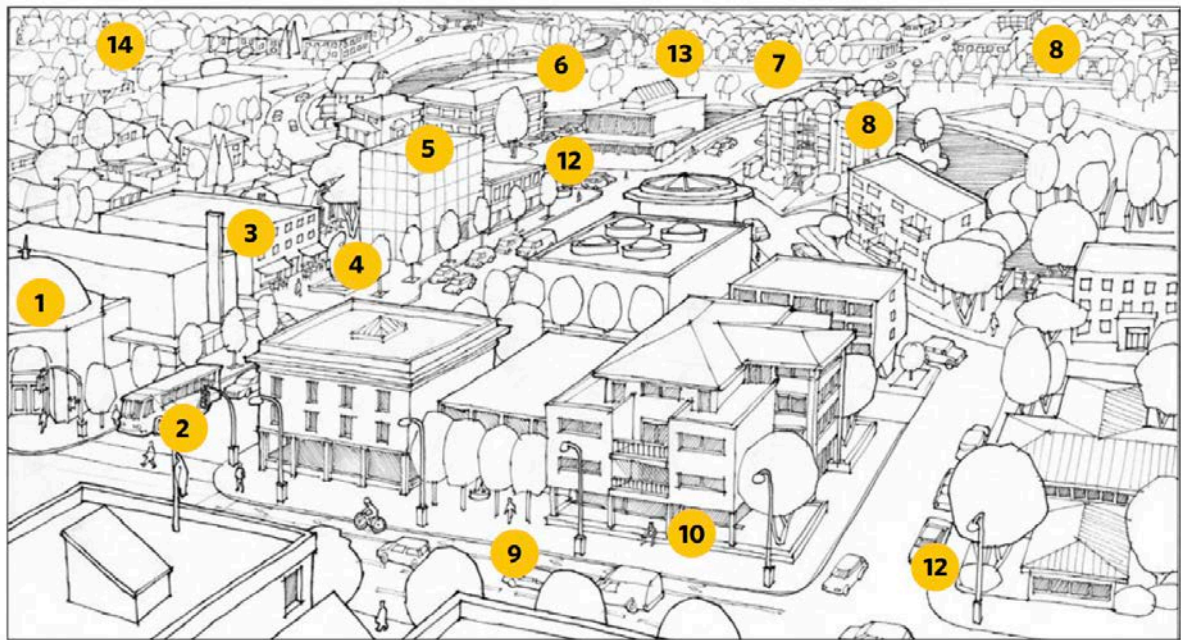


figure 01b

- |   |  |  |                         |
|---|--|--|-------------------------|
| 1. Preservation of heritage sites                         | 4. Promotion of arts and culture               | 7. High quality local spaces                 | 10. Safe and accessible |
| 2. High frequency transit                                 | 5. Local employment options                    | 8. Housing options/affordability             | 11. Schools             |
| 3. Mixed developments—housing, retail, public space, etc. | 6. Connected transit, pedestrian, bike routes. | 9. Complete streets—cars, bikes, pedestrians | 12. Parking             |
|   |  |  | 13. Parks               |
|   |  |  | 14. Urban forest        |

waterfronts/riverfronts or even open space networks or mobility plans, establish a policy framework that provides the auspices for creating Community Improvement Plans, Façade Incentive plans or the impetus to designate a Heritage District. Any and all of these initiatives require extensive consultation with the public as well as Council buy-in.

Complete Community ideas represent the broadest approaches to developing a secondary plan. When focused around a main street, the goal is to create places where people can live, work, study, exercise, and commute short distances.

Initiating new secondary planning processes for main streets is a way to bring together main street businesses, residents, developers, municipalities and downtown partner associations together to develop a shared proactive

vision for the street. They can be an important planning tool to support recovery as they can help a community come together to establish priorities for improvements and communicate local needs. The secondary plan process can also address the need for increased density and housing affordability near main street.

### Develop Complete Streets Plans

'Complete Streets' plans take a broader, more progressive view of the role of streets for all users including cars, people, cyclists, and transit. These plans bring together transportation engineers, planners, economic development specialists, and designers, using a public process to better understand community priorities and needs. The plans often emphasize community health and well-being and encourage street designs for all ages, abilities, and modes of travel. Generally

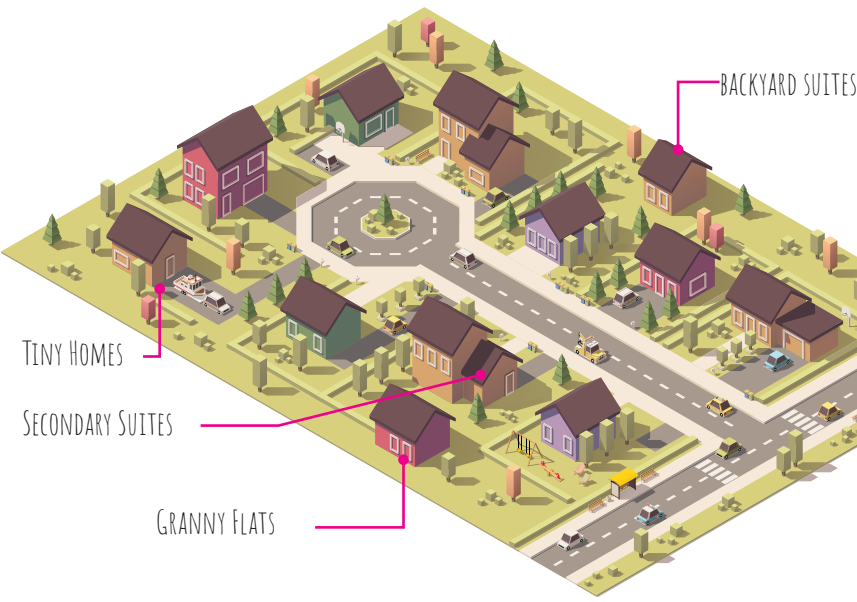


COGSWELL TRANSFORMED SECONDARY PLAN. TRANSFORMING THE 1960'S URBAN RENEWAL INTERCHANGE IN HALIFAX TO A NEW URBAN FABRIC AT THE GATEWAY INTO DOWNTOWN.



02 PLANNING & POLICY

HALIFAX SECONDARY & BACKYARD SUITES : REGIONAL COUNCIL APPROVED FIRST READING ON JULY 7, 2020 AND A PUBLIC HEARING WAS SCHEDULED FOR SEPTEMBER 1, 2020. ON SEPTEMBER 1, 2020 REGIONAL COUNCIL APPROVED THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS.



	SECONDARY SUITES	BACKYARD SUITES
<b>MAXIMUM FLOOR AREA</b>	» 80m <sup>2</sup>	» 90m <sup>2</sup> * or the maximum size permitted for an accessory building (garage); whichever is smaller
<b>PARKING REQUIRED</b>	» No	» No
<b>SIZE, SETBACKS, HEIGHT</b>	» The same zoning requirements as for main dwellings	» The same zoning requirements as for accessory buildings (garages)

speaking they focus on increasing physical activity, improving the experience for all street users and reducing the emphasis on motorists.

Complete streets plans usually include policies that are adopted in Official Plans, AT Plans or Transportation Master Plans. They promote livability and placemaking using design treatments such as street furnishings, trees, greater interaction with adjacent businesses and ways to animate our public realm and encourage people to linger.

Complete Streets plans are well suited to all main street topologies. The process and approach may need more buy-in and convincing for rural main streets that are owned and managed by provincial transportation departments, who are more focused on traditional auto-centric objectives.

Local governments and BIDs should work together to initiate complete street plans and development them in consultation with local communities.

### Promote Gentle Residential Density

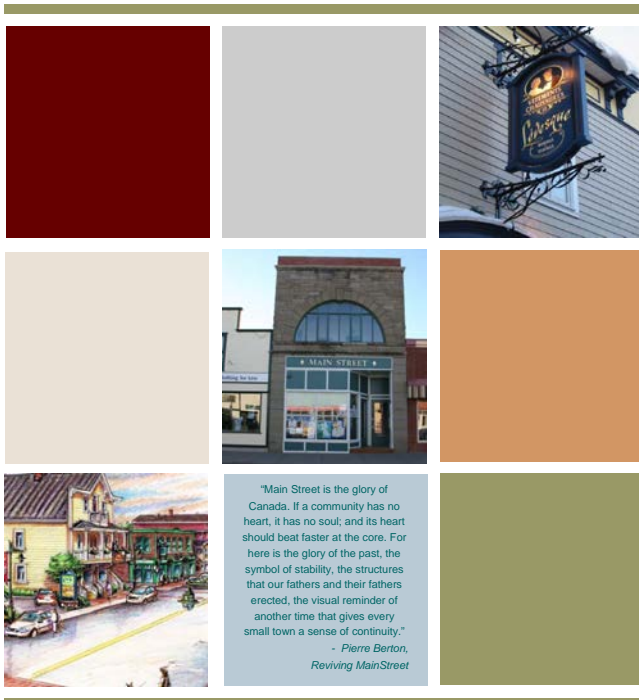
Increasing residential density and affordable housing options can help to bring foot traffic, diversity and vibrancy to a main street, as well as address social inclusion and equity issues.

Many municipalities struggle to create affordable housing options and increased density in neighbourhoods without wholesale changes to neighbourhood character. Gentle density options such as backyard suites, granny flats, secondary suites, tiny houses and carriage houses can be built on existing residential lots for very little cost – and critically, minimal opposition from neighbours.

With the political will and community support, changes to the official plan to provide the auspices for these small-scale initiatives can often be accomplished within a year.

## THE MAIN STREET PROGRAM: PAST AND PRESENT

Prepared by the Heritage Canada Foundation  
for Saskatchewan Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport  
March 2009



## Revive the Main Street Canada Program

[The Canadian Main Street Canada Program](#) was a federal program which contributed about \$6 million over a 10-year period to implement main street projects from 1980 to 1990. The program was administered by the Heritage Canada Foundation using their '4-Point Approach' to systematically revitalize business areas through a combination of (1) design, (2) economic development, (3) marketing and promotion, and (4) organizational development. The program was instrumental in establishing new business improvement districts and the commissions necessary to administer them.

