



# Centre First: Downtown Amherst Action Strategy

>> *Final Report*



# ~ Table of Contents

|  |    |   |    |
|--|----|---|----|
| Executive Summary.....                     | 1  | Guiding Principles.....   | 23 |
| Origins.....                               | 5  | 3.2 Elements of a Healthy Downtown.....                               | 27 |
| 1.2 Study Purpose & Objectives.....        | 6  | 3.3 The Brookings Institution: 12 Steps to Revitalizing Downtown ..   | 28 |
| Background.....                            | 13 | 3.4 Smart Growth Principles.....                                      | 31 |
| 2.1 Study Area.....                        | 14 | Centre First.....   | 33 |
| 2.2 Demographics.....                      | 14 | 4.2 Plan Principles.....  | 34 |
| 2.3 Market Overview.....                   | 15 | 4.3 Public Realm Beautification, Infill, and Open Space Strategy .... | 37 |
| 2.4 Planning Context.....                  | 17 | 4.4 Business Strategy.....  | 64 |
| 2.5 Traffic, Parking, and Circulation..... | 19 | 4.5 Real Estate and Land-Use Strategy.....                            | 69 |
| 2.6 Opportunities and Constraints.....     | 22 | 4.6 Parking and Circulation Strategy.....                             | 78 |

|   |            |                                    |     |
|---|------------|------------------------------------|-----|
| Design Guidelines.....  | 85         | Appendix A: Online Survey .....    | 111 |
| <i>Character Districts.....</i>                                       | <i>87</i>  | Appendix B: Brookings Report:..... | 117 |
| 5.1 <i>Off-Street Surface Parking .....</i>                           | <i>88</i>  | Appendix C: Traffic Study .....    | 125 |
| 5.2 <i>Single Detached Homes .....</i>                                | <i>90</i>  |                                    |     |
| 5.3 <i>Semi-detached and Townhouse .....</i>                          | <i>90</i>  |                                    |     |
| 5.4 <i>Apartment Buildings and Condos .....</i>                       | <i>91</i>  |                                    |     |
| 5.4 <i>Ground Floor Mixed Use.....</i>                                | <i>93</i>  |                                    |     |
| 5.5 <i>Large Format Commercial .....</i>                              | <i>94</i>  |                                    |     |
| 5.6 <i>Institutional Uses .....</i>                                   | <i>95</i>  |                                    |     |
| 5.7 <i>Architectural Materials .....</i>                              | <i>96</i>  |                                    |     |
| 5.8 <i>Signage.....</i>   | <i>97</i>  |                                    |     |
| 5.9 <i>Heritage Renovation &amp; Preservation Guidelines .....</i>    | <i>98</i>  |                                    |     |
| 5.10 <i>Design Strategy.....</i>                                      | <i>100</i> |                                    |     |
| Implementation .....  | 103        |                                    |     |
| 6.1 <i>Budget Estimates .....</i>                                     | <i>105</i> |                                    |     |
| 6.2 <i>Phasing Strategy.....</i>                                      | <i>106</i> |                                    |     |
| 6.3 <i>Next Steps to Move towards Realization of the Vision .....</i> | <i>108</i> |                                    |     |
| 6.4 <i>Ways to Measure Development Success .....</i>                  | <i>109</i> |                                    |     |



Amherst  
AMHERST COLLEGE

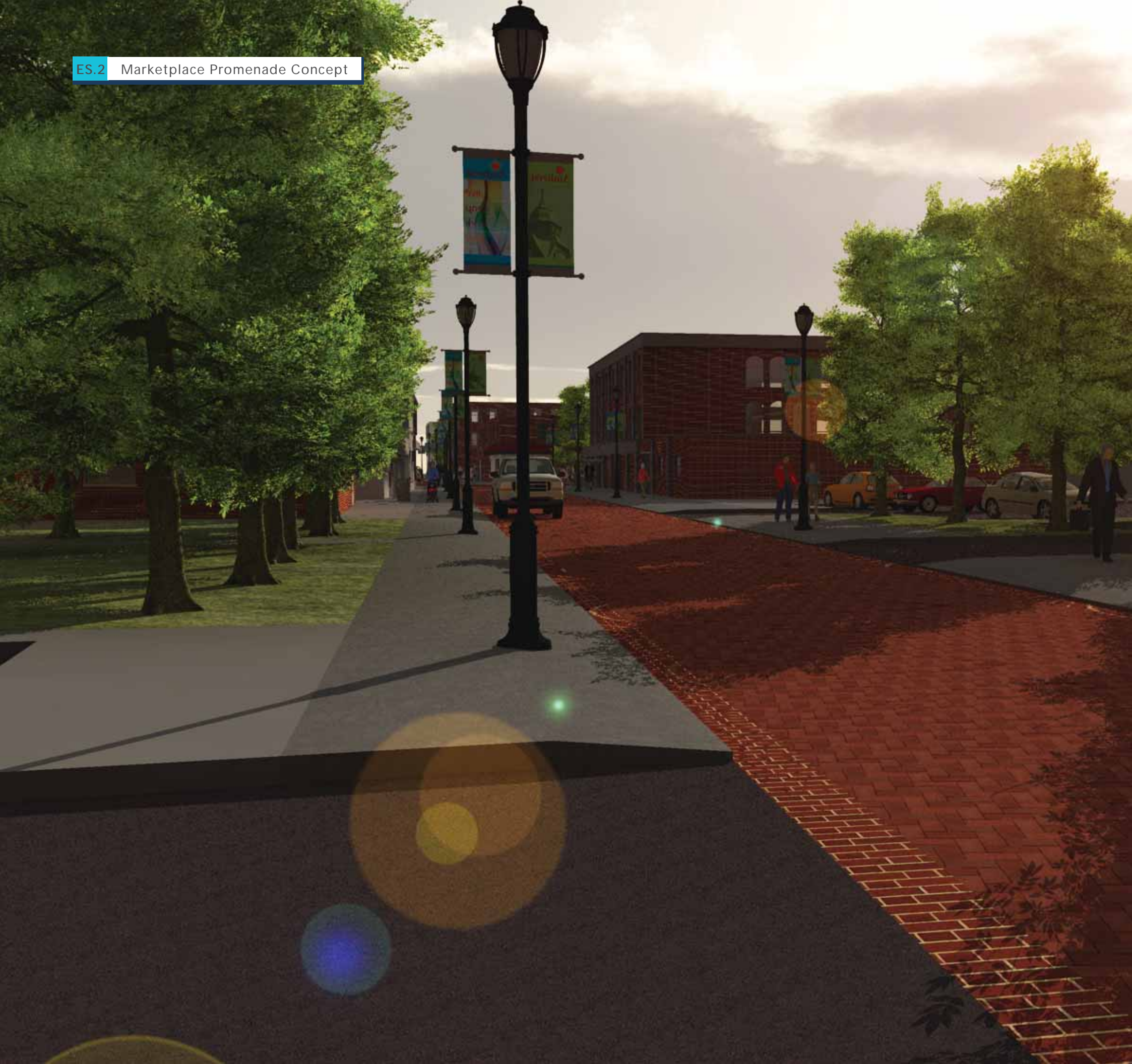




ES.1 Victoria Street Concept

# ~ Executive Summary

**T**In 2009, the Town of Amherst, in collaboration with the Cumberland Regional Economic Development Association (CREDA), commissioned the development of an innovative action strategy for Downtown Amherst. Ekistics Planning and Design, in association with Form:Media, SNC-Lavalin, and Colliers International began an extensive, nine-month long public consultation and design study, holistically examining development and planning issues, and developing a detailed plan that would guide the future development and investment for Downtown Amherst. This report, the Centre First: Downtown Amherst Action Strategy, is the culmination of that initiative.



The Centre First: Downtown Amherst Action Plan outlines a comprehensive vision for Downtown Reinvestment and Redevelopment, based on five component strategies; a public realm beautification, infill, and open space strategy, a business strategy, a real estate and land use strategy, a parking and circulation strategy, and a private realm / policy strategy. Each strategy is comprised of physical, administrative, and policy recommendations designed to attract and support public and private reinvestment in the Downtown.

An implementation strategy outlines the next steps that must be taken towards implementation. The Town must take the leading role for Downtown reinvestment, working towards the restoration of the depleted tax base. Through demonstrating their commitment to Downtown Amherst, the Town will attract private investment to further complement and enhance redevelopment initiatives. Through joint public-private investment, the Downtown will achieve its vision as the civic and functional centre of the Town of Amherst.



ES.3 Centre First Strategies





# 1: Origins

## 1.1 Introduction

The Town of Amherst is poised to enter the new decade in a period of economic change and development expansion. Unlike many other Atlantic Canadian towns and villages, Amherst is growing, and its central location in Atlantic Canada, its rich cultural history, and its proximity to the Tantramar Marsh are key amenities upon which to build a strong civic identity.

While the Town of Amherst has seen an overall increase in economic, commercial, and residential growth in the last 10 years, much of it has come on the periphery of the Downtown. Many large chain stores have located on the Albion Street 'strip' corridor, a streetscape which caters to big-box and strip mall developments, accessed mostly by automobiles. This commercial shift from the downtown is not uncommon for many regional service centres in Canada, and overall, the economic activity and varied services and products that these commercial strips provide enhances the Town's economy and regional destination appeal. It does pose the question though; 'what is Downtown's role in the new economy'?

Downtowns, big-box districts and industrial parks all have an important role to play in enhancing a community's liveability, its economy, destination appeal, and sense of place. However, the significance of a vibrant Downtown has become increasingly linked to the health of the local and regional economy; particularly in gateway communities like Amherst, Yarmouth, North Sydney, Pictou, and Halifax. A vibrant and robust Downtown is important to the economic health and civic pride of a community; it stimulates cultural activities, incubates creativity, preserves and showcases cultural history, fosters economic development, supports diversity, and provides for the varied needs of its residents and visitors. Other benefits of an established and lively Downtown core include better shopping in close proximity to residents, more cultural and social activities, increased or stabilized housing values, enhanced historical awareness, better quality of life for residents, broader tax base, increased tourism, job creation and reduction of ecological footprint and resource consumption.

*Given the importance of Downtowns and their small businesses, business and community leaders across the Country are realizing that they cannot afford to be passive about their Downtown's economic health and vitality.*

*- Central Business Districts:  
The Downtown Elements*

Although the Downtown Amherst is still home to most of the Town's professional offices, services, heritage buildings, and "landmark" retail businesses, there is a notable absence of other anchor uses, such as specialty shops, expanded retail, and residential options. Many buildings have been lost to parking lots, and there is little motivation to convert these lots to development sites. Further, new developments, while welcomed, often fail to maximize their aesthetic potential due to the absence of regulatory design guidelines.

The Centre First: Downtown Amherst Action Plan has been crafted to set a course for maximizing the potential of the Downtown Amherst over the next 20 years. The aim of this strategy is to "transform the Downtown into a vibrant civic, cultural and shopping destination for Town residents, and visitors" (2009, "Town of Amherst RFP 09-01 Centre First – Downtown Amherst Action Strategy"). This plan summarizes the community's vision for their Downtown and outlines a strategy to ensure its renewed relevance.

## 1.2 Study Purpose & Objectives

Amherst's Downtown requires a strategic approach to build upon its existing social, physical, and economic condition. The primary goal of the Centre First Strategy is to improve the liveability and quality of life in the community by making the Downtown a focus for investment and redevelopment. Private investment in individual buildings and properties needs to be leveraged through public investment in Downtown infrastructure and by concerted urban planning and organization.

The purpose of the Centre First strategy is to guide public investment in the Downtown over the next 20 years and to establish a planning framework that leverages private investment. This report establishes the principles which underlay the foundation of the plan and then introduces a variety of development and planning components which, taken together, should set the Downtown on a path to increased growth and enhanced prosperity.

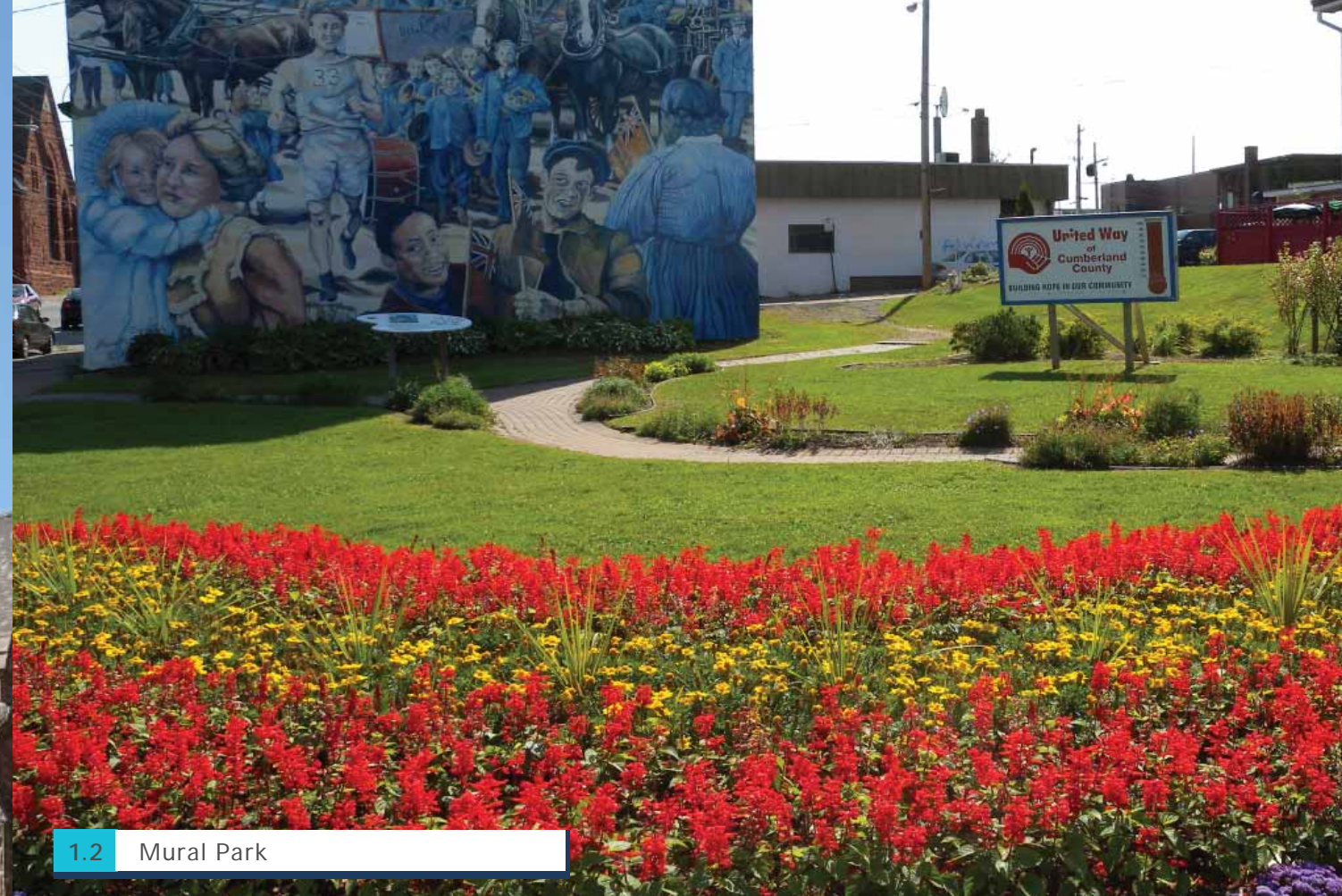
The strategy outlines various tools and initiatives designed to orchestrate decision-making regarding investments in infrastructure, development, programming, policy, and urban design that reflect the current Vision for Downtown as distilled through the public consultation process. The strategy works to strengthen the existing Downtown assets, diminish the liabilities, redirect priorities, build consensus, create partnerships, leverage investment, and build capacity for Downtown rejuvenation.

The specific objectives of the Centre First Plan are to:

- » Identify the future residential and commercial development potential of Downtown Amherst, from the perspective of market and economic forces and trends, as well as infill potential.
- » Develop action strategies and tools for guiding Downtown Amherst to maximize its potential as a vibrant regional business, cultural, and civic destination.
- » Develop strategies and tools for attracting commercial and residential development to the Downtown.
- » Develop a realistic implementation solution, which identifies: roles and responsibilities, specific targets, cost estimates for capital projects, prioritization and phasing of targets over time.
- » Raise public awareness regarding Downtown issues, and reinstall a broad sense of community pride.



1.3 Baptist Church



1.2 Mural Park



1.4 Amherst Train Station



1.5 Public Consultation



### 1.3 Study Process and Outcomes

This report was prepared by Ekistics Planning Design (in association with Colliers International, SNC-Lavalin, and Form:Media), and is the culmination of 6-month community planning and urban design process commissioned by the Town of Amherst, in collaboration with the Cumberland Regional Economic Development Association (CREDA) and the Downtown Amherst Revitalization Society (DARS).

The resulting Centre First: Downtown Amherst Action Strategy is reflective of the ideas and community dialogue heard throughout this project. The vision for the Strategy came into focus during a series of public workshops, where participants identified and agreed upon specific issues to address. The need for the Town and its stakeholders to come together and work collectively toward similar goals was seen as the best way to successfully address these issues and move a vision forward. This collection of voices ultimately spoke to the need for a plan that would allow the various stakeholder groups to champion their ideas.

This study was organized into three phases that were framed by a public engagement process, and designed to generate a new Vision for the future of Downtown Amherst in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders.

#### Phase 1: Understanding and Information Gathering

Phase one began with a project initiation meeting in September 2009 where the Consultant Team met with the steering committee and Town staff to review the timeline, deliverables, and protocol of the study. The Steering Committee was comprised of Town Staff, CREDA and DARS representatives, and Elected Officials. A walkabout was held with some members of the committee to point out local observations. Policy information, past studies and base maps were thoroughly reviewed to inform the study process. At the end of phase one, an opportunities and constraints exercise was completed.

#### Phase 2: Consultation

In order to achieve the sense of realism and uniqueness necessary for implementation, a successful master plan must be based on the needs, wishes, and desires of the community. For the Centre First plan, a four-stage consultation program was developed, consisting of stakeholder interviews, a newsletter, public and invited workshops, and an online survey.

#### Interviews

The steering committee provided a list of approximately 20 stakeholders (mostly business owners in the Downtown) for the Consultants to interview. The interviews were completed throughout the month of September, in person and over the phone. The interviewees were generally consistent in their observations, which are outlined below in the thematic summary table.

### Workshops

The results of the interviews formed the basis for the public workshop questions. A merchant workshop (afternoon) and public workshop (evening) were held separately on Tuesday, October 6th, at the Amherst Fire Hall. Both were very well attended. Twelve people attended the merchant session from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and more than 35 people participated in the public workshop from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. The overall response and activity generated during this process was generally positive and successful, especially during the public workshop. Both sessions used the same format where participants were divided into groups of six to eight people, with each group working together to answer a series of questions. Each group was given about 45 minutes to prepare their answers, and then summary presentations were made to all in attendance.

The questions posed to participants were:

- Housing for Amherst: Locate suitable sites for apartments, townhouses, affordable housing, and infill housing.
- Liveability / Tourism Strategy: What are the things that you do Downtown? What could be developed for people to do Downtown? What is missing from Downtown?
- Retain Institutions Downtown: Find space for an expanded NSCC campus and a two-acre site for a justice facility.
- Redevelop Vacant Buildings: What are the best uses for the vacant heritage buildings?
- Image Strategy: What are the ten best things about Downtown Amherst? How could each of these places or events be improved? What amenities do we need to make residential living more attractive Downtown?
- Youth Activities: What can be developed for youth in the Downtown?

Ideas and discussion from both workshops were plentiful in particular at the evening session. Response to the questions were varied but centred around a number of common themes.

After completion of the public and invited merchant workshops, a follow-up session was held with the DARS Board on November 5, 2009. This smaller, more focused session built upon the issues and themes that emerged from the previous consultations. Participants took this opportunity to provide meaningful and very specific feedback, regarding Downtown issues and developing plan ideas. This input is summarized below, along with all ideas and theming generated through various stages of public consultation.

### Online Survey

In order to further solicit public input, an online survey was developed to gather additional information on Downtown issues. Over a two month period, the survey yielded over 140 respondents interested in the future development of Downtown Amherst. The full survey results can be found in Appendix A.

The majority of respondents to the online survey were between the ages of 35 and 49 with an equal representation of male and female participants. 75 percent of respondents have lived in the area for more than 5 years. While the majority of the respondents do not live in the Downtown area they do live within walking distance; although most prefer to drive. Respondents report visiting the Downtown nearly everyday, mostly in the afternoon, and shopping in the area weekly. The majority (56%) of respondents regularly walk in the area; however very few (8.5%) bicycle.

When travelling to the Downtown, the majority of survey respondents went to banks, visit restaurants and/or bars, shop, or seek professional service offices. When accessing the Downtown area, respondents reported that parking was acceptable and easy to find, and that the directional and shop signage was fair. The major traffic issues which need to be addressed are the amount of transport truck traffic coming through Downtown and rapid speed of other vehicles.

Referring to the quality of the Downtown, the respondents felt that most of the storefronts were appealing and well maintained, with the overall appearance of Downtown being judged as fair. Most respondents would be further enticed to visit Downtown Amherst for programmed events such as concerts, festivals, or street fairs, or for additional shopping and restaurants/bars,

The respondents reported that the major problems in the Downtown were loitering, and perceived lack of care for the environment (i.e. litter, pet droppings). The respondents also expressed a need for more public benches, improved parks, street trees, and trash receptacles as well as more facilities and services.

### Phase 3: Centre First Action Strategy

Using the information gathered during the first two phases of the study, a draft plan for the Centre First Action Strategy was devised. This plan was presented to the Steering Committee on January 14th, 2010. Outcomes and Observations to be summarized in the Final Report.

## 1.6 Workshop Notice



# AMHERST PUBLIC INPUT

|   | Streetscape   | Uses for Empty Buildings   | Social   | Branding / Signage / Promotions / Events                              | Operations / Administration                              | Retail  | Open Space                                 |
|---|---|--|--|---|--|---|--|
| <b>▼ Merchant Workshop</b>                            |   |  |  |   |  |   |  |
| <b>Tuesday, October 6th, 2009<br/>12 Participants</b> | Light up the Town at night.                                       | Arts / Culture / Convention Centre   | Nothing for kids / families DT                               | Town / Government funds to support facade improvements & restorations | Use zoning to encourage relocation of residential to DT. | Later / coordinated opening hours for DT stores | Make Downtown non-smoking                  |
|   | Additional street beautification                                  | Justice Centre   | Relocate / better promote farmer's market - like Fredericton | Exploit Streetscape   | Need partnerships (i.e. Town)                            | Specialty retail in the DT (i.e. bike shop)     | Locate skate park on old gas station site. |
|   | Improve lighting in DT  | Tourist bureau   |  | More festivals  | Town needs to invest in DT events                        |   | Move cenotaph out of Victoria Park         |
|   |   | Grocery Store  |  |   | Streamline bureaucracy                                   |   | Soccer fields                              |
|   |   | Rug Hooking Studio   |  |   | Small Town' mindset hinders progression                  |   | Walking trails to marsh                    |
|   |   | Move theaters / Rail station should be included in empty building inventory. |  |   |  |   | Skate park in DT                           |
|   |   | Indoor Recreation Centre   |  |   |  |   |  |
|   |   |  |  |   |  |   |  |
| <b>▼ Public Workshop</b>                              |   |  |  |   |  |   |  |
| <b>Tuesday, October 6th, 2009<br/>30 Participants</b> | Cleaner streets, police presence, well lit, more night activities | Clock Tower Museum,  | Youth drop-in centre (YMCA?)                                 | Cultural Programming (heritage)                                       | Heritage District - tax incentives                       | Plus-sized store for Women                      | Skate park DT                              |
|   | Flowers - more streetscape beautification                         | NSCC   | Ice cream  | Ecotourism  | Deal with absentee landowners                            | Grocery store is a key retail asset for the DT. | Need playground in DT                      |
|   | Butt box & tables for Tim's                                       | Preserve facade, develop modern structure                                    | Sidewalk Cafes   | Need to create a Town 'Image'   | Town should buy abandoned buildings                      |   | Redevelop Victoria Park                    |
|   | Improve lighting  | Old police station - art centre / co-op                                      | Flea market with farmer's market                             | Program to draw institutions DT                                       |  |   | Fountain                                   |
|   | More trees  | Museum   | Encourage loitering  | Welcome signage - green space   |  |   | Create a "Walk through" DT                 |
|   |   | Patios   |  | Bicycle Tourism   |  |   | Bandstand                                  |
|   |   | Kid's Zone Building  |  | Sustainable approach - for locals first                               |  |   | Turn gas station sites into green space    |
|   |   | Arts and Culture Centre  |  | Emphasize Victorian heritage  |  |   |  |
|   |   |  |  | Interpretive program - carvings                                       |  |   |  |
|   |   |  |  | Four Father's festival  |  |   |  |
|   |   |  | Victorian Christmas  |   |  |   |  |

| Circulation  | Facilities / Attractions                             | Sites for Residential  |
|--|--|--|
| Improve / reorganize parking lots  | Community Gardens                                    | Birds Drapery Building (Haverlock Street). Already roughed in. |
| Change traffic patterns to spread development / retail across more of DT | Specialized goods / services (i.e. Bike Shop)        | Other sites close to (but not in) the DT                       |
| Centralize DT parking  | Improve theatre space                                | Legion site  |
|  | More restaurants                                     | Area behind Sobeys   |
|  | Arts and Culture Centre                              | Land behind Copps Ave.   |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| Improve circulation through DT.  | Public washrooms DT                                  | Knights of Pythis site (Laplanche Street)                      |
| Trails linkage to marsh  | Need a cultural centre DT                            | Existing units on Windsor Block - improve?                     |
| No trucks in DT  | Tanramar is too small                                | Legion Building  |
| Relocate highway entrance to Victoria Street.                            | Interactive centre for youth (i.e. Discovery Centre) | Birds Drapery Building (Haverlock St)                          |
| People like 'their' parking lot  | Black Nova Scotia Cultural Centre                    | Crescent Avenue Block  |
|  | Good restaurants                                     | Condo development is a good idea                               |
|  | Expanded theatre                                     | Tupper Block   |
|  | Tourist kiosk DT                                     | Townhouses on King Street                                      |
|  | Call Centre - jobs for DT?                           |  |
|  | Seafood Restaurant                                   |  |
|  | Mini-casino  |  |





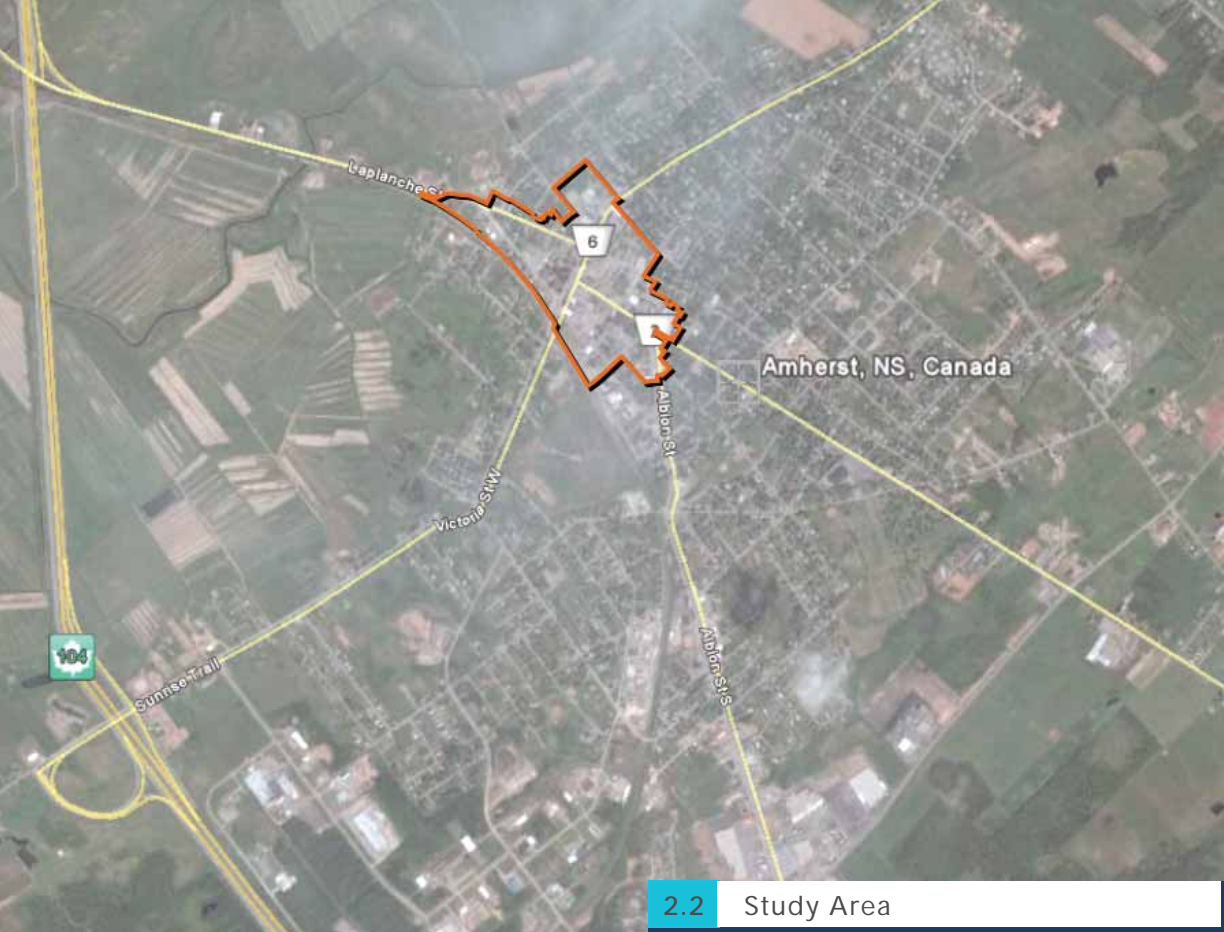
2.1 Downtown Amherst

## 2: Background

The Centre First: Downtown Amherst Action Strategy outlines the function, form, and character of future development in the Downtown Amherst, over the next twenty years. It will clearly define Downtown as the civic and community centre of Amherst, and as a valuable asset to surrounding neighbourhoods. The strategy recognizes that in order to create a strong and vibrant Downtown, many factors must work together towards a clearly defined vision for what Downtown Amherst will become. Factors, such as the physical land area, current real estate market, existing built form, Town demographics, Downtown economy, and the overall planning context are the important foundational elements that will support and guide the Strategy's evolution.

*Economic development specialists consistently tell me that investors and developers judge a community's vitality by the quality and character of the central business district.*

*- Decatur Illinois Mayor  
Erik C. Brechnitz*



2.2 Study Area



2.3 Church Street



## 2.1 Study Area

The Town of Amherst is located at the northeast end of the Cumberland Basin, adjacent to the Bay of Fundy and the Tantramar Marsh. Amherst is situated at the gateway to Nova Scotia, just three kilometres from the New Brunswick border. First settled in 1764, by the late 1800s, Amherst was a bustling regional centre, home to shipbuilding, rail transportation, and manufacturing operations. Many industrial leaders and prominent Town citizens built stately Victorian and Edwardian homes, often constructed from locally quarried red sandstone.

The modern Town of Amherst continues to be a growing regional centre, servicing the surrounding Cumberland County with new schools and a new hospital.

## 2.2 Demographics

Unlike many small Towns in Nova Scotia, Amherst's population remains relatively stable. According to the 2006 Census, the population was 9,505, increasing slightly from 9,470 in 2001. In comparison, the total population of Cumberland County declined by 2% in the same period, typical of rural areas of the Province. Downtown Amherst's population in 2001 was 1,579, about 17% of the Town's total population. Calculations by the province indicate that Cumberland County's population will decline by 12% by 2034. Only the 85 year and older age cohort is predicted to increase.

The median age of Amherst's population is 42.8 years, lower than the median age of the County (45.4 years) but slightly higher than the Provincial median age (41.8 years). The baby boomer age groups (age 45 to 64) have the strongest representation in the population. The Town has a greater proportion of children and younger adults than the County. Average household size has been decreasing, due to the aging population, and was 2.2 persons in 2006. Household formation (headship rate) is the main determinant of housing demand – not population growth per se: for example, a community with a stable population may have new housing formation due to increased divorce rates, lower marriage rates and increased longevity. The consequence of declining household size and an aging population for Amherst is that a larger number of dwelling units are required for the same population, while at the same time the dwelling unit mix must change to serve an older market.

## 2.3 Market Overview

Amherst's economy has historically been based in manufacturing, and has recently shifted to the service sector. Compared with other communities, Amherst still has a large manufacturing base, employing 17% of the labour force. IMP Aerospace, Teletech, and Poly-Cello in the Industrial Park employ close to 1,000 people. The Town is also a regional service centre for the retail, health, and government sectors. The retail trade employs 16% of the labour force; health care 10%; and public administration 9%. The hospital, just outside the Town limits, is the largest employer. The Albion Road retail district employs over 400 people in the grocery (Superstore and Sobeys) and discount retail (Walmart) sectors.

Employment levels in the Town were relatively stable between 2001 and 2006, with the unemployment rate at around 10 percent. The 2006 median household income, at \$36,539, was typical of small centres in the Province, and slightly lower than that for Cumberland County (\$38,433). Within the Downtown, government offices - the Federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and the Town of Amherst - are the largest employers.

### *Residential.*

The Town's housing stock is dominated by single detached homes, with a concentration of semi-detached, townhouses, and apartments in the Downtown. Although unit construction volume has remained stable, Amherst has seen an increase in the proportion of multi-unit dwellings constructed, while the volume of single detached homes constructed has fallen. The majority of new residential units being built in Amherst are one level townhouse units and manufactured homes in peripheral areas, such as Paradise Avenue and Southgate Village. These dwelling types appeal to mature adults looking for modestly priced housing on one level. Recent residential sales data indicate that the largest sales volumes were for properties under \$125,000.

Although the Downtown has seen renovations and conversions of homes into apartment units, the Town has not issued any permits for new residential construction in the Downtown and surrounding core areas in the past three years. Dwellings Downtown are more likely to be rented (approximately 60 percent), than owned.

In 2006, the proportion of Downtown Amherst households spending more than 30 percent of pre-tax income on housing (a measure of affordability) was 39 percent, higher than the Nova Scotia average of 22 percent. This is a result of lower incomes, not higher housing prices. In fact, housing costs Downtown are fairly modest.

### *Office.*

Demand for office space in the Town is modest and is limited to small, local companies or local branches of financial institutions, service firms, legal and accounting firms, and government agencies. Demand for office in Downtown Amherst is especially weak – evidenced by vacant buildings and the occupation of usually higher rent ground floor retail space by financial services offices. Most of the office stock in the Downtown is older, and current rental rates do not justify the cost of new construction.

### *Retail.*

Currently, retail is characterized by either large format (big-box) stores or small boutique stores. The Town has improved its position as a regional retail node with significant retail expansion of large format retail at the South Albion Street and Robert Angus Drive intersection. Amherst's retail sector, however, is at risk due to competition from Moncton, which has lower gas taxes. Amherst's Downtown retail has diminished: much of the former ground level retail space in Downtown Amherst is now occupied by financial services offices. Downtown retail in Amherst is anchored by restaurants, pubs, and older, locally-owned independent retail stores with a reputation and market reach that extend to Moncton.

The Downtown also accommodates a grocery store (Price Chopper) and recently, a new Lawton's.



2.4 Victoria Street



*Hotel.*

The vast majority of hotel rooms are located adjacent to Highway 104, to take advantage of the high volume of non-resident traffic. Seasonal bed and breakfasts and inns are located near the Downtown, typically in grand old homes on Victoria Street. Low hotel occupancies and flat room night demand (consistent with neighbouring southeastern New Brunswick) indicate that substantial hotel development in the Town is doubtful in the near future. There may still be demand for bed and breakfasts and small inns in large homes near the Downtown.

*Tourism.*

Over half of overnight visitors to Nova Scotia (1.125 million people in 2008) pass through the border near Amherst. The Town is situated at the northern entrance of three provincial tourist routes (the Sunrise and Glooscap trails and Highway 104); however, Amherst's capture rate for visitors is very low, at 12 percent (compare with 27 percent for Truro). Although heritage buildings in the Downtown are impressive, the Town offers relatively few reasons for visitors to stay. The main attraction is the Cumberland County Museum and Archives, which is hard to find. Amherst has the potential to become a gateway/service centre for attractions on the Bay of Fundy and Northumberland Shore tourist routes.

*Arts, Culture, Heritage.*

The Tantramar Theatre hosts live theatre year-round in the Downtown. The Town is known for its impressive historic red sandstone and brick buildings, most of which are clustered along and near Victoria Street. The cost of restoration has prevented reuse of some buildings and they are vacant and in disrepair. Nearby Mount Allison University graduates many fine arts students, but Amherst has not been able to capitalize on this resource.

*Institutional.*

Amherst has retained core government facilities in the Downtown, such as the Town Hall, Police Station, Courthouse, and Library. Among potential new institutional uses are shared Police Facility/Town offices, a Provincial Justice Centre, and an expansion of NSCC's Community Learning Centre. There is a proposal to relocate the jail to another jurisdiction.

## 2.4 Planning Context

Several background studies informed the result of the Centre First: Downtown Amherst Action Strategy. The topical issues relevant to this study are summarized below.

### *Municipal Planning Strategy (2005, consolidated 2008)*

The Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) for the Town of Amherst articulates Council's long-term policies to direct future development and land use within the Town. Using a broad policy framework, the strategy should be used as a guide when making major decisions on municipal servicing, development proposals and priorities, or land use.

The MPS makes reference to the Downtown Commercial Zone, indicating that Council will direct Downtown design and development through provisions in the Land Use Bylaw. The objectives of the Downtown Commercial Zone include the fostering of Downtown as the centre of specialty retail, new office, government employment, and cultural amenities. The MPS also states Council's goal for the conservation, retention, and improvement of the historically and / or architecturally significant commercial assets of the Downtown.

### *Land Use Bylaw (2005, consolidated 2008)*

The Town of Amherst Land-Use Bylaw (LUB) outlines planning provisions to guide the overall tone and intent of design and development for the Downtown commercial district. According to the LUB, any new development located adjacent to a heritage property, or with a ground floor area in excess of 1,500 square metres will be subject to a development agreement. All Downtown developments are currently exempt from the specified parking requirements (Section 5.1), and sidewalk patios would be also subject to site plan approval.

### *Vision 2000: Towards the Future (1992)*

The Amherst Area Development Commission's Vision 2000 document is the result of a comprehensive engagement and visioning process. In the fall of 1990, the twelve member Commission board, along with forty key community leaders, came together to examine the process for planning for economic growth and development. The resulting report outlined goals, issues, strategic actions and commentary on the topics of human resources, infrastructure, tourism, recreation, arts and culture, housing, investment, and business and industry.

### *newForm Consulting:*

### *Amherst Downtown Revitalization Plan (2009)*

In April of 2009, a group of graduate students from Dalhousie University undertook an in-depth examination of some of the key issues and challenges facing the redevelopment of Downtown Amherst. The resulting report outlined a strategy for Amherst that employed land use intensification as a catalyst for effecting design and policy change for Downtown. The overall goal of the study was to increase the intensity and efficiency of land use in the Downtown core, by reviewing current Town planning policy, identifying suitable sites for in-fill, and increasing public interest and participation in Downtown issues.



2.5 Planning Map





*Retail Market Opportunity Assessment (2003)*

In 2003, the Town of Amherst expressed an interest in reinvigorating the Downtown retail business. The Town commissioned a research study done by Cumberland Regional Economic Development Association (CREDA) in partnership with the Downtown Amherst Revitalization Society (DARS) and the Amherst and Area Chamber of Commerce (AACC). The goal of the study was to investigate opportunities to strengthen the existing retail product (Amherst Downtown Brand) and increase its marketing presence in Cumberland County and beyond.

The study found that the target consumer markets were New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia. Consumers in these areas are looking for product selection, after-sales service, convenience, and style. The report recommended that individual stores should be prepared to change in order to capitalize on Amherst's strengths: a centralized location in the Maritimes, rich history and friendly small town sense of community. Stores should identify niche markets, improve customer services, have competitive pricing and selection, and intimately know their products and target market.

