

## 6.9 DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

### 6.9.1 OVERVIEW

The Downtown is defined as the area bounded on the north by the North Saskatchewan River, on the west by the westerly block face of 2nd Avenue West, on the south by the south block face of 15th Street West and on the east by 2nd Avenue East. The surrounding neighbourhoods include: Midtown, West Flat, West Hill and East Hill.

The key element for the Downtown to continue as a prominent retail and commercial location is the need to create more of a “twenty-four hour” presence. Substantially increasing the residential base within Downtown and positioning it as a product different from competing retail centres could achieve this goal. The residential stock could include upper floor, loft style units. Vacant or underutilized properties and buildings represent potentially viable untapped resources for revitalization and redevelopment, as well as prime opportunities to expand and diversify the housing stock.

Prince Albert residents have identified a number of objectives for the Downtown as a whole, many of which are complementary. For example, the enhancement of the public environment supports the attainment of other objectives for the Downtown, such as increasing the residential population, and encouraging greater cultural, commercial and retail activity. As well, “theming” of the Downtown was considered to be of importance to residents as well.

Encouraging infill housing in the Downtown is a major goal that has implications for the social and economic function of the city. Downtown housing provides the critical mass or customer base needed to support strong local retail and commercial activities that would in turn attract more people to the Downtown. Establishment of a strong residential population base can also increase the safety of Downtown streets and public spaces by providing more “eyes on the street”. Ground level units would remain residential as per the *Downtown Strategic Plan, 2003*.

The concentration and accessibility of Downtown amenities, and the freedom from house and yard maintenance, offers a unique quality of life attractive to singles, families without young children, seniors, empty nesters and others who may not want the responsibilities of a single-unit dwelling or home ownership. Many Downtown advocates in North America have projected a continued demand for senior housing projects in urban centres as the “baby-boom” generation approaches retirement and transitions in the “empty nester” category. Senior housing developments in the Downtown are already benefiting from this.

In order for the Downtown to retain its identity as a consumer attraction, future development should endeavor to reinforce, conserve and enhance the Downtown as a retail, financial, professional and personal service centre in Prince Albert. In addition to containing niche markets, specialty shops, and a myriad of services, the Downtown should also accommodate larger anchor stores and entertainment facilities. Such development would complement higher density residential and government buildings that would result in greater use of the Downtown. The intent is to ensure the survival, upgrade and enhancement of the Downtown as a main economic centre of the city.

The city has been fortunate to have many anchors in the Downtown including government buildings such as City Hall, the Provincial Court House, the Forestry Centre, the E.A. Rawlinson Centre, major banking institutions, a library, the Museum, the Art Centre and many multi-use office buildings (e.g. the McIntosh Building and the Gateway Mall) that provide the critical mass to attract additional commercial investment in the Downtown. Meeting this challenge requires City officials, developers, and businesses to explore creative options in terms of land assembly, marketing, redevelopment and strategic mixed use initiatives.

Public investment in civic buildings, including historic structures, can also be a vital factor in the revitalization and redevelopment of the Downtown. The placement of public and civic buildings demonstrates the government's development priorities and sends a message to developers, investors and the rest of the community that the Downtown is a desirable investment opportunity. Drawing inspiration from the past through development of a themed approach to Downtown planning will further create a vibrant investment opportunity. To date, the City has continued to support the downtown by concentrating essential government services in the Downtown and through its Downtown Business Improvement District Association (PADIDA), several ongoing revitalization efforts are taking place. Not only does the placement of public buildings determine the residents' accessibility to such services, but it serves to increase the critical mass of the Downtown area and also acts as a catalyst for further economic development.

### **6.9.2 DOWNTOWN MIXED USE**

Downtown mixed use allows for high density residential and office space with ground floor or multi-storey commercial. The purpose of this land use is to allow for small scale (typically locally owned) businesses to provide the main local commercial services to the entire city. The combination of office and residential space above the ground floor is intended to bring more people downtown and safely animate the area 24 hours a day.

The downtown mixed use area consists of higher density mixed use buildings that accommodate commercial and residential units. It has a tight network of streets, with wide sidewalks, street furniture, lighting fixtures, steady street tree planting and buildings set close to the sidewalks.

This area has a high level of habitat fragmentation and human presence that minimizes potential wildlife conflict. This landscape has the smallest per capita impact on the natural landscape. Green roofs and landscaping should have a positive contribution to the diversity of smaller species including birds and insects. Natural wildlife diversity gives way to places and spaces that create and enhance cultural diversity.

#### **Goal:**

Maintain the Downtown as a centre of city and regional economic activities - retail, financial, administrative, cultural and commercial. Future development in the Downtown shall reinforce, conserve and enhance this function. Other land uses such as high density residential or government buildings, which complement the function of the area and which result in greater use of the Downtown area, shall be encouraged.