The \$90M program was rolled out in 70 communities. It is estimated that every dollar spent generated \$30 in private investment. Some 700 major buildings were renovated, leading to the creation of 1500 new businesses and 6000 jobs.

The new Federal [Canada Healthy Communities Initiative](#) fund provides up to \$31 million to support communities as they deploy new ways to adapt spaces and services to respond to immediate and ongoing needs arising from COVID-19 over the next two years. Projects considered include Creating (1) safe and vibrant public spaces; (2) improving mobility options; and (3) digital solutions.

A more direct program for main streets, through a new Canada Main Street program would be a logical next step as part of a stimulus program. Channeling federal stimulus funds into an investment program based on the Main Street Canada project could address the recovery needs of main streets across Canada.



## 2.2 Parks and Open Space Reinvestment

As public health experts continue to learn the best ways to reduce the potential for infection during the coronavirus pandemic, the importance of outdoor spaces for gathering and socializing becomes increasingly clear. This places a spotlight on the positive role that parks, open space and other open air venues can play in contributing to mental health as well as the vitality of main streets and main street businesses.

Quality parks and outdoor spaces are also critical infrastructure if main streets are to grow their nearby residential density. High quality parks and open spaces coupled with modern zoning tools are the perfect combination of tools to catalyze residential development, which in turn can grow the economic base for main street opportunities.

### TOOLS & APPROACHES

Ideally, every main street should have an urban park, square or plaza adjacent to and part of main street or within a few blocks. The following considerations

should be part of the strategy for renovating older parks or introducing new modern parks to main street.

#### Experiment with Pop-up Parks

Temporary or 'pop up' parks can serve an important function on main streets. Vacant lots are not only an eye-sore but break up the continuity of retail stores. BIDs are well placed to intervene in these situations by investing in temporary plantings and seating and to encourage owners to allow the public access. As vacant lots incur security costs, it may be to the owner's advantage to work with the BID and municipal staff to offset liability.

#### Plan for Park Improvements

Parks and outdoor spaces are now critical infrastructure for main street during the pandemic, providing the space for social and physical health and wellbeing. Existing parks near main street should be reviewed in light of the new requirements brought about by COVID and as potential gathering space for outdoor events that could bring more people to main street.





This process could begin by engaging the local community and businesses about how an existing park can be modified to increase its use during and after the pandemic. Parks are deeply personal to surrounding communities so the process should begin with a parks programming exercise, followed by a (or concurrently with) a parks master planning process. The master plan should communicate the desired end state (the plan), but it should also provide for phased implementation over time.

Park master plans offer an opportunity to ensure the right mix of parks near main street. It is also an opportunity to anticipate the needs of future populations before additional density comes to main street to ensure parks are programmed to be compatible with future resident demographics.



### Assemble Land on Main Street for New Parks

Closed businesses or unused parking lots provide an opportunity for land banking for future public space investment. BIDS and municipalities should identify strategic properties for purchase and conversion to a

park, parklet, pocket park, urban square or performance plaza. Some main streets may be well served by existing parks, but for those that may be lacking, now may be the time for strategic acquisitions in areas that would enhance the destination potential of main street. The scale of the park should be commensurate with the scale of main street and the location should be central, or at key gateway locations. Park assemblies must anticipate the needs of future populations when additional density comes to main street and ensure they are programmed for existing and future residents.

### Engage Communities in Park Interpretive Plans



With many provinces locked down and tourism all but stalled, local “staycationers” are revisiting their own province and relearning the roots of their own cultural history. Parks can educate people about their past if they are programmed to do so.

Interpretive design in a park context creates historic connections between the past and present using a creative visual story-telling language melded with urban design, graphic design and environmental design. This

## THE INTERPRETIVE PLAN CULTURAL TIMELINE FOR FORT NEEDHAM PARK IN HALIFAX.

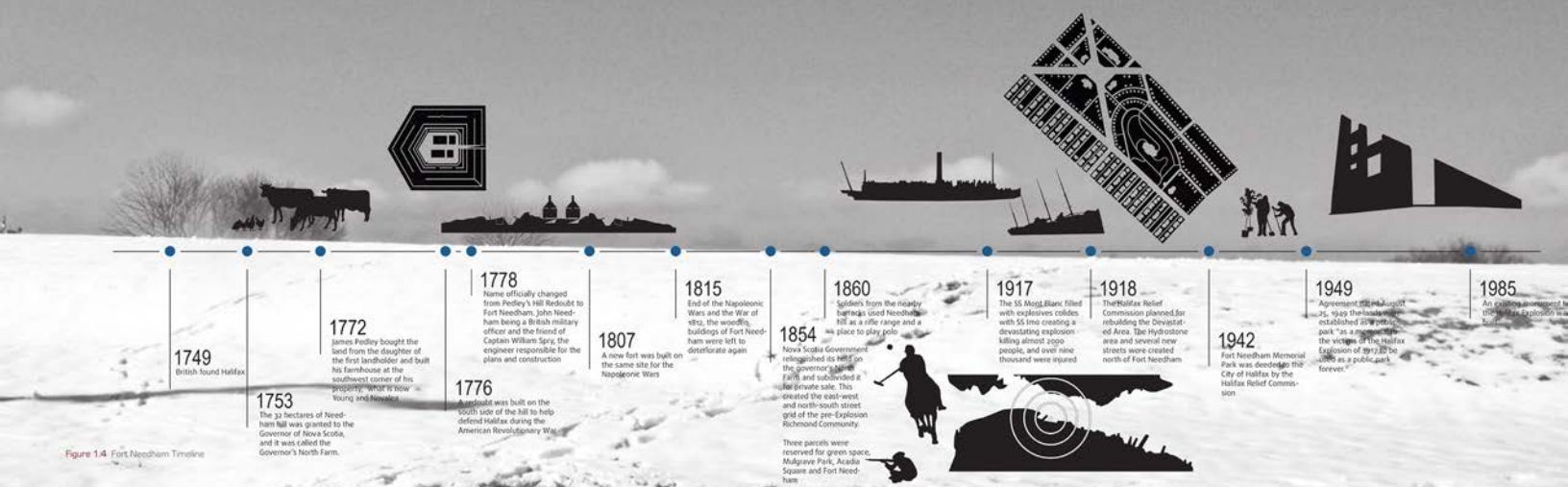


Figure 1.4: Fort Needham Timeline

approach begins with a deep understanding of place, and the meaning can be translated through symbolic forms. Thoughtful design can elevate the importance and meaning of a park. Exceptional interpretive place-making creates places that people want to be part of, associate with, and where people from different races, ages and socio-economic backgrounds can flourish.

### Explore Creative Solutions for Funding Parks & Public Spaces

If parks are essential to public health and main street recovery, yet governments are being challenged financially, we should be exploring creative solutions for funding parks and public spaces.

Although parks conservancies – independent non-profits that complement or replace a municipality's role in parks planning and operations – are most common in the [United States](#), Canada has its own burgeoning conservancy movement. In B.C. conservancies work in collaboration with indigenous leaders. The Nature Conservancy of Canada works with Parks Canada on a variety of major initiatives in the Ottawa area and parts of Quebec. Federal and Provincial governments could investigate tax provisions in the US Parks

Conservancy models to determine their applicability for augmenting Canadian models.

In combination with 'parks [philanthropy](#),' an increasingly high-profile movement that encourages foundations and individuals to direct gifts to protect endangered wetlands and other natural spaces (like the Oak Ridges Moraine north of Toronto), steering the interests of the parks conservancy movement to support main streets – particularly rural main streets would seem to be a timely initiative.

Municipalities could put out a call for local philanthropists to consider the acquisition of new parkland near main street or to retrofit older outdated parks. Another opportunity could be to consider opportunities to secure rights for privately-owned public spaces, trading off maintenance in exchange for usage rights.

Some municipalities are trading increased density for public benefits like public art or affordable housing and in some cases are 'taxing' the additional density for local public benefit projects like parkland improvements or new park acquisitions. Developers tend to be more supportive of a density tax when it directly benefits their development.

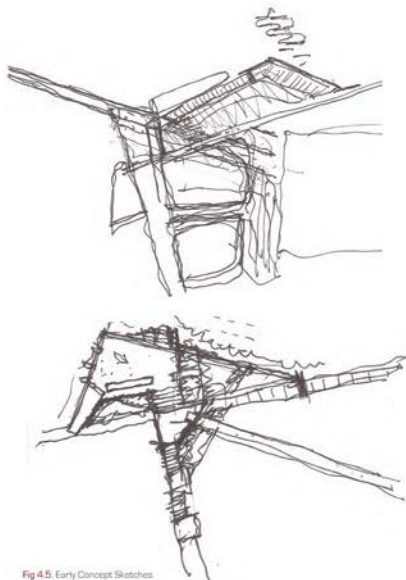


Fig 4.5. Early Concept Sketches

### 4.2 Master Plan

The Master Plan for Fort Needham recognizes the new importance of the park as a Regional Park and a renewed destination for people wanting to learn and remember about the victims and survivors of the Halifax Explosion. It is the expressed desire of the Municipality and the Special Advisory Committee to raise the profile of this park through improved programming, improved features and spaces, and improved legibility of the events which have shaped the community.

Park master plans are not cast in stone, they evolve over generations to represent the priorities, technology and values of each new generation. They usually have a life of one or two generations (20-40 years) before they need to be revisited and updated. Park master plans are also implemented over time, phase by phase, project by project. The plan represents a desired end state, but sometimes it can take tens of years to implement.

Master plans are guidebooks for future decision-making. They inform the present thinking, and guide decisions about suitable programs and activities, where things go or how they should look.