*Tourism Nova Scotia Plan (2010)*

The 2010 Nova Scotia Tourism plan outlines the province's strategic directions for capturing and retaining the valuable tourism dollar. The plan points out that Amherst's geographic location, at the gateway of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, is an advantage that should be capitalized upon. In 2009, the amount of tourists arriving to Nova Scotia by air decreased significantly; while the number arriving by car increased (up to 1.2 million visitors last year). Amherst's location on the Trans Canada highway is ideal to capture this vehicular visitor traffic, especially given its proximity to the major tourism destinations of the Bay of Fundy and the Northumberland shore.

The plan suggests that Amherst's unique and historic downtown, arts and cultural community, access to beaches, and open space are amenities that should be highlighted for tourists. Amherst should expand tourism programs to offer more eco-tourism and Nova Scotia 'staycation'-type activities, or focus on meeting the needs of mobile travellers by offering 'typically Nova Scotian' services, food, and amenities. The Town needs to market its natural resources and heritage culture to attract these vehicle visitors in order to increase tourism revenues.





## 2.5 Traffic, Parking, and Circulation

The Town of Amherst sits in a strategic location at the junction of the Trans Canada Highway Route 104 and Provincial Routes 2, 6, and 204. Highway 104 is a major route connecting Nova Scotia to New Brunswick and points west, and Routes 2 and 6 connect to the Glooscap Trail and Sunrise Trail, respectively – which are renowned scenic roadways that serve as popular tourist destinations.

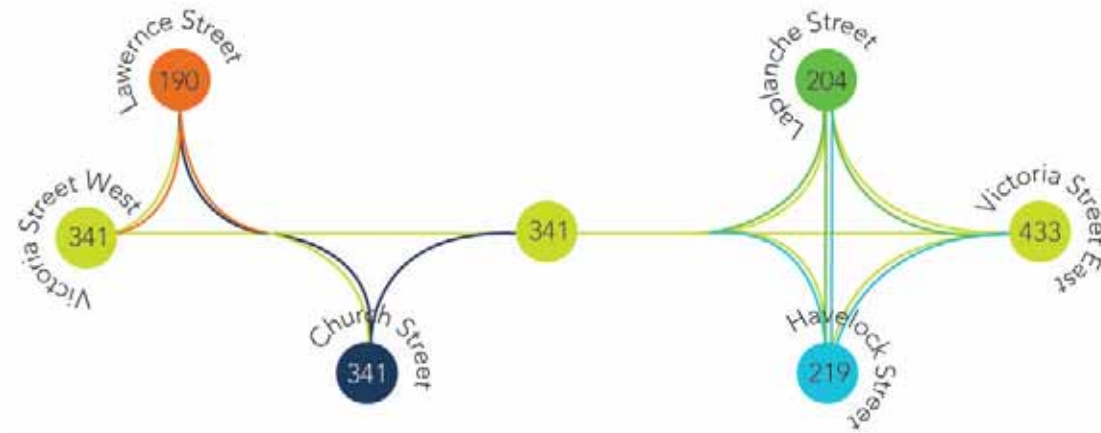
Direct access to the adjacent highway network makes Amherst an attractive stop for many travellers seeking amenities such as fuel, food, and accommodations. Traffic volumes on Highway 104 in the vicinity of Amherst range from 10,000 to 15,000 vehicles per day. This has provided considerable opportunity for commercial activity in the area, though due to its close proximity to the Highway, much of this activity in recent years has focused on the southern sections of Albion Street.

Amherst is accessible from Highway 104 at three interchanges: Exit 1 (Laplanche Street), Exit 3 (Victoria Street West), and Exit 4 (Albion Street). Of these, Albion Street experiences the highest annual average daily traffic volumes (AADT) of 12,000 vehicles per day compared with 3,600 and 2,500 on Laplanche Street and Victoria Street, respectively. While it is difficult to specifically determine the volume of traffic on each of these streets that is directly attributable to Highway 104 traffic, it is clear that the Albion Street interchange typically experiences the highest volumes.

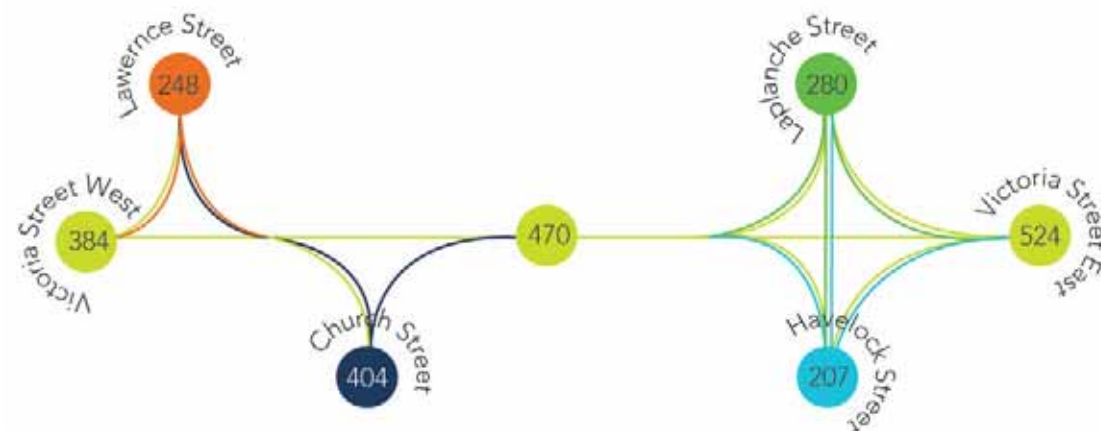
### Circulation

Although the Town of Amherst is located adjacent to Highway 104, direct access to the Downtown core is less convenient than that of the commercialized areas on South Albion Street. Each access route between Highway 104 and the Downtown is between two and three kilometres in length, which can deter the casual visitor from venturing into the Downtown. The three Downtown routes accessible from Highway 104 can be generally summarized as follows:

- **Albion Street:** A commercialized corridor comprising several service centres including fuel, convenience stores, hotels, and restaurants along with retail outlets including big box stores and shopping malls.
- **Victoria Street West (Route 6):** Primarily a residential street between Highway 104 and the Downtown, Victoria Street West passes many homes of older vintage and the Amherst Railway Station.
- **Laplanche Street (Route 2):** Runs through a aesthetically challenged area between Highway 104 and the Downtown core, surrounded primarily by abandoned / derelict buildings, agricultural fields, and some residential and commercial land uses.



2.6 Victoria Street Traffic Counts (am)



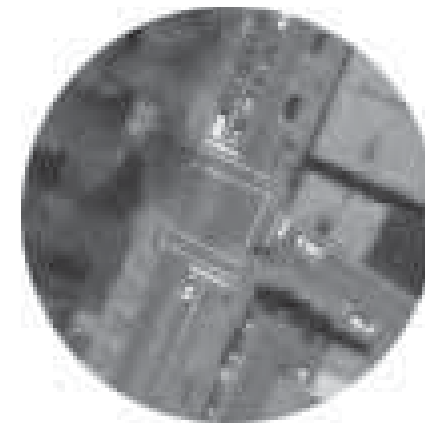
2.7 Victoria Street Traffic Counts (pm)

Traffic volumes in the Downtown core are relatively low and well within the capacity of the streets and intersections. Basic traffic models for the Victoria Street corridor and the Albion / Church / Crescent intersection show that circulation is very good and there is minimal delay or queuing. Traffic counts indicate that the peaking characteristics of traffic Downtown are relatively minimal, and observation of traffic at the intersections indicates that both signalized and unsignalized intersections operate efficiently with minimal delays.

### Parking

A recently completed parking inventory found that there are approximately 1860 surface parking lot stalls and 180 on-street parking stalls available to drivers in the Downtown core. Through the various discussions, workshops, and site investigations, all indicators and opinions suggest that the current volume of available parking spaces is adequate to serve the existing need. It has also been noted that parking capacity could be increased with a more efficient use of available space.

General guidance in publications such as “Parking: The Parking Handbook for Small Communities” suggests that parking supply varies based on community size, but in general smaller communities commonly have 50 – 100 spaces in the Downtown area per 1,000 population (of the overall town) and larger communities in the 18,00 - 20,000 range often only supply 40 – 60 spaces. Based on Amherst’s population of around 10,000, a parking supply of between 400 – 1,000 spaces would be typical. The current supply of close to 2,000 on and off-street parking spots therefore appears excessive.



2.8 Victoria Street parking conflict #1

### On-Street Parking

Maintaining on-street parking through the Downtown is considered positive in the context of a Downtown action plan. On-street parking is presently provided at a number of locations; however, there are some isolated areas where the presence of such parking appears unnecessary and poses safety risks. Generally, on-street parking should be provided where it has no negative impact on adjacent vehicle or pedestrian movements. This includes locations immediately upstream, downstream, or within intersection areas, as well as at crosswalks. The following are two specific examples where on-street parking is currently provided and is not recommended:

- Two parking stalls are located directly in front of the Bar on Victoria Street and are separated by a large painted hatched area. The southernmost parking stall is located in close proximity to the Station Street intersection and railway tracks as well as the driveway to the building’s parking lot. Given the availability of parking immediately adjacent to the building, the addition of two on-street parking stalls appears to have limited value, has the potential to compromise safety and operations at the adjacent driveways and intersections, and has a relatively significant cost of maintenance. Furthermore, this area is considered a gateway area to the Downtown core and there appears to be some benefit to eliminating these parking stalls and improving the visual appeal of this location through streetscaping, lane reduction to two through lanes only, or other measures.

- At the intersection of Victoria and Laplanche Streets, a single parking stall is located in the centre of the T-intersection. It is recommended that this stall be removed immediately as it compromises operational and safety performance of the intersection, is located between two intersection crosswalks compromising pedestrian safety, and again has a high cost of maintenance relative to the benefits.



2.9 Victoria Street parking conflict #2

In general, all on street parking locations need to be carefully considered to ensure they are not negatively impacting operations or safety of the surrounding area. On main thoroughfares, on-street parking should only be provided where adequate road width can be achieved to accommodate through vehicles as well as parked vehicles.

### Intersections

A number of intersections throughout the Downtown core are poorly configured. Specifically, these include:

**Lawrence Street at Victoria Street:** Relatively high speeds have been observed at the intersection, and safety has been identified as a concern. The Laplanche Street approaches are slightly offset, which forces traffic to veer to the left to make a through movement. The intersection is signalized with crosswalks on all approaches. There is a pocket park (Mural Park) in the southeast quadrant of the intersection.

**Albion Street at Church Street:** Previously a signalized intersection prior to the signal controller equipment being damaged, it has operated relatively efficiently as a 3-way stop, unsignalized intersection. This intersection is a key gateway location, but is aesthetically poor and raises safety concerns due to four approach legs. A recent study carried out by others at this intersection indicated that traffic signals were not warranted; therefore, maintaining the intersection as a stop controlled intersection was acceptable. Further, the town has indicated that the implementation of stop control at the intersection has reduced available gaps in traffic at downstream intersections, increasing subsequent delays.

**Laplanche at Lawrence Street:** A large, atypical intersection configuration that consumes a considerable amount of property northeast of Victoria Street. The intersection is poorly configured, can be confusing to drivers, and the configuration can be prone to high speeds and subsequent safety concerns.

**Victoria at Church Street:** This is a T-intersection at the heart of the Downtown core. It is located immediately across from Victoria Park and has a Tim Horton's located on the southeast corner. The Town has indicated that pedestrian accommodation is a common concern at this intersection and alternative modifications such as the implementation of a Pedestrian Scramble<sup>1</sup> phase, sometimes referred to as a "Barnes Dance", has been considered.

### Trucks in the Downtown

A common concern raised in the various consultation initiatives was the issues of excessive truck traffic in Downtown Amherst. Based on the traffic assessment conducted, it was observed that truck volumes appear to be relatively low through the Downtown core, however truck traffic does form a regular part of the daytime traffic. Opportunities are available to route truck traffic around the Downtown core area on designated truck routes and initiatives to limit trucks in the Downtown could be considered. Nonetheless, some of the truck traffic is related to deliveries being made at the various commercial businesses in the core.

### Mid-block Pedestrian Crossings

A number of mid-block pedestrian crossings currently exist along Victoria Street. While these are presently signed and marked, the presence of on-street parking and the lack of signalized crossings could increase the potential for pedestrian - vehicle conflicts. However, in general, the volume of traffic along Victoria Street is relatively low, and does not support the need for lit mid-block crossings.

<sup>1</sup> Pedestrian Scramble is a crossing system that stops all traffic on all approaches and lets pedestrians cross the intersection in whatever manner they desire.

## 2.6 Opportunities and Constraints

Given the previous discussion of current conditions, trends in Downtown development, and context findings from the participation process, the following assessment of opportunities and constraints conveys the strengths and weaknesses of Amherst's Downtown.

### Opportunities

**Provincial Gateway:** As the first Nova Scotia town on the Trans Canada Highway, Amherst is THE gateway Town to the Province. 25% of all travelers to the Province reported stopping at a Visitor Information Centre (VIC) upon entering the province and Amherst remained the most heavily used entry point to Nova Scotia (54% of all visitors), followed by the Halifax International Airport (29% of all visitors, 2004 NS Visitor Exit Survey). Using the projected number of 2010 visitors (2.102 million from the 2010 NS Tourism Plan), approximately 283,000 visitors will pass through the Downtown in 2010.

**Tantramar Marsh:** Acadians in the 1700's called the region Beaubassin. The Tantramar Marshes provide a regular stopover for migrating waterfowl. With bird watching as one of the fastest growing outdoor activities in North America (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey), the Marshes are one of the more significant under-developed tourism resources in the Province. They are only a few short blocks from Downtown.

**Regional Service Centre:** Amherst is a regional service centre for Cumberland County.

**Trail Head:** Amherst is situated at the head of both the Sunrise and Glooscap trails, offering access to the sandy beaches and warm waters of the Northumberland Strait, and the amazing tides of the Bay of Fundy.

**Historic Architecture:** Amherst has a historic Downtown, with many heritage buildings constructed from iconic red sandstone. The character of the Downtown core is a strong foundation for future Downtown development. People. Amherst has an active, committed, and engaged residential and business community, many of whom are actively involved with supporting the Downtown strategy.

**Vibrant Arts Culture:** The Tantramar Theatre and the Fibre Arts Festival are two of many of the arts and cultural connections that thrive in Amherst.

**Living Heritage:** Amherst is living and breathing history. The architecture, the industrial heritage, and its connection to Canadian confederation are only a few of its strong historical links. People can trace their roots through the museum and archives or learn from living decedents. There is a rich cultural fabric of people from all over the world in Amherst.

**Strong Character:** Compared to most downtown's in Atlantic Canada, Amherst has a high quality

streetscape a strong urban fabric of buildings from different periods. The downtown has a strong recognizable character.

### Constraints

**Fragmentation:** There is a physical and perceptive disconnect between the Downtown and the rest of Amherst. Gaps in the fabric Downtown, despite the presence of key anchors, such as Dayle's, Pugsley's, and Mansour's, interrupt the flow and functionality of the streetscape. The Town's land assets are sparse, and much of what appears to be contiguous parking is actually owned by a number of parties.

**Visual Ambiguity:** The Downtown is lacking in directional and way-finding signage. Businesses and attractions are not well signed, and often missed by residents and visitors. The visual quality of the Downtown appears dated and tired.

**Inertia:** A stigma exists, regarding the potential for

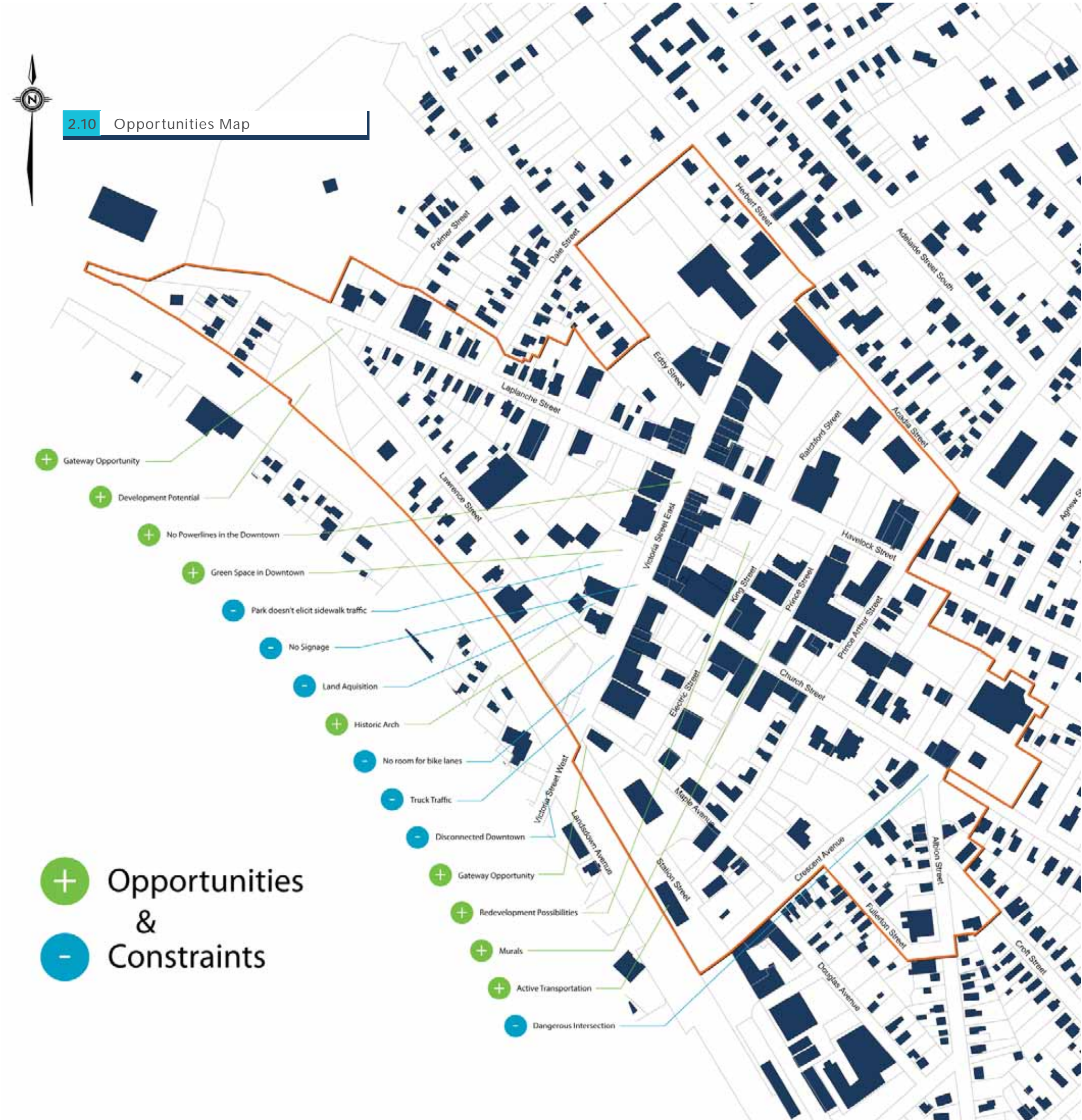
change and evolution for the Downtown. The general sentiment is one of inertia - there is little momentum for change.

**Perception:** Many residents feel that Downtown is in a decline, and there is nothing that they can personally do to change its future. There is a pervasive sentiment about what types of people and activities are found in the Downtown, and this perception may work against change.

**Infrastructure:** Many buildings in Downtown are in need of repair, reinvestment, and upgrade. The streetscapes and urban spaces of Downtown need attention and redevelopment, and vacant buildings require occupancy and investment.

**Downtown Living:** Downtown needs more residents to create a social anchor and keep 'eyes on the street'. There are currently not enough people living in the Downtown to create a genuine neighbourhood.

**Key Gateways:** Key gateways into the downtown are ambiguous and need better definition.





# 3: Principles

**A** Downtown should be the civic, social, and cultural heart of a Town. A great Downtown is vibrant, diverse, unique, and memorable.

A great Downtown meets the needs of Town residents, and attracts tourists and visitors. A great Downtown is reflective of the Town's personality, values, history, and future.

A great Downtown does not happen by accident. Great Downtowns are planned, thought-through, and articulated carefully. Planning, economic, social, cultural, and aesthetic factors must all be considered, weighted, and applied thoughtfully. The Centre First: Downtown Amherst Action Strategy seeks to achieve an overall goal of a vibrant, thriving, civic centre; one that is based on precedent and sound planning principles.

## *3.1 Renaissance of Downtowns*

Atlantic Canadian towns historically developed near shipping ports or the railroad, as prior to 1945, manufacturing and industrialization were major sources of employment. Shipping and rail provided one of the only reliable means of transportation and as a result, busy rail and port towns grew quickly. Restricted personal mobility clustered people and businesses together to create a tight urban texture and strong central civic core. Farmers populated the lands on the periphery of the Downtowns, in close proximity to their Downtown export markets. People lived and worked in Downtowns and there was a great mix of land uses in a very small area.

With the post war baby-boom of 1945, cheap, accessible land surrounding Downtown, coupled with federal infrastructure investment programs which encouraged road and highway development, led to suburbanization and decentralization. In the 1950's and 1960's, the concept of the shopping mall took hold, and many enclosed facilities were constructed on inexpensive suburban land with good proximity to the new highways.



The prospect of indoor, convenient, and accessible retailing competed heavily with traditional Downtowns, and many businesses opted for space in enclosed malls that became communities of their own. The growth of chain stores, which often preferred to lease space rather than own buildings, also favoured the shopping centre model over the Downtown model. By the end of the 1970s, regional and super-regional malls had saturated the market and covered the Canadian landscape in patterns that mirrored an area's buying power. The Urban Renewal program of the 1960's attempted to remedy the Downtown situation by encouraging the demolition of derelict buildings (many of them heritage buildings) and building roads, interchanges and highway between the central business district and the suburbs. By all accounts, the program did more to harm the Downtown than the 'improvements' it was designed to foster.



By the 1970's, many of Canada's Downtowns, large and small, had become run-down and derelict. In 1979 the Heritage Canada Foundation (HCF) embarked on "The Main Street Canada Program"; a comprehensive effort to halt the decay and destruction of traditional main streets in Canadian towns and cities. Despite the program's many successes, the federal government's contribution to Main Street Canada ran out in the early 1990s. The Town of Amherst was a participating community in this program.

Despite Downtown revitalization efforts, the emergence of the Big Box and Power Centre retailing concept during the recession of the early 1990's created a new round of development that further depleted the economic activity of the traditional Downtown. Over time, many of these box stores (i.e. Staples, Future Shop, Home Depot, Kent) become indistinguishable from one another. The term "Generica" describes this trend towards homogenized big box development, where the stores are so similar that visitors are hard pressed to tell where they are, as the buildings and landscape all look the same (i.e., they are generic). Large companies prefer this approach to conformity, as it simplifies the planning and design process and maximizes the economic return of their stores. Towns like New Minas (NS) and Sackville (NS) have built their economy on accepting "Generica". While Big Box retailing fills a need for mobile local residents (as long as they don't have to live near it or in it), its niche is in generic products and it does very little to contribute to the sense of place for communities.

In spite of this continued competition from suburban big box stores, Downtowns in Canada continue to transform themselves. Some of the reasons include:

- Downtown continues to provide a range of boutique retailers, restaurants, and cultural amenities. As a result, Downtown living has become fashionable to many segments of the population.

- Municipalities are now recognizing the cost associated with providing municipal services to suburban sprawl, and as a result, many have implemented growth management strategies to restrict further expansion. In addition, much of the inexpensive land on the periphery of Downtown has already been developed.
- As the cost of oil and gas continue to rise (many experts predict \$2/litre within the next two to five years), the cost of living in and driving to the suburbs increases. In larger cities, this is encouraging people to live and shop back Downtown.
- New planning policies encourage mixed-use development Downtown, which are bringing people back to live and work. Similarly, planning policies which discourage suburbanization and unsustainable development forms are also being put in place which further restrict sprawl.
- Downtowns are being recognized as centres of commerce, culture, education, entertainment, and art. Their strength continues to be seen in their diversity.
- Cultural tourism continues to be a driver of the tourism sector (In most Atlantic Canadian cities, over 70% of cultural tourists visit Downtown during their trip). These tourists are looking for unique environments and activities, and are not interested in generic box development.
- Federal and Provincial funding programs are targeting Downtowns and other sustainable initiatives like facade programs, Downtown infrastructure renewal, arts centre development, and active transportation plans.

In 2010, the renaissance of Downtowns in Canada has only just begun. The Town of Amherst is in an excellent position to act proactively to plan the evolution of its Downtown.

## 3.2 Elements of a Healthy Downtown

The health of a Downtown is a reflection on, and representation of, the health of a community. In the same way active planning is required to ensure the health of a community, proactive planning is needed to ensure the vitality and growth of Amherst's Downtown. There are many important reasons why Downtown development is important. It:

**Fosters Community Identity.** Because Downtowns are the traditional heart of most communities, they are often the first way residents identify or distinguish themselves from other communities. In an increasingly homogenized world, communities that preserve their unique culture and distinctive character have an economic advantage.

**Creates Jobs and Wages.** Locally owned businesses create more local jobs and often provide better wages and benefits than chain stores do.

**Expands the Tax Base.** Successful Downtowns generate revenues to pay for local community services. Public investment in Downtown redevelopment usually pays dividends in the long term to the entire region.

**Provides the First Impression.** Downtown's appearance is typically the first impression a community offers to visitors. First impressions stay with people and most visitors will return if they have a positive experience.

**Ensures Environmental Sustainability.** Downtowns help to sustain vibrant, compact, walkable Town centres—which in turn are essential to reducing sprawl, automobile use, habitat loss, and air and water pollution.

**Preserves Cultural History.** Because of their enduring history, Downtowns are the custodians of our collective cultural history. They provide a glimpse of our past accomplishments and sometimes failures. Cultural tourism, the fastest growing sector of our economy in Nova Scotia, depends on preserving and showcasing our history.

**Provides Residents with Retail and Services.** In many rural places, Downtown offers a diversity of retail stores, financial institutions, historic areas, cultural and educational institutions, public agencies and local government offices. Diversity is the formula for the long-term strength of Downtown.

**Keeps Dollars in the Community.** With services and goods available locally, residents will not need to shop outside the community as often.

**Is Self-Policing.** A vibrant residential Downtown population is much more secure than a 'work only' Downtown. The many 'eyes on the street' reduce vandalism and crime.

**Prevents Blight and Abandonment.** A strong Downtown will have lower health and safety costs and concerns.

**Promotes Community Well-Being.** Locally owned businesses build strong communities by sustaining vibrant Town centres, linking neighbours in a web of economic and social relationships, and contributing to local causes.

**Produces Diversity.** A multitude of small businesses, each selecting goods based on the interests and needs of local customers, guarantees a much wider range of product choices.





### 3.3 The Brookings Institution: 12 Steps to Revitalizing Downtown

The Brookings Institution is a nonprofit, public policy organization based in Washington, D.C. As one of Washington's oldest think tanks, Brookings conducts research and education in the social sciences, primarily in economics, metropolitan policy, governance, foreign policy, and global economy and development. In 2005, Brookings released a 12 step process to revitalize downtown (March 2005, "Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization", THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION).

The report (summarized below) outlines the chronology of steps required to turn a downtown around. A more detailed summary can be found in Appendix B. While some of the content applies to larger city centres, there is still applicability for Amherst.

#### *Step 1: Capture the Vision*

A good starting point is to engage in a "visioning" process. The public sector can and should participate, both to have a stake in and to give legitimacy to the process. This will eventually give way to a private/public partnership, an intentional reversal of the way this phrase is usually stated.

#### *Step 2: Develop a Strategic Plan*

The group should include neighborhood group representatives, retailers, investors, developers, property owners, churches, the mayor and key city councilors, the heads of select city departments, non-profit organizations, artists, homeless advocates, and others. It is also crucial that the individuals be people who are interested in successful solutions, not narrow political gain. Two one-day sessions devoted to the strategic planning process, separated by about a month, are generally sufficient to crafting the strategy and implementation plan.

#### *Step 3: Forge a Healthy Private/Public Partnership*

Successful downtown revitalizations are generally private/public partnerships, not the other way around. The key to the public sector's successful involvement in downtown redevelopment is to avoid making it overly political. **City leaders must be absolutely committed to the process both in word and in deed, and be willing and able to do what it takes to help create the right environment for private sector development and investment.**

#### *Step 4: Make the Right Thing Easy*

Often zoning and building codes of the past fifty years actually outlaw the necessary elements of walkable urbanism. In many cities, for example, often well-intended setback and floor-area ratio rules mean that new construction cannot maintain consistency with older historic structures. Also, excessive parking requirements can create large surface lots fronting once-lively streets, eroding the vitality of otherwise coherent places. Coupled with an emphasis on separation of land uses and limited densities, downtown revitalization becomes nearly impossible from a legal perspective.

### *Step 5: Establish Business Improvement Districts (BID) and Other Non-Profits*

The BID's main leadership role is managing the implementation of the strategy, which must be constantly updated. The BID may be responsible, for example, for ensuring the various task forces charged with implementing parts of the strategy are motivated to complete their efforts.

The BID's operational role is usually (1) increasing the perceived and actual safety of downtown; (2) making the place cleaner; (3) creating festivals and events to encourage suburbanites to come downtown, and; (4) improving downtown's image. The BID and other non-profits are a downtown's management team—ensuring its many complex elements work together to create a safe, attractive, unique, and well-functioning place.

### *Step 6: Create a Catalytic Development Company*

Revitalizing downtowns have overcome the problem of attracting developers by establishing a "catalytic developer." This organization is formed to develop the initial projects that the market and consumer research shows have potential demand but above market risk. The catalytic development firm demonstrates to the rest of the development community and their investors that downtown development can make economic sense.

A catalytic development company can engage in varying activities in the development process. Among the possibilities are: undertaking land assemblage and land development to prepare lots for new construction; financing the gap between conventional financing and the amount of money required to make the project happen; or developing a complete building from start to finish.

### *Step 7: Create an Urban Entertainment District*

It all starts, as in any real estate development, with market demand. Understanding which of the many urban entertainment options that have the greatest potential for success is a crucial first step. This complexity gives all sorts of people a reason to come downtown, which is particularly important in the early years when downtown's image may not be positive. The most important benefit of entertainment is to get "feet on the street," especially at night. And just as a crowded restaurant is the best recommendation that it is a good place, crowded sidewalks recommend downtown, a safe environment, and providing an excitement and spectacle that draws people to the area.

### *Step 8: Develop a Rental Housing Market*

The initial urban pioneers looking to live within walking distance of the urban entertainment growing in downtown will tend to be young, often students and those in their 20s. This age group was probably raised in the suburbs, and probably doesn't have as negative an impression of downtown as their elders. The young also tend to rent, as they don't have the assets, income, or location stability required to buy a home. They are more flexible, tied only to the lease they have signed, probably for a year or less. Once an urban entertainment concentration begins to emerge, this group generally has both the propensity to move downtown, and the ability to make the move quickly. Rental housing projects can be conversions of existing office, industrial, or institutional buildings or new construction. The renovation of existing buildings offers some of the most exciting new housing options, as they are unlike other rental products in the regional market.





### *Step 9: Pioneer an Affordability Strategy*

Like most things in life, turning around a downtown means good news and bad news. The good news is that if a critical mass of walkable urbanism is created, the rents, sales values, and land values will probably be the highest in the metropolitan area, rewarding those willing to take the risk, build high quality construction, and wait patiently for returns. The bad news is that the values will be some of the highest in the metropolitan area, meaning only the well-to-do can live downtown. To address this issue, an affordability strategy must be developed early-on in the revitalization process.

### *Step 10: Focus on For-Sale Housing*

Following the establishment of urban entertainment and the initial “colonization” of downtown by urban pioneers who rent, for-sale housing can return to downtown. For sale housing appeals to a very different set of households than renters. They are generally older, not as adventuresome, and are prepared and able to invest in the largest asset of their personal net worth, their home.

Having an established for-sale housing market is the ultimate test of whether the downtown has achieved critical mass. Given the size of the for-sale housing market, it is crucial to the success of a downtown turnaround. Bringing middle and upper-middle housing to downtown will provide the tax base so sorely needed by most cities, and members of these households will demand a level of service that will continue the upward spiral.

### *Step 11: Develop a Local-Serving Retail Strategy*

Once downtown begins to be repopulated, the demand for local-serving retail will grow. Local-serving retail is a “follower” real estate product, i.e., the housing must be in place before a grocery store can build a store. While some of these stores will continue to thrive, as a group they are probably only part of the solution to downtowns’ growing local-serving retail demands. The other part of the solution is finding ways to entice national “big box” retailers to integrate into a walkable landscape.

### *Step 12: Re-create a Strong Office Market*

As entertainment, housing, and retail are established downtown, the office market will begin to follow. As upper-middle income for-sale housing is built in downtown, there will gradually be a return of a healthy office market and the employment it houses. Once the bosses, who make the ultimate decision about office location, begin to live downtown, they will decide to bring their office there as well.

This step in the redevelopment process will probably only fill existing, vacant office space in most cities, due to the past overbuilding and the weak demand for office employment in the economy in general. However, it will be a tremendous benefit for city revenues and the employment prospects of other downtown and city residents.

### 3.4 Smart Growth Principles

The idea of Smart Growth arose from concerns over irresponsible development including environmental damage, high development costs, and poor quality of life.

**Create a Wide Range of Housing Options.** Providing quality housing for people of all income levels is an integral component in any smart growth strategy. Create Walkable Neighbourhoods. Compact, walkable communities with housing in close proximity to amenities are desirable places to live, work and play.

**Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration.** Growth can create and initiate many changes within a community. The best changes are made with the input of everyone whom the change will affect. |

**Create Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place.** Smart growth encourages communities to craft a vision and set standards for development and construction which respond to community values of architectural beauty and distinctiveness, as well as expanded choices in housing and transportation.

**The Development Process Must be Fair, Cost Effective and Predictable.** Governments and private sector associates must work together implement smart growth. Without co-operation on both sides, visions will not be realized.

**Mix Land Uses.** Smart growth supports the integration of residential and commercial land uses to achieve compact, vibrant communities.

**Preserve Resources for Future Uses.** Green space preservation supports smart growth goals by bolstering local economies, preserving critical environmental areas and improving our communities quality of life.

**Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices.** Providing people with more choices in transportation is a key aim of smart growth. It also contributes to active communities who can walk, bike, blade, board or drive to their destination.

**Use Existing Infrastructure.** Smart growth directs development towards existing communities already served by infrastructure, and utilizes the resources that existing neighbourhoods offer. It also aims to conserve open space and natural resources on the urban fringe. Employing these principles as a foundation for proactive planning creates communities where people will want to live. Having mixed uses in close proximity enables residents to have more options closer to home, including shopping, cultural, social and recreational activities as well as more entertainment options. Smart Growth also enables housing values to increase and stabilize, historical awareness to become more prevalent, quality of life to improve, tax base to increase, jobs to be created and ecological footprint and resource consumption to be reduced.





4.1 Downtown Amherst

# 4: Centre First

The projects and strategies outlined in this chapter will direct and focus the development efforts in Downtown Amherst over the next 20 years, bringing together the vision and intent of merchants, residents, and visitors with the best practices in Downtown development.

While physical improvements are naturally part of the Centre First strategy, the overall plan seeks to leverage economic and social evolution in the downtown as well. To accomplish these lofty aims, the strategy is divided into physical improvements (changes to public and private space), policy improvements (changes to planning policy that will encourage renewal) and administrative improvements (changes to how redevelopment can be administered).

## 4.1 Project Vision

Any vision for Downtown Amherst must inspire and compel people to carry it forward while balancing the realistic practicalities of municipal governance. The Vision statement establishes the rationale for the Centre First Strategy, to which all action plans, directions, and recommendations have been based. This is a statement that is reflective of the public input and the desired outcome of this Plan. Future developments Downtown will be reviewed for consistency with the Vision and Principles that follow.

### *Vision Statement*

In the year 2030, Amherst will be a diverse and thriving community made up of people living, working and playing in a historic yet modern small Town setting. For the people who live in this community, their day to day services are available and close by. For those living on the outskirts, Downtown becomes a much more frequent destination for services, leisure, and commerce.

This growing community is comprised of families, older and young adults, students, professionals, and empty nesters. Downtown Amherst is the cultural hub of the Cumberland region, a place where residents and tourists come to experience culture and history, visit galleries, see a play, go to a restaurant, attend events, and shop at one-of-a-kind specialty retail stores. The streets in Downtown are crowded and vibrant, as citizens and visitors access many of the professional services and retail opportunities, or stop to take in the historic architecture.

Many of the heritage buildings have been restored or repurposed, and the streetscapes are lively and engaging. Many lots have been infilled with high quality mixed-use developments. Young professionals, empty-nesters, and cottagers have moved into the apartments, townhouses, and condominiums that are found within or surrounding the Downtown core, and now enjoy a lifestyle that is less dependent on vehicles. Parks, greenspaces, and trail connections support the high standard of living that is found in Amherst.

## 4.2 Plan Principles

The principles frame the components of the plan and are designed to help realize the vision.

### Destination

Downtown should be the premiere destination for people and business in the Cumberland County region.



### Liveability

Downtown Amherst should be a place to work, reside, and play in the context of a liveable community.



### Diversity

Downtown should have a wide variety of things to do, places to see, people and cultures to meet. It should be vibrant at all times of the day and night.



### Safe

Downtown should be safe both day and night for residents and visitors.



### Walkable

Downtown should be compact and walkable. Streetscapes should cater to pedestrians and cyclists as well as cars.



### Identity

Downtown should have a strong and identifiable image. The image should be positive and it should resound with the community.



### Healthy

Downtown should foster healthy lifestyles and sustainable decision making.



### Inclusivity

Downtown should cater to a wide range of age groups, lifestyles, uses, activities, living choices, and cultures.



### Navigable

Downtown should be easy to navigate and legible for movement of people and vehicles.



### Respectful of Heritage

The built heritage is a legacy of our fore-bearers. It should be respected and preserved wherever possible.







## 4.3 Public Realm Beautification, Infill, and Open Space Strategy

The open and green space in the Downtown is the public realm fabric that knits together the architecture of the built form. It is these spaces that residents and visitors most often see first, and it is these spaces that create the potential to stop, gather, reflect, or enjoy. The Public Realm Beautification and Open Space Strategy outlines specific projects and initiatives designed to build upon the visual character and tone of the public space of Downtown Amherst.

The public realm beautification and open space strategy considers the high level contextual issues which will help the Downtown become a distinct neighbourhood and a true 'destination' Downtown.

- **Victoria Park Redevelopment.** Victoria Park is the core of Downtown Amherst. Redeveloping this key open space will create a green gathering space for Downtown residents and visitors. The proposed concept includes a hard-surface public gathering space, additional seating, and improved access and connectivity to Victoria Street.
- **Albion Street & Church Street Roundabout.** This intersection defines one of the major vehicular gateways into Downtown, in a manner that is often confusing and sometimes dangerous. The creation of a roundabout intersection would not only improve vehicle circulation, but would also clearly define a strong gateway entrance to the Downtown.
- **Laplanche & Lawrence Street Intersection Redevelopment.** This intersection is presently a major Town access point from the Trans Canada highway for Nova Scotia-bound traffic. This route into Town does not have a clearly defined gateway, and is not overly inspiring for visitors who do not know where the Downtown is located.
- **Streetscapes Improvements.** Sidewalk 'bump-outs' are created at every street corner and areas where parking is impractical. These bump outs can create pedestrian amenity areas and interpretive or wayfinding opportunities. Existing street lighting fixtures are raised higher to allow for festive banners and hanging planter arms. Sidewalk cafe's are incorporated into the street by forfeiting the occasional parking spot. Bike lanes are added where possible.
- **Marketplace Promenade.** The Ratchford Street, King Street, and Electric Street streetscapes are transformed into a pedestrian-focused promenade, linking Dayles at one end to the Farmer's Market at the other. Wide sidewalks and a multi-use trail line a reduced-speed vehicle corridor invite residents, families, and visitors to take a stroll through Downtown.
- **Civic and Wayfinding Signage.** A civic signage strategy is created to aid in wayfinding and improve the brand identity of Downtown.
- **Parking Lot Reorganization.** Existing parking lot infrastructure in the Downtown should be reorganized for a more efficient layout of spaces, and restructured to include wayfinding signage, trees, pedestrian walkways, and bioswales for drainage.
- **Gateways Creation.** The redevelopment of two major intersections (Albion - Church Street, and Lawrence - Laplanche Street) into the Downtown is a key opportunity to develop strong gateways. Two counterpoint gateways, at the north and south nodes of Victoria Street will complete the gateway package.
- **Downtown Pocket Parks.** Downtown Amherst is dotted with green space in the form of pocket parks. The redevelopment of these spaces into destination parks will create places for people to gather, socialize, or enjoy a quiet moment.
- **Festival Space.** The Ratchford - King - Electric Street promenade becomes the logical space to host festivals, street fairs, and other civic celebrations. The wide promenade is a natural catalyst for activity, entertainment, and gathering.
- **Marsh Trail.** A multi-use trail that connects from Town to the Tantramar Marsh will be a significant amenity for town residents and visitors. Ideally, this trail should eventually connect to other active transportation routes in the Town.
- **Public Art Program.** Building on the success of the DARS' mural program and the carved wooden sculptures, a Downtown public art program will continue to support the installation of new pieces, and the maintenance of existing elements.
- **Utility Corridors.** When and where possible, (i.e. During the implementation of road right-of-way projects) any above-ground utilities should be relocated to a common below-grade utility trench.
- **Provision of Public Washroom Facilities.** Working with members of the retail, restaurant, or business community, through a public bidding process is a unique way to provide washroom facilities without capital implementation costs, while compensating participating businesses for their participation.