**Policies:**

- i. Promote mixed uses in the Downtown including office, retail, hotels, housing, culture, entertainment and recreation.

**Goal:**

Continue to control horizontal expansion of the Downtown while its redevelopment at higher densities is encouraged (where applicable). The purpose of the goal is to concentrate commercial development in a defined area and to protect established neighbourhoods such as Midtown and West Flat from commercial encroachment.

**Policies:**

- i. Ensure expansion of the Downtown into the residential area to the east of the Downtown is limited and undue encroachment is prevented. Expansion of the Downtown may proceed in an orderly and contiguous manner as far as 2nd Avenue East.
- ii. Improve 13th Street East as a connector between the Downtown and the Cornerstone Mall with minimal impact on the residential area; and
- iii. Improve transit connectivity between the Downtown and the Cornerstone Mall.

**Goal:**

Ensure the continued development of a vibrant and active Downtown with unique and attractive residential districts and diverse entertainment, recreation and cultural opportunities.

**Policies:**

- i. Address issues such as streetscape improvements, vehicle and pedestrian circulation, and renovation, redevelopment/conservation of older structures where appropriate in the Downtown;
- ii. Develop urban design guidelines appropriate to the Downtown environment with respect to the location, function, scale and exterior finishing of new buildings to ensure that they are compatible with existing development; and
- iii. Support active and vital riverfront development that would enhance the Downtown, reinforce the historical significance of the riverfront, and acts as a catalyst for resident and tourist attractions.

**Goal:**

Enhance and improve the role of Central Avenue as Prince Albert's Main Street.

**Policies:**

- i. Reinforce the historic significance of Central Avenue and adjacent corridors through the encouragement of the preservation of older and historic buildings;

- ii. Revitalize Central Avenue by promoting continuous complementary retail and service uses at ground floor level and conversion of upper floor spaces to housing and other uses; and
- iii. Promote diversity of uses such as theatres, restaurants and pubs that would animate the Downtown without unduly interfering with the residential use after normal working hours.

**Goal:**

Reinforce the role of City Hall, the Arts Centre and the Forestry Centre as the Downtown's civic centre.

**Policies:**

- i. Improve the public environment and accessibility by concentrating civic buildings, offices and public spaces to provide a civic focal point for the Downtown;
- ii. Ensure attractive pedestrian linkages through streetscape improvements along 11th Street West (Civic Esplanade) to connect City Hall, the Arts Centre and the Forestry Centre to the E.A. Rawlinson Centre and the Provincial Courthouse; and
- iii. Create special lighting for City Hall, the Arts Centre and the Forestry Centre to highlight their architecture and provide safe, ambient lighting for pedestrians.

**Goal:**

Continue to promote the Downtown as a potential tourism destination area and accommodate future tourism development opportunities.

**Policies:**

- i. Support historic preservation and tourism efforts such as events and activities that showcase local history of Prince Albert and Aboriginal people with guided or self-guided tours of Downtown's historic buildings and sites in the Downtown; and
- ii. Encourage a highly animated, mixed use district focusing on the North Saskatchewan riverfront, historic River Street and the E.A. Rawlinson Centre.

**Goal:**

Enhance pedestrian and vehicular environment on 2nd Avenue West and address the importance of this corridor as a major entranceway into the heart of the city.

**Policies:**

- i. Identify and recognize the importance of hard and soft landscape features within the pedestrian environment that would provide a more memorable and distinct Downtown experience; and
- ii. Identify and provide measures to improve public safety, including street and pedestrian lighting, accessibility ramps and clearly defined pedestrian crosswalks.

**Goal:**

Promote housing development in the Downtown.

**Policies:**

- i. Support a variety of housing choices for a range of ages and income groups;
- ii. Encourage mixed use development where appropriate that integrates residential, retail, service businesses, and institutions needed by Downtown residents; and
- iii. Support infilling of vacant or underutilized land where feasible and consistent with the provisions of the Zoning Bylaw.

**Goal:**

Promote a business friendly environment that fosters a diverse and strong local economy that supports existing businesses and promotes new business. Successful Downtown development requires the involvement of many private, public and non-profit groups and individuals, who foster and build community support for achieving the vision.

**Policies:**

- i. Encourage business associations to participate in the revitalization strategies and additional investment in the Downtown; and
- ii. Review the existing Zoning Bylaw with the intention of facilitating the development review process of applications in the Downtown. Reduce the number of discretionary uses while establishing clear standards and guidelines for development that would fit within the Downtown.

**Goal:**

Implement recommendations regarding parking from the *Downtown Strategic Plan, 2003*.

**Policies:**

- i. Restrict the development of parking lots and parking lot access to side streets off Central Avenue; and
- ii. Review the parking meter supply and rates in the Downtown on a regular basis with a view to meeting Downtown parking demands.