02 PLANNING & POLICY

the hill, the trees and vegetation on the north eastern side mitigate the impacts of the wind significantly creating more comfortable conditions at the base of the hill and reducing the extreme wind impacts slightly at the top of the hill. Preserving the copse of vegetation at the north of the hill will improve the thermal comfort of the park all year round. In the summer, prevailing wind is from the south and south-west mostly. The winds can still be extreme at the top of the hill in the summer.

### 2.1.2 Aspect

As a distinct promontory, Needham Hill is not influenced by the shade of buildings or features around its periphery. Its eastern slopes receive the morning sun, kick-starting evapotranspiration earlier than its western slopes and helping trees pull access water out of the groundwater seeps. On the west side of the hill, the western slopes create unique sunset vantage points that are well known and appreciated by the

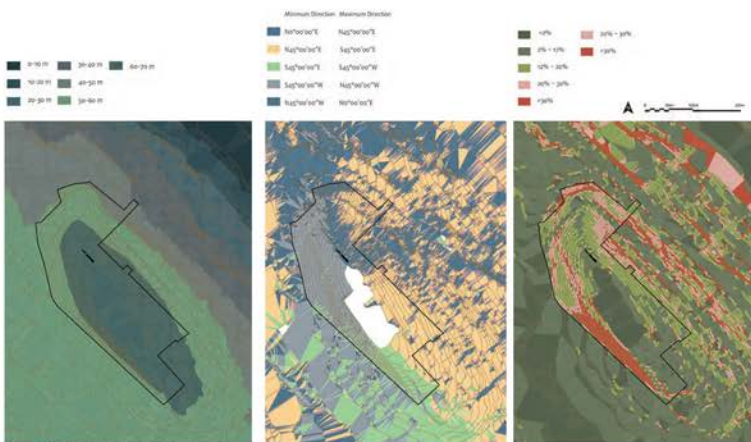
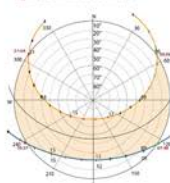


Figure 2.4 Elevation Map, Aspect Map, Slope Map

Figure 2.2 Halifax Solar Map



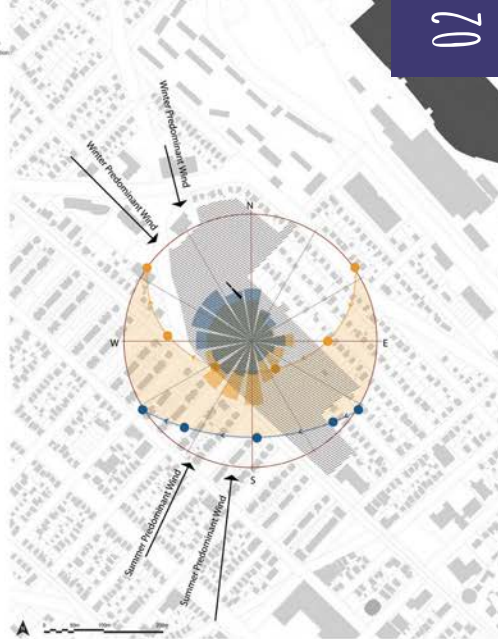
### 2.1.1 Climate & Microclimate

Halifax's climate is influenced by its coastal location and it falls into a Zone 5b hardiness zone along the coast. Coastal winters are comparatively mild, springs start early but are long and cool, and autumns tend to be warm and normally extend late into the year. Near the coast, mean temperature vary 15 to 20 degrees Celsius over the course of the year, inland mean temperature vary 20 to 25 degrees Celsius. This translates into a long frost-free period, and extended growing season and relatively low rates of evapotranspiration (the sum of evaporation and plant transpiration from the surface into the atmosphere), although summer temperatures are cool.

About 1,500 millimeters of precipitation fall on the Halifax peninsula annually, with 90 per cent as rain and 10 per cent as snow. On average, there is fog 15 to 25 per cent of the year, more often in summer and autumn, when warm air temperatures from the south mix with cooler offshore waters. High humidity is also a common coastal influence. Relatively cool moist conditions tend to encourage forest development, reduce the stress of midsummer droughts and lower the risk of forest fires.

The winter wind direction has implications on the human thermal comfort in open areas. The prevailing winter wind on Fort Needham Park is from the west and north-west. North-westerly gusts accelerate across the open Bedford Basin in the winter and as they approach Needham Hill, they accelerate creating exceedingly cold gusty winds at the top of the hill. Near the base of

Figure 2.3 Microclimate Map





## ARTICLES AND TOOLS

### Case Studies

- » [HALIFAX - FORT NEEDHAM PARK MASTER PLAN](#)
- » [TORONTO - HUMBER BAY PARK MASTER PLAN](#)
- » [EDMONTON - OLESKIW RIVER VALLEY PARK MASTER PLAN](#)
- » [THE PLAN FOR CANADA'S CAPITAL 2017-2067](#)
- » [NATURE CONSERVANCY OF CANADA](#)

### Tools

- » [INTERPRETATION JOURNAL - PLANNING FOR SUCCESS. INTERPRETIVE PLANS AND STRATEGIES](#)
- » [INTERPRETIVE PLANNING CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES](#)
- » [PHILANTHROPY IN ACTION](#)
- » [COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS OF CANADA](#)
- » [IMAGINE CANADA](#)
- » [THE CANADIAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS](#)



## 2.3 Parking Policies

Parking is always a lively topic on every main street and almost every BID has to deal with a perceived or real lack of parking or a desire for [free or cheap](#) parking. During the pandemic, free or cheap parking is being used by many cities to encourage people back to main street. But longterm, free parking forces people to cruise for spots, subsidizes driving, and is bad way to allocate land on main streets. The challenge will inevitably come post-COVID, when the time comes to remove these 'perks.'

### TOOLS AND APPROACHES



#### Return Parking Revenue to the Local Area to Pay for Main Street Amenities -

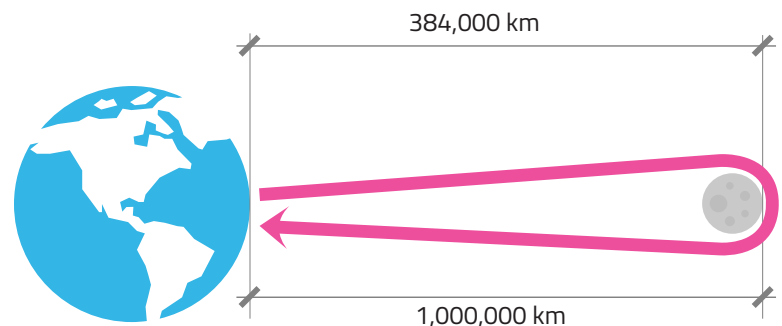
If main street businesses can see and measure the impact of paid parking in their downtown through new streetscape enhancements, new parks and pedestrian amenities that bring more people downtown, they will be more likely to support the need for variable priced parking.

Rather than putting parking revenue into general municipal revenue, it can be earmarked for downtown improvements and administering the parking precinct. This has been the practice in communities in Saskatchewan for some time.

#### Set the Right Price for Parking

After decades of parking research, parking experts identified that while free or under-priced parking benefits the first person to get the space, it creates an enormous social cost for others who can't find parking, who cruise the streets looking for a spot, and for others that just give up and don't come downtown because they know they will never find a parking space.

As a way to support the long-term health of main streets, municipalities should look to 'performance pricing' which aims to target the occupancy of parking at [85% utilization](#) and improves parking performance by ensuring parking availability at all times, reduces 'cruising' and congestion, and ensures turn-over by deterring long-term parking.

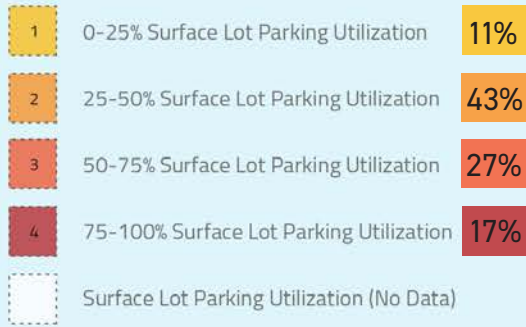


ONE MILLION KM PER YEAR CRUISING FOR A PARKING SPOT ON 5 BLOCKS OF CHARLOTTE STREET IN DOWNTOWN SYDNEY (NS). THIS IS ONE OF THE UNSEEN COSTS OF CHEAP OR FREE PARKING