Centre First:  
Downtown Amherst Action Strategy



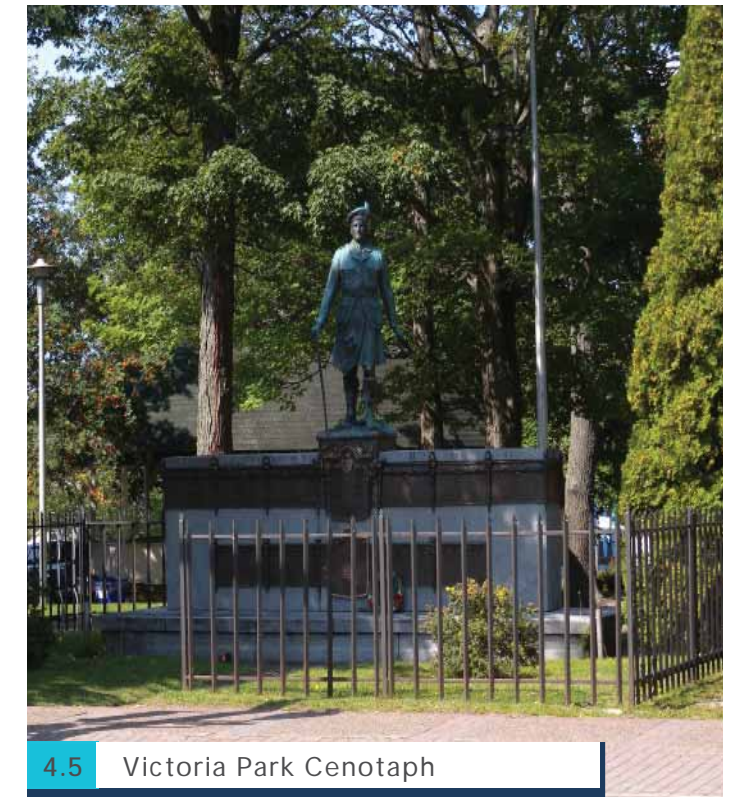
4.4 Victoria Park & Civic Centre



*Victoria Park & New Civic Centre*

If Downtown is the heart of Amherst, then Victoria Park is the soul. Situated at a key node for Downtown circulation, Victoria Park's prominent location should be built-upon, creating a truly memorable civic space. The redevelopment of this significant urban park is an eye-catching early step to commence the implementation of the Centre First Plan.

The proposed concept takes the park from forgotten space to civic cornerstone. The centre of the park is defined by a fountain. The pleasant sound of water invites people into the park, and children cannot resist running their hands over the spray on a hot summer day. Low seating walls provide ample space to sit, enjoy a coffee, and watch the people go by. The openness of the surround plaza offers space for civic events and festivals.



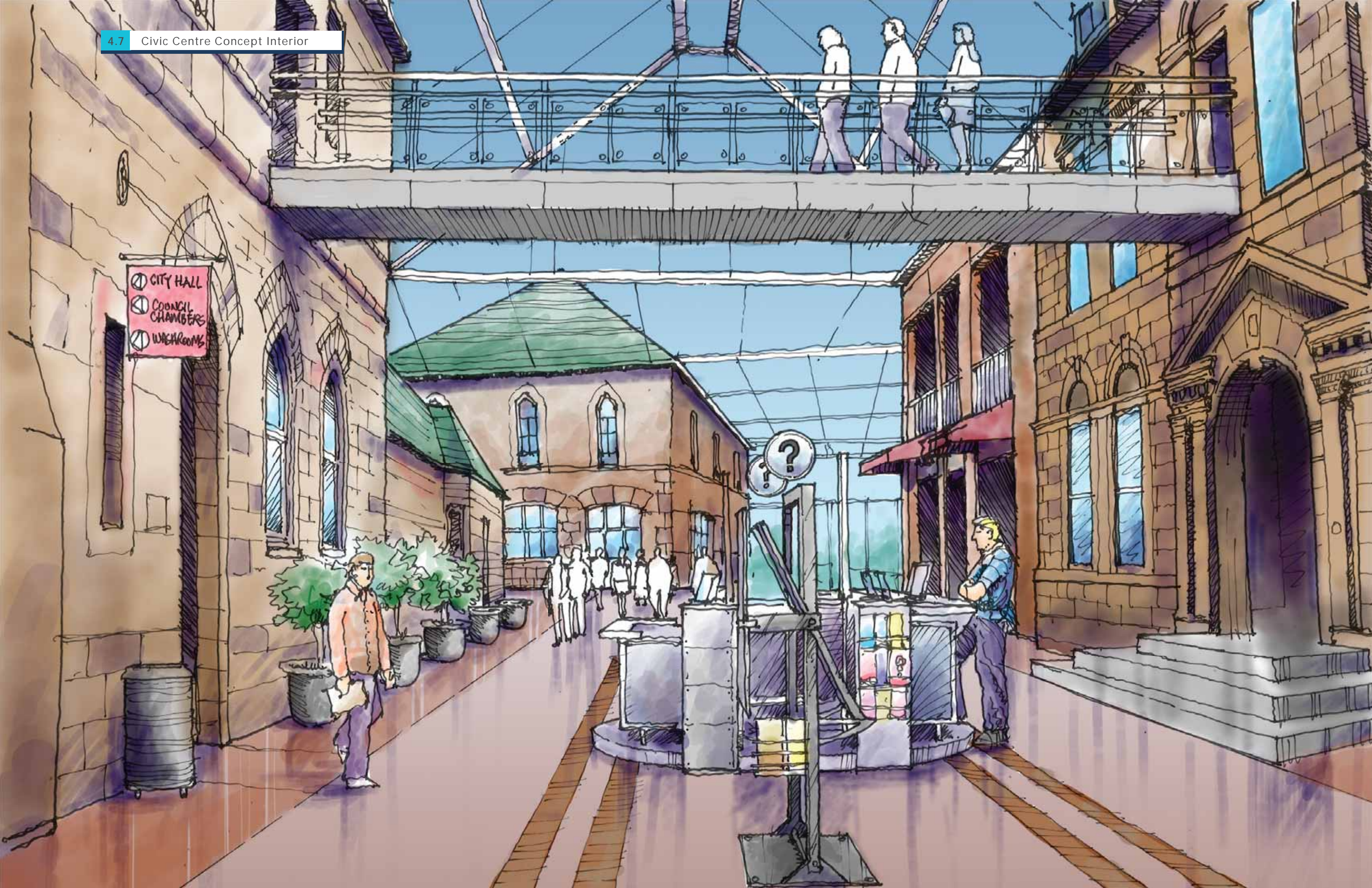
4.5 Victoria Park Cenotaph

The proposed relocation of the cenotaph to the north wing of the park creates the necessary space to adequately host Remembrance Day events. The large plaza directly in front of the cenotaph will allow citizens to gather without the need to stand in the street. The current location of the cenotaph, tucked in behind the highway signage, does not facilitate the gathering of large groups. The proposed relocation of the cenotaph also enhances its visual importance, creating a strong connection to a main entrance of the new Civic Centre.

At the eastern corner of the park, a new bandstand and amphitheatre offer space for casual relaxation, or provide a forum for formal entertainment. The proximity to the new vehicular drop-off will facilitate the movement of supplies or equipment required for civic events or festivals. The park has increased trail connections to Victoria Street, and a formalized link to the Tantramar Marsh multi-use trail.



4.6 Victoria Park Concept Detail



### *New Town Hall and Police Station*

The Town of Amherst is currently running out of space and Town Police are looking for a new home. A prominent location on Victoria Street and the opportunity to lead in historic restoration by example are two important considerations for the Town in looking for a home for these two important facilities. The Customs House Building, Amherst's most recognizable building, is mostly vacant; the jail facilities will soon be relocated and the courthouse may be consolidated into a new Justice Centre. These buildings could be combined and connected with a glass atrium to create a landmark civic development. Town Hall now takes up 9400 sq.ft. (inc council chambers). The possible new square footage would be in excess of 22,000 sq.ft. excluding atrium space.

The Civic Centre concept will house the Town office and Police Station. The buildings will be updated and renovated to create inviting and functional office, meeting, and other required space. A glass courtyard will connect the buildings, creating a weather-tight breezeway space to hold a quick meeting, enjoy the natural light, and move between offices. To the north of the complex, a new drop-off and parking lot will service the Civic Centre, Victoria Park, and the Anglican and Baptist Churches, with additional parking located adjacent to and behind the Baptist Church. The proposed plan for the Civic Centre is conceptual in nature, and will require the acquisition of buildings and lands for this development to move forward.



4.8 Civic Centre Concept Exterior





### Marketplace Promenade

The marketplace promenade is the transformation of the streetscapes of Ratchford, King, and Electric Streets. These roads, which currently function as parking lot access points, will be transformed into a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented promenade. Linking Dayle's at the north to the Farmer's Market at the south, the Marketplace promenade will become home to expanded sidewalks, cafes, buskers, snack trucks, and sidewalk sales. The reorganized and restructured central parking areas become the natural sites to host major civic events, such as the Four Fathers Festival or Victorian Christmas. It is along these wide, paved sidewalks that visitors will wander, looking for that ice cream cone or special keepsake.

The development of the marketplace promenade is a natural counterpoint to the continuing evolution of Victoria Street. The promenade links with the streetscape traffic on Victoria, providing a natural loop for pedestrians. Suddenly there will be a retail circuit in the Downtown; an ideal walk for the neighbouring residential areas that will draw people to the area. Infill sites are identified for development along the spine of the promenade, creating a consistent streetscape along the cross streets.

### Key Attributes of the Marketplace Promenade

- Road width is maintained at 6.6m, to allow for two-way, low-speed (30km/hr) vehicle traffic.
- Sidewalks are redeveloped or installed to include granite curbs and concrete pavers. Tree wells are encouraged in areas of adequate width.
- Paving texture and technique is consistent the entire length of the promenade, from Ratchford to Electric Street.
- Removable bollards are installed at the intersections with cross streets (Havelock and Church Streets), in order to close the road for festivals or events.
- Street parking is consolidated into the central parking areas, in order to increase sidewalk width.
- Central parking areas are reorganized to improve layout and ecological and pedestrian functionality.





4.10 Library Park Concept



*Pocket Parks*

Pocket Parks are urban green spaces intended to provide quiet, intimate, high-quality open space for a localized area. Generally smaller than 1000 square metres, a pocket park represents a splash of green in an otherwise urban streetscape.

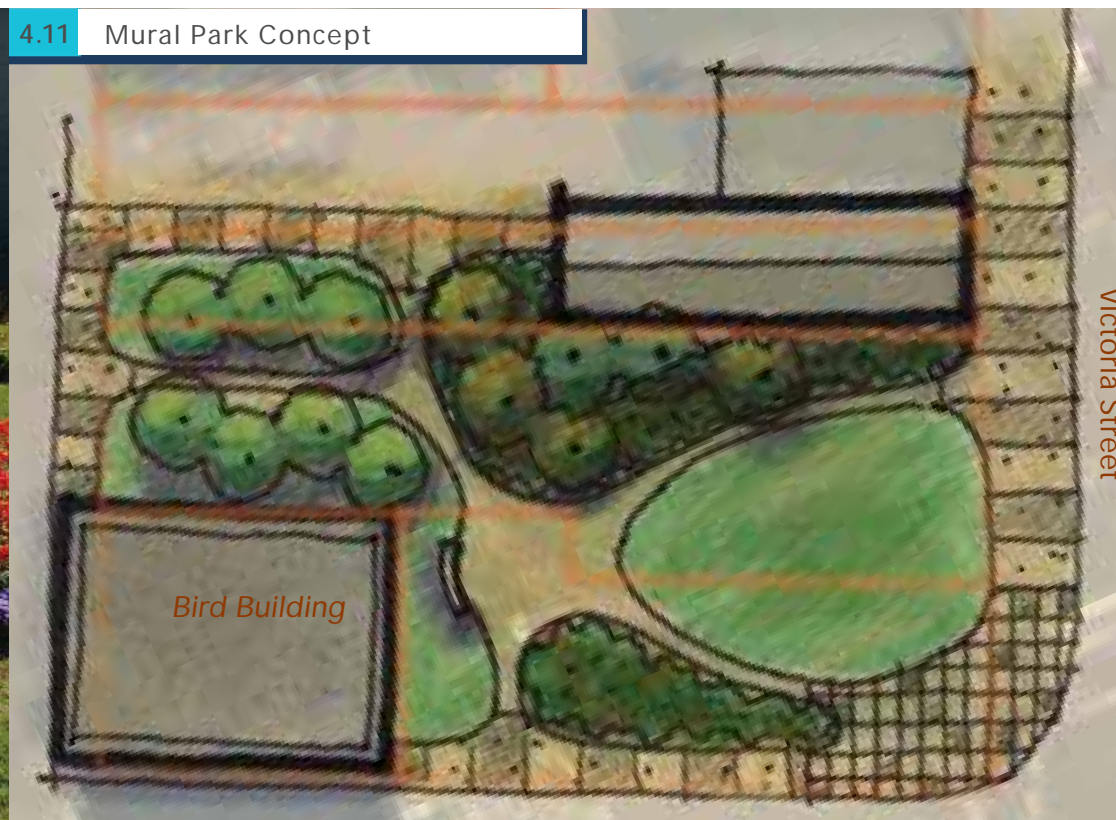
Downtown Amherst is lucky enough to have a number of these valuable green spaces in the Downtown core. These sites are genuine amenities, adding richness, depth, and softness to the urban streetscape. The redevelopment and enhancement of these pocket parks will create destinations for Downtown visitors; a quiet place to enjoy a coffee break, somewhere to eat lunch, or enjoy a book.

The Library Park currently acts as a pass-by; visitors cut across the site to get where they are going. By adding seating areas, library patrons will be encouraged to take their books outside for a read. This green space is ideally situated on the sunny side of the building, and offers a quiet spot to enjoy some fresh air. Topography, planting material, and a new plaza space complete the facelift of this valuable park space. The Train Station park is a gateway not only to Downtown, but to Amherst itself. Visitors do take the train to town, and when they disembark, their first impression of Amherst should be as memorable as possible. Simple greening of this space will improve the arrival experience for visitors, as well as creating a valuable park space on the south side of Downtown for Amherst residents.

The Urban Mural project is one of DARS' most visible and significant undertakings. The park at the corner of Victoria Street and Havelock Street showcases one of these incredible murals. This space, a key node in the Downtown core, should be further enhanced by simple park improvements. The creation of a strong link to the streetscape will invite visitors into the park, and additional seating areas and planting beds will add to the aesthetic quality of the space.



4.11 Mural Park Concept



### Laplanche & Lawrence Street Intersection

The present structure of the Laplanche & Lawrence Street intersection not only creates an undesirable and operationally complex situation, but it does not take full advantage of its function as a major gateway into Town. The redevelopment of this intersection will improve the safety and aesthetics of this important intersection. The proposed redevelopment concept shows a relocated intersection that aligns with the access point to a future development site. The relocation creates a 90 degree intersection that is much safer for drivers to navigate. Additional space presently underused is captured, and creates a strong gateway urban park space and ties in directly to the existing sportsfields.

In this concept, vehicle traffic still has the option of continuing into Town along either Laplanche or Lawrence Streets much as it does today (left turn onto LaPlanche or straight on Lawrence). The dangerous Y-intersection, however, is changed into a safer T-intersection with the purchase of 1 or two properties. The new layout creates a large new civic park at the corner of the sports fields property. This park acts as a trail head linking the Tantramar Trail with a new urban multi-use trail. Tourist traffic is directed along Lawrence to a new intersection at Victoria Street. At this intersection, a new bump-out on the south side of Victoria creates room for a streetside pocket park and signage directing visitors left to the downtown or right to the TransCanada Highway. A redeveloped commercial-oriented streetscape on Lawrence should be encouraged to develop as a mixed use street with the same character as downtown. Laplanche Street, a more residential streetscape, may become the quieter route into the Downtown but would now include the multi-use trail linking the Tantramar Trail to the downtown. This way, both a clearly defined vehicle route and signed bike route will be available to direct residents and visitors alike into Downtown Amherst.



4.12 Lawrence / Laplanche Intersection

### Roundabouts

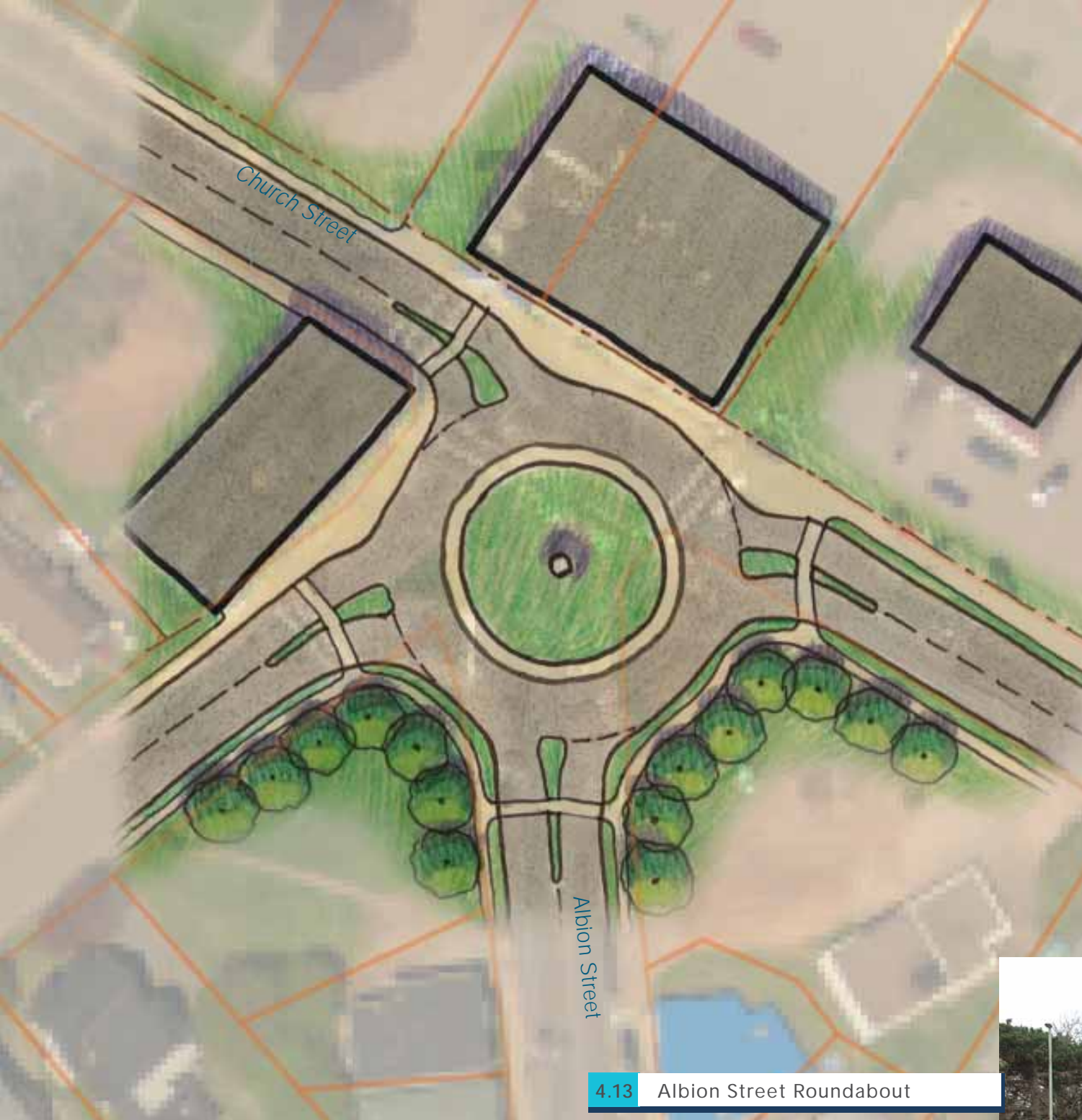
A roundabout is an intersection designed to control traffic in an efficient, circular flow. Traffic moves in a counter-clockwise direction around a central island, and drivers approaching the roundabout yield to traffic travelling in the circle. A roundabout is often much safer than a traditional intersection, as it reduces vehicle-vehicle and vehicle-pedestrian conflict points. The Province of Nova Scotia has a policy of assessing the viability of a roundabout for intersections of 3 or more collector roads and in 2010 had about 70 new roundabout projects on the books.

The Albion - Church Street intersection is the major gateway into Downtown from southeastern Amherst and New Brunswick-bound highway traffic. The current configuration of the intersection is awkward and unsafe, as the sight lines from Crescent Avenue are compromised due to the angle of entrance. Redeveloping this intersection into a roundabout would improve the safety at this difficult intersection while creating an important gateway transition between the Albion Street commercial core and the downtown core.

The central green space created by a roundabout development would provide an ideal location to situate a Downtown gateway feature, such as planting beds, signage, and/or a piece of public art. Creating a visually strong gateway and improving the safety of this key intersection are initiatives with natural synergy that would have measurable positive impact on the Downtown community.

The Laplanche - Lawrence Street could be optionally redeveloped into a roundabout, as an alternative to the proposed T-intersection redevelopment concept. The intersection would have to be shifted to the southwest to allow for the appropriate approach and entry angles, and to facilitate reasonable separation between entry points. This option would also improve vehicle operation and safety, and would enhance the gateway aspect of this significant intersection.

- A roundabout redevelopment has a number of potential benefits for the Town:
- Improved safety for vehicles entering the intersection;
- Improved flow of traffic, and reduced backlog the adjacent four-way stops;
- Opportunity to create a strong, clearly defined entry point to Downtown Amherst;
- Resulting island creates additional green space, and opportunity for a gateway feature or public art installation.




4.13 Albion Street Roundabout



### Streetscape Typologies

Streetscape design and character enhances the pedestrian and vehicle experience in the Downtown, and fosters a desirable environment for walking and cycling. As streets are a major component of the Downtown landscape, their treatment and design is an important component of the public space strategy. For Downtown Amherst, four streetscape typologies have been suggested. As capital development projects occur, the opportunity will arise to develop the streetscape towards these ideal scenarios.

#### STREET TYPOLOGY

-  TYPE 1 - ARTERIAL STREETS (20m CROSS SECTION)
-  TYPE 2 - PROMENADE
-  TYPE 3 - COLLECTOR STREETS (15m CROSS SECTION)
-  TYPE 4 - MULTI USE TRAIL (20m CROSS SECTION)

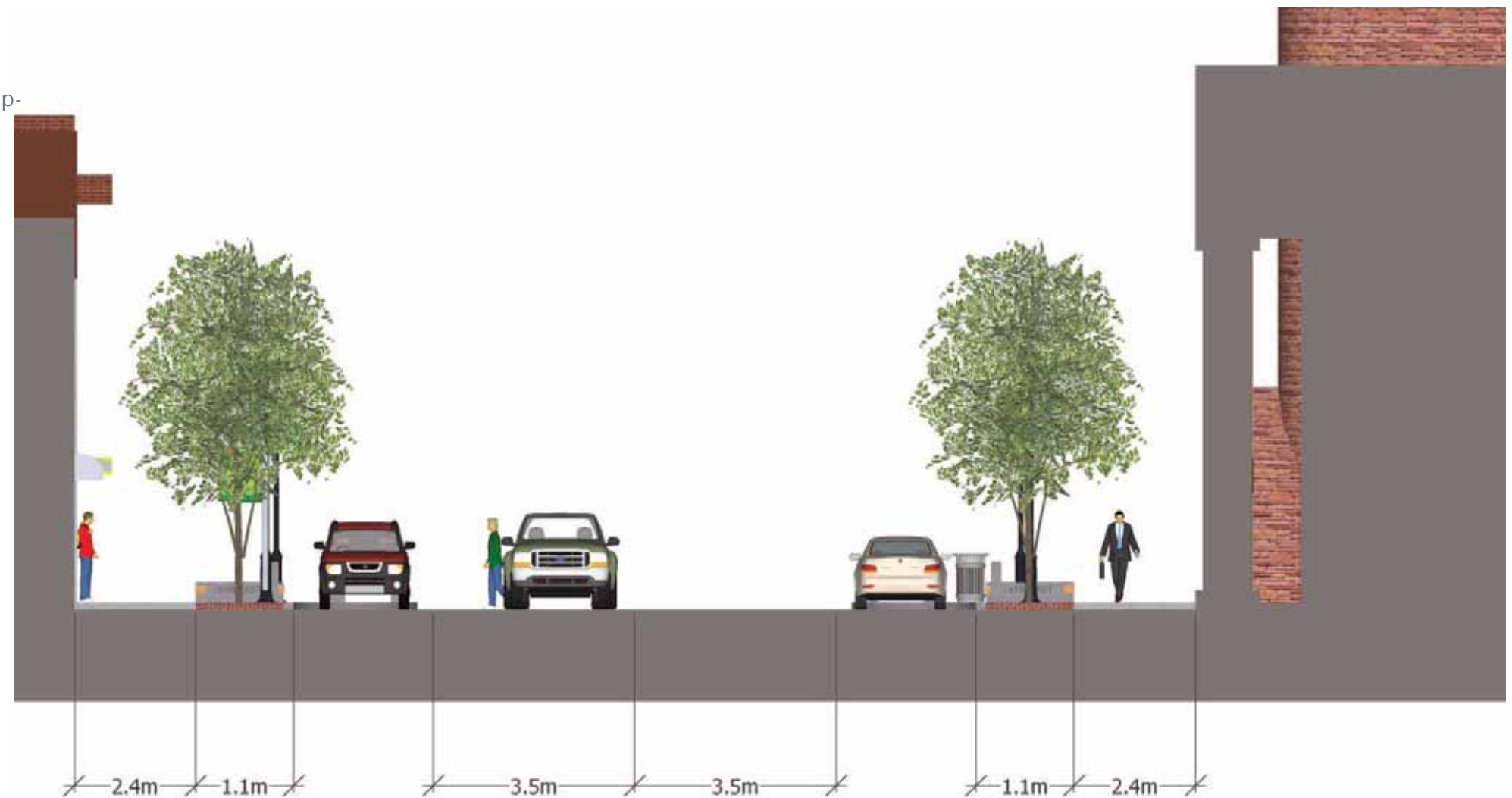


*Type One: Arterial Street  
(20m Street Right-of-Way)*

**Victoria Street and Lawrence Street**

Type One depicts the arterial street, which is a major thoroughfare through and into Downtown Amherst. These routes accommodate higher volumes and speeds of traffic, as well as functioning as major pedestrian corridors. Features of this street include:

- Wide sidewalks, with street trees, unique paving details, street furnishings, and bump-outs (where possible), to shorten the length of crosswalks.
- On-street parking on at least one side of the street, typically available on both sides.
- Mid-block pedestrian cross walks, characterized by bump-outs, distinctive pavement markings, and signage.



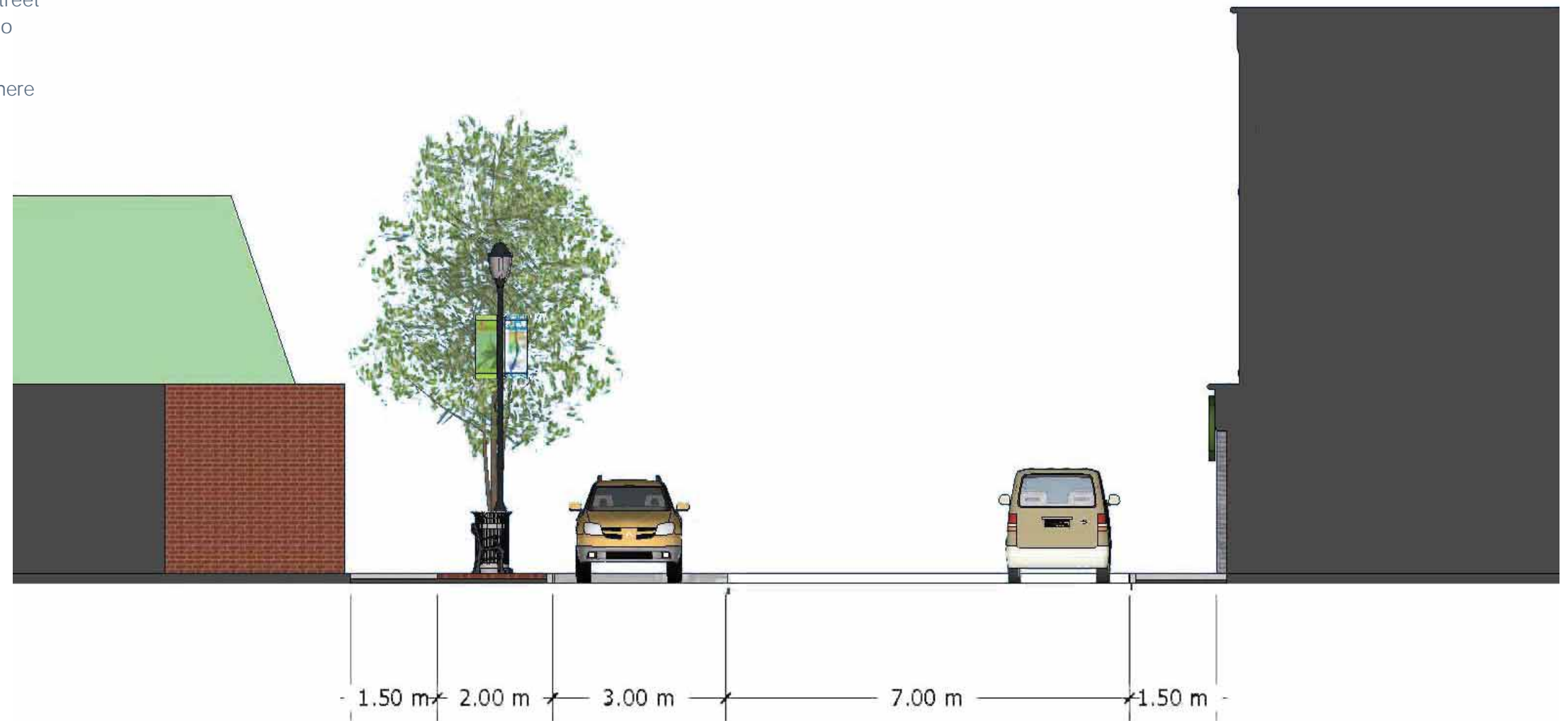
4.15 20 m Arterial Street

*Type Two: Collector Street  
(15m Street Right-of-Way)*

**Church Street, Havelock Street,  
and Prince Albert Street**

Type Two is a collector street, which is a secondary street travelling to and through Downtown Amherst. These routes accommodate typical speeds and volumes of traffic, as well as functioning as pedestrian corridors. Features of this street include:

- Sidewalks with tree-lined boulevards on at least one side of the street, unique paving details, street furnishings, and bump-outs (where possible), to shorten the length of crosswalks.
- On-street parking on one side of the street, where possible.



4.16 15 m Collector Street

*Type Three: Pedestrian Promenade  
(12 - 15m Street Right-of-Way)*

**Ratchford Street, King Street, and Electric Street**

Type Three is the showcase typology of Downtown, the Pedestrian Promenade. This space has been transformed from parking lot access to significant Downtown corridor. The road width is sufficient to accommodate slow moving, two-way traffic, and the street is lined by a wide, multi-use trail on one side, and a generous pedestrian-focused sidewalk on the other. Consistent paving treatment and removable bollards allow for the entire right-of-way to be transformed into a pedestrian-only zone, for festivals, street fairs, or other civic events. When open to cars, a rolled curb defines the path of traffic, without compromising the pedestrian-oriented feel of the space. Features of this street include:

- Unique paving details, street furnishings, and bump-outs (where possible), to shorten the length of crosswalks.
- On-street parking on one side of the street, where possible.



4.17 12 - 15 m Pedestrian Promenade

*Type Four: Street with Multi-use Trail*

*(15m Street Right-of-Way)*

**Example: Laplanche Street**

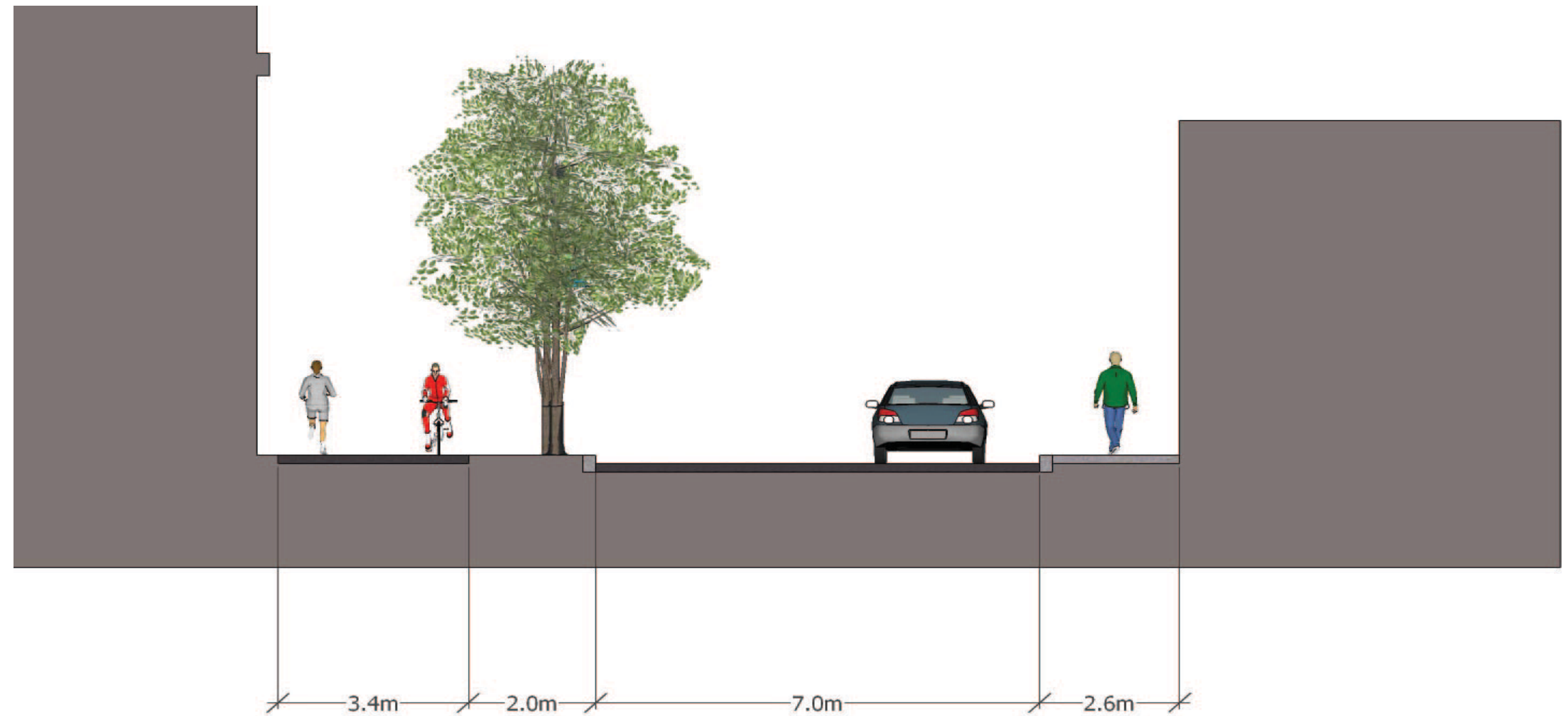
Type Four depicts a major collector street, with a conventional concrete sidewalk on one side, and a multi-use trail on the other. Features of this street typology include:

A 3.0 metre (minimum) wide asphalt multi-use trail, with a 2.0 metre tree-lined boulevard.

A conventional 1.5 metre (minimum) wide concrete sidewalk.

Two-lanes of vehicular traffic.

Access to off-street parking lots (where available)



4.18 15 m Multi-use Trail

### General Streetscape Improvements

The overall tone and character of the Victoria Street streetscape is positive, but indicative of deferred maintenance and a lack of recent attention. The granite curbing and brick pavers create a sense of character that is appropriate to the historic nature of Downtown. Most Downtowns in Maine have moved to granite sidewalks because their lifecycle costs are often much lower than concrete. Amherst should move towards granite sidewalks because they last 10 times longer than concrete but they only cost fractionally more to install. The use of brick or concrete pavers should also be employed Downtown in areas of low traffic like the 'amenity strip' or in special areas like bump-outs.

### Lighting & Site Furnishings

The current street light fixtures do not provide adequate lighting for security and comfort in the evenings. A retrofit of the lumiere to a more efficient, LED light fixture will not only improve illumination and reduce energy costs, but will ameliorate the pedestrian experience. Future lumieres should be at least 4.2m high from the base to the base of the lumiere in order to provide clearance of at least 2.6m and banner arms of at least 1.2m.

Other site furnishings should be standardized for the Downtown. These may include benches, waste receptacles, phone booths, bus shelters, bike racks, and letter boxes. The furnishings should be reflective of the heritage character of Downtown Amherst. Furnishings should be strategically located in amenity strips and bump-outs. The Town should undertake a memorial bench program in order to help fund the site furnishing program.

### Sidewalk Cafes

Outdoor sidewalk cafe's should be encouraged wherever possible Downtown. There are 2 possible approaches for mid-block cafe bump-outs in the Downtown. The first approach is to start a temporary sidewalk cafe program which would allow a temporary sidewalk cafe to take over one or more parking spaces. Sidewalk cafe guidelines would have to be created and the parking spaces would be 'leased' by the restaurant or bar owner from the city for the summer months. Most cities in Atlantic Canada have a similar sidewalk cafe program.

The second approach would be to create a permanent mid-block bumpout for restaurants or bars that have been in operation for 8 years or more. If the operation is financially stable, a sidewalk bumpout has good year round potential. The space would be leased for use from the Town by the business. The bump-out would be built as part of the regular maintenance improvements to the sidewalks.



4.19 Street Tree Planting Pit

4.20 Maglin Bike Racks



4.21 Maglin MLB310M backless bench



4.22 Maglin MLB310M Bench

Street Trees

The current street trees along Victoria Street are an appropriate species (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), but lack the space and maintenance to thrive in this type of urban condition. Planting pits should be retrofitted for a tree grate, tree guard, and to contain structural soils, to maximize root performance. Most standard tree grates are 1.2 - 1.5m in width, so sidewalks should be at least 3.6m wide to accommodate tree pits. Any new development agreements or capital sidewalk or road projects should include provisions for the installation and maintenance of new and / or existing street trees. An urban street tree policy should be developed and an arborist hired (full or part time) to manage the urban forest.

A list of suitable street trees for Downtown like Amherst is provided in the figure below.

4.23 Suggested Street Trees



*Gleditsia triacanthos*  
Honey Locust



*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*  
Green Ash



*Celtis occidentalis*  
Hackberry



*Pyrus calleryana*  
Callery Pear

### Urban Infill

There are many candidate redevelopment sites in the Downtown that would strengthen its destination and work-live-play appeal.