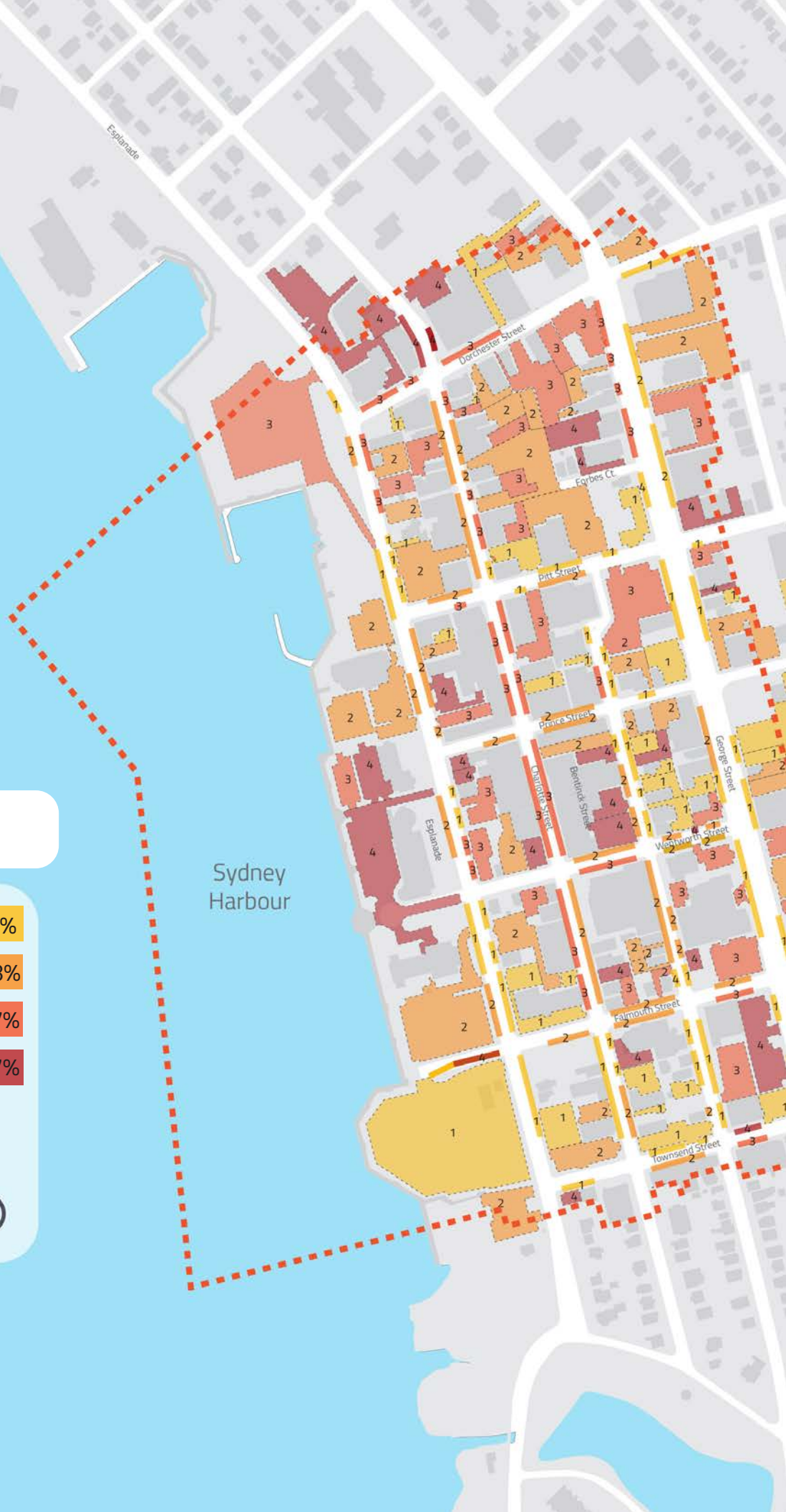
It's unfair to have cities where parking is free for cars and housing is expensive for people.

Donald Shoup

PARKING UTILIZATION AT 4PM (DECEMBER 16, 2019) AT DOWNTOWN SYDNEY.



0 50 100 150 200m





DRONE-BASED PARKING ASSESSMENT SYDNEY NS. USING AERIAL DRONES FOR REALTIME PARKING COUNTS

### Remove Zoning Parking Requirements Downtown

Many cities are removing minimum parking requirements on downtowns and main street because parking has been the leading restriction to infilling or redeveloping lots. The “missing teeth” on the street will stay missing if zoning bylaws require too many parking spaces for a new restaurant.

Though many cities have established a “parking in lieu” fund, the costs can be excessive and can be enough to prevent a good project from proceeding. Furthermore, the cash usually goes into general municipal coffers and is not returned to the local area. Developers will not build a project if they think that there won't be enough parking onsite for their tenants. Many progressive municipalities have or are working towards [removing parking requirements in downtowns](#).

### Invest in Parking Technologies

Parking planners for main street can now employ aerial drones to quickly capture parking utilization/ distribution throughout the day or week. The aerial counts are quickly converted to parking heat maps which can be used to weigh alternatives or create parking policies.

Traditional parking meters are also easy to convert to digital parking meters that can be controlled with a mobile app, allowing parking managers to do variable priced parking. Parking apps like [Hotspot](#) are perfect for clients because they can refund unused time, warn when time is up, and perform merchant parking validation.

Technology can also be used by municipalities to right-price parking as discussed above.

## ARTICLES AND TOOLS

### Case Studies

- » [EDMONTON REMOVES MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENTS CITY-WIDE](#)
- » [CALGARY PARKING REVENUE REINVESTMENT PROGRAM](#)
- » [THE HIGH COST OF FREE PARKING - VOX](#)

### Tools

- » [DONALD SHOUP'S PARKING LINKS & RESOURCES](#)
- » [PAYING FOR PARKING - CBC](#)

## 2.4 Zoning Reforms

A typical rezoning or development agreement process in most cities can take a year or more and there's no certainty that it will be approved. This lack of certainty creates barriers for developers seeking to introduce new developments. In the meantime, empty storefronts and unused office space could sit idle, while the affordable housing crisis is growing in Canada. Nobody wins in this scenario.

Zoning tools can also be used to support the creation of affordable housing on main streets.

Planners are cautiously moving to adopt variations on zoning to encourage affordable housing and the reduce levels of uncertainty for developers while setting a higher bar for development. These are discussed below.

## TOOLS AND APPROACHES

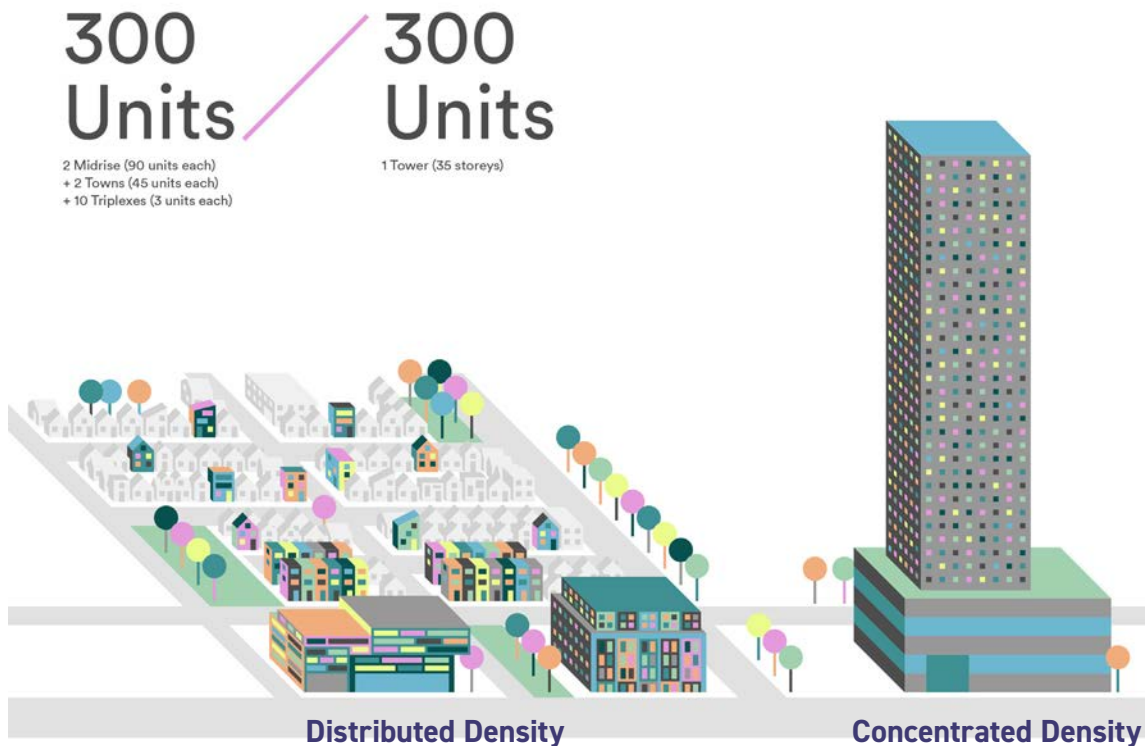
### Updating Zoning Bylaws to Promote Distributed Density

Distributing low, medium and high residential densities throughout our downtowns and Main Street neighbourhoods could help address many of the challenges associated with “hyper-concentrated development” by providing additional housing options. Main street is the ideal location for some of this distributed density because it is already a destination for traffic and transit, it is somewhat detached from low density residential neighbourhoods, and most importantly, the added density can benefit the commercial uses, transit and parks on main street.

[Distributed Density](#) is a model of planned urban intensification is a potential win-win for everyone but needs support from municipalities to make it happen. A bonus

CANADA'S GROWTH RATE COMPARED.





for redirecting growth downtown is to limit outward spread towards the suburbs. A 2005 study in Halifax found that suburban development costs the city (and tax payers) more than twice the cost of urban development per year (\$3462 per yr vs \$1462 per yr) saving the city upwards of \$3 billion over 18 years by restricting sprawl in favour of distributed density.

In this model, areas around urban or suburban main streets are encouraged to consider:

- » Mid-rise mixed-use buildings (5-10 storeys) at strategic locations on or near main street near transit station or along transit corridors.
- » Low-rise apartment buildings (3-4 storeys) and townhouses in existing residential neighbourhoods around main street.
- » Conversions of single-family homes into multi-family duplexes, triplexes or fourplexes.

» Accessory dwelling units like laneway suites, granny flats, tiny houses or carriage houses. Portland just passed a law allowing 4 homes per lot or up to 6 homes per lot if half are affordable housing. Vancouver has been making strides in this area.

Distributed density addresses the 'missing middle' in planning which refers to housing that is affordable for a range of household sizes and incomes but is compatible with the scale of a neighbourhood.

Municipalities should be questioning the cost of preserving single detached dwelling zoning near main street at the expense of sprawl in other areas of the municipality. There is also a cost to main street for maintaining low density around its fringes, a cost to local schools due to under-enrolment and potential for closures (a 2017 study found over 600 schools were at risk for closure in Ontario), a cost to maintain transit



*“The result of all this regulation—minimum lot sizes, height restrictions, parking mandates, historic districts, apartment bans—is that space is misallocated. We are too slow to change commercial buildings to residential, turn a single-family home into an apartment building, or convert a warehouse into a park. There is too much housing where people don’t want it and not enough where they do. A more dynamic and innovative economy must include a more dynamic and innovative built environment, and reforming land-use regulations is a vital step in the right direction.”*

Forbes. [Zoning Reform Is Needed Post Covid-19](#)

services when densities are low near main street. Distributed density can fund improvements to walkability, parks and recreation, AT improvements and a host of other streetscape improvements on main street.

Local governments can review their zoning bylaws for things that would prevent distributed density, such as restrictive or outdated unit-mixes.

In addition to zoning, the public needs to be engaged in conversations about density and planners need to find the right angle and strategy for increased density through public dialogue.

### Implement Inclusionary Zoning Policies

Inclusionary zoning either mandates or incentivizes developers to include a percentage of affordable units in new residential developments. A Statistics Canada [study](#) in 2019 found that 283,000 were on a waiting list for affordable housing in Canada and two-thirds of those had been on the list for over 2 years. The COVID crisis has [increased the demand](#) for affordable housing in Canada and so governments will have to get creative with how to incentivize it.

‘Upzoning’ lands near main street for additional density can be tied to a requirement for a percentage of affordable housing. Because upzoning increases land values, municipal governments can capture some of that lift by



requiring either a percentage of affordable housing in each development, or by creating 'public benefit' fund to tax developers for the additional density to create a municipal affordable housing fund. Affordable housing is the bargaining chip to allow developers extra density, in exchange for more lower than market rate housing.

Halifax's recent [Centre Plan](#) includes a Bonus-Rate for all new developments exceeding 2,000 sq.m., which range from \$84/sq.m. (in less desirable areas) to \$258/sq.m. (in more desirable areas). The money collected will be kept in reserve to be given out in grants to co-op housing projects and non-profit housing groups.

Municipalities can use inclusionary zoning to create more affordable housing near main street. This could include upzoning to allow more density in return for a percentage of affordable units or an affordable housing tax on added density

to collect funds for new affordable housing projects.

Similarly, municipalities can create long-term land leases on public lands to support the development of affordable housing. This approach reduces the developer's up-front land costs, in turn, requiring them to build a portion of affordable units.

### Explore the Use of Form-Based Codes

Form-based codes (FBC) add another dimension to traditional Euclidean zoning by creating regulations that deal with three-dimensional form of buildings, building and site materials and architectural and site design regulations that would normally be found in most design guidelines.

Many Form-based codes are also characterized by a different approval process than typical zoning, usually more closely following the development permit

## FBC Submission Requirements

- 1) Architectural Plans
- 2) Landscape Plans & Grading
- 3) Servicing Schematic
- 4) Traffic Impact Study
- 5) Microclimate Study
- 6) Other regionally specific studies.



process permitted in Ontario. In this process, the public engagement is coordinated at the 'bylaw-creation' stage, and public information meetings are usually not held for each individual development, creating much greater certainty to the developers about the outcomes. In return for greater certainty, developers must submit a host of design studies at the development permit stage confirming that they are meeting the FBC.

These usually include architectural drawings (floor plans, elevations, perspectives), a concept landscape plan, a servicing schematic, traffic impact study and a microclimate study (wind, shade, human comfort) depending on the scale of the building. Variances (small permitted changes to the hard-fast regulations) are usually permitted in conformance with a design standards manual which accompanies the land use bylaw. Variances are managed by the development officer in some municipalities, and in larger cities, they are handled by a design review committee (DRC) made of design

professionals from the local industry. In our experience, the DRC approach works well in medium to large cities.

The FBC Land Use Bylaw usually includes details relating to built form standards including streetwall heights, stepbacks and setbacks, tower dimensions, lowrise and midrise dimensions, unit mix requirements, height or Floor Area Ratios, and a host of other built form requirements. Parking is usually not mandated as a requirement except as it relates to minimizing surface parking, but there are usually sustainability standards baked into the bylaw like bike storage requirements, electric vehicle charging requirements, green roof and amenity requirements, passive design requirements, etc.

Most FBCs also include public benefit options to allow greater density (up to a limit) in return for a variety of agreed upon public benefits (like public art, affordable housing, LEED certification, public open space investment, etc.).





**FORM**

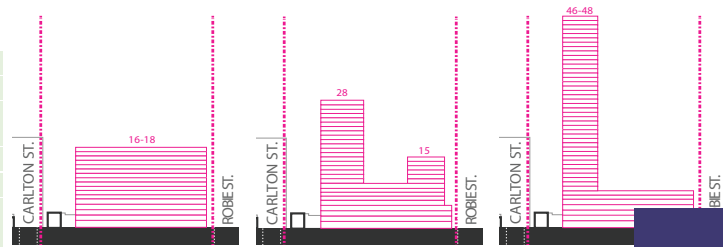
**WHAT WE HEARD**

- "Is this taking too much density?"
- "What is the discussion of the towers?"
- "Emphasize that density is the solution to traffic and affordability issues"
- "More shape in massing"
- "Too hard to get in and out of tower buildings"
- "Height/massing a solution not just a problem."
- "The towers are too much like slabs. They need to be slim!"
- "Let people know it's not a carte blanche for all but why height is important for this site"
- "I like the podium idea but would like to fit it"

**HOW WE RESPONDED**

The building form evolved throughout the design process. Starting with basic forms to elicit feedback. The podium and tower forms were refined throughout the public engagement process.

The overall massing of the highrise portion of the building reduces in scale at the corner. The void space between the towers allows sunlight to penetrate to Spring Garden Road.



**SPLIT TOWERS** We explored multiple possibilities to both achieve the developers feasibility objectives and meet our criteria for developing a successful tradeoffs. The public rally gravitated towards the split massing (top middle) compared to the slab style building (top left) and the solo point tower (top right).



Public engagement for FBC bylaws happen up front when the bylaw is created, and then the subsequent approval process permits the developer and the municipality to work without NIMBY interference.

Local governments can explore form-based codes (FBC) as a way to provide greater certainty to developers and surrounding communities about what a development will look like. The process can be designed to create more as-of-right style development with less political interference while ensuring high quality developments.

**Allow for Ground Floor Conversions and Office to Residential Conversions**

The future of how we will work remains uncertain, but an office to residential conversions or other hybrid alternative could make city cores and main streets into less of a nine to five downtowns, but rather 24-hour livable communities. Rezoning existing buildings is by and

large immune from the typical NIMBY roadblocks. Buildings that have already been built create much less opposition than new buildings. Though many main streets have mixed use zoning that allows for office and residential uses, now is the time to check the flexibility of the bylaw for creative conversions.

In the same vein, the ground floors of many main streets have been purposely zoned for single purpose commercial and office uses. Bylaw updates may want to consider more flexible uses such as residential until the economy stabilizes over the next few years. Temporary conversions need to be considered cautiously so as not to impact the longterm commercial destination potential of main street.

The point is that there may need to be some rapid surgical changes to zoning to improve conditions for businesses and building owners on main street during the pandemic.



NSCC SYDNEY CAMPUS. MORIYAMA & TESHIMA ARCHITECTS, FATHOM STUDIO, AND BARRIE & LANGILLE ARCHITECTS, 2020

### Encourage Institutional Main Streets

Municipalities, provinces and other institutions are beginning to recognize the synergies of locating on main streets. The new Halifax and Calgary Central Libraries have benefited from and transformed their main street locations and new museums, galleries, concert halls and world trade centres are capitalizing on main street locations. Institutions are a powerful activator of main street, and all 3 levels of government should be looking to main streets for new institutional facilities.

Many [Native Friendship Centres](#) in Canada have benefited from and enriched their main street locations. Friendship Centres provide culturally appropriate services for Indigenous people living in urban centres across Canada. They are places where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to come together to learn, share traditions and



SOURCE: RED RIVER COLLEGE

celebrate one another. As some of these facilities are upgraded or rebuilt, they would benefit from a continued main street presence and a more mixed-use development form.

Post secondary institutions are also recognized as catalysts for the knowledge economy. In 2017, the UCL Urban Laboratory, has released several reports on [University-led Urban Regeneration](#), looking at the trend of universities relocating to urban centres. The reports found that colleges and universities located in urban cores can help fund regeneration initiatives by establishing partnership arrangements with external entities that can open up more diverse sources of funding.

Their partial or full relocation location to urban centres have stimulated enormous place-based development capacity in terms of innovations, employment centres, real estate investments, and their voracious purchasing power. Some notable Canadian institutions which have recently moved to main street sites include Simon Fraser University, UCB, the University of the Fraser Valley, The University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan University, University of Windsor, University of Waterloo's health sciences campus, and Brock University. Mains street leaders should pursue local colleges and universities for a main street presence by showcasing the economic benefits

## ARTICLES AND TOOLS

### Case Studies

- » [CITY OF VANCOUVER COVID-19 HOUSING RESPONSE AND RECOVERY](#)
- » [CALGARY OFFICE-TO-RESIDENTIAL CONVERSION](#)

### Articles

- » [GUIDE FOR CONVERTING SHOPS TO RESIDENTIAL SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT](#)
- » [FCM URGES RAPID HOUSING SOLUTIONS AMID PANDEMIC](#)
- » [CORONAVIRUS: FEDS PUSHED ON PLAN TO BUY VACANT PROPERTIES FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING](#)
- » [HOW CORONAVIRUS WILL RESHAPE OFFICE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT](#)
- » [DENSITY CAN WORK POST-COVID-19 IN CANADA](#)
- » [THE POST-PANDEMIC FUTURE: INCLUSIONARY ZONING CAN HELP FIX THE HOUSING CRISIS](#)
- » [THE RISE OF DOWNTOWN CAMPUSES](#)
- » [THE ECONOMIC EFFECT OF URBAN COLLEGES ON THEIR SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES](#)



CREDIT: TJ MCGUIRE, HALIFAX CENTRAL LIBRARY

charted by NSCC and Red River College for other main streets in Canada. Locating post-secondary institutions in downtowns and on main streets should also be explored as part of the government stimulus programs.

## INSTITUTIONAL CASE STUDY

### New Downtown NSCC Campus - Sydney, NS

The Nova Scotia government, which oversees the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) network recently decided in [2018](#) to relocate its NSCC's Marconi Campus (237,000 square feet), from a rural site to a new downtown site on Sydney's main street. A key objective for the move was to stimulate the economy of an ailing the downtown.