- INFILL
-  INFILL OPPORTUNITY
  -  CIVIC CENTRE
  -  DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

4.24 Urban Infill Map





*Marketplace (Ratchford - King - Electric Street) Promenade*

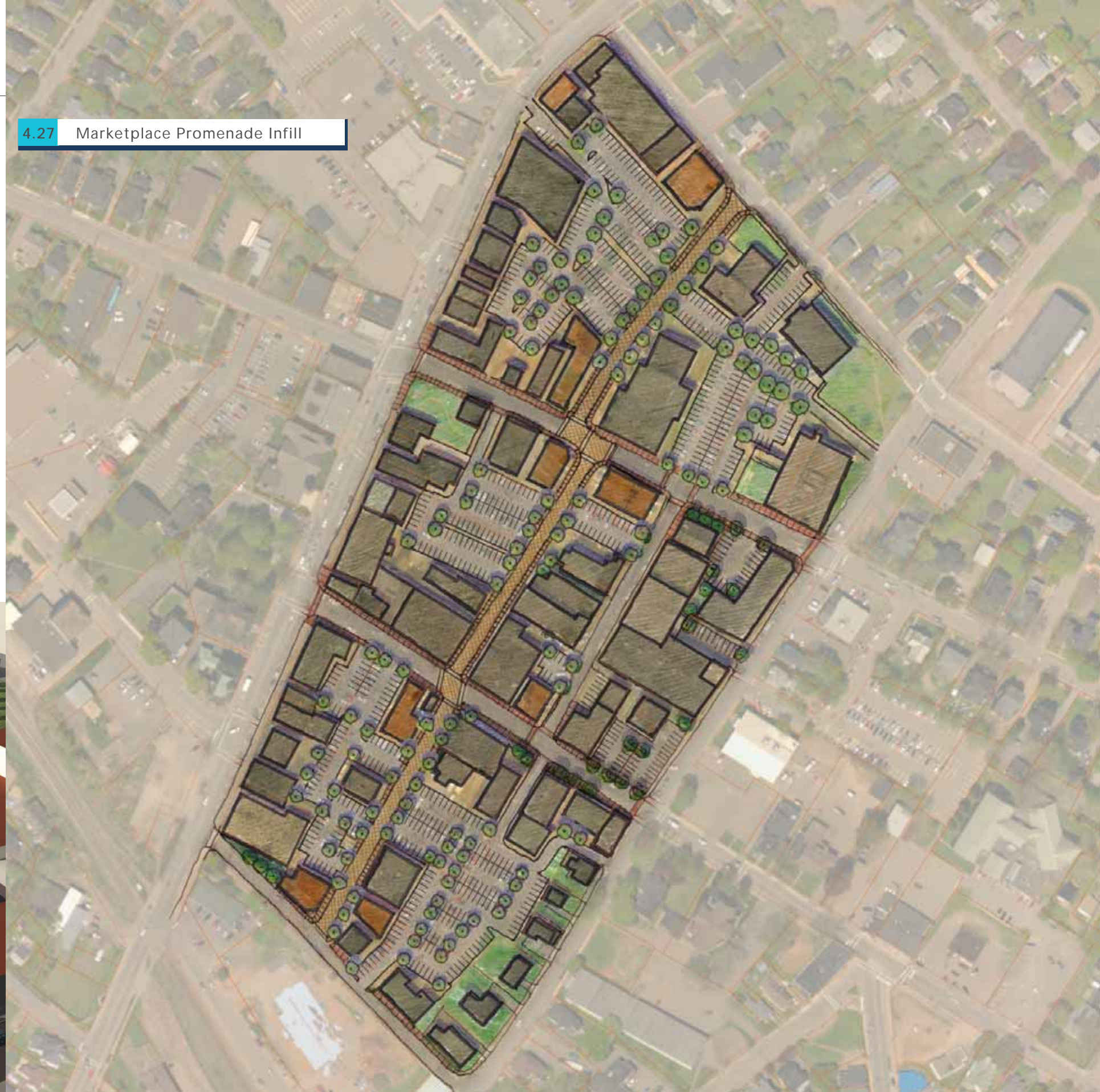
The creation of a new pedestrian promenade from the current Town Hall down to the Farmer's market sets up the potential for a number of infill sites. For each of the three blocks, development should be encouraged along the periphery, leaving space in the centre for restructured parking areas. Any large gaps on the bounding streets (Victoria and Prince Street) should be encouraged for development. The Town should work with landowners to reorganize internal parking lots, as there is ample space to increase capacity while adding green space and pedestrian amenities.

The planned relocation of Town Hall to a new site (in concert with the new police station) offers the opportunity to create a strong anchor for the new Pedestrian Promenade. This site, at the northern most tip of the promenade, is an ideal space for redevelopment.

4.26 Marketplace Promenade Infill



4.27 Marketplace Promenade Infill



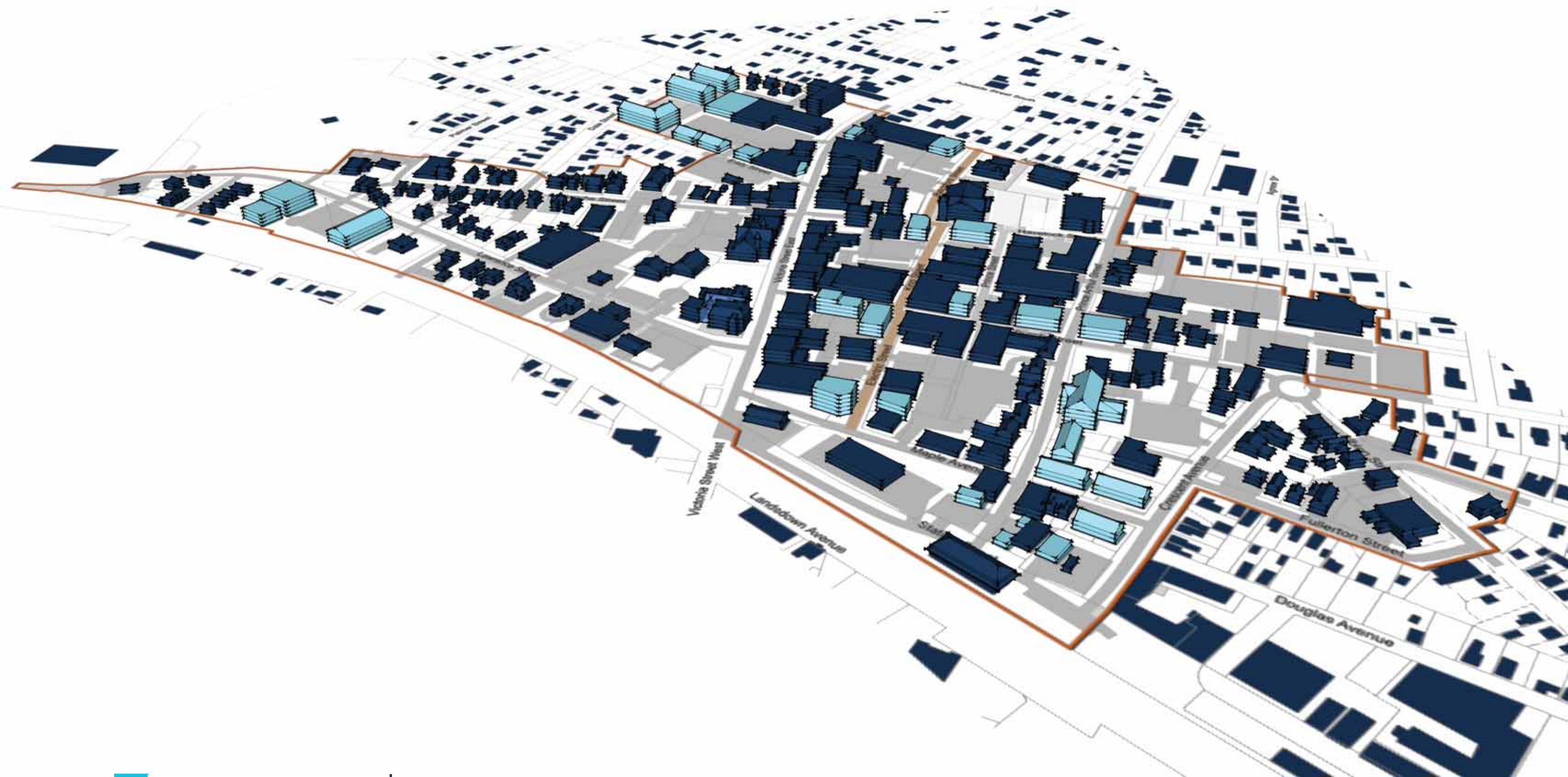
*Sobey's Plaza*

Price Chopper (Sobey's) is an important and significant Downtown retail anchor. As Downtown Amherst continues to develop, and a more vibrant residential community is established in the Downtown core, Sobey's may desire to expand upon their current operations. The proposed development concept shows an expanded retail space with the main entrance relocated to the southwest side of the building. This mixed-use, village-type development includes adjacent two to three storey pad spaces, for retail commercial use on the first floor, and mixed-use / residential on the upper floors. As the grade on the site is significant, there is the opportunity for the second floors to exit at the same level as the Sobey's, making these developments ideal for senior's housing. The concept also shows an expanded parking area for the Sobey's market, and upgraded pedestrian access to the site.

*Old School Lands*

The existing residential area behind the Old School is an ideal location for infill residential development. The proposed concept depicts low-rise apartments or condominiums with Row Houses, and communal green space.





4.30 Massing Model

### Signage and Wayfinding

Co-ordinating community signage is another aspect of reinforcing the Downtown Amherst brand. A full detailed civic signage and branding strategy is beyond the scope of this report, however, the following pages hint at the elements that could become the basis for a future sign program for the Town. A more detailed schematic design phase will be needed at a later date. The following hierarchy of signage is recommended for Downtown Amherst:

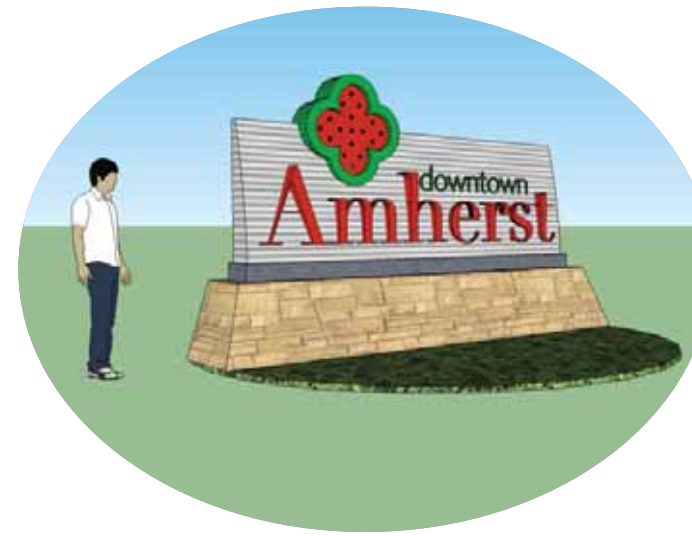
- Gateway Signage
- Directional Signage
- Wayfinding Sign & Event Kiosk
- Interpretive Panels
- Banners

#### SIGNAGE

-  GATEWAY
-  DIRECTIONAL
-  INFORMATIONAL

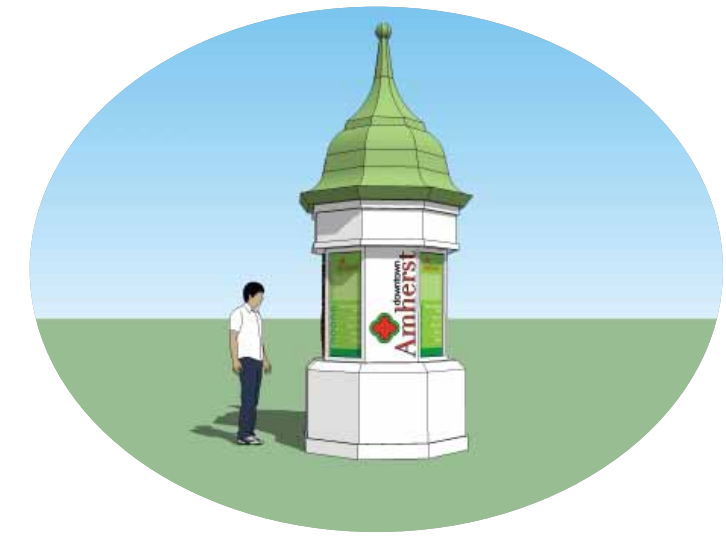
4.31 Signage Map





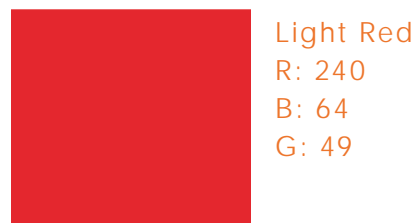
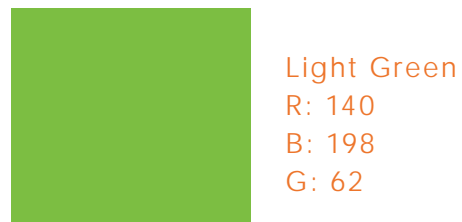
Gateway Signage

There are three primary gateways into Downtown, one to the south at Albion Street, one to the west at Lawrence Street, and the main thoroughfare through Downtown, along Victoria Street. The Town has currently undertaken a gateway signage program for the two major highway entrances to Town, at Albion Street and Victoria Street. Additional gateway signage should be created, to delineate the entrances to the Downtown area. The creation of the two roundabout intersections (at Albion Street and at Lawrence / Laplanche Streets) are ideal locations for Downtown gateway signage. Additional gateway signage should be located at the north and south Downtown boundaries along Victoria Street.

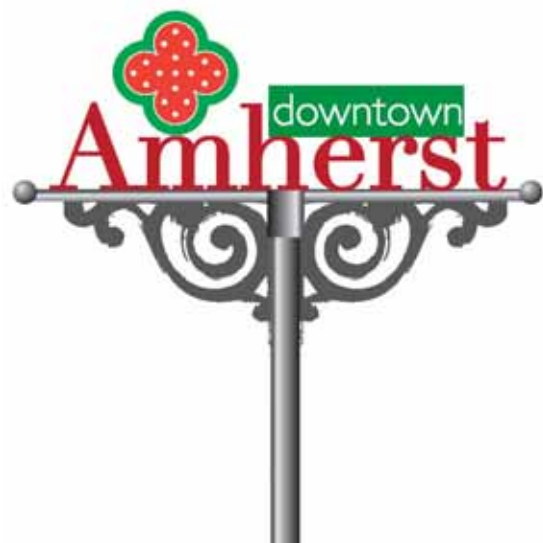


Wayfinding Signage

The Town's pedestrian wayfinding structure should be readily visible as an important landmark in the Downtown. The iconic design plays to the family of other signs in the Town. The wayfinding structure includes a community map, possibly keyed to a business directory and a list of important Town destinations. Half of the sign board could be dedicated to a community events board. The structures should be located in high traffic areas and highly visible locations.



4.33 Colour Palette



*Interpretive Panels*

An interpretive program should be developed throughout the Town to convey its rich architectural, artistic, and industrial heritage. The panels would be located for each of the murals, one for the carved wooden sculptures, and in select areas Downtown and in parks. Each panel should address one particular topic of relevance with a maximum of 150 words in French and English. A more detailed interpretive strategy for the Town should be developed following this report.



*Banner*

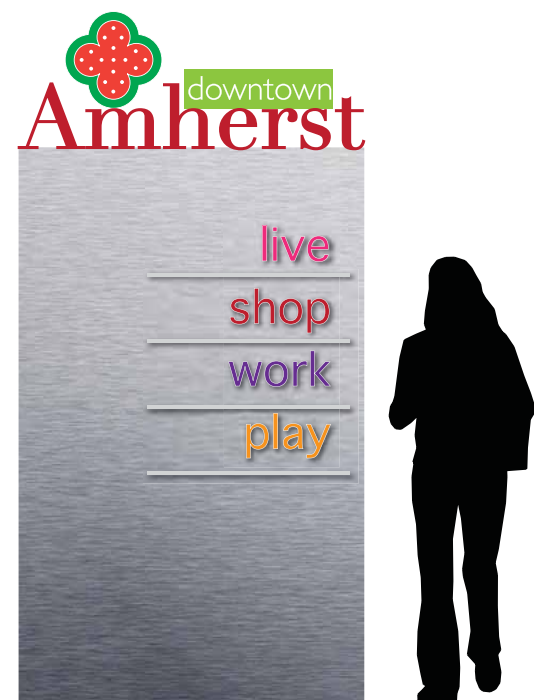
A banner program should be developed for the main Downtown streets. Any future light standards should be a minimum of 4.2 metres high, to provide adequate height for banners. Ideally, banners should be created for various events, such as the Fibre Arts Festival or Victorian Christmas. Typical banners cost about \$150 each. It may be possible to encourage businesses to sponsor the banner in front of their establishment.



*Directional Signage*

The eventual civic signage manual should consider directional signage for key public facilities:

- parking locations (high priority),
- parks & trails,
- Downtown Amherst,
- museums, cultural centres, schools, library, police, etc.





### Urban Forestry Plan

Because of the long time needed for trees to grow to an appreciable size, an urban forest management plan should be prepared and implemented to ensure maintenance and tree replacement occur on a timely basis.

The value of an urban forest is substantial in terms of real estate value, water quality, air quality, energy use, and human health. Many forward looking municipalities are now preparing an urban forest master plan to ensure the continued longevity of this most important civic investment. American Forests<sup>2</sup> recommends an average 15% tree canopy for central business districts and Downtowns. A satellite analysis of Amherst's Downtown shows a 2.2% canopy cover. Fifteen percent canopy cover should be a goal of the Town.

The plan should aim to perpetuate the hallmark characteristics of the Downtown urban forest, reduce conflict between trees and utilities, and maintain a healthy canopy of trees of diverse age and species. The plan should articulate the pattern and species of trees to be planted to meet these objectives. Programs to promote timely tree replacement, planting on private properties, and appropriate maintenance and management procedures should also be addressed. Report recommendations should be based on results of a GIS inventory of public trees in the Downtown Area. Existing gaps in the tree cover, and the future decline of the forest may be modelled to highlight priorities for replacement. Incentive programs and development regulations may help to ensure the development of that part of the urban forest that stands on private property.

A full time arborist should be brought on to the Town's staff to lead the urban forest master plan.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.americanforests.org/resources/urbanforests/treedeficit.php>

### Public Art

Downtown Amherst is lucky enough to benefit from two existing, distinctive public art projects, the DARS-lead mural initiative, and the carved wooden sculptures. These art pieces add richness and depth to the Downtown landscape in ways beyond conventional streetscape improvements, and celebrate the unique cultural heritage of the Town.

Public Art should be considered an integral component of the overall aesthetic quality of Downtown, and should be managed as a valued asset. The Town's existing public art assets should be included in the interpretive signage program, in order to inform and highlight residents and visitors on these important artistic elements. The Town should liaise with the Region's vibrant arts community, to further develop or articulate a public art strategy.

A public art strategy for Downtown Amherst should consider:

- Art pieces may include (but are not limited to) sculptures, murals, memorials, water features, landscape installations, lighting, and could be integrated into either building or landscape design.
- Public art should become an engaging component of the streetscape, encouraging people to stop and interact with the piece and with each other.
- The scale of both the art piece and the site should be considered; larger sites with greater visual prominence can support larger or more substantial elements.
- Local artists or their works should be featured prominently.
- Arts festivals should be pursued in the downtown
- Add additional information in coordination with Arts Strategy



4.34 Downtown Amherst Tree Cover

### *Tantramar Marsh Trail*

The Tantramar Marsh is one of Amherst's best natural assets, and one of the Province's most under-developed tourist assets. As a major stop-over for migrating birds, a relic of Acadian dykeland ingenuity, and with the significant growth of bird-watching as one of North America's highest outdoor participation activities, the Tantramar Marsh is a Provincial gem worthy of significant investment. The Town of Sackville NB (10 minutes away) has capitalized on the marsh through trail development and bird watching and the Town is reaping significant economic benefits. The Town should work with the Province and other trail organizations to create a Provincially significant trail system and Watchable Wildlife program which would link to the downtown.

The Town's goal of creating a multi-use trail link that connects to the marshlands should be actively pursued, as it has a number of associated benefits. Presently, many residents (as described in the online survey) walk to and from the Downtown, but other major active transportation routes have not been developed to their full potential. Connecting Downtown to a major marshland trail linkage will provide residents and visitors with a walkable and bikeable route to a significant environmental asset. The public health, environmental, and tourism benefits of such a trail connection will trickle down to the Downtown, increasing pedestrian and cyclist traffic and offering opportunities for increased retail spending and Downtown visitor volume and vibrancy.

This one recommendation could have a significant economic impact to the downtown and Town as a whole and should be pursued vigorously.

4.35 Look-offs along the Marsh Trail





4.36 Downtown Amherst Lawtons

## 4.4 Business Strategy

The success of the Downtown area is not just built upon the physical characteristics and layout of the space, but on the strategy to attract and retain business dollars. The Business strategy for the Centre First Plan looks at the existing business mix, and makes recommendations on those types of enterprises to attract. The strategy also looks the creation of a Downtown development officer, and various other initiatives to draw and retain dollars flowing into Amherst's central business district.

### Centre First: Downtown Amherst Action Strategy

#### *Business Recruitment Plan*

Developing effective business strategies and actively recruiting based on the strategy is important in attracting business to the Amherst Downtown. An active strategy catches the attention of potential businesses and investors, instead of passively waiting for them to discover what the Downtown has to offer. Having a business recruitment strategy establishes that the Town of Amherst is ready and open for business, and it shows that the Town has collectively decided to actively recruit new business. In order to establish a successful strategy it is important to know your market and play to the strengths of what the Downtown has to offer.

#### Steps in Creating a Successful Business Strategy

##### 1) Know your Market:

A successful strategy should identify new market opportunities, support existing businesses and stimulate investment.

- **Market Assessment:** A marketing assessment is imperative to understand the market. A detailed assessment will allow the Town of Amherst to build upon their existing business inventory, and identify where there is opportunity for growth. It will also highlight the types of businesses that are desirable and may be lacking, in order to recruit for and fill the missing niches. A market assessment should include a survey for existing businesses to find out what initiative might support their success, a Downtown user survey to identify what services are lacking, and a market area survey to gather information on housing, present economic conditions, and rental rates.

- **Demographic Assessment:** Demographics are the cornerstone of any business recruitment strategy. This section should include at a minimum the general population make-up (age, gender, race, income) as well as the population's spending potential.
- **General Market Information:** Housing and employment information are important subsets of demographic data. This section should include information on the housing market, employment rates, the current business mix, investment rates, and tourism information. It should also include traffic counts and pedestrian foot traffic numbers.
- **Current and Planned Projects:** When selecting a new location for development, developers often look at current development trends to evaluate the future potential in an area. Current and planned projects help forecast that potential and allow developers to who else is interested in the area; a further enticement. Information on project location, size, intended use, and completion date should be made easily available to the development community.
- **Commercial and Office Property Listings:** Make potential and current businesses interested in expansion aware of the type and quality of properties and spaces the Downtown has to offer. Listing the current business mix, in addition to the building or space size, cost per square foot, current or intended use and location facilitates real estate transactions for developers. It is also important to list contact information for each space and a map showcasing its location within the town.

## 2. Business Retention

Maintaining and strengthening existing economic assets is crucial. It is important to develop personal connections with business owners and between businesses; having businesses communicate and collaborate will only strengthen their ties to the community.

Identifying key businesses in the Downtown is necessary as they are the area's greatest assets. Recognizing these assets (anchor stores, traffic generators, longstanding businesses, large employers and unique or niche stores) and keeping those business owners happy enables the entire Downtown community to capitalize on their success.

The Downtown Idea Exchange lists the top 10 businesses types that are successful in Downtowns:

1. Community gathering place businesses (popular social destinations, like cafes or coffee shops),
2. Retailers that celebrate local heritage,
3. Stores that entertain,
4. Stores that celebrate local arts or artisans,
5. Stores that educate,
6. Stores with a community and global perspective,
7. Gift shop and indulgence stores,
8. Unique destination retailers,
9. Neighbourhood serving retailers,

## 3) Business Expansion

Identify and support existing business expansion opportunities by facilitating physical expansion and encouraging revenue and profitability expansion. Encourage business expansion in the Downtown by: Being aware of businesses who are profiting in the Downtown and identify the reasons behind their success,

- Educate current business owners on business development by enabling access to seminars held by outside experts or professionals,
- Engage businesses in partnerships and relationships. Help downtown business succeed by providing an open forum for communication,
- Encourage cross selling; seek business owners' input and encourage the development of synergistic or symbiotic businesses,
- Be sure that businesses are aware of opportunities that arise for expansion.

## 4) Business Attraction

Diversify and expand upon economic activities and offerings. Market Amherst as an attractive place for businesses to set up shop. Seek businesses that will add to the vibrancy of Downtown.

- Target specific businesses and actively recruit. Many retail groups or Downtown organizations employ headhunters to seek out and bring in specific businesses or business types. Areas like Spring Garden Road (Halifax) and Dartmouth Crossing (Dartmouth) use headhunting techniques to draw in retailers.
- Make businesses aware of the benefits of locating in Downtown Amherst, through networking, marketing, incentives, and testimonials.
- Networking is an essential tool in attracting business. Getting the name of Amherst out there is essential to attract business. Networking can occur through personal contacts, professional contacts, commercial contacts or municipal contacts. Each of these avenues can put forth an interesting Amherst product (Downtown Amherst Brand) and sell it.

## 5) Develop a Guidebook

Developers and investors should be able to find this information easily. It is important to create a concise business development guide that contains all the necessary information in an organized, visually appealing document. This guide should be made available in both hard copy and online, and should contain any contact information. The ease of access to information and materials may make the difference in whether or not a new business will consider locating to Downtown Amherst. A business development guide should:

- Have visually appealing and consistent design;
- Allow online users the choice of both HTML and PDF download options;
- Have recent and relevant maps and photos;
- Be capturing, clear, and concise.

Downtown Seattle has an excellent website layout which could be used as an example. (<http://www.downtownseattle.com>) Here, they have successfully designed an interesting website with all the business development information made easily available to potential developers and investors.



3 Leinberger, Christopher B. 2005. *Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization*. The Brookings Institution Research Brief.

### *Downtown Business Coordination*

Amherst has retained a modest mix of retail, office and accommodations in the Downtown. Downtown retail in Amherst is anchored by established restaurants, pubs, and older, locally-owned, independent retail stores. The Downtown also accommodates a grocery store (Price Chopper) and recently, a new Lawton's, demonstrating interest in the viability of downtowns by larger scale retailers. Although the office sector in the downtown has been impacted by the development of office space on Albion Street, Downtown Amherst has retained financial services offices and core government office facilities, such as the Town Hall, Police Station, Courthouse, and Library. Hotel rooms are concentrated at the highway, but seasonal bed and breakfasts and inns are located near the Downtown, typically in grand old homes on Victoria Street.

The business community in Downtown Amherst has the potential for growth, and a level of coordinated vision and organization will help to facilitate that evolution. The idea of establishing an 'ideal' ratio of business types was investigated; however, downtown Amherst is a distinct place, and no 'ideal' ratio or case-study comparison would be appropriate. As well, retail viability must be considered in the context of the Town as a whole.

Growing the business district in Amherst is dependent on laying substantial groundwork. New businesses will begin to locate in the downtown when their risk is minimized, and established businesses will be able to grow after many of the recommendations of this plan have been implemented:

- A coordinated vision for the downtown must be adopted up by residents, Council, and businesses.
- The implementation of the Beautification Strategy – in particular, creating an inviting pedestrian environment, enhancing wayfinding and signage, reorganizing parking, individual businesses increasing curb appeal, and creating an overall perception of a clean and safe downtown.
- The introduction of new residential to the Downtown and peripheral areas (as suggested in the Residential Strategy) will be essential to strong neighbourhood retail. Retail is always strongest in areas where there is a strong residential market.
- Establishing (or increasing an existing) large, anchor institutional project in downtown Amherst will support increased business development.

In addition, the Downtown business district should immediately begin to follow the model of successful Downtowns and local retail districts elsewhere:

- Coordinated and consistent opening and closing days and hours of operation (that are predictable for customers), and extension of the store opening hours into the evening hours to capture more business.
- Coordinated marketing campaigns: the downtown district needs to be managed like a shopping centre. Landlords and downtown businesses need to organize and work with the Town to merchandise and lease the district to achieve a good tenant mix and quality. Some areas have established private/public retail leasing and management agencies for this purpose. In accordance with the vision for the downtown, the desired businesses should be pursued. Clustering of like businesses will help to reinforce downtown image and identity.
- Retail businesses that should be attracted, and will do well, should be modelled on local businesses such as Dayle's, Mansour's, and Pugsley's - specialty and niche retail places that distinguish themselves from the generic chains with products that reflect the local culture, middle range prices, and above average service and product knowledge.
- Many successful downtowns have also developed community gathering places - or "Third Places" - often modest food establishments - that also have the benefit to the community of increasing community social interaction and quality of life.
- Larger downtown retail anchors are risk averse, and will be the last retailers to enter the market.





### *Downtown Development Committee*

As Amherst's Downtown continues to evolve and develop, it will need a clear champion. Drawing from the existing resources available through CREDA, the Town, and DARS, a joint Downtown Development Committee should be set-up to champion Downtown issues. This group would work directly with the private sector, including existing Downtown property managers, and existing programs, such as CREDA's Business Retention and Expansion program, would be customized for Downtown by the committee.

The committee would report to Town Staff, the DARS board, and CREDA. Some of possible responsibilities of the Downtown Development Committee include:

- Creating and managing the clearinghouse of available space in the Downtown;
- Leading business development and promotional initiatives;
- Managing residential or office rental space, on behalf of building owners;
- Program development for Downtown events;
- Co-ordinating streamlined retail operations;
- Liaising between Downtown business owners, residents, DARS, and the Town of Amherst.

### *Vacant Space Clearinghouse*

A valuable initiative for the creation of an inventory and clearing house for these vacant spaces. The Downtown Development Committee, in association with the private sector, could create a central registry where a business or potential tenant could be linked, and directed to, available space. The clearing house could also direct owners to apartment management to divest that requirement and eliminate that issue. The clearing house could negotiate a reduced management fee for the Downtown district apartments.



4.37 Downtown Redevelopment Site

### *Downtown Development Promotion*

The development community could be asked to participate in a “Downtown Development committee” with the mandate to create a specific number of apartment units Downtown within a specified time frame. Other municipalities have found that one reason there was no interest in Downtown development was that local developers had not examined the issue because it was not part of their suburban history of development activity.

### *Wireless Downtown*

Recent advancements in Wi Max (with a range of many kilometres) will allow very cheap implementation of a Downtown internet solution for Amherst. Fredericton’s Fred e-zone is a wireless network for the entire Downtown providing free wireless internet to all. The Town should look to partner with an Internet provider to install a trial system as soon as possible (DARS has the initiative on the books for 2010 / 2011). Like Fredericton, Amherst should brand and advertise this network.

### *Programming the Downtown*

Amherst needs to capitalize on regular Downtown events to keep the focus on the central business district. There should be at least ten high profile public events per year, with five or six in the high tourist season. Current initiatives, such as the Fibre Arts festival, the Four Fathers festival, and Victorian Christmas are excellent examples from which to build upon. Sackville, New Brunswick has the “Festival By The Marsh” and Amherst should find a way to celebrate the Tantramar once it is developed further. Regular programming will continue to be an important approach to animating public spaces in the Downtown. Town staff and budget resources must be allocated to ensure the spaces in the Downtown are well programmed. It is particularly important during the first five to ten years of this Downtown plan. The events need to focus on the resources that the Downtown offers like the architecture, street festivals, parades, arts festivals, music, or food.

Partnering with volunteer groups, arts organizations and businesses is an effective way to extend resources and offer more and a greater variety of programming. As the residential population Downtown increases, the role of programming will become less important as a strategy for public space animation.



4.38 Downtown Redevelopment Site

## 4.5 Real Estate and Land-Use Strategy

An important component of the Centre First Action Strategy is the capitalization of infill and adaptive reuse opportunities in the Downtown core, as well as the creation of programs and initiatives designed to support the retention, improvement, and continued use of heritage buildings, and the development of land use planning programs that support Downtown development.

### *Development Priorities*

Amherst's Downtown has retained a resilient core of businesses, office uses, institutional uses and heritage structures that are the nucleus of future development. New development Downtown should be centred on:

- Protecting existing uses, including retail, entertainment, and most importantly, institutional uses.
- Preserving heritage structures to retain the character and history of the community.
- Introducing activity to the Downtown by increasing and diversifying residential uses, and retaining/attracting institutional anchors.
- Improving the quality of life for Amherst residents and increasing visitation through improving the Downtown experience.

| Amherst Downtown Plan - Real Estate Strategy |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
|  | Step/Process   | Rationale  | Town's Role  |
| Set Policy and Organizational Framework      | Adopt an "Open for Business" attitude  | Facilitate private investment in the Town  | Welcome developers and investors and facilitate development approval process   |
|  | Introduce municipal policies to support desired development  | Reduce real or perceived impediments to downtown development   | Accelerate approval process, eliminate fees, catalyze development<br>Increase allowable density, clarify development standards, introduce property tax incentives, reduce or eliminate building permit fees<br>Fast track affordable housing proposals |
|  | Establish Heritage Conservation District   | Allows Municipal control and funding, and access to Provincial funding for owners of heritage buildings and buildings in Heritage District | Provide guidance to owners of heritage properties; Provide funding and tax rebates to owners in heritage district (Heritage Division, NS Department of Heritage and Culture)   |
|  | Reorganize Town/Downtown Business Organizations  | Cooperation and coordination among all Town businesses is required (Downtown, Industrial Park, Albion Street)                              | Partner with private sector interest in downtown; support private sector leadership of Downtown development process  |
|  | Purchase/option properties   | Facilitate private sector development in keeping with plan vision  | Town should be "catalytic developer" - reduces risk for private development  |
|  | Assemble small land parcels  | Small parcels impede substantial new development projects  | Reduces risk for private development   |
| Establish Downtown as a Destination          | Protect and Enhance Existing Entertainment/Attractions/Retail/Restaurants for residents and tourists                                   | Increase draw of downtown for residents and visitors by building on existing strengths   | Streetscape improvements; market downtown  |
|  | Establish Tourist/Community Centre Downtown  | Serve as anchor destination point and base for tourists in the Town  | Obtain funding for restoration and establish tourism/community centre (ACOA)   |
|  | Institutional Capture, Retention and Expansion   | Institutions anchor downtown economics and day-time activity   | Ensure well-located land is available for Institutions (NSCC, Justice Centre) to locate in or near downtown when needed<br>Retain all Town offices Downtown  |
|  | Organize Events with focus on Quality of Life and Culture  | Increase activity in Downtown; enhance sense of community and quality of life  | Facilitate and promote events in the downtown  |
| Residential Strategy                         | Establish market rate and affordable rental housing: conversions and new (infill) product aimed at younger, mobile renters and seniors | Increasing number of residents supports downtown retail and overall vibrancy of downtown environment                                       | Obtain funding for affordability (or work with developer or organization to obtain funding), and issue RFP for 50/50 affordable/market development proposals (NS Department of Community Services)   |
|  | Affordable for-sale housing in neighbourhoods adjacent to downtown   | Targeting a range of household incomes will make Downtown a neighbourhood  | Town to assist development/identify opportunity sites and promote them to home builders  |
|  | Create opportunities for infill housing downtown   | Vacant/underutilized land downtown is cost effective for Town to service   | Facilitate development by upzoning density, relaxing municipal standards, eliminating building permit fees   |
| Commercial Strategy                          | Increase Boutique Retail, Local Food Establishments  | Distinguish from the generic retail product; enhance quality of downtown experience  |  |
|  | Commercial Capture   | Larger commercial uses are key anchors for downtown activity but must follow residential development and increased visitation              | Facilitate activity downtown (residential development, tourism, institutions, events - see above) to increase demand and reduce risk for new commercial uses   |
|  | Local Retail   | More local retail in addition to existing grocery and pharmacies will follow other development   | Facilitate a range of residential uses in and near downtown to increase client base for local retail   |
|  | Office   | Office uses are anchors for downtown activity; an increase will follow other development   | Retain all Town offices Downtown   |

### Real Estate Strategy

A significant attribute to a successful downtown is the ability to attract a thriving residential community. Halifax began such a concerted effort in 1994, and the influx of people created a sense of vibrancy, safety, and activity. In applying similar principles for the Town of Amherst, a real estate strategy has been articulated, to attract development investment for downtown, including residential, institutional and commercial development.

The strategy is based in part on principles established by the Brookings Institution in their study of successful downtown development projects across North America and Europe over the past 20 years<sup>3</sup>, and incorporates the recommendations for development priorities laid out previously in this plan. The strategy has four interrelated stages:

- Stage 1. Creating the conditions to facilitate desired development by setting a policy and organizational framework.
- Stage 2. Establishing the downtown as a destination for residents and visitors by supporting and enhancing current downtown activities and infrastructure.
- Stage 3. Creating a true downtown neighbourhood by increasing and diversifying residential development.
- Stage 4. Increasing commercial activity, based on an enhanced residential and visitor environment.

The strategy is presented as a the table on the following page, showing rationale for each step of the strategy and the Town's role in its implementation. Re-establishment of a critical mass of development in Downtowns is notably slow, and will occur over a period of five to 20 years, rather than the two to six years typical of suburban developments.

It should be emphasized that each stage is underpinned by the previous stages – for example, residential development must follow other activity in the downtown, such as enhancement of the existing retail and attractions, increasing the number of community and tourist-oriented events.

It is important to note that most of the initiatives presented in this strategy are relatively low cost.

#### Stage 1. Setting Policy and Organizational Framework

The Town of Amherst should be the catalyst for downtown development. Although the strategy requires the co-ordination and co-operation of the private and public sectors, the Town will play a key role. The Town's most important role is to eliminate any real or perceived impediments to development consistent with the vision laid out in this plan, and to assist with the protection of assets in the town, such as existing businesses, heritage structures, and streetscapes.

### Stage 2. Establishing Downtown as a Destination

As the Business Strategy presents, retail growth does not lead development – it follows jobs and housing. Protecting existing retail uses by implementing the recommendations in this plan will enhance the attractiveness and increase the appeal of the Downtown to visitors and residents, a key component of this strategy.

Amherst lacks the basic infrastructure and marketing to attract and retain visitors, such as higher visibility and a more attractive access. Although much effort has been put into upgrading the Lawrence Street exit, Exit 3 is more direct, and should be promoted and signed as the primary entrance for visitors. The Victoria Road streetscape at the Downtown entry point should be designated as a Heritage Conservation District, so that the Town has some ability to control the nature of development and redevelopment on the street.

In the Downtown, there is need for infrastructure in the form of a tourist/community/activity centre as a base for tourists to plan their activities in the downtown and surrounding areas. This should be located on Victoria Street; reuse of a heritage structure at a main crossroads, such as the vacant Old Police Station at the corner of Laplanche Street would be an appropriate location. This is the only type of use that can generate funding to restore this significant heritage building. This facility may also be a satellite location for the Cumberland County Museum on Church Street. There are also opportunities for Amherst to market itself as a service centre for the surrounding areas located on the main tourist routes.

The Tantramar Marsh is a natural asset that can be easily accessed from the Downtown core. A marsh trail system should be linked to an active transportation network in the Downtown, which will make downtown more attractive for residents and visitors.

Institutional uses, along with housing, underpin Downtown activity and economics. Amherst has many institutional uses, but some, including the courthouse and the community college, may be at risk. Establishing a large, anchor institutional project in Downtown Amherst would be a key part of new development. For example, the Nova Scotia Community College's Community Learning Centre in Amherst on Victoria Street is already an important component of downtown Amherst. The NSCC, although not having made an official announcement, appears to have some interest in an expansion of the current campus. Although the Amherst jail will be relocating elsewhere, the Provincial Department of Justice may consider locating a new Justice Centre to replace the current courthouse, which is sub-standard for its purposes. A two acre site will be required for a new building, which should be built in the Downtown.

The Town should continue to engage the NSCC and Provincial Justice Department in discussions about new facilities. In addition, the Town should ensure that land is available for new facilities in the future.

The provincial trend is to centralize civil service jobs, which often means Amherst loses out. The Town needs to work with the Province to advocate for institutional retention in Amherst.

### Stage 3. Residential Strategy

The focus of housing development should be to target a range of household incomes, so that Downtown becomes a neighbourhood.

Conversions of existing properties and the creation of new, good quality rental housing downtown should be a first priority. Currently, housing in the downtown offers little choice, and the Downtown environment is not sufficiently attractive to residents who have the financial means to locate in other areas. This is an opportunity to infill under-utilized land parcels in the Downtown, such as vacant land now used for parking. One or more high quality apartment buildings should be developed for tenants at the mid level price points. These units would provide accommodations for younger, mobile residents, as well as seniors; and would be a rental alternative to current older homeowners wishing to downsize from a large older home. Rental housing provides all the benefits of condominium living (for example, lower maintenance and heating costs, and the ability to "lock and leave" for a winter vacation down south), without the risk associated with the condominium ownership.

One option to stimulate housing downtown is to build affordable housing. In order to address the provision of affordable housing, apartments should have a 50/50 blend of market rate and affordable units. Funding is available for affordable housing through a joint agreement with the federal government (See Appendix). The Town should facilitate development of these units through the identification and acquisition (or purchase of an option) of properties for apartments and the requirement (through an RFP process for purchase of the properties) for the provision of the affordable/market blend.





4.40 Marketplace Promenade



The Town should consider the initiation of demonstration pilot housing projects for the downtown. For example, one of the impediments to attracting residents to the Downtown is that other sites in town can provide more attractive amenities, such as views. The Town could help to establish new rental housing by identifying sites in the downtown that have views of the marshland. Where appropriate, zoning should be put in place to build multi-family housing. The Town could apply for affordable housing funding through NS Department of Community Services, and then promote the site as an opportunity to developers/bidders.

Although condominium development is not viable in the early stages of the strategy, as multi-family housing becomes a more popular housing choice, the demand for condominium ownership will likely increase. In addition, there are opportunities for additional small lot single family dwellings on vacant or under-utilized land adjacent to the Downtown, in areas that are cost effective to service. Manufactured homes may be one option for these sites. The Town could facilitate development of these small lots, beginning by meeting with owners of lots and builders to understand their development requirements. As an incentive to locate Downtown for developers (who currently must pay the costs of roads and servicing for new developments), the Town should facilitate development by ensuring zoning is in place to encourage the development of higher density housing such as row houses, relaxing municipal standards for road widths (and thus reducing road costs) to allow private lane ways for access, and eliminating building permit costs.

#### *Stage 4. Retail, Hotel and Office Strategy*

More Downtown retail growth will follow other institutional and residential development, and should be modelled on local businesses such as Dayle's, Mansour's, and Pugsley's that reflect the local culture, have middle range prices, and above average service and product knowledge. Other successful Downtowns have also developed community social places - or "Third Places", usually food or drink establishments, or places for recreation and leisure, that become valued community gathering places .

The Farmer's Market would benefit from a higher profile in the downtown. This could be accomplished without losing the market's current arrangement with the Lion's Club, by enhancing access to the facility from Electric Street. This important contributor to the neighbourhood feel of Downtown could also move vendors to outside stalls on fine weather days.

As the market study shows, there is currently no demand for a new full-scale hotel in the Town. With an increase in visitor numbers, developers considering new hotel builds would likely locate in less risky locations near Highway 104. In the Downtown, however, there are opportunities for small, seasonal accommodations operations, such as Inns and Bed Breakfasts, which would do well in a newly invigorated downtown environment.

The current office uses by the Town, the provincial and federal governments, law offices associated with the courthouse, and financial services firms are essential to retain in the downtown as activity generators. Additional medical offices associated with Pugley's Pharmacy and the new Lawton's could be attracted by offering low rents (with the potential for the pharmacies to capture business associated with the offices).

### Facade Incentive Program

A facade program provides some level of funding for facade improvements to building owners within the program area. The program usually provides matching funding (50 cent dollars) to building owners up to an upset limit (usually \$10,000-20,000). If the Town were to undertake the funding of a facade program, the up-front costs would be offset in the long term by increased property values, which lead to increased tax revenue. A facade program would be a long term investment in the Downtown.

The goal of this section is to provide some basic considerations for a facade program if and when it goes ahead. Only two building facade sample designs were completed as part of this report employing the principles described herein. If a full facade program is to be implemented, property owners will need more detailed design work done on each building within the participating area and the Town will need to do a complete facade incentive program design manual.

The Facade Improvement Incentive Program will be likely managed by the newly created Downtown Development Committee. The Downtown Development Committee will select individual projects and award professional services as may be required during the program.

### Incentive Details & Program Eligibility

A key incentive for property owners to participate in the design process is the opportunity to access financial support to assist with implementation of the recommended facade improvements. The details of the funding arrangement have yet to be finalized, however, it is thought that participating property owners may be eligible for a grant equal to 50% of the cost of facade improvements up to a maximum which is yet to be determined (materials and labour). The project cap will be based on the number of participants and the extent of changes for each building. For corner properties on two streets, it is envisioned that the potential exists to access 50% funding (up to a maximum) on two facades with the same civic address. This funding only covers exterior facade improvements (like roofs, windows, doors, and siding) and professional fees (structural, architectural, or electrical) which may be needed to implement the changes. Interior alterations are not eligible for this program even if the exterior alterations require interior modifications.

To be eligible for the funding, the property owners must follow the recommendations outlined in a full facade design report. Alterations to these plans must be submitted with the application to be checked by the Downtown developments committee prior to receiving approval for funding. The reason is to ensure a high standard of design and construction on the street. The Downtown development committee will not fund 'improvements' which do not contribute to the overall image of the village character Downtown. This requires a consistency in design and construction approaches. Vinyl siding, for instance, will not be considered as an appropriate siding material Downtown. Vinyl windows will be acceptable above the first story, however, wood or metal windows will only be acceptable at the ground level. Applicants will need to fill in an application form and submit a drawing(s) of the proposed changes for consideration prior to receiving approval to proceed.

### 4.41 Facade Improvement

| Material  | Low Cost                | High Cost               |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Cape Cod (or equal) Wood Siding                 | \$6.00 per square foot  | \$8.00 per square foot  |
| Hardie Plank Siding                             | \$8.00 per square foot  | \$10.00 per square foot |
| Clay Brick Veneer                               | \$13.00 per square foot | \$18.00 per square foot |
| Concrete Brick/ Stone Veneer (Stonatile)        | \$13.00 per square foot | \$17.00 per square foot |
| MDO Plywood sign w/ paint and trim              | \$29.00 per square foot | \$47.00 per square foot |
| Aluminum Storefront Window                      | \$43.00 per square foot | \$65.00 per square foot |
| Aluminum Storefront Door (3'x7')                | \$1300 each             | \$1700 each             |
| Vinyl Window (66" x 32" installed)              | \$900 each              | \$1100 each             |
| Wood Window (66" x 32" installed)               | \$1100 each             | \$1500 each             |
| Steel insulated pre-hung door (installed)       | \$1000 each             | \$1400 each             |
| Wood door                                       | \$1700 each             | \$2500 each             |
| Fabric back-lighted awnings (5' x 5' x 30"nose) | \$550 per linear foot   | \$750 per linear foot   |
| Light fixture (angled reflective storefront)    | \$850 each, installed   | \$1050 each, installed  |

| Required Step | Owner                                | DTP | Designer | RDA | Contractor |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|-----|----------|-----|------------|
| 1             | Facade program approved              |     |          |     |            |
| 2             | Advertise for contractors            |     |          |     |            |
| 3             | Approve contractors                  |     |          |     |            |
| 4             | Application by owner                 |     |          |     |            |
| 5             | Participation approved               |     |          |     |            |
| 6             | Select detail designer (if required) |     |          |     |            |
| 7             | Prepare detail Plan (if required)    |     |          |     |            |
| 8             | Detail Plan approved                 |     |          |     |            |
| 9             | Select Contractor                    |     |          |     |            |
| 10            | Budget approval                      |     |          |     |            |
| 11            | Obtain permits                       |     |          |     |            |
| 12            | Construction                         |     |          |     |            |
| 13            | Construction Inspection              |     |          |     |            |
| 14            | Progress Payment                     |     |          |     |            |
| 15            | Funds transfer                       |     |          |     |            |



When the construction is complete, the owner must schedule a site inspection by the project manager to ensure the project is built as detailed in the drawings. Owners should note that deviation from the original design drawings may be grounds for not approving funding. Once the inspection is completed, the project manager will issue a letter of acceptance to the owner and will issue the funding directly to the contractor within 30 days of receipt of an invoice from the contractor and a signed and sealed letter verifying that the building owner has paid their share of the renovation costs.

*Simple Design Guidelines for Building owners*

There are several considerations that should guide façade work in Downtown Amherst:

- The authentic history and character of Downtown is its most valuable asset. If lost, this can not be replaced.
- All eras are part of this history. No single period is more important than another.
- Everything that is upgraded or renovated should be executed with the utmost care and respect. Downtown should look like everybody cares for it.
- Customers in the Downtown are not looking for an anonymous big box experience.

These basic ideas lead to seven general recommendations:

- If the original colour, detail, and materials are known, and if they meet modern fire safety requirements, use them.
- Repair any damaged or failed finishes as soon as possible. The “first broken window” concept has restored mid-Town Manhattan in just six years.
- Use the most durable, lowest maintenance material available. Maintenance costs will eclipse capital costs. Deferred maintenance will detract from the economic performance of the Street.
- The basic structure of the building should be respected with any alteration. This means that building signs, like corner stones, should not be covered or removed. Columns should be retained in original materials. Cornice details and basic façade form should be retained.
- Signs should be placed in areas originally designed for the placement of signs; in the sign band above the storefront, in windows, projecting from store fronts and on awnings.
- Each facade should be completed using at least three colours. The body colour should relate to the architecture. Brick or stone should be left unless painting or covering is the only solution to deterioration. The secondary colour should relate to the body colour. The third colour should be a trim colour and should be used to highlight special architectural features. Signs may introduce another, fourth, colour.
- The area of the storefront is where retail creativity can be unleashed. Within the space between the columns, the base and the sign you can do what is required to market your wares.



4.42 Victoria Court Facade - after



4.43 Victoria Court Facade - before

4.44 Your Place Fitness - before



4.45 Your Place Fitness - after



#### *Built Form Theme*

The existing built form and natural setting of Downtown Amherst combine to create a vernacular style unique to the community. The individual buildings that make up Downtown Amherst are a mix of architectural styles (Maritime vernacular, Victorian, Industrial, Second Empire, bungalow, etc.) in a wide variety of physical conditions (run-down to new and modern). The goal of the built form theme will be to recognize the architectural style of each building and provide tools that allow the owners to build on that style. For instance, there are historic standards that speak to how commercial facade signage is handled for each commercial architectural style.

Providing guidance for building owners relating to recognition of their building type and the associated window styles, massing, sign styles, roof styles, building materials, paint colours, etc, is part of the built form theme that will be summarized in the report. Several facade improvement examples will be designed to illustrate this point. There may also be some urban design guidelines proposed to ensure that future infill, fits the context of Downtown. This would be demonstrated with architectural design guidelines and signage guidelines which may or may not be incorporated into the Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) and zoning Bylaw in the future.

#### *Facade Program Steps*

A facade program typically goes through a number of steps for the various involved stakeholders. Table 4.41 shows the typical responsibilities and stages of the program.

4.46 Dominion Building



### *Heritage District*

Nova Scotia's Heritage Property Act enables the identification and protection of built heritage and encourages its continued use. There are three types of protection for heritage properties: a provincial registry, municipal registries, and heritage conservation districts.

At the municipal level, the legislation enables municipal control of built heritage, and municipal ability to provide financial assistance to restore or renovate heritage structures. In summary:

- The Town of Amherst may establish a registry of locally significant heritage properties by adoption of a Heritage By-Law. Permission for substantial alternation or demolition to the exterior of properties may require Town Council approval. Should Council not give permission, owners may make alternations or demolish without penalty after giving written notice and waiting one year.
- The Town of Amherst may also establish Heritage Conservation Districts, after background studies and public consultation. Under the associated By-law, the Town may control alterations to existing structures, demolition and the design of new structures.
- The Act authorizes municipal councils to provide financial assistance to any person for the restoration or renovation of registered municipal heritage property or property located in a heritage conservation district. Terms and conditions may be set by council.
- The Act also enables the Minister of Municipal Affairs to provide financial assistance to the Town of Amherst to assist it in exercising its authority under the act.

Under the Province's Heritage Property Program, individual property owners may be eligible for Heritage Grants, small grants (\$1,000 and under) to support conservation work, conservation advice costs, and material and labour costs. These apply to municipally- and provincially-registered properties under certain conditions. The Province also offers tax rebates for material costs on non-commercial properties under certain conditions.

The Municipal Government Act, 1998, c. 18, s. 1, establishes what a municipality may do.

It is interesting that in an act where the interpretation is to be based on the notion: if the act doesn't say it is allowed, it is not allowed, there are a few statements not allowing specific activities. One of the very few negative statements in the act is: (2) A municipality shall not grant a tax concession or other form of direct financial assistance to a business or industry. 1998, c. 18, s. 57.

The Municipality May:

- identify and promote a business district as a place for retail and commercial activity;
- establish or maintain parking facilities.
- The municipality may levy an area rate applicable only to the commercial property and business occupancy assessments in the area benefited by the expenditures in order to recover them.

In setting such an area rate, the council may set:

- different rates for business occupancy assessments and commercial property assessments.

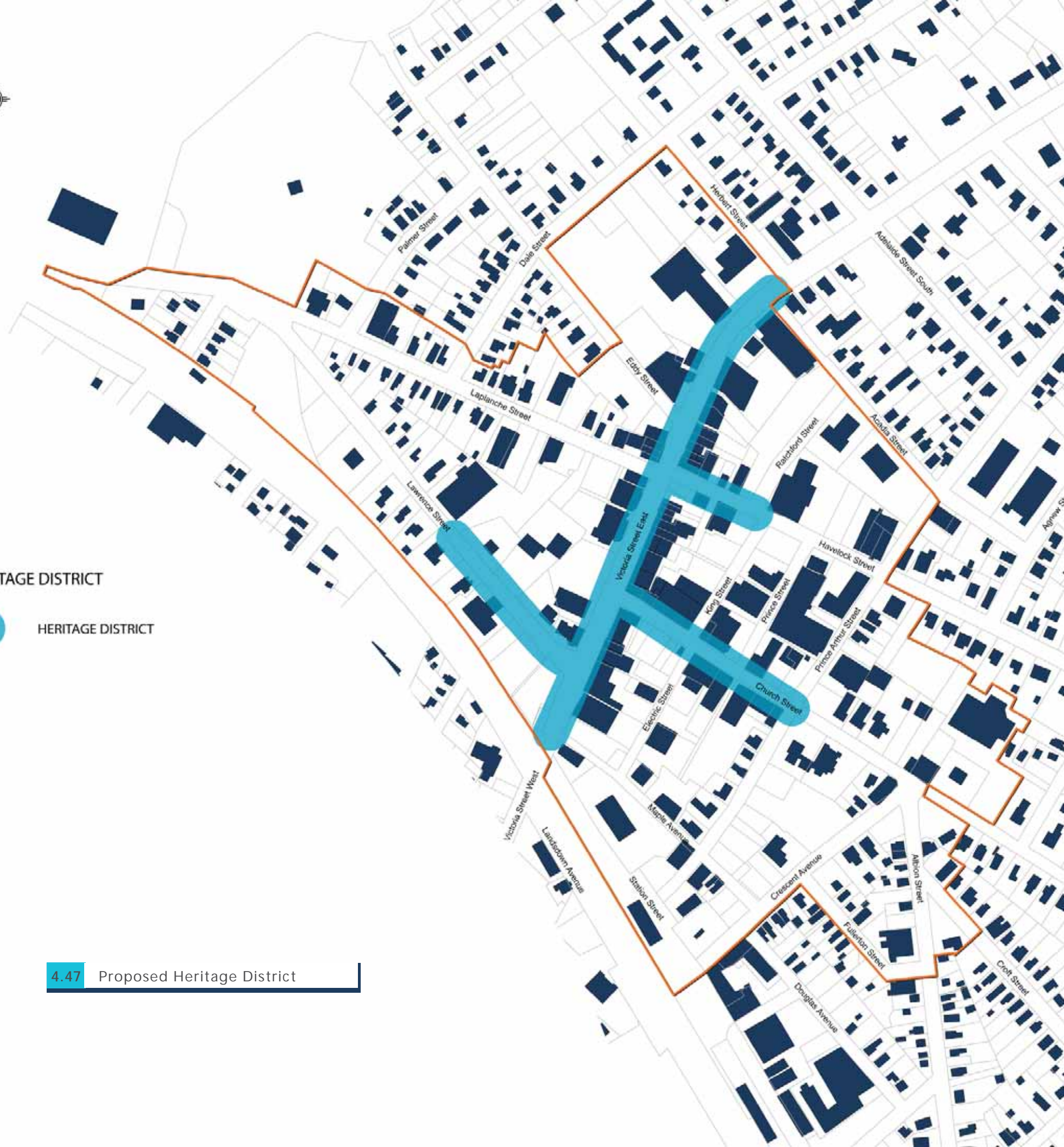
The Municipality may spend money to improve an identified business district and collect funds through area rates or taxes on the entire municipality. They may also set different tax rates for different areas of the municipality. To encourage development in the Downtown core over the next few years the Town could set a lower tax rate for the identified Downtown Heritage area, by reducing taxes such as the business occupancy tax. The Town could also lower any area rates in the Downtown to further encourage business to locate, or re-locate, in this area.

The Municipality may also set different residential and commercial tax rates. The Town could further encourage new residential in the Downtown core by reducing the residential tax rate in this small area of the Town.

A tax holiday on the value of improvements in Downtowns is a method used by many North American cities to encourage preservation and development in their city centers. While the "tax holiday" is not allowed under the Municipal Government Act, the effect of a lower area tax rate, which is allowed, would be similar, or superior, as an inducement to renovation and development. The municipality would benefit from increased tax, based on increased investment in the Downtown, as well as the essential, and incalculable, benefits that will derive from saving Downtown Amherst.



HERITAGE DISTRICT  
 HERITAGE DISTRICT



4.47 Proposed Heritage District





## 4.6 Parking and Circulation Strategy

### Parking

Downtown Amherst seems uniquely positioned with ample parking available in the Downtown core. A detailed parking inventory was beyond the scope of this study but anecdotally, almost every street has on-street parking on both sides and there are a number of large, strategically located parking lots which service the Downtown. A rough parking count indicates the following:

- 1870 off-street parking spaces (approximately)
- 180 on-street parking spaces (approximately)

### Off-Street Parking

There is a clear need to consolidate individual parking areas to larger lots that practice better access management and circulation principles. The parking lots have various owners, and are presently maintained by the Town as civic parking. The Town should either purchase these parking lots or work with the land owners to restructure and reorganize the parking in a more efficient manner, improving the ecological and pedestrian quality of the space. There is adequate space to add pedestrian walkways, green islands for bioretention (rain gardens), and lighting, and still increase the number of available parking spaces. A more efficient layout of parking will ensure that adequate capacity is maintained, even if some space is lost due to infill development.

Consideration should be given to the distribution of staff versus customer parking. While staff have a direct interest parking that they use on a very regular basis, visitors to Downtown decide to return based on their direct experiences. In this regard, reserving parking spaces closest to the business for customer parking can provide a significant benefit to those visiting the Downtown. Staff parking still needs to be accommodated, but ideally at locations more removed from the preferred consumer spaces.

### On-Street Parking

On street parking has a direct commercial benefit, and therefore should be retained and promoted where appropriate. There are a number of places where existing on-street parking compromises safety or operational performance of the adjacent and surrounding roads and vulnerable road user facilities. In these cases, the on-street parking should be removed or revised to respect intersection function (See appendix for a complete list of recommended locations).

In order to formalize on street parking, consideration may be given to the use of bump-outs in the vicinity of intersections and at other start and end points of parallel parking strings. The bump-outs provide a number of distinct benefits include a physical definition of on street parking areas, reduced pedestrian crossing width intersections, improved aesthetic quality, and opportunities for additional landscaping.

A comprehensive parking strategy addressing the consolidation of parking areas, improved efficiencies and capacities of parking area, and the most appropriate spatial use of the parking areas is recommended. Any such strategy will require a means of promoting and permitting adjacent land owners to work together to create quality parking spaces / environments that make the best use of available space.

Clearly, this process must walk hand-in-hand with the future changes to buildings and land parcels in the Downtown area as new buildings may reduce the available parking and the removal of older buildings may provide additional opportunities for parking.

### Parking Structures

A parking structure has been suggested at various stages of the study process. After careful review of both the inventory of existing parking, and the capital and operational costs required to implement and maintain a parking structure, it has been determined that such a structure is neither practice nor cost effective at this time. Due to the absence of parking fees, adequate on and off-street parking, and the potential to provide additional parking in peripheral areas if needed, the ability to recoup the costs of a parking structure is limited.

#### ON-STREET PARKING AVAILABILITY

— On-Street Parking





### Roundabouts

Based on the traffic patterns and available real estate at the gateway locations identified, there is a unique opportunity to further emphasize the gateway concept through implementation of a roundabout themed approach. Roundabouts, which have been used prominently in European nations for decades, are rapidly growing in popularity in Nova Scotia, and are part of a major initiative by Nova Scotia Transportation & Infrastructure Renewal. Roundabouts have been shown to include many benefits including enhanced safety, reduced traffic delays, decreased maintenance costs, and improved aesthetics relative to traditional intersection types.

Implementation of a roundabout gateway theme has considerable potential to provide a recognizable gateway that differentiates the Downtown core from the surrounding areas. Potential locations where the use of roundabouts has been considered particularly advantageous include:



**Albion Street @ Church Street:** There is an abundant amount of land in the vicinity of the existing intersection that would be ideal for installation of a roundabout. Traffic volumes would operate well within the capacity of a single lane roundabout, likely reducing delay relative to the existing 3-way stop configuration. As the entrance to the Downtown from the busy Albion Street commercial area, this location has the opportunity to serve as the “signature” gateway to Downtown Amherst.

**Laplanche Street @ Lawrence Street:** Another location where abundant space is available for a potential roundabout, this intersection would likely benefit as much operationally as it would aesthetically. Roundabouts force vehicles to reduce speed upon their approach to the intersection, which would provide safety benefits over the current intersection configuration. A roundabout would also facilitate access between Laplanche and Lawrence Streets efficiently, operating as a collective gateway to the Downtown. However, the preferred intersection recommendation is a T-intersection, rather than a roundabout.

*Marketplace Promenade  
(Ratchford - King - Electric Streets)*

King Street has the potential for form part of a north-south corridor through the Downtown when considered in conjunction with Ratchford Street and Electric Street. There appears to be a significant opportunity to upgrade this corridor to include two-way vehicle traffic as well as promoting the corridor as a pedestrian and vulnerable road user friendly environment. This corridor should include consideration of such options as a narrower curbed cross section, with bike lanes or wide curb lanes, substantial pedestrian facilities (potentially the construction of a multiuse trail), as well as an improved roadside environment.

4.50 Marketplace Promenade Section





### *Bike Lanes*

Bike lanes should be accommodated on Victoria Street as part of the sidewalk and road work. The Velo Bike standards for two-way streets with two lanes shows a 10.2-13.6 metre curb to curb cross section. The current road configuration averages about 12-13 metres of cross section so bike lanes should not be an issue. Separate bike lanes should not be painted on the street.

### *Bike Parking*

Additional bike parking facilities should be provided throughout Downtown, in a variety of configurations. The quantity of bike parking should vary based on the importance of the destination. The Library, Town Hall and all parking lots should have significant available bike parking in close proximity.

Bike parking should not be located in pedestrian travel zones or gathering areas. Along streets, bike racks should be located at regular intervals in line with other street furniture and street trees.

Individual bike racks are appropriate along all streets, and should be provided along retail frontages at a frequency similar to vehicle parking.

### *Bump-outs*

Bump-outs are ways to reclaim unused portions of the street for sidewalk use. Bump-outs should be explored:

- for all street corners in the Downtown that have on-street parking;
- for all crosswalks, and;
- in areas that are designated as 'no parking' (e.g. fire hydrants) for more than 6m of length.

Bump-outs provide additional space in the pedestrian realm that is ideal for street trees, sidewalk cafes, bicycle parking, or signage installation.



### *Mid Block Pedestrian Alleys*

With most of the commercial activity on Victoria Street and most of the parking on rear streets, it is important to maintain high quality mid block alleys to connect parking lots with Victoria Street. These alleys should be well lit, well signed, and constructed with high quality streetscape standards. The most visible of these is the alley adjacent to Dayle's, however several also exist between Victoria Street and the parking lots along Ratchford, King, and Electric Streets.

Mid-block connections should be designed to the same high standards as all other public spaces. Design considerations include:

- Ensure sight lines from start to finish are clear. Avoid hidden or dead areas and blank façades.
- Landscaping should not obstruct views.
- Include wayfinding and signage and good night lighting.
- Encourage store fronts on these spaces wherever possible.

These connections are often privately owned but the Town should partner to implement the pedestrian improvements. Ideally the Town should purchase and maintain some of the more important right-of-ways.

### Mid Block Pedestrian Crossings

In general, mid-block crossing locations are marked to encourage pedestrians to cross at specific locations to minimize risks to both pedestrians and vehicles. It is critical that a marked mid-block crossing location respond to a distinct demand for crossings, otherwise they become ineffective and may compromise safety and operations. Often, visual observations of pedestrians in the areas surrounding a mid-block crossing will show whether a demand is present and whether the crossing is being used as intended. It may also be clear whether pedestrians are electing to cross at other unmarked locations. It is equally important that pedestrians and motorists clearly see each other and do so at an adequate distance to limit potential conflicts. Therefore, crossings should not be positioned where on-street parking is present, near busy roadside environments or where other visual obstructions negatively impact the effectiveness of mid-block crossing locations.

When properly designed and implemented, mid-block crossings can provide a number of advantages including the following:

- They help to position vehicles and pedestrians to increase the visibility and recognition of each;
- They can help identify the preferred crossing locations for pedestrians that limits their exposure to vehicular traffic and potential traffic conflicts;
- They help direct and limit pedestrian traffic to specific locations;
- They can provide advanced warning to drivers of the presence of a pedestrian crossing location; and,
- They may help in implementing enforcement measures.

Unfortunately, if mid-block crossing locations are not well designed or appropriately placed and marked, many of the above advantages can become disadvantages as they can provide pedestrians with a false sense of security, which could ultimately place the pedestrian in undesirable positions with respect to approaching vehicles. This in turn can result in an increased number of vehicle and vehicle/pedestrian collisions, or otherwise negatively impact operational and safety performance.

Mid-block crossings should be avoided where parking is present immediately up or down stream of the crossing. Conversely, where a crossing is required, consideration should be given to the removal of on street parking up and downstream of the crossing to ensure that approaching drivers have a clear indication of the crossing locations and are able to see and process signage and markings related to the pedestrian crossing.

#### Other key considerations include:

- mid-block crossing locations and treatments should be as consistent as possible throughout the Town;
- crosswalk locations should have appropriate lighting levels to improve visibility during the night-time.



### Road Closures and Modifications

In general, municipalities are moving away from one-way street systems for a variety of reasons including that they may be confusing to unfamiliar drivers, access to parking areas or business may be more difficult, they typically promote higher speeds, and they limit the visibility of retailers.

In Downtown Amherst, the majority of streets are two-way, with the exception of King Street and Princess Street. These two streets are presently operated as two parallel one-way streets running the same south to north direction. There appears to be some significant opportunity in this area to modify these streets and their general function.

Princess Street starts at the T-intersection at Church Street and extends to the north to Havelock Street. Immediately north of Havelock is a parking lot access. Given the adjacent King Street and Prince Arthur Street, Princess Street has limited usefulness, and certainly has little if any impact on traffic capacities through the area. Closure or modification to this street is expected to have limited impact on the adjacent business or circulation patterns in the area.

The other proposed significant roadway modification is the conversion of Ratchford, King, and Electric Streets to the marketplace promenade. For more information on this concept, refer to the preceding sections.





Bella's

Bella's

Lobster  
Set  
Lunch

EXPO 2010  
FESTIVAL

# 5: Design Guidelines

The following design guidelines have been assembled to direct and co-ordinate the appropriate form of development for the Downtown as a guide for both staff evaluating proposals and developers preparing proposals. Traditional 'zoning' is typically fixated on land use, building massing and height, site arrangement, and parking. Design guidelines add dimensions of aesthetic standards to ensure that the look of the development fits the Town's vision for its Downtown.

Design guidelines are typically divided into public realm (Town) and private realm (non-municipal land owner) standards. Since the public realm standards have been described in the previous chapter (streetscape, open space, park, new Town Hall, etc.), the design guidelines in this chapter focus specifically on private realm standards. Private realm design guidelines will help to direct the tone and form of private property development within the Downtown. Character Districts.





5.1 Bella's Cafe Streetscape



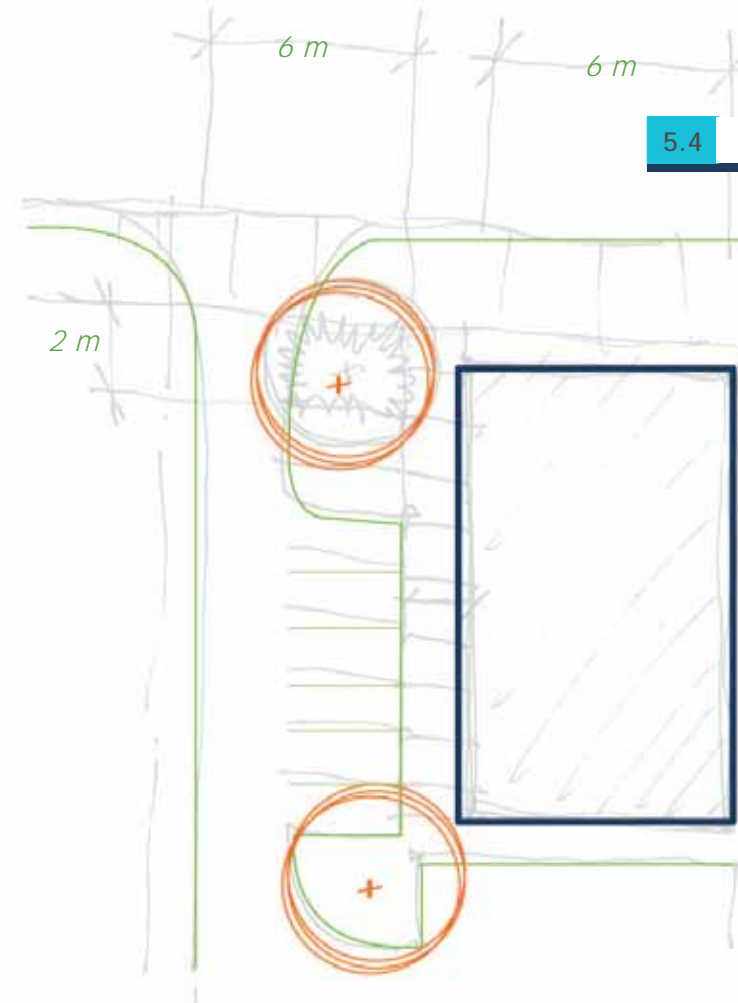
## Character Districts

The design guidelines recognize two important character districts in the Downtown. The first district, called the "Downtown Mixed-Use District", encompasses all frontages on Victoria Street East, Church Street and Havelock Street within the Downtown zone. This district requires an active commercial or institutional facade fronting on each of the 3 streets. Ground-Floor residential uses are not permitted in this district but are encouraged in the upper stories. The intent is to ensure a lively commercial streetscape in this area. The second district, called the 'Downtown District', permits ground-floor residential uses so long as entryways and or lobbies front on the street. In both cases, buildings are encouraged to be built right to the street right-of way.

### DOWNTOWN DISTRICTS

-  DOWNTOWN MIXED-USE DISTRICT
-  DOWNTOWN DISTRICT





## 5.1 Off-Street Surface Parking

### General Principles

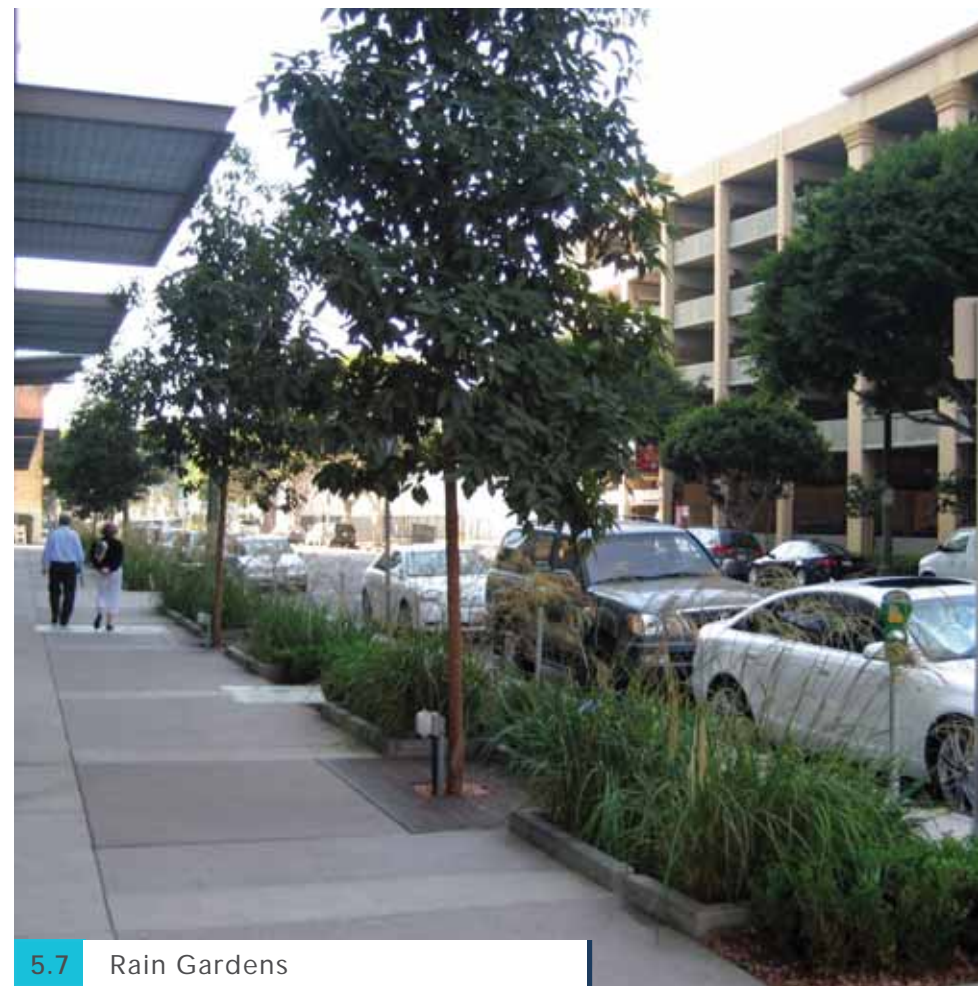
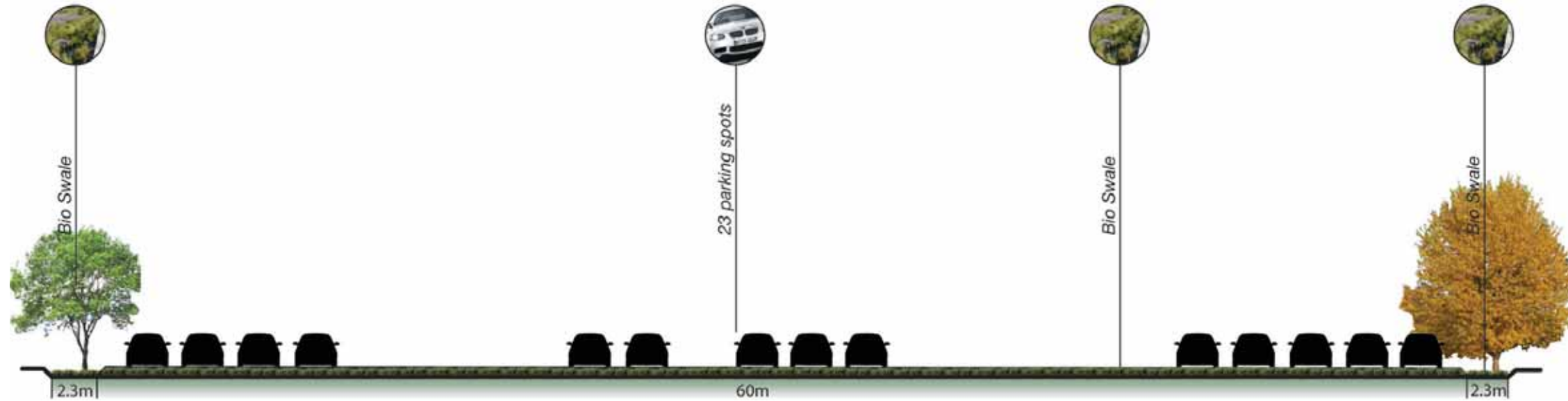
- The existing configuration of 'missing teeth' (buildings lost to parking lots) in the Downtown needs to be reversed. Parking lots fronting directly on 15-20m street right-of-ways should be replaced with buildings, particularly at street intersections, over the next 20 years. Recognizing that the loss of these parking lots to buildings will create additional pressure for parking, the Town needs to act proactively to create public parking opportunities in the Downtown. The Town has been encouraged to expand on-street parking in the Downtown core from 180 spaces to over 400 spaces in the next 20 years. The Town has also been encouraged to assemble a municipal parking lot(s) to service the Downtown, adding an additional 200+ parking spaces. This public parking will take pressure off of private parking lots while reducing the private parking standards.
- Off-Street Surface Parking should be configured and designed to reduce its visual dominance of from public streets.
- Off-Street Surface Parking should incorporate high quality walkways and alleyways to connect parking lots to public streets and safely separate pedestrian and vehicle movements.
- Off-Street Surface Parking should be designed to provide a strong visual quality through the use of high quality landscaping, lighting, and pavement materials.
- Off-street parking should maximize capacity of rear lots by encouraging neighbouring land owners to work together to restructure and reorganize parking layout. The Town should continue to work with land owners to help facilitate this process.
- Off-Street Surface Parking should be designed according to environmental sustainability principles, including the minimization of surface water runoff and 'heat island' effects.

### Guidelines

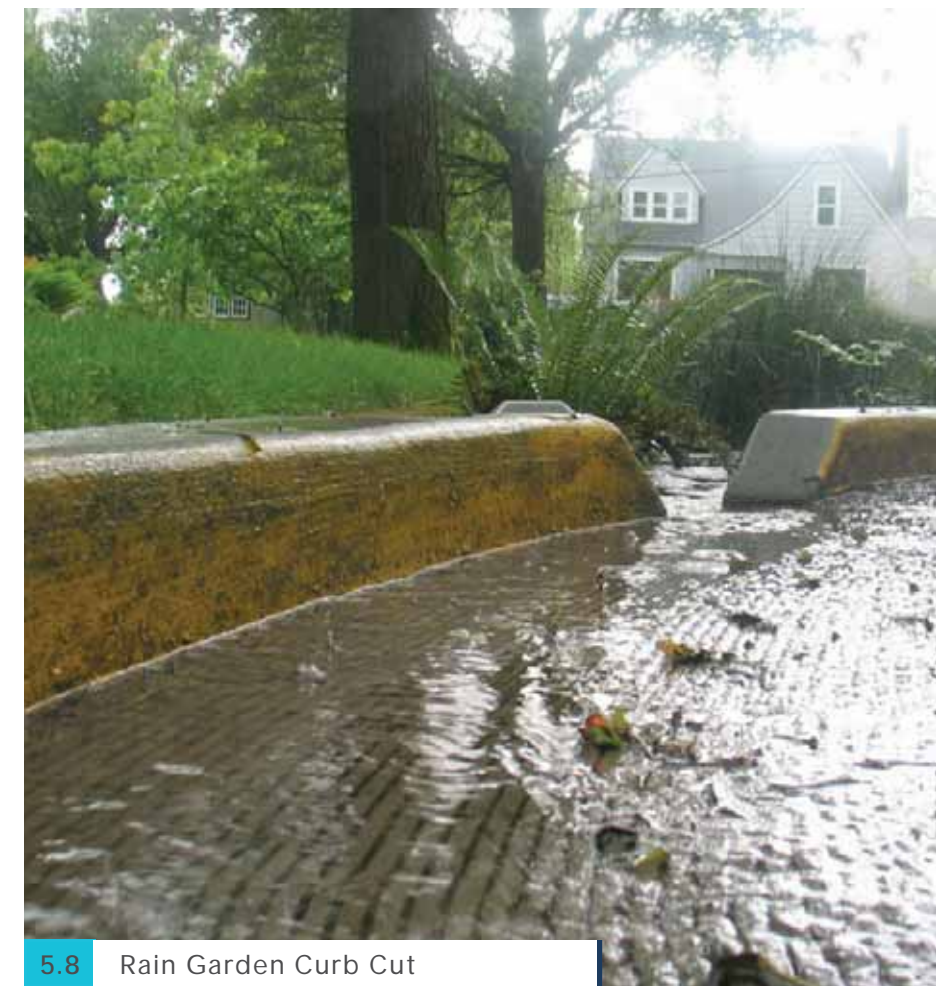
- For off-street parking fronting on Victoria Street East, Church Street, or Havelock Street
  - No off-street parking fronting on Victoria Street East, Church Street, or Haveloc Street will be permitted in the Downtown area for any future developments.
  - Entries to rear-lot parking will be permitted (no more than 6m wide) and single loaded parking on these entries will be permitted provided that:
    - The street related stall is separated by no less than 2m of landscaping between it and the sidewalk.
    - The width of the entry road and parking stall does not exceed the width of the building facade fronting on the street
  - For every loss of public on-street parking caused by driveways to private rear yard parking, the developer should provide the Town with \$2,000 cash-in-lieu. This amount shall be waived if the driveway services more than 2 properties (in which case a written agreement will need to be provided to the Town by the developer).
- For existing parking lots fronting on Victoria Street East, Church Street, or Havelock Street; any alteration requiring a building permit will trigger the following condition:
  - For every parking stall which fronts on the street, the developer will be required to construct a 2m wide landscape bed between the stall and the sidewalk and install at least one 50 mm caliper street tree in each bed. The plant species and conditional are to be approved by the Town.
- Any existing off-street parking lot fronting on Victoria Street East, Church Street, or Havelock Street which is converted to a building shall have its property taxes waived by the Town for 3 years (from the time of completion of the building) AND shall have NO parking requirements.
- For off-street parking fronting on all other streets in the Downtown other than Victoria Street East, Church Street, or Havelock Street
  - No parking should be located between the street and the building
  - For parking fronting on any street in the Downtown, the parking frontage shall not exceed the building frontage

5.6 Parking Cross Section

- 2.3 For every space which fronts on the street, the developer must install a 2 m wide landscape bed and provide at least one 50 mm caliper street tree. Planting to be approved by the Town prior to installation. A 1.5 m (minimum) concrete walkway must link the parking to the sidewalk.
3. A landscaped island should be located at each end of every parking aisle. Landscaped islands should be a minimum width of 2m wide and include one 50 mm caliper sized tree per parking row.
4. Limit the length of parking rows to a maximum of 60 m (20-23 contiguous spaces per row). Longer spans should be broken up with landscaped islands (rain gardens). Ideally, all catch basins should be located at or near these islands.
5. Landscaped islands to be designed as stormwater catchment areas. Sub-base and base material are to be high performance granular material ideal for infiltration and interception of groundwater. When necessary, french drains or perforated-bottom catch basins will be installed, to further facilitate infiltration.
6. Parking Islands will be curb-less, or have frequent curb cuts, and the surrounding area will be graded to drain towards the islands. Concrete curb stops should be used, if required.
7. Lighter asphalt is preferred over darker asphalt to reduce urban heat island effect. Asphalt should include a high percentage of white aggregate. Concrete is preferred over asphalt where practical.