After a siting and feasibility study was completed, a 14 acre downtown waterfront site was chosen and construction started in 2020. The [new campus](#) which will bring 1,400 students and 250 staff into the downtown. The waterfront location will be accessible to cruise ship tourists and residents along the boardwalk which should support many of the college's programs (tourism and culinary), and could provide



## 2.5 Peak Hour Traffic and Transportation Planning

The transportation response to COVID-19 served as a major social experiment resulting in an unprecedented drop in traffic volumes on road networks, reducing or eliminating most of the congestion. Nonetheless, there was a significant cost. Fewer people on the road network meant fewer people visiting businesses on main street.

Two things are clear. First, we do not want to go back to where we were – long commutes, congestion, frustrated drivers, pollution, etc. Second, we have a historic opportunity to implement real change, part of which is simply maintaining things that the COVID-19 response has created.

### TOOLS & APPROACHES

#### Focus on Flattening the Transportation Curve

Our roads are generally designed for the traffic demand during the AM and PM (and sometime Saturday) peak hours. If we “flatten” those peaks, in theory we can have the same amount of traffic on the road network, but more evenly distributed throughout the day resulting less congestion, less infrastructure required to support that traffic, less pollution, and just as many people getting to and from the business that need that traffic.

The challenge that our planning and engineering professionals now face is:

- » What is the right level of peak hour traffic reduction on our road network to significantly reduce congestion, but effectively bring people to downtown businesses?
- » What incentives can be used to continue to reduce, or spread peak hour volumes to help reduce congestion?
- » Should additional road capacity to be built to accommodate a perceived (or “habitual”) peak hour demand, or should behavioural change (Transportation Demand Management) be prioritized?

If employers continue to provide flexibility to work from home or alternate arrangements (part time, rotational, etc.) such as the ability to work different hours of the day, it will impact peak hours and help flatten the transportation curve. Transportation authorities can incentivize automobile travel at non-peak hours (e.g. higher peak hour fares at bridges or on highways, higher parking rates at peak hours, etc.).

Technology can play a role as well. Transportation planners can use transportation demand management systems and initiatives to help change network wide travel demand expectations. They can implement real time information technologies that inform the public of current road network conditions. This, combined with the flexibility to choose alternate travel times at non-peak hours, can hold to flatten the transportation curve.



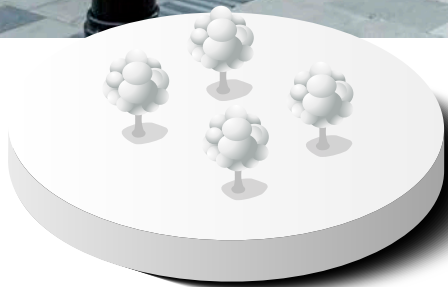
NEW PERMANENT AT LANE BUILT ON LOWER WATER STREET HALIFAX

# PHYSICAL DESIGN INTERVENTIONS

Physical distancing strategies have been universally adopted around the globe to minimize COVID spread through respiratory droplets (cough or sneezing) and touch. As a consequence, Cities and governments quickly responded with aggressive physical design interventions intended to separate people following public health guidelines.







## 03 Physical Design Interventions

The imperative for distancing caused a grand reset on long-held priorities and beliefs in cities. The status quo, so firmly entrenched, became much more fluid. The onset of the pandemic has made creating space for people walking or cycling a priority which has affected both car travel and transit use.

Learning to deal with COVID has stimulated a renewed interest in public space design, leading to a wide range of temporary, tactical conversions as well as longer-lasting projects with the potential for permanent change. Some businesses pushed back against relinquishing space for cars, but for now, the pendulum appears to be swinging firmly on the side of pedestrians.

### 3.1 Types of Road Conversions

With traffic reduced during the pandemic, traffic engineers and urban designers were encouraged to reprioritize roads to take back space from cars to give to people. This strategy has taken on many forms from shared streets, to road dieting to local-traffic-only streets (or slow streets), street closures, etc. Some are more temporary tactical conversions, and some may end up being more permanent installations.

#### Shared Streets

A “shared street” is a concept derived from the Dutch ‘Woonerf’ where the sidewalk and street are level and storm drainage is handled by trench drains. By not delineating the sidewalk and road with a typical raised curb, there is great flexibility in how the street space can be apportioned. Removing formal distinctions between spaces dedicated to pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles, creates greater awareness and gives all users equal priority. Shared streets can be a good solution where there are high volumes of people and lower volumes of cars, and unlike dedicated pedestrian malls (where vehicles are not permitted), the shared street benefits from all forms of transportation. Both Montreal (Saint Catherine St) and Halifax (Argyle Street) have recently implemented shared streets with great success, although the capital cost to implement these changes can be significant.

#### Temporary Road Dieting

“Road diets”, like nutritional diets, come in different options and combinations. The aim is to convert roadways into “thinner, safer, and efficient” routes of passage and enhanced public space (Dan Burden and Peter Lagerwey 1999). With this strategy, travel lanes are often narrowed and/or reduced, making room to widen sidewalks, add medians, establish refuge islands, bike lanes, and more.

‘Road diets’ have been implemented across North America municipalities using context-sensitive design methods and when implemented appropriately have proven beneficial in giving road space back to public realm. Road diets can enhance safety, multi-functionality, business activity, beauty and user experience of a street. The time frame can be quite short if treated as pilot projects with liberal use of paint and plastic cones, as famously implemented in Manhattan by Transportation Commissioner Janet Sadiq-Khan during the Bloomberg administration.

During the pandemic, many cities have been exploring various road dieting approaches including:

- » [Lane narrowing](#)
- » [Lane closures](#)
- » [One-way street conversions](#)

### Argyle Street, Halifax

Atlantic Canada's first "shared street" design. Since COVID, the street has been pedestrian only.



- » Turning lane removals
- » Intersection or midblock bump-outs
- » Onstreet parking removal

Road diets are sometimes used for temporary bike lanes or mixed-use trails with the sidewalk and the bike lane remaining grade-separated by the curb. Some road dieting projects use jersey barriers, which are modified concrete barriers to physically separate traffic from pedestrians or cyclists.

A challenge with temporary road diets is that curbs and catch basins remain in the same spot, which requires additional temporary measures to overcome grade differentials in order to and ensure accessibility.

With one-way street conversions, the temporary drop in traffic volumes from main street provides opportunities for businesses on diversion streets to benefit from the additional visibility.

### Road Closures and Slow Streets

Some roads have the benefit of limiting vehicle traffic to transit, to taxis and deliveries, to garbage pickup, or to emergency access only. Closing a road means additional traffic on surrounding roads and a traffic impact study will be needed to look at the network impacts.

Road closures need not be full-time throughout the day. Many streets use signage and traffic signals to close off a street from vehicle traffic for a portion of the day (opening during peak AM or peak PM periods). The slow street movement allows only local traffic and is mostly controlled with signage and temporary movable barriers.

### Transit Oriented Streets

Some cities are moving to remove vehicle traffic from main transit corridors either part-time, full-time or with signalization controls that give preferential access to buses over vehicles. Some transit oriented streets are removing bus laybys slowing vehicle traffic on the street who have to wait behind the bus, and this action causes vehicles to take other routes and avoid the transit street. Transit oriented streets normally allow some degree of road dieting to give space back to sidewalks and to enlarge bus stops.

### 3.2 Public Space Reprioritization

#### TOOLS & APPROACHES



#### Improve Parking for Temporary Road Conversions

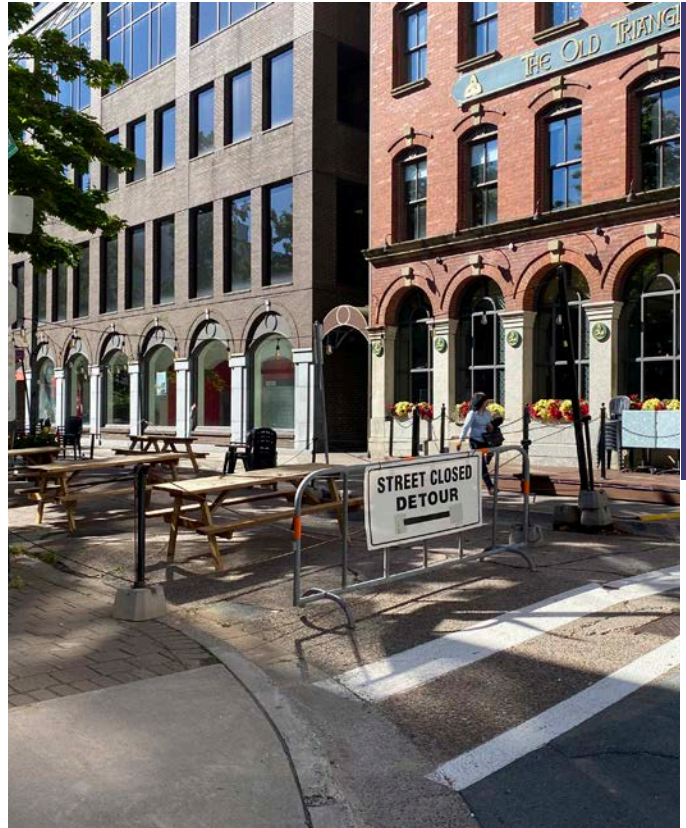
Temporary parking removal or one-way conversions can be controversial. Although sidewalk cafes have been gaining ground on main street by taking over parking spaces in the summer, the wholesale removal of parking on one side or a section of main street is often a concern for business owners.

Removal of onstreet parking for cafes may necessitate new offstreet parking lots near main street. Municipalities and BIDs should identify opportune parking expansion locations to offset those lost on the street.



#### Implement Street Improvement Pilot Projects

Interest in launching pilot projects during COVID have gained momentum across the country. This allows municipal staff to test options for street design and placemaking strategies to improve public space for pedestrians. The appeal of pilot projects is that they can be put in place quickly with the creative use of paint, plastic cones etc but can be removed if



 <p><b>Space to support business</b></p> <p>Visit local businesses while staying safe and following public health measures</p>	 <p><b>Keep it moving</b></p> <p>This closed street creates space to move and queue, not to gather.</p>
 <p><b>Use the street to walk, roll and cycle</b></p> <p>Watch for other people using the street.</p>	 <p><b>Closed to vehicles</b></p> <p>No vehicle traffic. Use alternate routes.</p>



they are perceived to be ineffective.

Pilot projects range from curb extensions to test bump-out locations, back-in angled parking, speed bumps, temporary raised medians to provide mid-street safety for pedestrians, transit '[stoplets](#)' to prioritize transit on main streets, and even temporary active transportation lanes. In Halifax, the pilot projects are guided by the recently completed Integrated Mobility Plan ([the IMP](#)). If these pilots work the way they were conceived, they can be developed as fully-designed, long-term street conversions. The pilots can be tweaked along the way after the impacts have been observed for some time, testing and honing the idea for the ideal street solution.

There is an opportunity to continue testing new public realm projects, building on the lessons learned from COVID about how to move quickly, engage different communities and work across municipal departments.

### **Conduct Monitoring and Engagement for Road Conversions**

The shifting of priorities of public space on main street has not been met with universal appeal from business owners on main street, who expressed concerns over the loss of street parking and a general reduction in traffic volumes.

Rural main streets have also been challenged with the conundrum or loss of onstreet parking in exchange for more pedestrian oriented streets. Street pilot projects should be given enough time to test if they are helping or hindering business.

There are also impacts on safety, accessibility and the local community that need to be carefully examined.

On-going monitoring and engagement needs to be a critical part of the process of any road conversion project. As part of this process, stakeholders should:

- » [Monitor the success and failures of pilot projects over time and tweak as needed to achieve the goals of the project.](#)

- » Inform the public about the pilot projects and develop a website to gather feedback and identify where new pilots might be warranted.
- » Use artificial intelligence technologies like Miovision Scout or even simple technologies like pedestrian counters to monitor your street conversion projects to ensure it is performing as imagines.

### Look for Opportunities to Make Road Diets Permanent

Temporary road conversions provide a 'proof-of-concept, permanent road dieting projects should also be considered as well. Adjusting the width of traffic lanes can reduce traffic speeds, creating safer streets. Following monitoring and data collection of the impacts of an initiative, local governments in partnership with BIDs should look for ways to make road diets permanent.

Permanent road dieting projects allow for travel lane reductions to accommodate:

- » Sidewalk widening,
- » Sidewalk cafe creation,
- » Bus waiting area enlargements,
- » Street parklets
- » Permanent on or off street AT lanes (single way or dual way).
- » Intersection bump-outs to reduce road crossings and provide a larger staging area for people waiting to cross the street.

### Create Multidisciplinary Implementation Teams to Support Public Realm Projects

Public realm projects require input from transportation professionals, planners, urban designers, landscape architects, architects and civil engineers, safety and accessibility experts. When these professionals are brought together the collective wisdom of all the disciplines can more fully address complicated cross-disciplinary nature of public realm projects.

In Halifax, the [Strategic Transportation Planning Program](#) oversees the implementation of the Integrated Mobility Plan, as well as the streetscaping and urban design program, and the mobility response team. This well-rounded team responds to complex complete streets issues throughout strategic areas of Halifax.

Municipalities could consider creating strategic implementation teams with representatives from various municipal departments to lead the delivery of these projects, both during the pandemic and after. These special project groups would have an interdisciplinary focus to address both public and private space objectives on main street.



## Street Improvement Pilot Projects, Halifax

Testing new Complete Street ideas quickly and cost effectively.

PILOT TRANSIT STOPLET ON SPRING GARDEN ROAD, HALIFAX.



PILOT AT LANE, HOLLIS ST HALIFAX.



PILOT CURB EXTENSION, AGRICOLA ST.





## Audit Multi-Modal Transportation Safety

The physical and operational changes to public spaces are having a major impact on transportation networks. Active transportation modes saw significant increases due to the natural ability to physically separate, with portions of roadways restricted or closed to allow for more pedestrian and cycling space. Transit on the other hand saw ridership drop drastically resulting in few network improvements intended to support transit ridership.

To provide guidance for municipal staff on the impact of these initiatives on the transportation network and safety, the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO), a coalition of the Departments of Transportation in North American cities, published "[Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery](#)." The document provides design guidelines intended to augment 'traditional' design engineering standards promoted by the [Transportation Association of Canada](#) (TAC).

In order to minimize public risk and reduce municipal liabilities resulting from road conversions implemented during COVID-19, municipalities should include safety oversight at various stages of the project including: planning and conceptual design; detail design and implementation planning; installation and opening; and, monitoring and refinement. Project teams may also want to include internal or independent transportation safety

oversight to help identify potential risks associated with a proposed pandemic response project.

Establishing road safety references that design professionals should be aware of such as the Canadian Road Safety Engineering Handbook (CRaSH) would also be helpful.

## ARTICLES AND TOOLS

### Case Studies

- » [TORONTO BIKE NETWORK EXPANSION](#)
- » [CITY OF VANCOUVER TEMPORARY EXPEDITED PATIO PROGRAM](#)
- » [CITY OF HAMILTON ON-STREET PATIO PROGRAM](#)
- » [TORONTO BIKE NETWORK EXPANSION](#)

### Tools

- » [STREETMIX - A FREE ONLINE TOOL TO VISUALIZE AND CREATE STREET LAYOUTS](#)
- » [TRANSITIONAL STREETS OF MONTREAL - INSPIRATIONS CATALOGUE](#)
- » [DESIGN FOR DISTANCING GUIDEBOOK](#)
- » [SHARED STREETS GUIDE](#)
- » [HAMILTON FRIENDLY STREETS TOOLKIT](#)
- » [VANCOUVER TRANSIT-ORIENTED COMMUNITIES DESIGN GUIDELINES](#)
- » [INTERVIEW: EPISODE-32-TANYA DAVIS--MANAGER-OF-THE-STRATEGIC-TRANSPORTATION-PLANNING-PROGRAM-FOR-HALIFAX-REGIONAL-MUNICIPALITY](#)

### 3.3 'Streeterie' Expansion

Profit margins in the restaurant and food service industry are extremely narrow and most restaurateurs depend on minimum occupancy in terms of dining tables to cover the rent. Restrictions on

indoor dining and physical distancing rules during the pandemic, have put additional pressure on the restaurant industry.

Most cities have developed programs which allow businesses to install sidewalk cafes and outdoor dining areas on public streets where there is room to accommodate it. These programs have made a significant impact by enlivening and drawing people to the street and providing additional revenues sources for restaurants. These 'privatized' public spaces are now critical to the financial security of many businesses, so it is now a matter of survival that cities and towns find creative ways to prioritize the temporary

(or permanent) use of the public right of way for business impacted by indoor public health guidelines. The onset of winter potentially places these temporary arrangements in jeopardy.

### TOOLS & APPROACHES

#### Allow for Year-Round Sidewalk Cafes

Municipalities should make every effort to permit sidewalk cafes year-round in 2020-2021, and where possible, reduce fees for permits and ensure rapid permit reviews and approval times.

Typically, seasonal sidewalk installations have to be removed every winter, which is costly and disruptive for the businesses involved. Cities like Halifax have begun to issue year-round permits on select main streets like Argyle Street, which allows owners to recover the physical costs of installation and municipal fees over a longer period. As part of this year-round consideration, municipalities need to think about ways to winterize the sidewalk cafes that are both cost effective for owners, visually attractive and safe for pedestrians, and easy to maintain for snow and ice removal.

## ARTICLES AND TOOLS

### Case Studies

- » [HALIFAX SIDEWALK CAFE LICENSE](#)
- » [CITY OF RICHMOND - SIDEWALK CAFÉ DESIGN GUIDELINES](#)
- » [CITY OF EDMONTON - SIDEWALK CAFÉ DESIGN GUIDELINES](#)
- » [CITY OF REDWOOD CITY - DOWNTOWN SIDEWALK CAFÉ DESIGN GUIDELINES](#)
- » [CITY OF VICTORIA - SIDEWALK CAFÉ GUIDELINES](#)
- » [CITY OF SASKATOON - SIDEWALK CAFÉ APPLICATION FORM](#)
- » [THE YEAR OF THE CAR-FREE STREETERIE](#)

### Tools

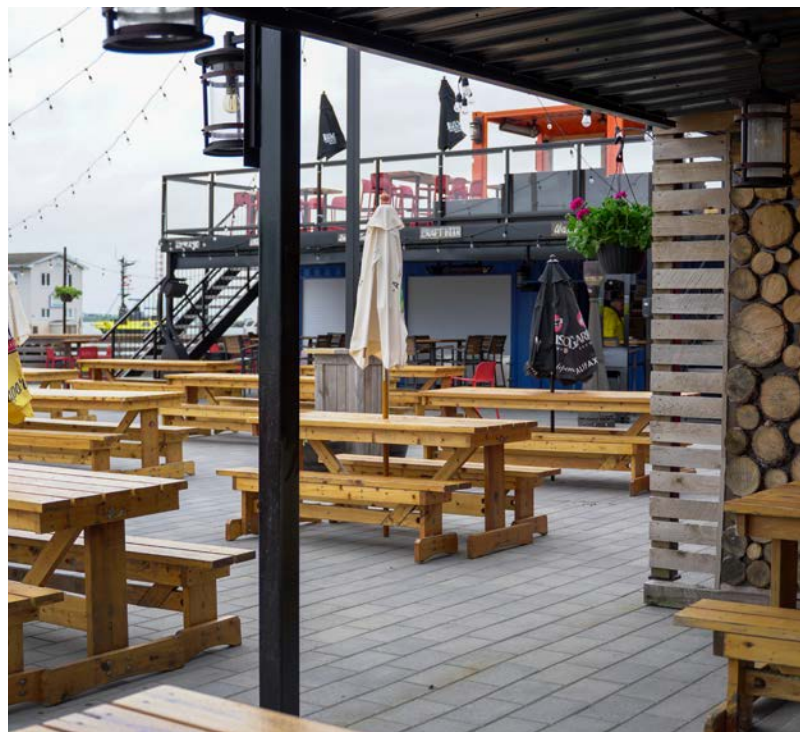
- » [WEBSTAIRANT STORE - A STORE FOR SIDEWALK CAFE FURNISHINGS](#)
- » [CONFIGURATIONS FOR SIDEWALK CAFE BARRIERS](#)

## Explore Opportunities to Loosen Liquor License Laws

To support the local businesses, provincial governments in some places have loosened liquor laws to allow service at the sidewalk (which was previously illegal in some places). Ontario recently (temporarily) allowed bars and restaurants to sell beer wine and spirits 'to go' during the pandemic, and it looks like other provinces are looking at revamping long held liquor taboos. Compared to the new Cannabis laws, which allow its use in public parks and public spaces (with some exceptions), Canada's liquor laws (many still linked to prohibition laws) remain outdated and in need of updating. Provincial governments could look at piloting and then potentially permanently adjusting liquor licence laws to support small businesses and main street vibrancy.