5.7 Rain Gardens



5.8 Rain Garden Curb Cut



## 5.2 Single Detached Homes

### General Principles:

- New Single detached homes will not be permitted in the Downtown core. Developers should favour multi-unit residential or mixed use development over single unit in new developments.
- Existing homes in the Downtown should maximize their flexibility by allowing home based businesses or apartments.
- Heritage homes should reflect the high quality of Amherst's architectural heritage.

### Guidelines

- No new single family homes will be permitted in the Downtown.
- There will be no restrictions (beyond the building code and parking requirements) for business uses in single family homes in the Downtown. Parking, which may be required for additional business uses, cannot be provided between the front of the dwelling and the street.
- Signs on single family lots or on single family buildings must follow the signage design guidelines.
- Registered heritage buildings should be eligible for the facade incentive program when it is put in place by the Town.
- New garages should not be permitted between the front facade and the street.

## 5.3 Semi-detached and Townhouse

### General Principles:

- For new development in the Downtown, an increase of density of semi-detached homes and townhouses is preferred over single detached homes.
- The quality of new residential development must be high.
- New buildings must demonstrate a definitive architectural style.

### Guidelines

- All buildings should be designed to an architectural style that is compatible with the Town's architectural forms (Maritime, Queen Anne, Victorian, Craftsman, Colonial, Second Empire). Each building should have a clearly identifiable style. Windows, doors, roofs, porches, and other details should reinforce the style.
- Dwellings on corner and flanking lots should be designed so both exposed facades are oriented towards the street. There should be no blank side walls or gables.
- Only single car garages less than 3.25 metres wide are permitted, however garages are not encouraged.
- No garage should project beyond the front building facade.



- Porches are encouraged on all semi-detached homes and townhouses.
- Parking is encouraged in the rear or side of the building instead of in the front (where practical).
- Low flow fixtures are encouraged.
- Fireplaces are encouraged. Chimneys often add to the character of townhouses and semi-detached homes.
- Fences in the front yard are not permitted.
- Each unit should have a landscape bed of at least 2 square metres per unit in the front yard if the building is set back more than 2 metres from the property line.
- Front setbacks cannot exceed 7 metres.
- All driveways must be concrete, brick, or pavers.
- No water or electrical meters are permitted on the front of a building.



## 5.4 Apartment Buildings and Condos

### General Principles:

- For new development in the Downtown, the increased density of apartments or condominiums is preferred over single detached, semi-detached, or townhouses.
- The quality of new residential development must be high.
- New buildings must demonstrate a definitive architectural style.
- New buildings must be 'street-related'.
- Bicycle parking facilities should be provided to encourage alternative modes of transport, particularly for employees and consumers with small purchases.

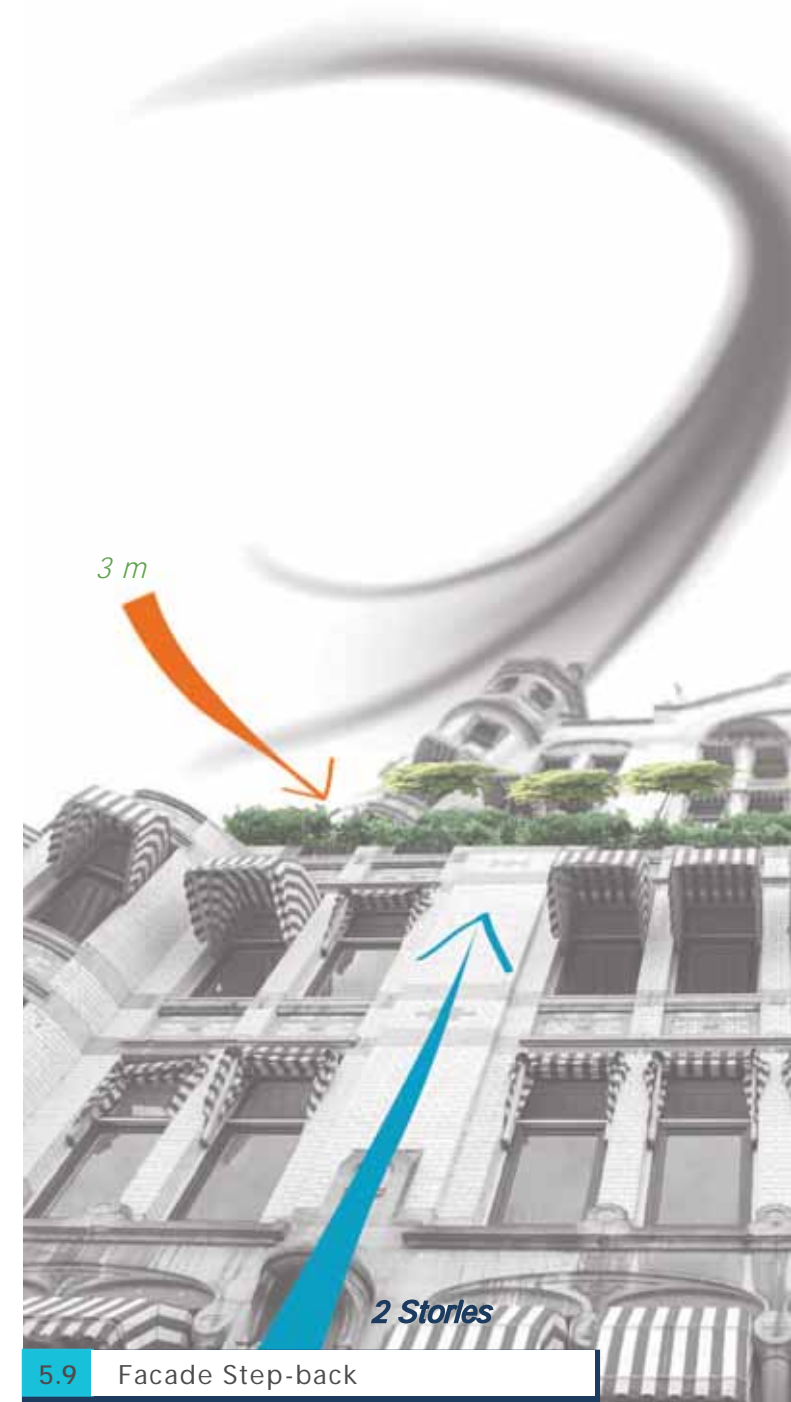
### Guidelines

- All buildings greater than four units should be designed by an architect registered to practice in the Province of Nova Scotia.
- All buildings should be designed to an architectural style that is compatible with the Town's architectural forms (Maritime, Queen Anne, Victorian, Craftsman, Colonial, Second Empire). Each building should have a clearly identifiable style. Windows, doors, roofs, porches, chimneys & other details should reinforce the style.

- Primary entries to multi-unit buildings must front on an adjacent street.
- Individual ground level entries into ground floor units are encouraged so long as exterior steps, if required, do not exceed 1.5 metres from the sidewalk elevation to the finished floor.
- All buildings should have no more than a 2.5 metre setback from the street for no less than 15% of the facade frontage. The remainder of the ground-floor frontage cannot be setback more than 5 metres from an adjacent street.
- All buildings should have a high quality entry plaza no less than 10 square metres as part of the streetscape between the sidewalk and the building entry. The entry plaza should have seating walls of no less than 4 metres in length. The plaza should be made of pavers, stone, or concrete (or a combination of).
- The entry should be a highly visible architectural feature incorporating elements such as awnings, roof overhangs, lighting, double doors, glazing and/or distinct architectural materials.

### Height & Massing

- New apartment or condominium buildings should be no less than 2 stories and no more than 6 stories.
- Buildings of 2 stories should have an architecturally distinct base (first and second storey), middle (third storey) and top (roof).
- For 4-6 storey buildings, the upper floor shall be incorporated into the roof design (i.e. the roof eave is no higher than the 1.2 metres above the finished floor elevation).
- Buildings of more than 2 stories should have an architecturally distinct base (first, second and third storey), middle (fourth to top storey) and top (roof).
- Buildings over 2 storeys should incorporate a 3 metre minimum 'step back' from the front facade to minimize the building's mass to pedestrians on the street.
- Corner buildings should incorporate articulation and forms that emphasize the importance of the corner.
- Consideration should be given to eventually converting ground floor residential uses to commercial uses in the future.



5.9 Facade Step-back



### Details

- Chimneys often add to the character of multi-units building and are encouraged as part of the architectural decoration.
- Mechanical or communication appurtenances larger than 0.50 square metres shall not be visible from the street. Loading and service areas should not occupy more than 6 metres of building or street frontage, and should be screened from view by enclosure. These areas should be designed as an integral part of the building and made of finished materials compatible with design of primary building.
- Awnings or overhangs are required to cover no less than 20% of the ground-floor facade. Awnings must have at least 2.7 metres of clearance for snow clearing, may not project more than 2/3 of the width of the sidewalk or a maximum of 3 metres, and should be no wider than a single storefront or architectural bay, whichever is narrower.
- The awning design should respond to the scale, proportion and rhythm created by the structural bays. Awnings should be traditional shed in design, with cotton canvas preferred over poly-type materials. Colours should be consistent with the overall palette of the development. For awning signage standards refer to the subsequent section.
- No upper storey projecting patios are permitted facing the street. All patios must be recessed into the building at least 1.5 metres, with no patio extending more than 2.0 metres beyond the facade. Any patio facing the street must be screened using the prevalent facade material (brick, shingles, steel, glass, etc.) to at least 0.75 metres above the floor elevation.
- The bottom of any patio, as a visible element of the building, must be afforded the same scrutiny as the siding material on the building. Plain concrete finish, or wood decks are not permitted.
- Buildings greater than 12 metres of frontage length need to be broken down into horizontal compartments with a distinct change in vertical architectural articulation using different facade materials, projections, bays, roof changes, colours, etc.
- Buildings which extend beyond 30m in length adjacent to any street should be designed to look like architecturally distinct buildings using different siding materials, window treatments, paint colours, roof treatments, building massing, etc.
- All private balconies will have a retractable laundry line installed as a standard feature.
- Low flow fixtures are encouraged.
- Rooftop mechanical equipment and vents should be incorporated as an integral part of the building design wherever possible. Roof top units and vents should be set back from the roof edge and screened using materials complementary to the building.

## 5.4 Ground Floor Mixed Use

### Site

- All residential units within 30 metres of the existing CN Rail track are required to have windows with an STC rating of 45, and walls with an STC rating of 60.
- Projecting signs, canopies or awnings over 4 metres of clearance height may project into the public right-of-way.
- Parking is not permitted between the street and the building. Off-street parking must follow the design guidelines for off-street parking found in this chapter.
- Parking lot frontage (for parking lots fronting on streets) cannot exceed the buildings frontage on the street unless specifically approved by the Town through site plan approval.
- All units should have outdoor bicycle stands at a rate of 1 per 4 units and indoor bicycle storage for tenants.
- Underground parking is not permitted on the first floor level of the building. Underground parking, if used, must be below grade, reserving the street level for residential or commercial units.
- Vehicular ramps for underground or structured parking should not exceed 30% of the street frontage.

### General Principles

- All buildings in the Downtown Mixed-Use District should have an active commercial or institutional ground-floor.
- Ground-Floor residential is not permitted in this district, but entryways to upper storey uses are permitted.
- All previous design guidelines for Apartment Buildings and Condos apply to Ground-floor Mixed-Use except for the following ground-floor guidelines

### Built Form

- The ground storey shall have at least 3.2 metres of clear interior height (floor to ceiling).
- Main entries shall be located along primary streets, with prominent corner entry to buildings located at street intersections.
- Windows and doors should occupy no less than 50% of the ground floor facade area for buildings fronting on streets. The use of clear glass (at least 88% light transmission) on first floor storefronts is recommended. Reflective or tinted glazing should not be used, however passive shading devices such as "special E" glass technologies, deep overhangs, or external sun shades and trees may be used.
- Building Setback: The building setbacks should be no more than 1 metre from the front lot line for at least 60% of length of the facade. No part of the ground floor facade shall have a setback greater than 2.5 metres.

- The use of window mullions or recessed windows, set into the facade, will create enhanced shadow lines. Shutters, operable or inoperable, should be sized to the window they are associated with such that, if closed, they cover the entire window.
- Doors for retail shops should include a high percentage of glass area. Security grilles along street frontages are discouraged unless integrated within the overall architectural theme.
- Primary building entrances should directly front onto, and connect to, public sidewalks or open spaces. Secondary entrances may face interior plazas and open spaces, alleys, and surface and parking lots.
- Overhangs or protected shelters are required over all public entry ways into multi-unit developments.
- Awnings or overhangs are required to cover no less than 40% of the ground-floor facade. Awnings must have at least 2.5 metres of clearance for snow clearing. Signs are permitted on awnings and under-lighting is encouraged. Awnings should be traditional shed in design, and cotton canvas is preferred over poly-type materials.
- Continuous Sign bands should be incorporated above the first storey.
- Architectural lighting should wash the entire first storey storefront at night.
- The location of service area entrances along roads should be discouraged where possible. It is preferable to locate service areas off side streets or service driveways.



## 5.5 Large Format Commercial

### General Principles

- Large format commercial is not desirable in the Downtown with the exception of the neighbourhood Save Easy store which could be enlarged into a full Sobey's store, and the existing Home Hardware store.
- Strip Malls are discouraged in the Downtown zone.

### Guidelines

- No additional large format commercial (footprint greater than 1500 square metres) should be encouraged in the Downtown area unless it can be incorporated into a multiple storey development.

### Renovations of existing large format commercial

- The base, middle and top of the building facade should be expressed through the use of materials and detail design.
- Blank or single material facades that extend the entire length of the building parallel to the public street should not be permitted. Blank walls in other locations, which are visible to the public, should incorporate additional architectural detailing and/or signs, murals, sculptural, or graphic design
- Facades of any significant size should be subdivided through a combination of windows and projections and recessions in the building wall to create a consistent rhythm across the facade and establish divisions that express a hierarchy of entrances and identify individual businesses, where applicable.
- At least 60% glazing should be provided on the at-grade primary building facades and areas that have public activity. Glazing should be actively used to provide storefront windows or merchandise displays. 'Spandrel' or faux glazing should never be used at street level.
- Main entrances to buildings should be emphasized through canopies, awnings or taller, non-habitable building structures. The volume and height of such structures emphasize the prominence of entrances particularly at a corner location.
- Colonnades, covered walkways and porticoes are recommended as a means of weather protection and adding articulation to the building elevation. These building projections should be allowed to project beyond the minimum front setback line, but should not extend beyond the front property line.

- Colonnades, covered walkways, porticoes and other substantial structures should be permanently roofed. Lighting and landscape elements should be incorporated into the design of these structures to promote their use.
- Pitched or sloped roofs should be considered as alternatives to flat roofs for commercial development, provided that sloped roofs respect the context and rooflines of adjacent buildings.
- Rooftop mechanical equipment should be integrated with the building design and rooftop units and vents should be screened using materials complementary to the building. Where appropriate, parapets should be used to screen rooftop mechanical units.

5.10 12 m Facade Width



## 5.6 Institutional Uses

### General Principles:

- Institutional uses, particularly government offices, are highly desirable Downtown.
- Where possible, institutional uses which can renovate existing heritage buildings are strongly encouraged.
- Institutional buildings should be designed as iconic features of the Downtown.

### Guidelines

- All Institutional buildings should be designed by an architect registered to practice in the Province of Nova Scotia.
- All Institutional buildings should be designed to an architectural style that is compatible with the Town's architectural forms (Maritime, Queen Anne, Victorian, Craftsman, Colonial, Second Empire, Richardsonian Romanesque, modern, etc.). Each building should have a clearly identifiable style. Windows, doors, roofs, porches, decks, chimneys and other details should reinforce the style.
- Wherever possible, new institutional uses should be encouraged to renovate existing heritage buildings.
- At least 10% natural stone should be incorporated into all Institutional buildings.

### Entries

- Civic entries and plazas are an important part of institutional buildings. Civic entries and plazas should incorporate an area of no less than 8% of the building's footprint.
- Primary entries to institutional buildings must front on an adjacent street.
- All institutional buildings should have no more than a 3 metre setback from the street for no less than 30% of the facade frontage. The remainder of the ground-floor frontage cannot setback more than 5 metres from an adjacent street.
- The entry plaza should have seating walls of no less than 1 metre in length for each 5 metres of frontage.
- The plaza should be made of pavers, stone, or concrete (or a combination of).
- The entry should be a highly visible architectural feature incorporating elements like porticoes, roof overhangs, lighting, inset doors, glazing and/or distinct architectural materials.





5.11 Architectural Materials



## 5.7 Architectural Materials

### General Principles:

- These guidelines appeal to all new development in the Downtown.
- Building materials for Downtown should be high quality.
- Sustainable building practices are encouraged in the Downtown.

### Guidelines

- The use of traditional, natural, high quality, durable materials which enhance the building's aesthetics and convey a sense of permanence shall be required. Green building materials, or materials produced in a sustainable manner are preferred.
- Water conservation measures, such as low flow plumbing fixtures and waterless urinals must be used in all buildings. Energy conservation measures, such as the provision of Energy Star rated appliances, must be used in all buildings.

- Wood, cementitious board, red clay brick, high quality metal, glass and/or natural stone is encouraged as the primary exterior finish material. Aluminum siding, vinyl siding and stucco are not permitted. Cladding materials may include brick, stone, metal, wood, glass, in-situ concrete, and pre-cast concrete (excluding split face concrete, or concrete block).
- In general, the appearance of building materials should be true to their nature and should not mimic other materials. Any product that mimics a more expensive material is not permitted (e.g. stone tile, brick tile, etc). Vinyl siding, plastic, plywood, concrete block, mirrored glass and metal siding utilizing exposed fasteners are not permitted.
- Bamboo flooring, wheat board cabinet substrate, wool carpeting, and cork flooring are all recommended interior finishing (due to their sustainable production practices). Finishing materials containing a percentage of post-consumer recycled content are encouraged.
- In general, heavier materials (like stone or metal) shall be used at the building's base, and lightest materials (glass or wood) shall be used at the building top.



## 5.8 Signage

### General Principles:

- Signage should not be an afterthought in the building design but instead should be integrated into the design as a necessary element.
- All signs should convey their message clearly and legibly, shall be vandal and weather resistant, and if illuminated, shall not be overly bright for their surroundings.

### Sign Elements:

- A sign board for commercial signage or awnings is required above the at the top of the first storey and must be integrated into the architecture of the building.
- Signs are permitted anywhere between the first and second floors. Signs on the top storey are permitted provided they are no greater than 0.3 square metres times the number of storeys (i.e. a 6 storey building can have 1.8 square metre sign).
- Back-Lit or internally illuminated signs are not permitted anywhere in the Downtown area, except for backlight raised lettering only, where letters are greater than 200 mm high and no deeper than 150 mm.

- Projecting signs are strongly encouraged in the Downtown Mixed-Use District and should be designed to match the architectural style of the building or structure to which the sign is affixed as well as the signs and buildings adjacent and in the general area. Projecting signs can be no larger than 2 square metres. Projecting signs must have a clearance of 2.7 metres above grade.
- Preferred materials for suspended or projecting signs include wood, metal, or a high-quality composite material.
- Awning signs are encouraged along the street. Awning sign copy should be limited to the business name, logo or internet address. The sign size should be in proportion with the awning. Awning graphics must complement the awning colour.
- Spot lights, gooseneck light fixtures and other decorative light fixtures should be utilized for illuminating awning signs.
- Buildings with businesses that do not have ground floor usable space may have one 2.5 square metre sign, such as a directory sign, to be utilized by all above ground floor businesses so long as those businesses do not also occupy ground floor usable space. Sign to be placed adjacent to the primary entrance for the above ground floor businesses.
- New signs proposed for existing buildings should provide a compatible appearance with the building signage of other tenants. When there are multiple signs on a single building, there should be an effort to bring in a unifying element (such as size or material), even where no sign program exists.
- Window signs are only permitted on the first floor level. Window signs shall be designed to attractively promote the business while still allowing for the customer to view the interior of the business. Letter height shall not exceed 200 mm. Signs placed or painted on the interior or exterior glass windows or doors provided that such signs cover no more than 30 percent or the glass area of the entire storefront, nor more than 50 percent of the window in which it is placed.
- Signage which contains business slogans or advertising is not permitted. However, signs may include information describing the products sold or services provided.
- Repetitious signage information on the same building frontage shall be avoided regardless of the sign area square footage allowed.
- Temporary hand painted signs, vinyl signs, or vinyl lettering is not permitted.
- Billboards, free-standing pole signs, monument signs, marquees, any kind of animation, roof, and signs painted on the exterior walls of buildings are prohibited. No flashing, travelling, animated, or intermittent lighting shall be on the exterior of any building whether such lighting is of temporary or long-term duration.
- Modern low energy LED lighting is encouraged in all signs.



## 5.9 Heritage Renovation & Preservation Guidelines

### Design Principles

- Balance Heritage Preservation & New Development: The preservation of heritage assets within the Downtown is a Centre First priority and supports the objectives for compact built form and enhancing community distinctiveness. Development sites situated adjacent to existing historic areas have general market appeal and should be developed as a catalyst for broad based urban renewal.
- Character Sensitive: Respect the 'original' historic character and preserve original fabric where appropriate. Contemporary additions should also be considered.

- Conservation: The alteration of any historical architectural feature or building should be resisted. The process and mechanisms for the conservation and restoration of heritage buildings should be prioritized.
- Maximize Mixed Use & Reuse: Mixed-use development provides live/work opportunities, and contributes to vital, attractive Downtown character. Adaptive reuse should be considered as part of the conservation and restoration of heritage buildings.

### Guidelines

- Where feasible, the original building fabric should be preserved. Repair rather than replace deteriorated architectural features. When replacement is necessary, match the original. Replacement of missing features should be based on historical accuracy.

- Original elements that lie beneath contemporary alterations should be preserved and replicated where necessary if damaged.
- Renovate shop fronts in keeping with the original building design, using those elements that are intact, and replacing missing features.
- The base panel of heritage storefronts provides a visual and functional building base. Original base panels should be maintained when they exist with materials of the same colour and texture as the display window frame, or the pilaster materials.
- As the largest element of the shop front, the display window establishes the character of the facade. The continuity of large display windows should be maintained.
- The display front is often divided near the top into transom windows. The transom should be maintained and any obstructions such as air conditioning units that have been inserted into this space should be removed.



- Doors are a very important functional design feature of heritage buildings. The location, size, shape, and style of doors establish our most immediate impression of a building. Traditionally constructed of wood and glass and fitted with metal hardware, each style of door was designed to fit a particular style of building. The style of heritage doors should be preserved where possible, respecting the shape of the opening, the divisions within it, and the surrounding trim.
- In addition to providing light, views, and ventilation, windows are an important design element of a heritage building facade. The location, size, shape and style of windows help to establish our impression of the building. Replacement windows should duplicate the originals in style, type and material. Custom wood sashes should be used to provide a near-perfect match for the original. If an exact duplicate is not possible, windows with similar operation and internal divisions should be installed.
- The size, location or number of openings on the main facades should not be changed, unless the property is being restored to its original appearance. In cases where the interior has been renovated and the ceiling lowered, a bulkhead or valance can finish the ceiling edge against the window. In some cases, an opaque upper pane may also be appropriate.
- Heritage buildings should be painted in colours matching the original selection. Historic photographs (supplied by the local heritage society), and paint samples/fragments (retrieved from the structure if possible) will provide useful information.
- Non-traditional colours should be discouraged, e.g. primary colours, pastels and excessively bright tones and hues. Traditional colours should be used for heritage buildings.

## 5.10 Design Strategy

The following policy review is intended to suggest broad changes or additions/deletions to existing municipal policy in order to cement the principles of the Downtown plan into the Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) and Land Use Bylaw (LUB). The MPS contains the general policy statements with regard to municipal intent (vision, principles, goals, objectives), while the LUB contains the specific policy 'rules' for managing land uses in the Town. The MPS and LUB are typically updated on a 5-10 year schedule as a full public process which is required by the Municipal Government Act (MGA). The existing MPS and LUB were adopted and accepted in 2007.

The following policy suggestions should be considered for future plan iterations.

### *Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS)*

The existing MPS is structured into broad land use groupings (residential, commercial, commercial industrial, industrial), social and cultural considerations, and infrastructure. A detailed policy review is beyond the scope of this project. The following general recommendations are suggested for future revisions:

Include a policy chapter on sustainability. Many municipalities, particularly with the need for integrated community sustainability plans, have incorporated a dedicated chapter on sustainability policies and objectives. The Downtown plan emphasizes a compact, walkable, mixed use core in favour of suburban sprawl. The Downtown plan also encourages significant growth in Downtown residential development so that more people can work, live, learn and play within a self contained area. The sustainability chapter should also address AT-planning, bicycle friendly Downtown, transit oriented development, urban forests, open space, etc.

Adopt a policy on restricting banks, business, and professional offices on Albion Road. This single policy has prevented the out-migration of the service industry from the Downtown in many other Towns.

Add a new land use category, Downtown Zone. This zone shall replace the existing Downtown Commercial Zone. Within the Downtown Zone, the following uses shall be deemed compatible:

- a. Commercial
- b. Residential
- c. Mixed-use
- d. Parks and Open Space
- e. Recreational Facilities
- f. Cultural Facilities
- g. Institutional Uses and Public Buildings
- h. Other uses deemed to be compatible and desirable for the Downtown area.

Policies CP-10 and CP-11 - strong design guidelines and architectural standards should be determined, in order to inform and guide the development agreement process. This will ensure that future development is of a character and quality that is acceptable to the Town. Under policy R-14, add a category of pocket park to the list of Town facilities.



### Land Use Bylaw

The Center First Plan seeks to create a compact, vibrant Downtown core with a variety of shops, services and housing options. Attracting businesses and adding more residential development will draw people in and help Amherst reach its full potential. In order to achieve the vision set forth by this project the following general recommendations have been suggested with respect to future Land Use By-law revisions:

The following general recommendations are suggested for future revisions:

- The use of the phrase ‘Downtown Commercial Zone’ shall be replaced with ‘Downtown Zone’.
- Drive-through restaurants should not be permitted in the Downtown Zone (except those grandfathered).
- Garden and Nursery Sales and Supplies should not be permitted in the Downtown Zone (except those grandfathered).
- Exclude Motor Vehicle Fuelling stations in the Downtown Zone (except those grandfathered).
- Exclude Self Storage Facilities in the Downtown Zone (except those grandfathered).
- Exclude Banks and Financial Institutions from the Highway Commercial Zone.
- Exclude Business and Professional Offices from the Highway Commercial Zone.
- Exclude Government Offices from Institutional Uses in Highway Commercial Zone.
- Add a Heritage Zone. This zone will overlap with the Commercial and Residential Zones and will outline specific provisions for the maintenance and development of Downtown Historic Properties.

### Vacant Building Bylaw

Vacant buildings and structures in Downtown areas may detract from the positive impression of the space. In order to encourage landlords to occupy these assets, municipalities may employ an amendment to the planning strategy, or a land-use bylaw to outline the roles and responsibilities for vacant building ownership. In order to encourage the use of vacant properties in Downtown Amherst, the Town may wish to consider one of the following options:

- Negotiate a lease for vacant buildings.

The Town would negotiate a lease of the vacant property from the owner, for a short period of time. During that time, occupancy would permit the Town to carry out a number of options for the space:

- Minor improvements to the interior and / or exterior space, such as clean-up, or painting.
- Advertise the availability of the building, either for sale, for lease, or for sub-lease.
- Create attractive window displays advertising civic events or other Downtown services.

If the lease of the building includes an option to purchase (which is typical of many commercial leases), the Town could renovate and sub-lease, or buy and flip the property.

The leasing option does require the Town to act as a real estate speculator, but would be a visible commitment to Downtown development, and could potentially lead to income or increased tax revenue, in addition to limiting the number of vacant spaces.



5.15 Vacant Building in Downtown



# 6: Implementation

This report describes both a long-term 20-year vision and achievable short-term 10-year plan for downtown Amherst. The plans and proposals are consistent with the objectives described in both the public consultation component of this project, and many previous studies and reports.

Initial priorities should be placed on making incremental streetscape improvements to Victoria Street (street trees, lighting, interpretation, and furnishings), marking the area with appropriate signage, and forging an organization alliance with merchants to facilitate the physical improvements. This will also ensure maximal benefit from marketing initiatives. Taking positive and visible small steps at the beginning is important to gather momentum for the larger vision.

Initiatives with a high profile and ease of implementation should be given the highest priority, especially where cost is not prohibitive. Larger and more complex projects will require time and further study to work out all the details required for implementation.

Setting priorities for implementation should be based on the following criteria:

- Immediate economic impact
- Best probable funding opportunity
- Timeline for possible environmental, infrastructure, and land acquisition issues
- Potential for greatest positive impact
- Ability to link to other open spaces and sites
- Status of land ownership or construction readiness
- Opportunity for partnerships with the private sector
- Co-ordination with other on-going municipal projects
- Logical design and construction sequence.

| Estimate of Probable Costs  |  |       |           | February 2010      |           |
|---|--|-------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|
|   | Measure                                  | Units | Unit Cost | Cost               |           |
| <b>2.1 - Public Improvements</b>  |  |       |           |                    |           |
| <b>Victoria Street Streetscape</b> (including curbs, sidewalks, lighting, trees, line painting) |  |       |           |                    |           |
|   | Station Street - Lawrence Street         | 100   | lin.m.    | \$3,000            | \$300,000 |
|   | Lawrence Street - Church Street          | 85    | lin.m.    | \$3,000            | \$255,000 |
|   | Church Street - Havelock Street          | 130   | lin.m.    | \$3,000            | \$390,000 |
|   | Havelock Street - Acadia Street          | 210   | lin.m.    | \$3,000            | \$630,000 |
| <b>Subtotal</b>   |  |       |           | <b>\$1,575,000</b> |           |
| <b>Side Streets Streetscape</b> (including curbs, sidewalks, lighting, trees, line painting)    |  |       |           |                    |           |
|   | Church Street                            | 350   | lin.m.    | \$2,400            | \$840,000 |
|   | Havelock Street                          | 240   | lin.m.    | \$2,400            | \$576,000 |
| <b>Subtotal</b>   |  |       |           | <b>\$1,416,000</b> |           |
| <b>Lawrence &amp; Laplanche Intersection</b>  |  |       |           |                    |           |
|   | Asphalt Removal                          | 1200  | sq.m.     | \$6                | \$7,200   |
|   | 150mm Concrete Curb                      | 130   | lin.m.    | \$150              | \$19,500  |
|   | Asphalt Road                             | 50    | lin.m.    | \$110              | \$5,500   |
|   | 2m Concrete Walkway                      | 360   | lin.m.    | \$160              | \$57,600  |
|   | Concrete Plaza                           | 140   | sq.m.     | \$110              | \$15,400  |
|   | Topsoil & Sod                            | 2400  | sq.m.     | \$7                | \$16,800  |
|   | Trees                                    | 100   | ea.       | \$1,000            | \$100,000 |
|   | Public Art                               | 1     | ea.       | \$50,000           | \$50,000  |
|   | Signalized Intersection                  | 1     | lump sum  | \$300,000          | \$300,000 |
|   | Line Painting                            | 1     | lump sum  | \$2,000            | \$2,000   |
| <b>Subtotal</b>   |  |       |           | <b>\$574,000</b>   |           |
| <b>Victoria Park/Civic Centre Upgrades</b>  |  |       |           |                    |           |
|   | Asphalt Removal                          | 1440  | sq.m.     | \$6                | \$8,640   |
|   | 150mm Concrete Curb                      | 220   | lin.m.    | \$150              | \$33,000  |
|   | Asphalt Parking                          | 1180  | sq.m.     | \$90               | \$106,200 |
|   | 2m Concrete Walkway                      | 680   | lin.m.    | \$160              | \$108,800 |
|   | Concrete Plaza                           | 750   | sq.m.     | \$110              | \$82,500  |
|   | Courtyard                                | 470   | sq.m.     | \$2,000            | \$940,000 |
|   | Topsoil & Sod                            | 1600  | sq.m.     | \$7                | \$11,200  |
|   | Planting Beds                            | 1360  | sq.m.     | \$90               | \$122,400 |
|   | Trees                                    | 70    | ea.       | \$1,000            | \$70,000  |
|   | Amphitheatre                             | 250   | sq.m.     | \$100              | \$25,000  |
|   | Relocation of Cenotaph                   | 1     | lump sum  | \$46,000           | \$46,000  |
|   | Public Art                               | 1     | ea.       | \$50,000           | \$50,000  |
|   | Fountain                                 | 1     | ea.       | \$15,000           | \$15,000  |
|   | Bollards                                 | 3     | ea.       | \$1,000            | \$3,000   |
|   | Line Painting                            | 1     | lump sum  | \$2,000            | \$2,000   |
|   | Furnishings                              | 8     | ea.       | \$2,000            | \$16,000  |
| <b>Subtotal</b>   |  |       |           | <b>\$1,639,740</b> |           |
| <b>Mural Park Upgrades</b>  |  |       |           |                    |           |
|   | 150mm Concrete Curb                      | 65    | lin.m.    | \$150              | \$9,750   |
|   | 2m Concrete Walkway                      | 55    | lin.m.    | \$160              | \$8,800   |
|   | Concrete Plaza                           | 380   | sq.m.     | \$110              | \$41,800  |
|   | Topsoil & Sod                            | 360   | sq.m.     | \$7                | \$2,520   |
|   | Planting Beds                            | 210   | sq.m.     | \$90               | \$18,900  |
|   | Trees                                    | 13    | ea.       | \$1,000            | \$13,000  |
|   | Furnishings                              | 2     | ea.       | \$2,000            | \$4,000   |
| <b>Subtotal</b>   |  |       |           | <b>\$98,770</b>    |           |
| <b>Marketplace Promenade</b> (including sidewalks, lighting, trees)                             |  |       |           |                    |           |
|   | Electric Street                          | 150   | lin.m.    | \$3,000            | \$450,000 |
|   | King Street                              | 145   | lin.m.    | \$3,000            | \$435,000 |
|   | Ratchford Street                         | 155   | lin.m.    | \$3,000            | \$465,000 |
|   | Asphalt Parking West of Electric Street  | 2980  | sq.m.     | \$90               | \$268,200 |
|   | Asphalt Parking East of Electric Street  | 5710  | sq.m.     | \$90               | \$513,900 |
|   | Asphalt Parking West of King Street      | 2710  | sq.m.     | \$90               | \$243,900 |
|   | Asphalt Parking East of King Street      | 630   | sq.m.     | \$90               | \$56,700  |
|   | Asphalt Parking West of Ratchford Street | 5760  | sq.m.     | \$90               | \$518,400 |
|   | Asphalt Parking East of Ratchford Street | 4730  | sq.m.     | \$90               | \$425,700 |
| <b>Subtotal</b>   |  |       |           | <b>\$3,376,800</b> |           |

6.2 Estimate of Probable Costs

|  |                       |      |          |           |                     |
|--|-----------------------|------|----------|-----------|---------------------|
| <b>Library Park Upgrades</b>                   |                       |      |          |           |                     |
|  | 150mm Concrete Curb   | 65   | lin.m.   | \$150     | \$9,750             |
|  | 2m Concrete Walkway   | 180  | lin.m.   | \$160     | \$28,800            |
|  | Concrete Plaza        | 220  | sq.m.    | \$110     | \$24,200            |
|  | Topsoil & Sod         | 900  | sq.m.    | \$7       | \$6,300             |
|  | Planting Beds         | 160  | sq.m.    | \$90      | \$14,400            |
|  | Trees                 | 26   | ea.      | \$1,000   | \$26,000            |
|  | Amphitheatre          | 140  | sq.m.    | \$100     | \$14,000            |
|  | Public Art            | 1    | ea.      | \$50,000  | \$50,000            |
|  | Furnishings           | 4    | ea.      | \$2,000   | \$8,000             |
| <b>Subtotal</b>                                |                       |      |          |           | <b>\$181,450</b>    |
| <b>Train Station Park</b>                      |                       |      |          |           |                     |
|  | Asphalt Removal       | 2340 | sq.m.    | \$6       | \$14,040            |
|  | 150mm Concrete Curb   | 280  | lin.m.   | \$150     | \$42,000            |
|  | 2m Concrete Walkway   | 200  | lin.m.   | \$160     | \$32,000            |
|  | Concrete Plaza        | 900  | sq.m.    | \$110     | \$99,000            |
|  | Topsoil & Sod         | 1750 | sq.m.    | \$7       | \$12,250            |
|  | Trees                 | 43   | ea.      | \$1,000   | \$43,000            |
|  | Furnishings           | 8    | ea.      | \$2,000   | \$16,000            |
| <b>Subtotal</b>                                |                       |      |          |           | <b>\$258,290</b>    |
| <b>Albion Street Roundabout</b>                |                       |      |          |           |                     |
|  | Roundabout            | 1    | ea.      | \$350,000 | \$350,000           |
| <b>Subtotal</b>                                |                       |      |          |           | <b>\$350,000</b>    |
| <b>Land Assembly</b>                           |                       |      |          |           |                     |
|  | Year 1 - 5            | 5    | years    | \$150,000 | \$750,000           |
|  | Year 5 - 10           | 5    | years    | \$170,000 | \$850,000           |
|  | Year 10 - 20          | 10   | years    | \$190,000 | \$1,900,000         |
| <b>Subtotal</b>                                |                       |      |          |           | <b>\$3,500,000</b>  |
| <b>Signage &amp; Interpretive Program</b>      |                       |      |          |           |                     |
|  | Gateway Signage       | 4    | ea.      | \$20,000  | \$80,000            |
|  | Street Blades         | 100  | ea.      | \$150     | \$15,000            |
|  | Information Kiosks    | 6    | ea.      | \$12,000  | \$72,000            |
|  | Banners               | 50   | ea.      | \$150     | \$7,500             |
|  | Directional Signage   | 6    | ea.      | \$1,200   | \$7,200             |
|  | Informational Signage | 4    | ea.      | \$1,200   | \$4,800             |
|  | Interpretive Signage  | 12   | ea.      | \$4,000   | \$48,000            |
| <b>Subtotal</b>                                |                       |      |          |           | <b>\$234,500</b>    |
| <b>2.2 - Additional Studies</b>                |                       |      |          |           |                     |
| <b>Signage &amp; Branding Schematic Design</b> |                       |      |          |           |                     |
|  |                       | 1    | lump sum | \$30,000  | \$30,000            |
| <b>Urban Forest Plan</b>                       |                       |      |          |           |                     |
|  |                       | 1    | lump sum | \$40,000  | \$40,000            |
| <b>AT Plan</b>                                 |                       |      |          |           |                     |
|  |                       | 1    | lump sum | \$50,000  | \$50,000            |
| <b>Parking Strategy</b>                        |                       |      |          |           |                     |
|  |                       | 1    | lump sum | \$20,000  | \$20,000            |
| <b>Subtotal</b>                                |                       |      |          |           | <b>\$140,000</b>    |
| <b>Total</b>                                   |                       |      |          |           | <b>\$13,344,550</b> |

## 6.1 Budget Estimates

The implementation strategy illustrates how the recommended public projects may be completed in three phases. Assuming that funding is available, the work indicated should be able to be completed within the 20-year vision. These estimates also assume program budgets will be adjusted accordingly for inflation and other unexpected cost increases. The following table (Table 6.1) summarizes the total cost of implementation, and a breakdown of how these costs may be distributed over three phases.

The total implementation budget for the 20-year Centre First Strategy is approximately \$13.4 million dollars (2009 dollars). If the Town and project funding partners were able to contribute approximately \$650,000 (2009 dollars) in capital or in-kind to the projects identified each year, all works could be completed within 20 years.

Some of the capital required may already exist within annual budgets for maintenance and renewal of the streets and other related infrastructure. We have included a 20% contingency to allow some flexibility during detailed design. We have also added 15% for design and project management costs however, these will vary from 8% to 18% depending on the size, nature and the level of project management required. Exact costs will depend upon detailed designs and bidding climate prevailing at the time of implementation. All projects require detailed design to facilitate quality implementation.

Materials and quantities were derived from measurements taken from the 1" = 200' geo-referenced base mapping. This level of accuracy is sufficient for general planning; however, more accurate estimates will be required during the detailed design and construction stages before going to tender with proposed work. Actual costs may be plus or minus 20%. All quotes reflect Dec 2009 'installed' prices, not including tax. With recent ballooning petroleum prices, prices could increase rapidly in line with petroleum. The budget estimate does not include costs for long-term easements, land purchases or private improvements. Miscellaneous items/costs are outlined in the various sub-area descriptions and these include allowances for grading, catch basin relocation and special features.

It is important to recognize that the drawings and designs in this document are conceptual only. A qualified design firm/team should be commissioned to prepare schematic and detailed design drawings and contract documents for each individual project. This additional cost has been accounted for in the cost spreadsheet.

The following budget summaries are broken down on an area by area.

*Clear public policy favouring historic preservation, particularly when targeted at identifiable districts, provides a level of certainty and stability necessary to attract investment.*

*- Carolyn Douthat,  
Economic Incentives for Historic Preservation*



6.3 Victoria Street Concept

## 6.2 Phasing Strategy

This report describes the long term vision for Downtown Amherst. Implementation of the various plan components will occur over a 20 year build out period, and successful realization of the strategy is integrally linked to a comprehensive and realistic phasing program. A successful approach will address any challenges that may arise and will implement the various elements of the plan in logical and cost-efficient manner.

Forecasting a year-by-year phasing strategy is difficult without a strong sense of annual budgets. Priorities set by the Steering Committee can be influenced by the opportunities that arise from unforeseen funding sources, new developments and private sector initiatives.

Phasing Timeline

Immediately: 0 - 2 Years.

Short Term: 2 - 5 Years.

Medium Term: 5 - 10 Years

Long Term: 10 + Years

| Implementation Chart <span style="float: right;">Jan 2010</span> |  |             |                                   |
|--|--|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| Centre First Strategy Components                                 | Project Phase / Detail   | Time Frame  | Responsibility                    |
| <b>Public Realm</b>  |  |             |                                   |
| Victoria Park Redevelopment                                      | Detailed design  | Immediately | Town of Amherst                   |
| New Civic Centre   | Program development / Feasibility Study                            | Short Term  | Town of Amherst                   |
| Marketplace Promenade  |  | Medium Term | Town of Amherst                   |
| Pocket Park Redevelopment  | As capital funding permits, undertake detailed design              | Ongoing     | Town of Amherst                   |
| Laplanche and Lawrence Street Intersection                       | Feasibility / detailed traffic study                               | Medium Term | Town of Amherst                   |
| Albion Street Roundabout   | Feasibility / detailed traffic study                               | Medium Term | Town of Amherst                   |
| General Streetscape Improvements                                 | As capital projects unfold, include streetscape elements.          | Ongoing     | Town of Amherst                   |
| Urban Infill   | As market value determines.  | Ongoing     | Developers                        |
| Signage and Wayfinding   | Undertake a comprehensive signage and branding program             | Short Term  | Town of Amherst                   |
| Urban Forestry Plan  | Undertake an urban forestry plan                                   | Short Term  | Town of Amherst                   |
| Tantramar Marsh Trail  | Detailed design  | Short Term  | Town of Amherst                   |
| Utility Relocation   | As capital projects unfold, include utility relocation in scope.   | Ongoing     | Town of Amherst                   |
| Public Art Program   | Expand upon current program  | Short Term  | Town of Amherst with DARS / Other |
| <b>Business Strategy</b>   |  |             |                                   |
| Downtown Development Committee                                   | Determine terms of reference and invite members.                   | Immediately | Town of Amherst with DARS & CREDA |
| Business Recruitment Plan  | Begin development of a recruitment guide.                          | Ongoing     | Town of Amherst with DARS & CREDA |
| Downtown Retail Coordination                                     | Downtown Development Committee to examine this further.            | Immediately | Town of Amherst with DARS & CREDA |
| Vacant Space Clearinghouse                                       | Early priority for Downtown Development Committee                  | Short Term  | Town of Amherst with DARS & CREDA |
| Wireless Downtown  | Commence RFP process (Town could offer bidding assistance to DARS) | Immediately | Town of Amherst with DARS & CREDA |
| Downtown Development Promotion                                   | Early priority for Downtown Development Committee                  | Ongoing     | Town of Amherst with DARS & CREDA |
| Downtown Programming   | Build upon successful events, such as the fibre arts festival      | Ongoing     | Town of Amherst with DARS & CREDA |
| <b>Real Estate &amp; Land Use Strategy</b>                       |  |             |                                   |
| Real Estate Strategy   | Articulate policy and organization framework                       | Ongoing     | Town of Amherst                   |
| Facade Incentive Program   | Early priority for Downtown Development Officer.                   | Short Term  | Town of Amherst                   |
| Heritage District  | Form a heritage advisory committee                                 | Short Term  | Town of Amherst                   |

#### 6.4 Implementation Matrix

| Parking and Circulation Strategy           |   |             |                 |
|--|---|-------------|-----------------|
| Off-Street Parking                         | Form a working group with parking lot landowners              | Short Term  |                 |
| On-Street Parking                          | Remove dangerous or undesirable spaces                        | Immediately | Town of Amherst |
| Laplanche and Lawrence Street Intersection | Feasibility / detailed traffic study                          | Medium Term |                 |
| Albion Street Roundabout                   | Feasibility / detailed traffic study                          | Medium Term |                 |
| General Streetscape Improvements           | As capital projects unfold, include streetscape elements.     | Ongoing     | Town of Amherst |
| Bike Lanes                                 | As capital projects unfold, include typical bike lane detail. | Ongoing     | Town of Amherst |
| Bike Parking                               | As capital projects unfold, include streetscape elements.     | Ongoing     | Town of Amherst |
| Mid-Block Pedestrian Alleys                | As capital projects unfold.                                   | Ongoing     | Town of Amherst |
| Road Closures & Modifications              | As capital projects unfold.                                   | Ongoing     | Town of Amherst |
| Design Strategy                            |   |             |                 |
| Municipal Design Guidelines                | Adopt   | Short Term  | Town of Amherst |
| Municipal Planning Strategy Update         | Revise and update in 2012 (five year milestone)               | Medium Term | Town of Amherst |
| Land Use Bylaw Update                      | Revise and update in 2012 (five year milestone)               | Medium Term | Town of Amherst |
| Vacant Building Bylaw                      | Include in MPS update   | Medium Term | Town of Amherst |



6.5 Victoria Street Concept



6.6 Church Street Concept

## 6.3 Next Steps to Move towards Realization of the Vision

### The Town

- The Town should investigate the land use suggestions in this report and formulate policy to encourage the mixed use strategy outlined in this report.
- The Town should continue to ‘passively’ assemble land (as strategic lots come up for sale, purchase them) for parking lots and anchor developments in the downtown as outlined in this report.
- The Town should develop an Urban Forest Master Plan.
- The Town should develop an Open Space Master Plan.
- The Town should develop an Active Transportation Plan.
- The Town should pursue the Facade Incentive Program with higher levels of government to determine the potential contributions. A further, more detailed facade study (above the recommendations of this report) may be required as part of this program once the details of the program are better defined.
- The Town should develop and implement a detailed civic signage and wayfinding strategy in more detail than the concepts outlined in this report. A downtown branding strategy should be developed in association with the signage program.
- The Town should commission detailed design drawings for the new streetscape design once funding priorities are investigated.
- The Town should find a location for an urban market.
- The Town should add bike lanes, bump-outs, mid-block alleys, and other streetscape enhancements as outlined in this report.
- The Town should encourage a civic art strategy for the entire downtown to make Amherst one of the most memorable art communities in Atlantic Canada.
- An interpretive program should be developed for the Town with interpretive panels or high tech podcasting tours. The program should highlight potential interpretive themes and topics, and interpretive approaches (panels, hands on exhibits, etc.).
- The Town should develop additional marketing collateral around the proposed landmark outlined in this study. This would include stationary package, website, community walking maps, developer information package, commercial business information package, etc.
- The Town should implement the public space physical improvements suggested in this report.

### DARS

- DARS should actively meet with and pursue experienced mixed use developers and commercial prospects to increase downtown development.
- DARS should develop an event program for the downtown that includes at least 8 significant public downtown events per year during all 4 seasons.
- DARS should create downtown space clearing house or registry of potential properties for active marketing of downtown to infill developers.
- DARS should look into initiating an annual Downtown Awards Program for private land owners.
- DARS should work with the town in implementing a facade incentive program.
- DARS should develop a series of retailing and storefront design courses for its members.

## 6.4 Ways to Measure Development Success

Unlike more conventional planning exercises, which may have clear indicators of implementation and success, Downtown redevelopment often focuses on more abstract or complex solutions which can be harder to quantify. How can the success of a plan such as Centre First be measured? What tools exist for the Town of Amherst and its partners to track the progress of the various plan components as they unfold? Other municipalities have examined this question, and several categories for measurement and evaluation emerge as common indicators of Downtown redevelopment success.

- **Economic Indicators.** A successful Downtown should be busy during the day and night. Economic Indicators include number and variety of businesses, and number and variety of housing options as well as the quality and quantity of office space. Residents should have a variety of restaurants to choose from, things to buy, services to enjoy, and housing options. Entertainment and cultural venues are also important generators of economic activity.
- **Vacancy Rates.** Attracting new businesses to the Downtown increases revenues and gives patrons options for shopping and services. The more competitive commercial space is in the Downtown the more revenue can be drawn from the space. In order to be successful, businesses want to locate in places with high foot traffic. Vacant lots and spaces mean a town is missing out on potential revenue. Capitalizing on the space in the Downtown contributes to the vibrancy of the Downtown which will only attract more people and potential business opportunities.
- **Perception.** Successful Downtowns have a variety of activities during the day and night. Good lighting, lots of people, and a subtle police presence all contribute to a perception of activity, safety, and vibrancy. What visitors and residents see in the Downtown contributes to their feelings and perceptions. Creating a positive experience encourages frequent interaction and allows residents to feel a sense of pride in their community, and be enthusiastic about their surroundings.
- **Community Involvement.** Engaging the community in decisions about the Downtown and getting their feedback is also a good way to measure a successful Downtown plan. Participating in the planning process and attending community events shows that people have a vested interest in what goes on in their town. Also, providing activities for patrons, especially youth, reduces the amount of loitering and vandalism which has been expressed as a problem in Amherst.
- **Cleanliness.** Keeping streets clear of refuse is important. Clean streets are more welcoming and frequent curbside garbage and recycling receptacles encourage and support a litter-free Downtown.
- **Prior to the implementation of any of the Centre First plan components or recommendations, the Town of Amherst should collect data for these categories (if it does not already exist), to use as a baseline for comparison. At the various implementation milestones, progress can be tracked to ensure that the plan stays focused on the end goals, and any adaptations can be made, as required.**

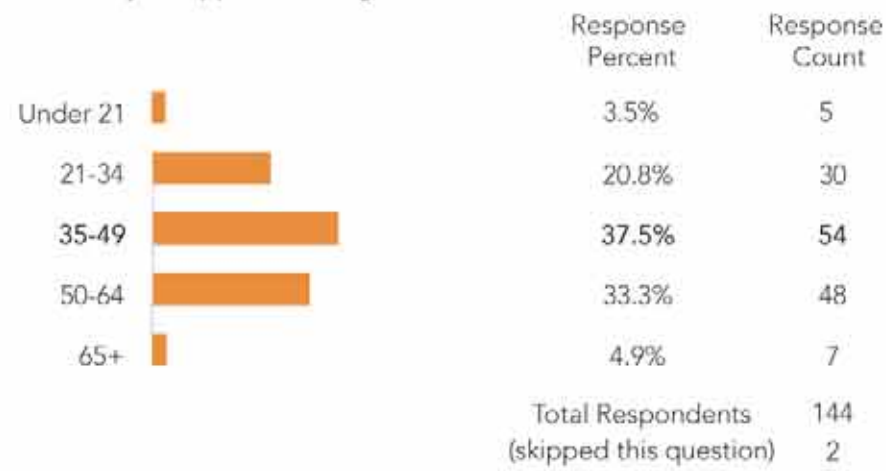




# A: Online Survey



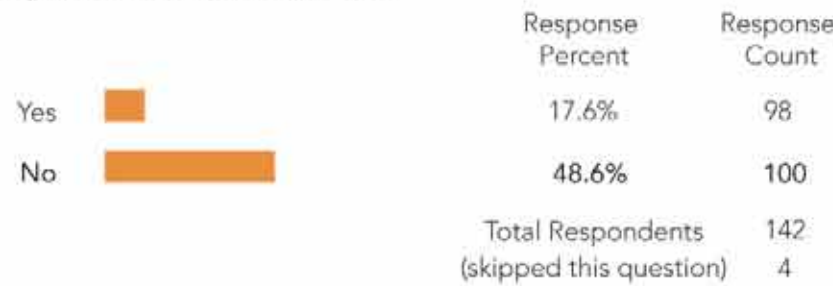
1. What is your approximate age?



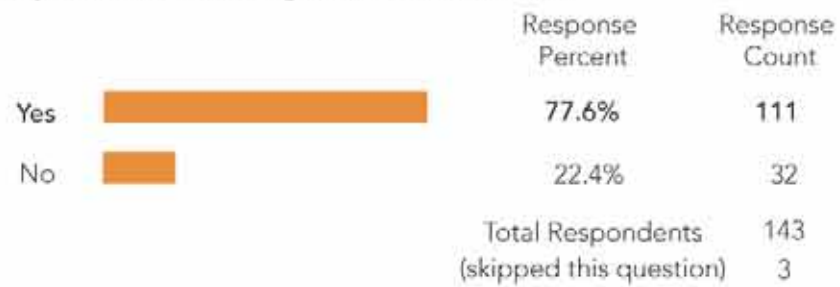
2. Are you...



3. Do you live in the downtown area?



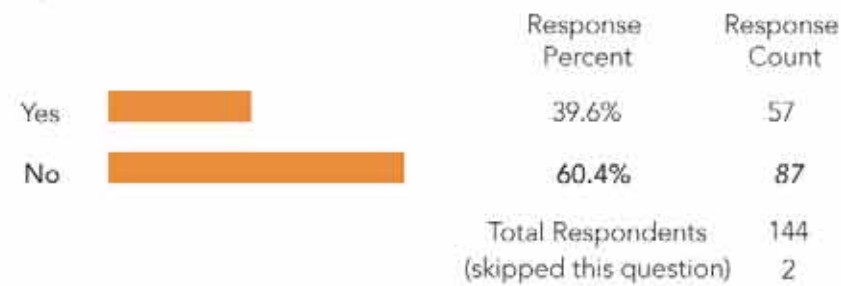
4. Do you live within walking distance of downtown?



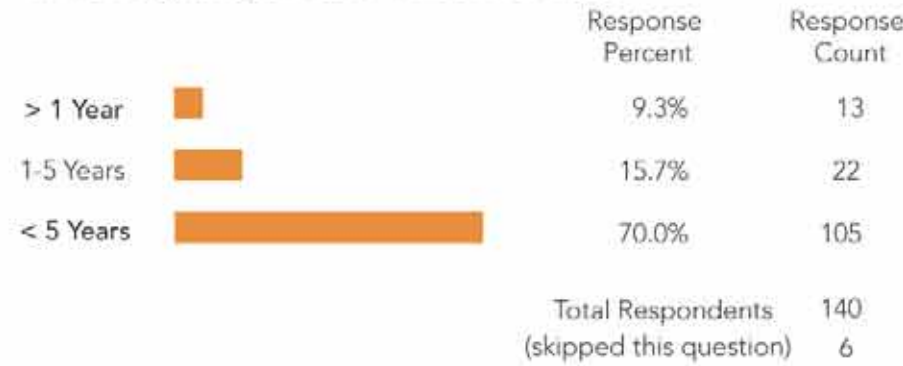
5. Do you drive to downtown more than you walk to the area?



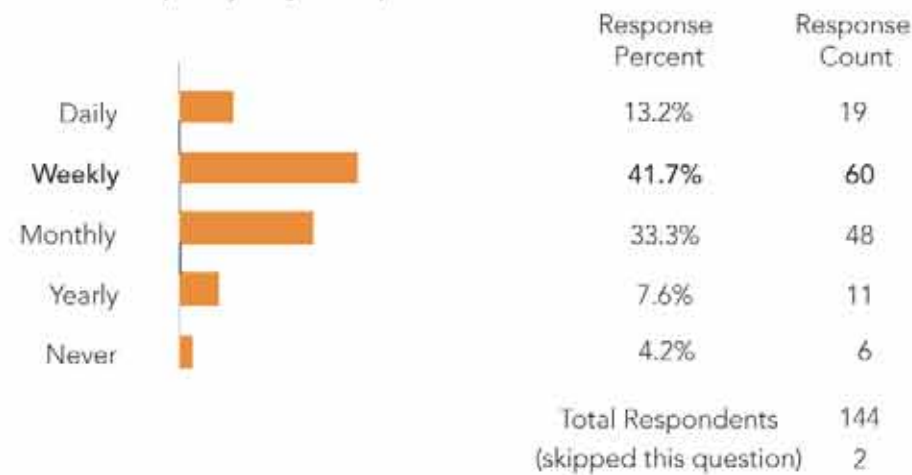
6. Do you work in the downtown area?



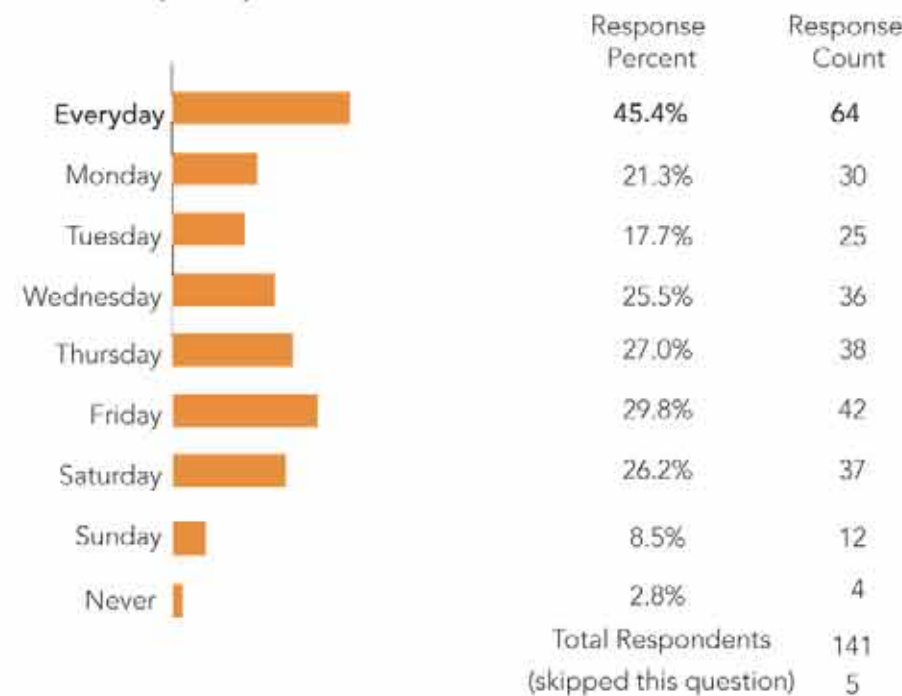
7. How long have you lived or worked in the area?



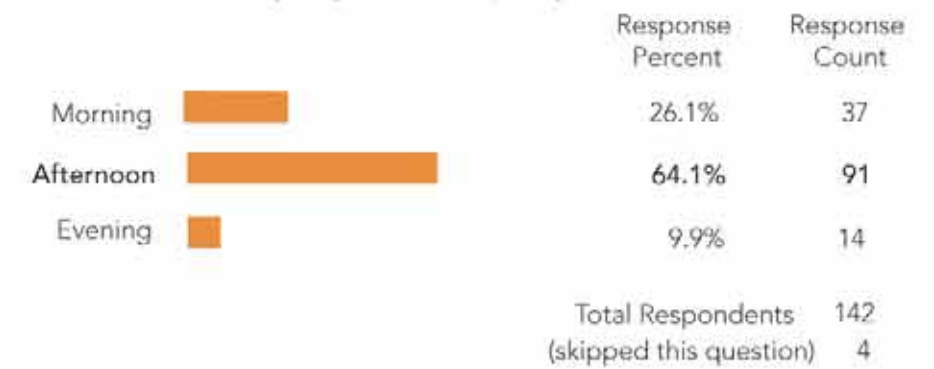
8. How frequently do you shop downtown?



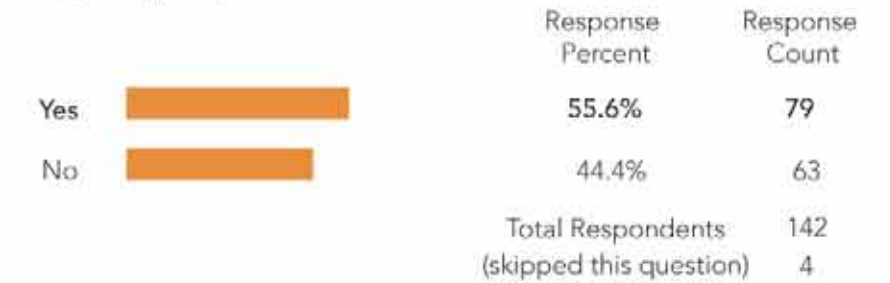
9. What day(s) do you use the downtown?



10. What time of day do you most frequently use the area?



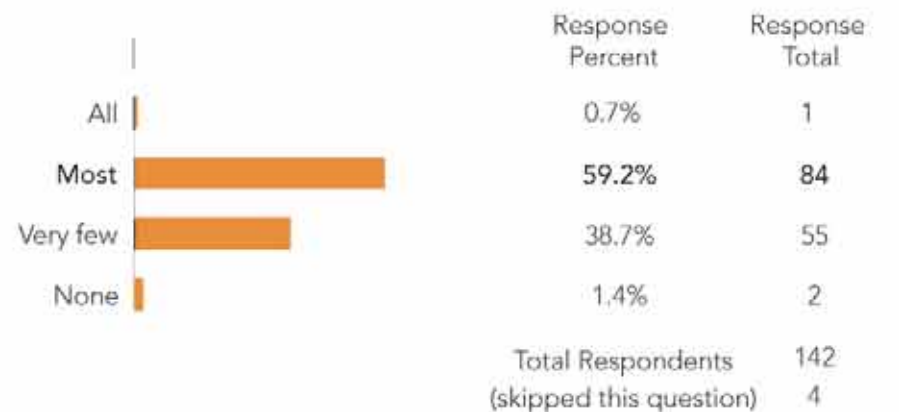
11. Do you regularly walk in the area?



11. Do you regularly bike in the area?



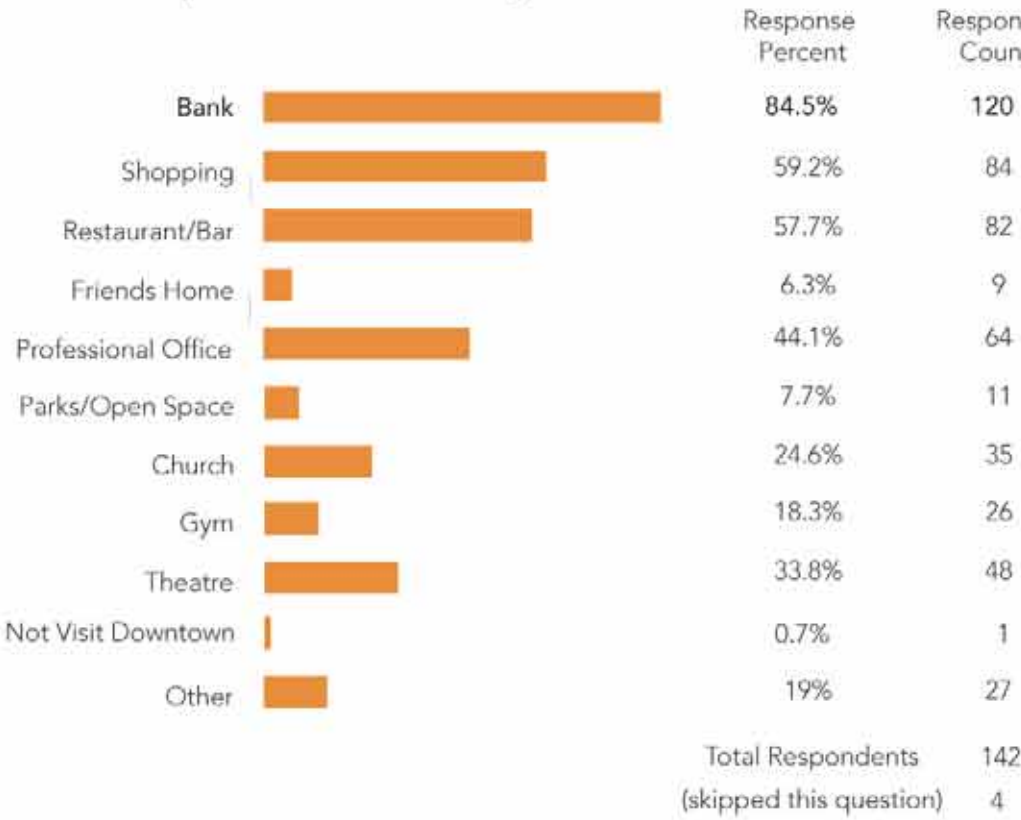
13. How many of the storefronts in the area, in general, in general, do you consider to be well maintained and appealing?



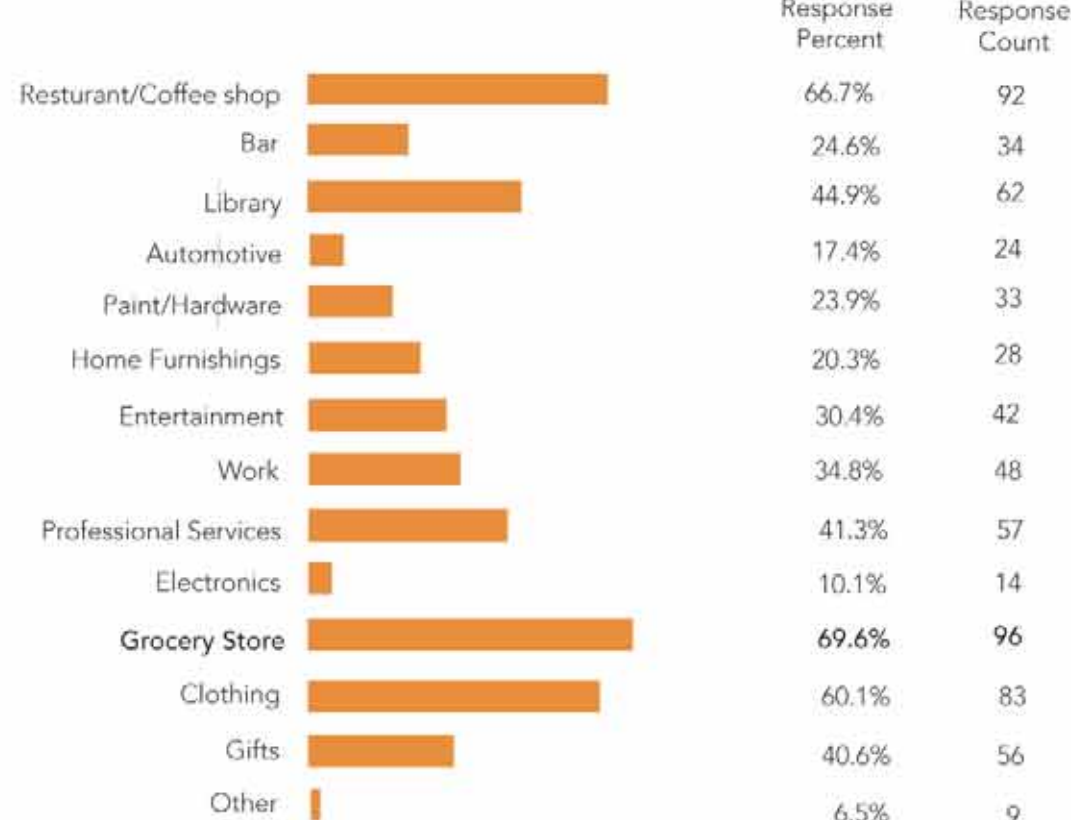
14. What is your overall opinion of the current appearance of the downtown area?



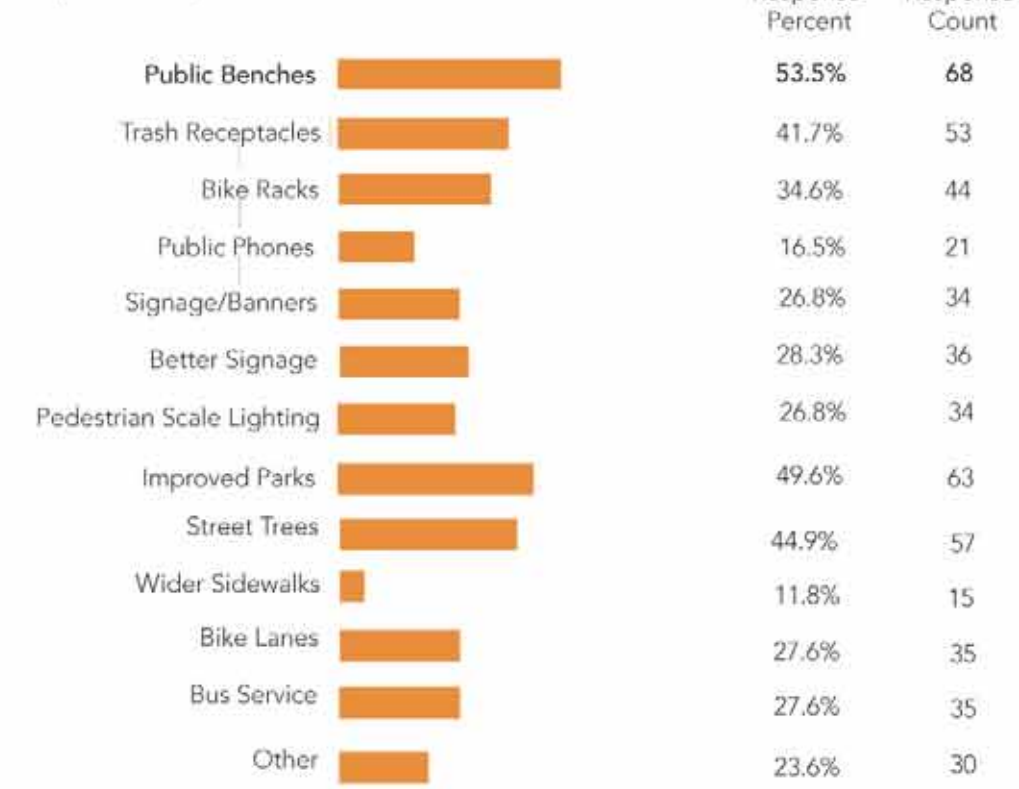
15. What is your destination when visiting the downtown area ?



18. What other services do you use in the area?



20. What amenities would you like to see added to create a better experience for pedestrians?



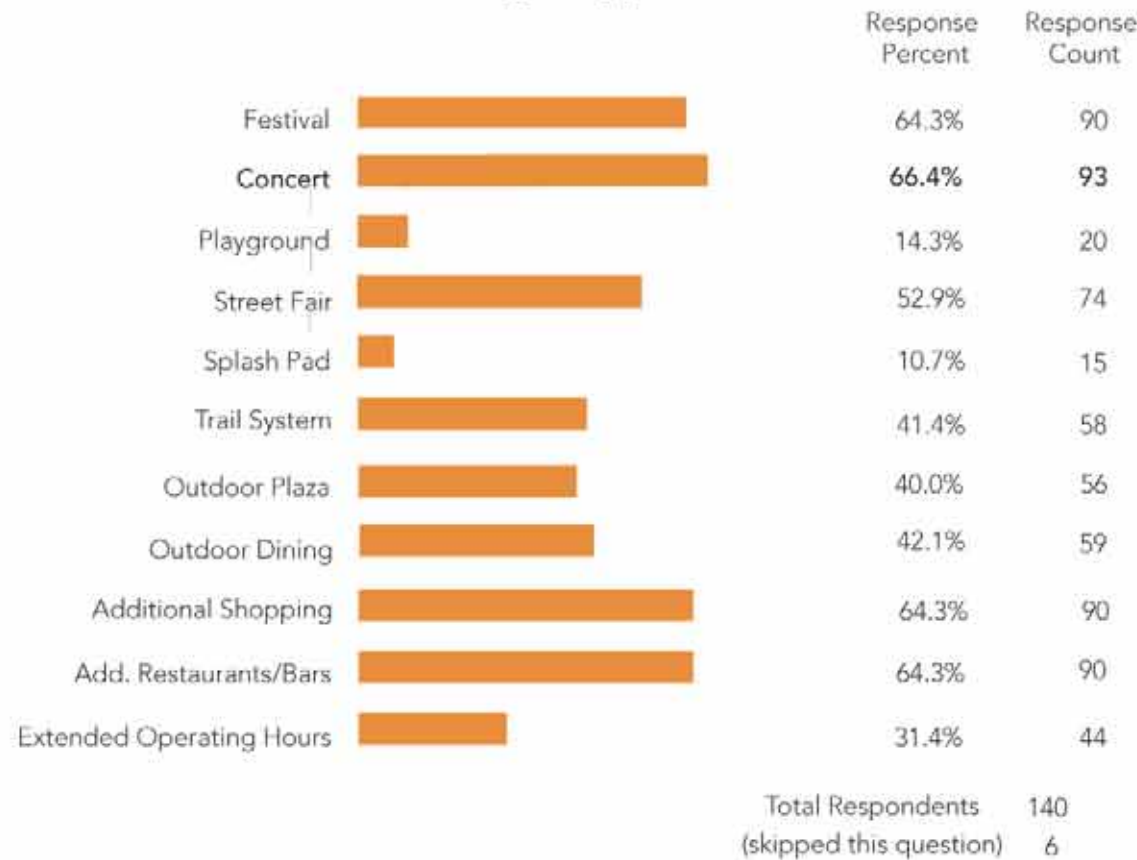
16. How easy is it to find parking in the area?



Total Respondents 138  
(skipped this question) 8

Total Respondents 127  
(skipped this question) 19

19. What other activities or events might bring you to the downtown?



Total Respondents 140  
(skipped this question) 6

21. Which safety issues need to be addressed in the area?



Total Respondents 134  
(skipped this question) 12

17. The current directional and shop signage is:



22. What traffic issues, in your opinion, need to be addressed in the area?

|   | Response Percent | Response Count |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| Cars Driving Too Fast                     | 30.2%            | 26             |
| Turning Lanes                             | 23.3%            | 20             |
| Transport Trucks Downtown                 | 59.3%            | 51             |
| Access to Downtown                        | 18.6%            | 16             |
| Other                                     | 27.9%            | 24             |
| Total Respondents (skipped this question) |                  | 86 / 60        |

23. What facilities or services would you like to see added to the downtown?

|   | Response Percent | Response Count |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| First Priority                            | 100%             | 87             |
| Second Priority                           | 83.9%            | 73             |
| Third Priority                            | 64.4%            | 56             |
| Fourth Priority                           | 42.5%            | 37             |
| Total Respondents (skipped this question) |                  | 87 / 59        |

23. What services/ businesses would you like to see added downtown?\*

- shopping variety
- Festivals & Concerts
- more, and better shopping stores; not old people stores
- much better signage to indicate attractions and businesses
- boutique shopping
- outdoor activities
- more daycare
- Shopping Plaza
- new movie theatre
- improved Victorian Mark, maybe relocate the cenotaph
- community garden
- somewhere for the youth
- "Real" walking trails
- NEW JAIL
- eliminate the loitering in the town, especially by Tim Hortons
- beautify coming into the town, with signage/store fronts
- Any business which make the area a "To Go" destination vs. leaving the area
- a By-Law which ensures old buildings are maintained, preserving Amherst history
- first class accomodations
- I don't know how it would work - A public washroom
- Stores
- inviting public spaces for dinner/drinks/entertainment
- Bike lanes
- outdoor market in the spring/summer (local produce, etc)
- parking
- events, to bring people in, if it fails to be popular at first keep trying
- more retail, specifically boutiques which would differentiate us
- Arts/culture centre
- Visitor Information Centre
- Shopping
- Civic Center
- More local craft stores
- New Police Department
- shopping
- eb games
- Wheelchare access to more banks and stores
- high end dining
- uniform signage
- Improved appearance - comparable to Victoria street
- Skateboard park - give kids a safe place
- enhance aesthetics of present store fronts
- more retail shops
- Cornerstone Cultural Centre (Alpha Centre)
- Mandatory Cleanup of the buildings we do have
- better eating establishments
- Attitude of downtown merchants is poor
- Extend store hours beyond 5pm
- Art Gallery for Local Artists, Artist Co-Op
- More shopping - Boutique stores, speciality stores
- Theatres
- NSCC campus expansion
- Safe Water Fountains in 3 or more locations
- Doctors who accept new patients
- Main street shopping ie. Bakery, more clothing stores, shoe store
- a top quality restaurant
- More stores/shops
- shops - shoes, jewelery, crafts, clothing - Amherst has no shoe store
- MORE PARKING
- MORE PROFESSIONAL JOBS
- more entertainment geared to adults
- public skating - not hockey!
- Farmers Market
- market style venue
- artisans and crafts
- benches
- more resturants
- Dog Park
- Housing both upscale apartments and lower income
- Outdoor plazas
- less abandoned and vacant buildings
- kids recreation, splashpad
- more small business that is interesting
- more dining choices
- Conference and Cultural Centre
- Consider a housing strategie that would encourage new development
- a decent coffee shop
- Outdoor hockey rink/ball hockey in summer
- definetly more lighting
- flowers and shrubbery
- young people area/centre
- outdoor patio
- trees and green space
- more trash receptacles
- fix the condition of the sidewalks
- more lifestyle stores
- Museums
- multi-cultural food/health food stores
- uniform banners and hanging baskets in the summer
- bus service to the Tignish beach
- tourism shops
- outlet stores
- a decent bookstore
- Welcoming public space with washrooms
- bile lanes
- GOVERNMENT SERVICES
- clean up the people who hang out downtown
- bike/ski shop, bookstore, coffee shops - create a true streetscape
- tax breaks/incentives, to encourage new business in old structures
- bike racks for locking bikes
- improvements to Victoria Park
- Parking meeters
- Walking trails
- a second grocery store
- Furniture store
- Senior and visitor assistance
- concerts/events @ the bandstand
- vintage cloths/music store
- flea market
- more police officers on the weekends
- more greenery to line the streets

\* Comments transcribed as written on survey





# B: Brookings Report:

## *Step 1: Capture the Vision*

A good starting point is to engage in a “visioning” process. While denigrated by some for being “soft and fuzzy,” a visioning process not only determines if there is community support but it also uncovers the emotional, economic, and fiscal reasons for turning around the downtown. This process should be professionally managed, with money allocated to pay for it. It is best if the money raised starts the entire revitalization process off on the right foot; it should be primarily private and non-profit sector funded. The public sector can and should participate, both to have a stake in and to give legitimacy to the process. This will eventually give way to a private/public partnership, an intentional reversal of the way this phrase is usually stated.