03 PHYSICAL DESIGN



### 3.4 New Public Spaces

While parking remains vital to the success of main street, the pandemic has made people a little more receptive to the idea of trading-off the convenience of nearby parking for the safety of more spacious sidewalks and improved streetscape retail experiences. Main streets have the advantage of a safer outdoor shopping experience. The challenge for main street is to create the best and safest possible pedestrian experience, and some of this can be achieved by converting on and off-street parking.

#### TOOLS & APPROACHES



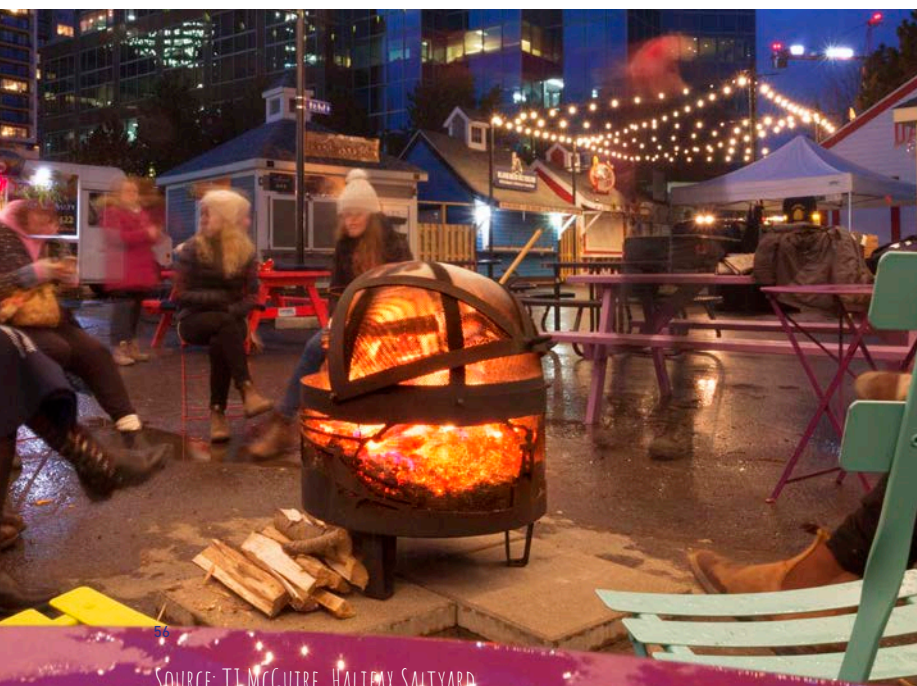
#### Look for Opportunities for Parking Lot Conversion

Redesigning small sized corner lots, dead-end alleys and other leftover spaces used for parking can aid the demand for green and amenity spaces on main street.

In 2016, the City of Vancouver partnered with BIDs and other businesses to design and construct 18 such enhancements. Inspired by the success of these pilots and the willingness of patrons to trade-off convenient parking for a more enjoyable retail experience, other communities have used the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic to undertake similar improvements on main streets. Paley Park in New York, the original “vest-pocket park” created more than 50 years ago, demonstrates that a simple paving, seating, and tree planting combination with an added water feature, in this case, can transform an enclosed alley into a vibrant urban oasis. There are numerous clever instances of how pocket park designs have reshaped these forgotten areas into destinations for gathering and relaxation and have supported local neighbourhood growth.

At a larger scale, underutilized parking lots can be redesigned into urban parks and commercial spaces. Examples can be found around Canada, including the recent [Halifax Saltyard](#) development which converted a parking lot, to a new food village node on the waterfront using low-cost kiosks, seating, lighting, and outdoor performance spaces.

Municipalities can identify strategic properties for purchase and conversion to a park, parklet, pocket park, urban square or performance plaza. Good candidates include underutilized parking lots or derelict properties in areas with ample



SOURCE: T. MCCUIRE, HALIFAX SALTYARD



sunlight and good thermal comfort. The scale of the park should be commensurate with the scale of main street. An interim solution could be to create a temporary tactical installation on the site to test if this is the right spot for a park conversion.

Another less permanent solution could be to consider “time of use pop up parks” which reclaim parking lots for evening or weekend use when a business may not need the space.

### Experiment with Car Parks to Public Parks Initiatives

A total conversion of a parking lot along or near a main street into a park may be challenging depending on parking demand. Onstreet parking to parklet conversions are another alternative.

Sectioning off the main street facing side of the parking lot and activating it for

public use with seating, planting, vendor booths, other additions can be widely advantageous. There are ranging possibilities of street-side activation methods, temporary interventions can provide valuable lessons and be the catalyst for permanent design strategies.



## 3.5 TYPES OF SMALLER PUBLIC SPACES

### Parklets

Both a low-cost, tactical intervention method and top-down economic driver tool, parklets are small additions to a right-of-way that aim to fill the gap for the need for interactive public space along main streets. They average 15 square meters used up by a parking space in a parklet scenario are typically covered with a raised wooden platform extending out of the sidewalk at curb height protected from vehicle traffic and have features for passive and/or active activities with planting.

They are often found with seating, tables, planters, and at times integrated bike racks. These elements in combination creates a pleasant break along the street and enjoyable space benefiting residents, business and visitors.

Parklet design are influenced by a number of factors:

- » Location: former curb-side parking spaces, traffic islands, residual pavement areas
- » Context: residential, commercial or mixed-use
- » Size: occupying single to multiple parking spaces, intersection corners or stretches of block
- » Function: for passive and/or active uses; provides greenery
- » Duration: for single events (e.g. Park(ing) Day), particular weekdays, seasons or year-round
- » Ownership: public, private (e.g. adjacent business), non-for profits, or joint public-private partnership

### Pocket Parks

Regarded as mini-parks, pocket parks fill the small voids of built-up spaces and ideally serve the surrounding community they are situated in. They act as scaled-down versions of larger parks that still can provide important functions. Pocket parks can be an urban refuge from main street bustle, contribute to urban greenspace and canopy cover, as well reduce the pressure of nearby larger parks. If a parklet is not designed for multi-use from day-to-day to year-to-year and not maintained well, the pocket park can once more be neglected and forgotten. Forming joint partnerships or "friends of" type groups that can oversee and help program the pocket park can help ensure its longevity.

Pocket Parks have essential elements:

- » Location: parking, corner, and vacant lots, dead-end alleys, leftover and forgotten spaces
- » Context: often used by the immediate surrounding community and may require upkeep by the same local population, "friends of" or other partnered group
- » Size: 1-3 lots in size
- » Function: neighbourhood events, gathering, relaxation, eating area, and play space
- » Elements: seating (e.g. chairs and tables), areas plantings, trees, commonly a water feature, and play equipment.

## Sydney Main Street

Empty lot pocket park infill



03 PHYSICAL DESIGN

## ARTICLES AND TOOLS

### Case Studies

- » [CITY OF TORONTO REES STREET PARK DESIGN COMPETITION BRIEF \(PARKING LOT TO PARK CONVERSION\)](#)

### Tools

- » [RECLAIMING THE RIGHT-OF-WAY: A TOOLKIT FOR CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING PARKLETS](#)
- » [CITY OF VANCOUVER PARKLET MANUAL](#)
- » [CITYMAKING - A FREE ONLINE TOOL TO CREATE PARKLETS](#)
- » [POCKET PARK TOOLKIT](#)
- » [TOOLKIT FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN POCKET PARKS](#)



### Charlotte Street Main Street Proposed Conversion

Parking Lot to Park Conversion with 'film-noire' cinema

## 04 Parting Thoughts

Main street's recovery will depend upon rapid, inexpensive, tactical responses and long-term strategic planning over the coming years. The fundamental reprioritization of main street public space could have long-term implications for decision makers, and we hope that the Complete Streets approach, which looks at streets holistically using placemaking principals, has a long life moving forward.

Many municipalities would benefit greatly from reorganizing to include multi-disciplinary project teams dedicated to strategic transportation and planning objectives. Rural main streets would benefit from well rounded representation from other disciplines in Provincial Departments of Transportation who own our rural main streets.

The reduction in main street traffic offers us an opportunity to experiment with new ideas in city-building and placemaking. New zoning reforms offer new opportunities to create greater certainty for developers and communities with the aim towards increased density and greater mixed use at main street. All levels of government have the opportunity to come to the table to make Canada's downtowns and main streets more progressive and more competitive. Ultimately these objectives will create better communities, improved health outcomes and better quality of life.

We hope the contents of this report will spark new ideas and renewed hope for bringing back main street.





04 PARTING THOUGHTS

SOURCE: TJ MCGUIRE, ST. JOHN'S NFD



[www.bringbackmainstreet.ca](http://www.bringbackmainstreet.ca)