## *Step 2: Develop a Strategic Plan*

The process for determining the comprehensive strategy starts by bringing together an expanded version of the advisory group. The group should include neighborhood group representatives, retailers, investors, developers, property owners, churches, the mayor and key city councilors, the heads of select city departments, non-profit organizations, artists, homeless advocates, and others. Selecting the right composition is extremely important to ensure that no

significant group feels left out. The group needs to be relatively small (less than 25 individuals), however, in order to both build a sense of trust and cohesion and, ultimately, to ensure the process stays focused on results. It is also crucial that the individuals be people who are interested in successful solutions, not narrow political gain.

Two one-day sessions devoted to the strategic planning process, separated by about a month, are generally sufficient to crafting the strategy and implementation plan. Before the first day, a “briefing book” should be assembled to provide the group with a common set of data about the existing conditions downtown. This briefing book should include findings from the visioning process (technical and subjective portraits), market and consumer real estate research for all product types (office, hotel, rental housing, retail, etc.), data on the existing condition of the downtown infrastructure and public services, and other relevant information.

### *Step 3: Forge a Healthy Private/Public Partnership*

Successful downtown revitalizations are generally private/public partnerships, not the other way around. The public sector, usually led by the mayor or some other public official, may convene the strategy process but it must quickly be led by the private entities whose time and money will ultimately determine the effort's success. A healthy, sustained partnership is crucial to getting the revitalization process off the ground and building the critical mass needed to spur a cycle of sustainable development.

The key to the public sector's successful involvement in downtown redevelopment is to avoid making it overly political. Once it has been launched, it is essential for future politicians to "keep their hands off" to the maximum extent possible. Investors, developers, and volunteers helping to revive downtown are motivated by emotion, passion, long-term financial returns, and many other unique and personal reasons. A politician trying to advance his career can very easily quash this momentum and destroy the private/public partnership in the process.

All this is not to say that the public sector should be completely laissez-faire. City leaders must be absolutely committed to the process both in word and in deed, and be willing and able to do what it takes to help create the right environment for private sector development and investment.

### *Step 4: Make the Right Thing Easy*

If the downtown area around Santa Fe, New Mexico's much beloved and vibrant 400 year old Plaza burned to the ground, legally it would only be possible to rebuild strip commercial buildings, likely anchored by Wal-Mart Super Centers, Home Depots, and the other usual suspects.

In downtown Santa Fe and dozens of others around the country, zoning and building codes of the past fifty years actually outlaw the necessary elements of walkable urbanism. In many cities, for example, often well-intended setback and floor-area ratio rules mean that new construction cannot maintain consistency with older historic structures. Also, excessive parking requirements can create large surface lots fronting once-lively streets, eroding the vitality of otherwise coherent places. Coupled with an emphasis on separation of land uses and limited densities, downtown revitalization becomes nearly impossible from a legal perspective.

### *Step 5: Establish Business Improvement Districts and Other Non-Profits*

The BID's main leadership role is managing the implementation of the strategy, which must be constantly updated. The BID may be responsible, for example, for ensuring the various task forces charged with implementing parts of the strategy are motivated to complete their efforts.

The BID might also create a new signage program for downtown, work for the development and approval of the form-based code, and market the downtown to new developers.

The BID's operational role is usually (1) increasing the perceived and actual safety of downtown; (2) making the place cleaner; (3) creating festivals and events to encourage suburbanites to come downtown, and;

(4) improving downtown's image. BIDs typically include a force of trained "safety ambassadors" who offer a friendly face on the street, are trained to handle quality of life infractions, and who are wired to the police. They also have permanent staff performing the cleaning, events, and marketing functions. In short, the BID and other non-profits are a downtown's management team—ensuring its many complex elements work together to create a safe, attractive, unique, and well-functioning place. Step 6: Create a Catalytic Development Company Revitalizing downtowns have overcome the problem of attracting developers by establishing a "catalytic developer." This organization is formed to develop the initial projects that the market and consumer research shows have potential demand but above market risk. The catalytic development firm demonstrates to the rest of the development community and their investors that downtown development can make economic sense.

A catalytic development company can engage in varying activities in the development process. Among the possibilities are: undertaking land assemblage and land development to prepare lots for new construction; financing the gap between conventional financing and the amount of money required to make the project happen; or developing a complete building from start to finish.

In the early years of the revitalization process, it is probable that the catalytic development firm will have to engage in complete building development. Eventually, once the market is proven, the catalytic developer can joint venture with other building developers, possibly providing land for deals. In a successful downtown, the catalytic developer will eventually work itself out of business as more developers come to understand the financial benefits of downtown development.



### Step 7: Create an Urban Entertainment District

It all starts, as in any real estate development, with market demand. Understanding which of the many urban entertainment options that have the greatest potential for success is a crucial first step. These can include:

**Arenas,** performing arts centers, or stadiums. Since 1990, the vast majority of all new arenas, performing arts centers, and stadiums have been built downtown. They work better financially by having higher average attendance than their suburban competitors, and there is significant economic spin-off within walking distance.

**Movie theaters.** The new generation of movie theaters—mega-plexes with digital sound and stadium seating—also benefit from a downtown location, assuming large amounts of evening and weekend parking can be provided for free. They also spark significant restaurant demand.

**Restaurants.** A crucial part of any urban entertainment strategy, downtown restaurants provide lunch for the office workers and dinner for the night-time crowd, broadening their appeal and financial success.

**Specialty retail.** Unique clothing, shoes, cosmetics, gift, and other specialty stores—as well as service providers such as day spas and design studios—can be attracted downtown. These will be mostly small, locally-owned retailers but will also include national chains.

**Festivals.** One of the initial urban entertainment concepts, street festivals can be introduced relatively quickly to a reviving downtown since there is little or no capital outlay.

**Arts.** The vast array of arts organizations, particularly music performers and visual artists, has a natural affinity for downtown. They are generally in the vanguard of urban dwellers. Arts festivals, galleries, museums, and workshops are among the best and earliest urban entertainment providers.

**Night Clubs.** Generally aimed at people in their 20s and 30s, night clubs also have a natural affinity for downtown; these venues tend to be loud and stay open late so there are constraints on where else they can locate in the region.

These urban entertainment concepts appeal to different clientele, yet can all be accommodated within walking distance. There can be a night club district a few blocks away from the performing arts center. There can be an arts district close to a movie theater and restaurants. An arena can be shoe-horned near office towers, double using the commuter roadways, transit, and office parking lots. This complexity gives all sorts of people a reason to come downtown, which is particularly important in the early years when downtown's image may not be positive.

The most important benefit of entertainment is to get “feet on the street,” especially at night. And just as a crowded restaurant is the best recommendation that it is a good place, crowded sidewalks recommend downtown, signaling a safe environment, and providing an excitement and spectacle that draws people to the area.



A.4 Marketplace Promenade Concept



A.5 Marketplace Promenade Concept



### *Step 8: Develop a Rental Housing Market*

The initial urban pioneers looking to live within walking distance of the urban entertainment growing in downtown will tend to be young, often students and those in their 20s. This age group was probably raised in the suburbs, and probably doesn't have as negative an impression of downtown as their elders. They also look upon it as exciting and interesting, especially compared to where they were raised.

The young also tend to rent, as they don't have the assets, income, or location stability required to buy a home. They are more flexible, tied only to the lease they have signed, probably for a year or less. Once an urban entertainment concentration begins to emerge, this group generally has both the propensity to move downtown, and the ability to make the move quickly. Rental housing projects can be conversions of existing office, industrial, or institutional buildings or new construction. The renovation of existing buildings offers some of the most exciting new housing options, as they are unlike other rental products in the regional market.

Though often a source of great challenge for developers, converting obsolete, sometimes decrepit buildings into attractive, active uses has ancillary benefits. This type of development also begins to take lower end, class C office buildings off the market, paving the way for the eventual recovery of the office market.

New construction of rental housing has its own unique trials. While construction costs are much better known up front, with fewer surprises than conversions, these new costs tend to be high. There is no existing steel or concrete structure frame, parking, or re-useable heating and cooling systems to recycle. Since apartment rents tend to have an absolute ceiling in any market, the cost of new construction must come in at a level that is financially feasible, which can be very difficult to do, especially early in the redevelopment process when rents are probably low.

Like suburban development, an initial downtown turnaround requires sufficient parking. Only after critical mass is reached will parking ratios begin to drop, as more of the residents are walking or taking transit for their daily needs. The majority of the parking for rental apartments typically needs to be on-site. While converted office or industrial buildings may have more than sufficient parking, new construction will likely require structured parking, which is approximately 10-20 times more expensive than surface parking to build. In either case, the amount of parking on the site will drive the number of units that can be built.

In spite of the obstacles, downtown can often achieve the highest rents in the metropolitan area. If you offer a unique rental product in a unique, walkable downtown that is on the way back, the rents are likely to float to the top of the market.



### *Step 9: Pioneer an Affordability Strategy*

Like most things in life, turning around a downtown means good news and bad news. The good news is that if a critical mass of walkable urbanism is created, the rents, sales values, and land values will probably be the highest in the metropolitan area, rewarding those willing to take the risk, build high quality construction, and wait patiently for returns. The bad news is that the values will be some of the highest in the metropolitan area, meaning only the well-to-do can live downtown. To address this issue, an affordability strategy must be developed early-on in the revitalization process.

The issue of affordability generally focuses on housing. Specifically, lower paid workers who are employed downtown will not be able to afford the newly converted or new construction rental or for-sale housing due to the basic cost to deliver the product, and the high demand generated for it. Federal government-sponsored affordable housing programs have recently been cut back and the red-tape is discouraging to some developers. And the community development corporations (CDC's) who specialize in affordable housing generally do not have the capacity to fill the need.

One of the usual approaches to affordability is to simply mandate it be addressed. Some downtown projects have a quota of affordable housing, such as 20 percent, particularly if the project had some form of government assistance. While this approach is required if federal housing tax credits are employed, it is counter-productive if they are arbitrarily used. In essence, the use of an affordable set-aside means the other 80 percent of the tenants or buyers must pay for the 20 percent being subsidized. So just at a time the downtown is struggling to come back, the very families they are trying to attract are "taxed" for pioneering the downtown revitalization. If all housing developments in the metropolitan area, or even in the city, had an affordable housing set-aside, that would be both fair and socially beneficial. Yet almost no affordable housing advocates have the will to take on the powerful suburban homebuilders. It is much easier to mandate affordable housing program on developers willing to take on socially oriented development, like the revitalization of downtown.



### *Step 10: Focus on For-Sale Housing*

Following the establishment of urban entertainment and the initial “colonization” of downtown by urban pioneers who rent, for-sale housing can return to downtown. For sale housing appeals to a very different set of households than renters. They are generally older, not as adventuresome, and are prepared and able to invest in the largest asset of their personal net worth, their home.

The natural markets for for-sale housing in a reviving downtown include young professional singles and couples and Baby Boomer empty nesters. These are typically childless households who likely demand less living space, and aren’t concerned about the quality of the schools. Still, far-sighted civic strategists responsible for downtown revitalization would be wise to include improving the downtown schools in their strategic plan. This would allow for the young professionals to stay in downtown if they eventually have children. In downtown Albuquerque, for example, the schools were a part of the strategy. There is a magnet elementary school serving downtown and in the fall of 2005, a charter high school with 200 students is moving into an old federal Building.

Another likely market to come downtown, though generally after the initial wave of for-sale housing, is retirees. The ability to access goods and services without the need for a car, coupled with close proximity to medical care in many cities, make downtown an ideal location for this group. This allows them to stay in the same city near friends and family while maintaining their self-sufficiency, especially if they are not able to drive.

Having an established for-sale housing market is the ultimate test of whether the downtown has achieved critical mass. Given the size of the for-sale housing market, it is crucial to the success of a downtown turnaround. Bringing middle and upper-middle housing to downtown will provide the tax base so sorely needed by most cities, and members of these households will demand a level of service that will continue the upward spiral. These services—whether they be safety, cleanliness, or parades—will benefit all elements of the community, not just those who choose to make their home downtown.

### *Step 11: Develop a Local-Serving Retail Strategy*

Once downtown begins to be repopulated, the demand for local-serving retail will grow. As new downtowners often come to realize, however, long-time inner-city households have had to drive to the suburbs for most of their daily shopping needs for the past 20 to 30 years. In the initial stages of redevelopment, the new downtown residents have to as well. There are two primary reasons why many of these urban areas are under-retailed, despite their high density of demand for goods and services. First, the structure of retail has changed considerably over the past several decades, evolving into fewer and larger outlets. These larger outlets draw from a consumer radius that has become wider and wider, increasingly undercutting smaller retailers in the area in price and selection.

The mom and pop grocer had a three to four block consumer draw, A & P had a one to two mile consumer draw and Wal-Mart has a three to five mile consumer draw. Store sizes went from 5,000 square feet mom & pop stores to 20,000 to 40,000 square feet regional and national chains to 180,000 square feet super centers. More significantly, the 40,000 square foot grocery store had about five acres of land, 80 percent under asphalt for parking, while the super center has a need for about 20 to 25 acres of land, most of it used for parking. Finding five acres in or near downtown is difficult, and finding 20 to 25 acres is nearly impossible in many cities. As each succeeding generation of retailer’s stores and parking lots became geometrically larger in size, the obsolete retail space was abandoned or under-utilized, resulting in the miles of deteriorating strip commercial littering American arterial highways. The big retail boxes went further to the fringe to obtain the vast amount of land required for their “modern” concepts.

Second, local-serving retail is a “follower” real estate product, i.e., the housing must be in place before a grocery store can build a store. As a downtown redevelops, there are not enough households initially to justify the conventional grocery store. This is coupled with the fact they these stores have little or no experience in an in-fill urban location with parking challenges.



Of course, there are still locally-owned retailers who provide groceries, drugs, and hardware and offer the “in and out” convenience—especially for one and two item trips—that larger stores lack. Unfortunately, they have become a dying breed. These companies often have weak balance sheets and thus have difficulty obtaining financing from banks for new development. Only if a project has sufficient patient long-term equity is it possible to lease or build space for smaller retailers with a shaky financial history. Thus while some of these stores will continue to thrive, as a group they are probably only part of the solution to downtowns’ growing local-serving retail demands. The other part of the solution is finding ways to entice national “big box” retailers to integrate into a walkable landscape.

#### Step 12: Re-create a Strong Office Market

As entertainment, housing, and retail are established downtown, the office market will begin to follow.

As upper-middle income for-sale housing is built in downtown, there will gradually be a return of a healthy office market and the employment it houses. Once the bosses, who make the ultimate decision about office location, begin to live downtown, they will decide to bring their office there as well. Why should they drive to the suburbs from downtown when they could walk to work or have a very short drive? This has happened in those downtowns that have been redeveloping the longest over the past generation, particularly Denver, Portland, and Seattle. Denver, for example, had a vastly overbuilt office market following the energy bust of the early 1980s, which left office vacancies over 30 percent. Due to the combination of the 1990s economic boom, the conversion of obsolete office space into housing, and the construction of new for-sale housing in downtown, office buildings were once again being built in the last few years.

This step in the redevelopment process will probably only fill existing, vacant office space in most cities,

due to the past overbuilding and the weak demand for office employment in the economy in general. However, it will be a tremendous benefit for city revenues and the employment prospects of other downtown and city residents. With most new metropolitan jobs located in the favored quarter of the suburbs, they were hard to reach by city residents, especially those with lower incomes. A growth in office development will address this imbalance, though it generally takes 15 to 20 years from the start of the revitalization process.





# C: Traffic Study

Developing a plan for traffic in the Downtown core requires consideration of both quantitative and qualitative aspects. From a qualitative perspective, consideration is given to the general efficiency of traffic operations, safety considerations/perceptions, vehicle composition, vulnerable road user activities, parking activities and other factors that affect the overall quality of travel experience for all users of the downtown. Quantitatively, it is important to understand specific characteristics that can provide travel opportunities or constraints such as operations at key intersections, parking capacity, queues and delays and volume characteristics as some examples.

Due to the high level nature of this project, much of our work focuses on the qualitative aspects of travel and in and through the Downtown area, through quantitative evaluation has been carried in certain circumstances were required to support the Action Plan.

## *Surrounding Roads*

The Town of Amherst sits in a strategic location at the junction of the Trans Canada Highway Route 104 and Provincial Routes 2, 6, and 204. Highway 104 is a major route connecting Nova Scotia to New Brunswick and points west, and Routes 2 and 6 connect to the Glooscap Trail and Sunrise Trail, respectively – which are renowned scenic roadways that serve as popular tourist destinations.



Direct access to the adjacent highway network makes Amherst an attractive stop for many travelers seeking amenities such as fuel, food, and accommodations. Traffic volumes on Highway 104 in the vicinity of Amherst range from 10,000 to 15,000 vehicles per day. This has provided considerable opportunity for commercial activity in the area, though due to its close proximity to the Highway, much of this activity in recent years has focused on the southern sections of Albion Street.

Amherst is accessible from Highway 104 from 3 interchanges: Exit 1 (Laplanche Street), Exit 3 (Victoria Street West), and Exit 4 (Albion Street). Of these, Albion Street experiences the highest annual average daily traffic volumes (AADT) of 12,000 vehicles per day compared with 3,600 and 2,500 on Laplanche Street and Victoria Street, respectively. While it is difficult to specifically determine the volume of traffic on each of these streets that is directly attributable to Highway 104 traffic, it is clear that the Albion Street interchange typically experiences the highest volumes.

#### *Getting to Downtown Amherst*

Although Amherst as a whole is located directly adjacent to Highway 104, direct access to the downtown core is less convenient than that of the commercialized areas on South Albion Street. Each access route between Highway 104 and the downtown is between 2 and 3 kilometers in length, which can deter the casual visitor from venturing into the city centre. The three downtown routes accessible from Highway 104 can be generally summarized as follows:

- Albion Street: A commercialized corridor comprising several service centers including fuel, convenience stores, hotels, and restaurants along with retail outlets including big box stores and shopping malls.
- Victoria Street West (Route 6): Primarily a residential street between Highway 104 and the downtown, Victoria Street West passes many homes of older vintage and the Amherst Railway Station.
- Laplanche Street (Route 2): Runs through a less developed area between Highway 104 and the downtown core, surrounded primarily by agricultural fields along with some residential and commercial land uses.

#### *Background Data Collection*

##### *Site Investigation*

A detailed site investigation was undertaken of the study area that included comprehensive video capture and commentary on existing conditions. The primary purpose of the investigations was to gain a better understanding of the vulnerable road user, traffic and parking characteristics of the core area, areas of opportunities and deficiencies, and provide a video record for subsequent analysis.

##### *Traffic Counts*

Traffic counts provide a basic quantitative understanding of how traffic flows on the overall road network, along with the evaluation of the performance of key intersections and identification of current and potential capacity and operational constraints. Intersection turning movement counts were carried out for the weekday morning and afternoon peak traffic periods at the following intersections:  
Victoria Street @ Lawrence Street  
Victoria Street @ Church Street  
Victoria Street @ Laplanche Street

Additional intersection turning movement counts were provided by the Town for the intersection of Albion / Church / Crescent. The observed peak hours were between 8-9 AM and 4-5PM, though it is possible the PM peak may start before 4 PM. Counts carried out at Albion / Church / Crescent intersection suggest that the noon peak hour is also relatively busy, but is not significantly different from the AM and PM peak periods.

Traffic volumes are considered relatively low throughout the peak periods and no capacity or queuing issues were evident. Figure 1-1 shows traffic volumes for the 3 intersections along Victoria Street East for the AM and PM peak periods, respectively. Traffic counts included pedestrian counts and vehicle classification (i.e. car, heavy vehicle). The percentage of heavy vehicles during the AM and PM peak periods was observed as 3.7% and 1.5%, respectively. Pedestrian volumes were quite low during both peak periods. For example, pedestrian volumes through the Church / Victoria intersection were in the range of 10-15 pedestrian crossings per hour on a typical leg of the intersection.

### *Parking*

There is a considerable amount of available parking space in the downtown supporting the needs of employees, customers, and visitors. The parking is composed primarily of on-street and surface based parking lots and it is important to note that all parking in the downtown area is free of user charges. Viewing an aerial photo of the downtown area reveals a vast array of surface based parking areas which exhibit different shapes, sizes, design standards, parking orientations, and access characteristics. It appears that parking has grown organically based on the availability and need of individual businesses as well as the parcel of land that is available for parking purposes in that specific property. It is clear that in many cases, adjacent land owners do not coordinate efforts to utilize available parking areas in a mutually beneficial manner resulting in many inefficiencies, reduced parking capacity, and often confusing or non-intuitive access to the parking areas.

Similar to surface parking lots, there is a considerable amount of on-street parking spaces available to drivers accessing the downtown core. In general, the on-street parking spaces are intended for short-term use, as they are marked as 1-hour usage during typical working hours (8 am to 5 pm) on weekdays. Similar to the off-street parking, all on-street parking stalls are free of user charges.

### *Parking Capacity*

A recently completed parking inventory found that there are approximately 1860 surface parking lot stalls and 180 on-street parking stalls available to drivers in the downtown core. Through the various discussions, workshops, and site investigations, all indicators and opinions suggest that the current volume of available parking spaces is adequate to serve the existing need. It has also been noted that parking capacity could be increased with more efficient use of available space.

General guidance in publications such as *Parking: The Parking Handbook for Small Communities*<sup>1</sup>, suggests that parking supply<sup>2</sup> varies based on community size but smaller communities commonly have 50 – 100 spaces in the downtown area per 1,000 population (of the overall town) and larger communities in the 18-20,000 range often only supply 40 – 60 spaces. Based on Amherst's population of around 10,000, a parking supply of between 400 – 1,000 spaces would be typical. The current supply of over 2,000 on street and off street parking spots therefore appears excessive.

### *Study Area Considerations and Concerns*

#### *Capacity and Level of Service*

Traffic volumes in the downtown core are relatively low and well within the capacity of the streets and intersections. Basic microsimulation traffic models for the Victoria Street corridor and the Albion / Church / Crescent intersection show the Levels of Service are very good and there is minimal delay or queuing. Traffic counts indicate that the peaking characteristics of traffic downtown are relatively minimal, and observation of traffic at the intersections indicates that both signalized and unsignalized intersections operate efficiently with minimal delays.

#### *Circulation and Access*

Overall, the road network throughout the downtown operates relatively efficiently from a capacity and circulation perspective. Most streets are designated as two way streets and generally appear to have appropriate traffic control. Overall volumes in the downtown area are relatively low which limit occurrences of poor levels of service during typical operating periods.

There are, however, a number of locations where improvements should be considered. King Street and Princess Street are adjacent 1-way streets running in the same direction, which does not appear to provide any specific benefit other than allowing access to adjacent buildings. Two parallel 1-way streets operating in different directions is a more common application, though it is unlikely there is any justification to provide such an arrangement. In fact, many large and small municipalities are in the process converting 1-way street systems



to 2-way street systems. Conversion to 2-way streets and elimination of one of these streets is recommended in order to better utilize the available space in this area.

The study area is bounded by “gateway points”, though none are specifically enhanced or well defined to provide drivers or pedestrians a welcoming feeling to the core area of Amherst. There appear to be opportunities to enhance the gateways at the following locations:

- Albion Street @ Church Street;
- Laplanche Street @ Lawrence Street;
- Victoria Street @ Laplanche Street; and,
- Victoria Street at the CN Rail crossing

Access to and circulation through parking areas in the downtown are poorly designated, poorly marked, often confusing for unfamiliar drivers and pedestrians alike, and are generally inefficient. Significant opportunities exist to improve these environments.

#### *On-Street Parking*

Maintaining on-street parking through the downtown is considered positive in the context of a downtown action plan. On-street parking is presently provided at a number of locations, however, there are some isolated areas where the presence of such parking appears unnecessary and poses safety risks. Generally, on street parking should be provided where it has no undue negative impact on adjacent vehicle or pedestrian movements. This includes locations immediately upstream, downstream, or within intersection areas, as well as at crosswalks. The following are two specific examples where on-street parking is currently provided and is not recommended:

- Two parking stalls are located directly in front of \_\_\_\_\_ on Victoria Street and are separated by a large painted hatched area. The southernmost parking stall is located in close proximity to the Station Street intersection and railway tracks as well as the driveway to the building’s parking lot. Given the availability of parking immediately adjacent to the building, the addition of two on-street parking stalls appears to have limited value, has the potential to compromise safety and operations at the adjacent driveways and intersections, and has a relatively significant cost of maintenance. Furthermore, this area is considered a gateway area to the downtown core and there appears to be some benefit to eliminating these parking stalls and improving the visual appeal of this location through streetscaping, lane reduction to two through lanes only, or other measures.
- At the intersection of Victoria and Laplanche Streets, a single parking stall is located in the centre of the T-intersection. It is recommended that this stall be removed immediately as it compromises operational and safety performance of the intersection, is located between two intersection crosswalks compromising pedestrian safety, and again has a high cost of maintenance relative to the benefits.

In general, all on street parking locations need to be carefully considered to ensure they are not negatively impacting operations of safety of the surrounding area. On main thoroughfares, on-street parking should only be provided where adequate road width can be achieved to accommodate through vehicles as well as parked vehicles.

#### *Intersections*

A number of intersections throughout the downtown core are poorly configured. Specifically, these include:

**Laplanche Street @ Victoria Street:** Relatively high speeds have been observed at the intersection, and safety has been identified as a concern. The Laplanche Street approaches are slightly offset, which forces traffic to veer to the left to make a through movement. The intersection is signalized with crosswalks on all approaches. There is an empty lot in the southeast quadrant of the intersection.

**Albion Street @ Church Street:** Previously a signalized intersection prior to the signal controller equipment being damaged, it has operated relatively efficiently as a 3-way stop, unsignalized intersection. This intersection is a key gateway location, but is aesthetically poor and raises safety concerns due to 4 approach legs. A recent study carried out by others at this intersection indicated that traffic signals were not warranted; therefore, maintaining the intersection as a stop controlled intersection was acceptable. Further, the town has indicated that the implementation of stop control at the intersection has reduced available gaps in traffic at downstream intersections, increasing subsequent delays.

**Laplanche @ Lawrence Street:** A large, atypical intersection configuration that consumes a considerable amount of property northeast of Victoria Street. The intersection is poorly configured, can be confusing to drivers, and the configuration can be prone to high speeds and subsequent safety concerns.

**Victoria at Church Street:** This is a T-intersection at the heart of the downtown core. It is located immediately across from a park and has a Tim Horton's located on the southeast corner. The Town has indicated that pedestrian accommodation is a common concern at this intersection and alternative modifications such as the implementation of a Pedestrian Scramble<sup>3</sup> phase, sometimes referred to as a "Barnes Dance", has been considered.

### *Road Safety Considerations*

In general, the downtown core consists of relatively slow moving vehicles, many pedestrians along and crossing the roadways, deliveries, and turning movements to access various commercial and parking areas. It is also important to note that that drivers and active transportation users will often be a combination of local people (who are generally familiar with where things are and how they work) and tourists or pass-through traffic (who may find navigating the core area more challenging).

The combination of these characteristics suggests that attention needs to be given to general road safety principles when evaluating the existing networks or generating recommendations for future improvements. Critical considerations include:

- **Driver Workload:** Drivers should be given time to process and react to information that is presented to them. Providing too much information at one time or not allowing adequate time to process the information will take the drivers attention away from the task of driving. Areas such as the Church Street-Victoria Street intersection are high workload environments due to the pedestrians, higher volumes of traffic, excess signage, limited sight distances, and other roadside features.
- **Positive Guidance:** When traveling through the downtown core, drivers should have clear guidance on where they are going, how to get to various highway routes, how to find parking, parking or turning restrictions, the presence of cross walks, etc. If a driver is confused about what their next step is, they will pay less attention to their driving tasks.
- **Consistency / Driver Expectations:** Drivers become accustomed to driving in a particular environment and when they are faced with something different, it can introduce speed changes, confusion, inappropriate turns, or other actions that may negatively impact safety performance.
- **Respecting Intersection Functional Areas:** The functional area of an intersection refers to an area of influence of an intersection within which vehicles can be reasonably expected to be maneuvering (i.e. turning, decelerating, queuing, etc.) and therefore should be free of driveways, parking maneuvers, significant decision points, or other things that would negatively impact operations at the intersection.
- **Other Issues / Concerns:** There are a wide variety of other road safety based issues

and principles that can be considered and applied. Examples include a building at the corner of Church Street and King Street that has a mirrored façade that can give the impression of a vehicle approaching from the side.

- **Trucks in the Downtown:** This was a common concern among respondents to the online survey. In general, truck volumes were observed to be relatively low through the downtown core, though formed a regular part of the daytime traffic. Opportunities are available to route truck traffic around the downtown core area on designated truck routes and initiatives to limit trucks in the downtown could be considered. Nonetheless, some of the truck traffic is related to deliveries being made at the various commercial businesses in the core.

### *The Blueprint*

In general terms, the road network in Amherst is relatively efficient in terms of access options to, and through, the downtown core. There are multiple options for accessing the adjacent highway network, and connectivity between different areas within the town including the downtown core, residential and commercial areas, and the industrial park appears to be adequate.

There is no doubt that development trends in Amherst, specifically the commercialization of the Albion Street area, have made the advancement of the downtown core a challenge. Although challenges do exist, there are certain factors working in favor of downtown revitalization that should be considered.



**Existing Road Network:** Provides adequate circulation between the downtown and other areas of Amherst, including the adjacent Trans Canada Highway. Downtown Amherst is a crossing point for multiple highway routes in the area.

**Downtown Character:** The downtown core has a character and general feel that transcends that of the more contemporary commercialized areas at the periphery of Amherst. Older buildings and the more pedestrian friendly environment provide an attractive alternative to Albion Street, and have the potential to attract a different type of visitor to the downtown area.

**Gateway Opportunities:** There are opportunities to emphasize gateways to the downtown area, which can serve as inviting thresholds that differentiate between the character of the downtown area and the outlying areas.

**Parking:** There is ample parking to accommodate those visiting the downtown by vehicle. Although there is room for improvement in terms of the configuration of parking, the lack of a parking capacity constraint is encouraging.

**Active Transportation Opportunities:** Downtown Amherst is close to the Tantramar Marshes, which provides many scenic opportunities and would make an excellent location for an active transportation trail.

### *Transportation*

Given the competing commercial interests and environments within the Town, and the associated travel characteristics, there appears to be an opportunity to provide a more pleasant, safe and inviting environment that is more typically of smaller downtown cores. From a transportation perspective, this includes contributions from many interacting components which include the roadway, pedestrian and general streetscaping

environment.

Making the downtown area a more pedestrian oriented area as an alternative to the vehicle-focused areas of the city such as the Albion Street commercial area and the Amherst Industrial Park will help draw people to the core. This includes:

- Wider sidewalks widths, with good surfaces and free from obstructions.
- Clearly marked crosswalks at predictable locations complete with clear markings, ample crossing times, ramps, removal of any obstructions, and minimize vehicle conflicts.
- Clear indication of where things are AND how to get to them including commercial business, parking areas, pathways, etc.
- Street widths – narrower streets when carefully applied create more appealing pedestrian environments, limit vehicle speeds and general move the focus away from the vehicle.
- Provide drivers of vehicles with clear and consistent way finding messages including some redundancy in guide people through the core.

### *“Gateway” Considerations*

Gateways can be considered an important indicator for visitors that they are entering a distinct part of the town. Downtown Amherst has a number of locations that can be considered gateways, most of which are not being used to their full potential to serve as an inviting entrance to the area. The following locations have been identified as natural gateways to the downtown core:

**Laplanche Street @ Lawrence Street:** The junction of Laplanche and Lawrence Streets is an atypical intersection that consumes a considerable amount of property northeast of Victoria Street. The intersection’s location northwest of Victoria Street and connecting to Highway 104 makes it a logical gateway location. The intersection is aesthetically poor and can be confusing to drivers, and more importantly can pose a safety risk as its configuration lends itself to high speeds. Although from a capacity perspective, it could be argued that one of the two streets could be eliminated, each provides a direct link to opposite ends of Victoria Street and is beneficial for circulation and access to local businesses. Our traffic counts also suggest that the traffic volumes are evenly distributed between the two streets.

**Albion Street @ Church Street:** This intersection has the potential to serve as a gateway to the downtown area from the Albion Street commercial area. Currently, the intersection has very poor aesthetics, with empty adjacent lots and a rough feel. There is a lot of real estate in the vicinity, and there is potential to realign the approaches to form a T-intersection or install a roundabout (discussed below). As a minimum, opportunities to eliminate one of the four approach legs would significantly help safety performance.

**Laplanche Street @ Victoria Street:** An alternative to the Laplanche Street – Lawrence Street gateway, this location is the entrance to Victoria Street for traffic coming from the northwest. There is an attractive wall mural on the southwest corner of the intersection that illustrates Amherst’s history and character.

**Downtown Gateways: A Roundabout Theme**  
Based on the traffic patterns and available real estate at the gateway locations identified, there is a unique opportunity to further emphasize the gateway concept through implementation of a roundabout themed approach. Roundabouts, which have been used prominently in European nations for decades, are rapidly growing in popularity in Nova Scotia, and are part of a major initiative by Nova Scotia Transportation & Infrastructure Renewal. Roundabouts have been shown to include many benefits including enhanced safety, reduced traffic delays, decreased maintenance costs, and improved aesthetics relative to traditional intersection types. Implementation of a roundabout gateway theme has considerable potential to provide a recognizable gateway that differentiates the downtown core from the surrounding areas. Potential locations where the use of roundabouts has been considered particularly advantageous include:

**Albion Street @ Church Street:** There is an abundant amount of land in the vicinity of the existing intersection that would be ideal for installation of a roundabout. Traffic volumes would operate well within the capacity of a single lane roundabout, likely reducing delay relative to the existing 3-way stop configuration. As the entrance to the downtown from the busy Albion Street commercial area, this location has the opportunity to serve as the “signature” gateway to Downtown Amherst.

**Laplanche Street @ Lawrence Street:** Another location where abundant space is available for a potential roundabout, this intersection would likely benefit as much operationally as it would aesthetically. Roundabouts force vehicles to reduce speed upon their approach to the intersection, which would provide safety benefits over the current intersection configuration. A roundabout would also facilitate access between Laplanche and Lawrence Streets efficiently, operating as a collective gateway to.

#### *Parking*

All drivers become pedestrians once they arrive downtown<sup>4</sup> and therefore the need to accommodate the pedestrian movements internally and external to the parking areas are equally important. The current configuration of the parking throughout the downtown area makes pedestrian connectivity very difficult, and in general does not provide for clear pedestrian pathways to the adjacent streets and businesses.

Through the various discussions, workshops, and site investigations, all indicators and opinions suggest that the current volume of available parking spaces is adequate to serve the existing need. It has also been noted that parking capacity could be increased with more efficient use of available space.

**Parking Structure: Can it be Cost-Effective?**  
The terms of reference, and various discussions throughout the project have questioned whether a parking structure would be a viable option in the downtown core. In general, a structure would not be a practical or cost effective parking solution given the available space in the core, the absence of any existing parking fees in the downtown area, and the potential to provide additional parking in peripheral areas if required.

#### *On-Street Parking*

In general, the presence of on street parking in a downtown core where many smaller businesses are present is considered positive. On street parking is generally easy to access, visible, close to destinations, provides buffer between on street traffic and pedestrians, slows down street traffic, creates a “commercial” environment as opposed to a thoroughfare.

Nonetheless, it is important that on-street parking be used in an appropriate and efficient manner that provides distinct benefits, while eliminating any potential negative impacts on vehicle and pedestrian safety. There are clearly, select areas around town where on-street parking should be eliminated. In particular:

- Areas that have adequate dedicated parking lots that have adequate spaces;
- Areas where the parking spot compromises the operations or safety of the adjacent street or intersection;
- Narrow side street locations where there is ample parking in adjacent parking lots.



### *Off Street Parking*

There is a clear need to consolidate individual parking areas to larger lots that practice better access management and circulation principles. The larger consolidated lots also generate opportunities to improve the aesthetic qualities of parking areas, better coordinate vehicles and particularly pedestrians, and improve external way finding to the parking lot.

Improvements to the internal parking environment should also be coordinated with external improvements such as providing clear and consistent way finding signs, clear, well marked and convenient access points, and initiatives to promote travelling to and stopping in the core of Amherst.

Consideration should also be given to the distribution of staff versus customer parking. While staff have a direct interest in being in the core to earn a living, visitor to the core decide to return or not based on the experiences that have. In this regard, reserving parking nearest to the business for customer parking can provide a significant benefit to those visiting downtown. Staff parking still needs to be present, but preferably at locations that are somewhat removed from direct location of the establishment.

### *Trucks in the Downtown Area*

2 parts – through truck traffic and deliveries.

- Issue at workshops surveys
- Some streets and intersections are relatively narrow
- Volumes are a relatively low based on counts
- It is downtown therefore elimination / minimizing through truck traffic is generally considered preferable. Deliveries should remain in appropriate areas.
- Restrictions such as truck restrictions could be placed on main corridors to eliminate as through routes.
- A truck route around the downtown would be preferable.

Enforcement at some level would be required  
Opportunities and Recommendations

Road Closures and Modifications

In the project scope of work and through various discussions, consideration has been given to the closure of some roadways or making modifications to or from one-way streets in the downtown area.

In general, municipalities are moving away from one-way street systems for a variety of reasons including that they may be confusing to unfamiliar drivers, access to parking areas or business may be more difficult, they typically promote higher speeds, and they limit the visibility of retailers.

In downtown Amherst, the majority of streets are two way streets with the exception of King Street and Prince Street which are two parallel one way streets running the same south to north direction. There appears to be some significant opportunity in this area to modify these streets and their general function. Prince Street starts at the T-intersection at Church Street and extends to the north to Havelock Street. Immediately north of Havelock is a parking lot access. Given the adjacent King Street and Prince Arthur Street, Prince Street has limited usefulness, and certainly has little if any impact on traffic capacities through the area. Closure or modification to this street is expected to have limited impact on the adjacent business or circulation patterns in the area.

King Street Corridor

King Street has the potential for form part of a north south corridor through the Downtown when considered in conjunction with Ratchford Street and Electric Street. There appears to be a significant opportunity to upgrade this corridor to include two way vehicle traffic as well as promoting the corridor as a pedestrian and vulnerable road user friendly environment. This corridor should include consideration of such options as a narrower curbed cross section, with bike lanes or wide curb lanes, substantial pedestrian facilities (potentially the construction of a multiuse trail), as well as an improved roadside environment.

### *Parking*

Recommendation: On street parking should be retained and promoted where appropriate, has a distinct benefit, and does not compromise safety or operation performance of the adjacent and surrounding roads and vulnerable road user facilities. In this context, a number of locations of on-street parking should be removed or revised to respect intersection functional areas.

In order to formalize on street parking, consideration may be given to the use of bulb-outs in the vicinity of intersections and at other start and end points of parallel parking strings. The bulb outs provide a number of distinct benefits include a physical definition of on street parking areas, reduced pedestrian crossing width intersections, improved aesthetic quality, and opportunities for additional landscaping.

Recommendation: A comprehensive parking strategy addressing the consolidation of parking areas, improved efficiencies and capacities of parking area, and the most appropriate spatial use of the parking areas is recommended. Any such strategy will require a means of promoting and permitting adjacent land owners to work together to create quality parking spaces / environments that make the best use of available space.

Clearly, this process must walk hand-in-hand with the future changes to buildings and land parcels in the downtown area as new buildings may reduce the available parking and the removal of older buildings may provide additional opportunities for parking.







# Centre First: Downtown Amherst Action Strategy

>> *Final Report*

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**EKISTICS PLANNING & DESIGN**

1 Starr Lane, Dartmouth, NS B2Y 4V7  
t 902.461.2525 ext:102 f 902.465.3131

