

Downtown Ponoka Action Plan

DERELICT BUILDINGS, VACANCIES AND PROPERTY UPKEEP

It is important that the overall effort to revitalize Downtown is not hampered by the unsightly appearance of existing buildings and properties in the mixed use/commercial area. Vacancy in available commercial space is natural and available spaces need to be advertised. The Town owns lands that can be used to demonstrate the desired urban design and architectural treatment.

1. Encourage realtors and property owners to market their vacant building space in a positive manner.
2. Inventory each block in the mixed use and commercial area for blank or roughly finished walls that are visible from the public sidewalk
3. As a stop gap measure, create a program to build false storefronts on vacant lots where there is a space between two buildings.
4. As a longer term measure, encourage building development on empty lots to close gaps in the street façade.
5. Work with the Canadian Pacific Railway to develop buildings along the west side of railway along 50 Street.
6. Use the Town owned lands along 50 Street that are surplus to any public function to showcase the desired form of buildings and architectural treatments.
7. Establish a program for land assembly by the Town of Ponoka with the goal of acquiring abutting small parcels of land as they come on the market and then selling larger blocks of contiguous land to prospective developers.
8. Implement a brownfield redevelopment program based on the recent changes to the Municipal Government Act.
9. Establish a façade improvement program to encourage upgrading of the publicly visible fronts and sides of existing buildings.
10. Ensure the Town's bylaws relating to unsightly premises and property upkeep are current and enforced.



DESIRED MIXED/COMMERCIAL USES

There is strong desire to see more activities and range of mixed and commercial uses in the downtown. Many suggestions focus on re-establishing retail activities that used to be present. Downtown Ponoka must strive to distinguish itself with unique goods and services and a high quality experience to attract local patrons and patrons from the Calgary-Edmonton corridor.

1. Establish an incubator space to encourage small scale business to locate in the downtown.
2. Undertake a retail gap analysis to identify those businesses and services that may be missing in the mix of commercial activities and may be viable for Downtown Ponoka.
3. Market to a broad customer base throughout the Calgary-Edmonton corridor.
4. Create and implement a marketing strategy that can be used by businesses and the community to promote Downtown Ponoka to local and broader markets.
5. Make sure the Land Use Bylaw allows as broad a range of compatible uses in the mixed use/commercial areas of Downtown Ponoka.
6. Allow for the transition of existing residential buildings to a mixed or commercial use along 48 Avenue and on the periphery of the mixed use/commercial area.
7. A mixture of uses is encouraged along the commercial streets to add variety and interest for pedestrians and passers-by.
8. Redevelop the "old hospital site" on the north end of 50 Street to form an anchor or draw to downtown by hosting activities that attract people.
9. Explore the creation of a community development corporation with the mandate to invest in opportunities and take an active role in the redevelopment of Downtown.

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EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

Attractive physical spaces in Downtown Ponoka will only go so far in attracting people. Organizing and holding special events offers a way to get people who otherwise may not visit or travel through Downtown during their usual routine to visit. The hope is that the special event builds up their familiarity with the area and entices them to come back on a regular basis.

1. As initiatives and capital improvements are completed in Downtown Ponoka, for example the construction of a civic plaza, host a celebration to mark the occasion and get word out about the improvement.
2. Working with other community organizations, establish a calendar of festivals and special events currently taking place and assess opportunities to fill in and have at least three annual events in Downtown.
3. Select and design special events that have the greatest possible connection to businesses in the Downtown area. This includes opportunities for sponsorship and demonstration of the services and products available in the Downtown area.
4. Make use of the street for space to host special events such as an outdoor farmers market.



LOCAL PARKS AND COMMUNITY RECREATION FACILITIES

Besides the river valley, Downtown Ponoka has four smaller parks and open space areas. Some of these spaces have defined roles and functions and some do not. In each case there is opportunity to incorporate them into the overall concept for Downtown.

The proximity of the major community recreation facilities to Downtown Ponoka is an advantage in terms of drawing people to the area and serving existing and future Downtown residents. Physical connection to these facilities and cross marketing to visitors at the Aquaplex and Community Wellness Centre offers potential.

1. Central Park should continue to serve as a local/neighbourhood park serving residents of Downtown.
2. The site of the Central Boosting Station at the corner of 53 Avenue and Highway 2A should be landscaped in a way that matches the features of the major commercial street design.
3. Siding 14/Tractor Park should be redesigned to create defined pedestrian access to draw people into and through the park.
4. The park space directly south of the Seniors Drop In Centre should be the subject of a design process to assess the long term future of this space.
5. The skate park should receive re-investment to make it more appealing. This includes the addition of some shade trees and, if possible, replacement of the existing perimeter fencing with a more aesthetically pleasing barrier.



SAFETY DOWNTOWN AND CPTED

For the most part, Downtown Ponoka is a safe place to visit, live and work. On occasion there are incidents of undesirable behaviour. These can be managed through enforcement of community norms and expectations. There is also a role for the physical design of a space to deter undesirable behaviors and to promote a greater sense of safety and security.

1. An assessment should be undertaken for each of the mixed use/commercial blocks in the Downtown to identify items that could be altered to better secure a property or contribute to a higher degree of safety. For example, installing motion activated lighting in back lanes in small areas that may be screened from plain view.
2. The Town should review its Licensing Bylaw to ensure that it adequately addresses ways to mitigate potential negative behaviours associated with business activities in the Downtown.
3. In applying the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design it is important to balance the desire for security of property with attractive building design and architectural interest on the street.



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DESIGN AND FUNCTION OF STREETS

Streets in Downtown Ponoka perform a variety of roles. They serve as corridors for vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle access to properties and throughout the area. They connect the area to abutting residential and open space areas and key community facilities such as the arena and Stampede Grounds.

1. Develop a comprehensive streetscape design for those streets identified as having a major commercial function.
2. Consider the following in the streetscape design:
 - wide sidewalks for pedestrian movement, plantings and furnishings, and signs;
 - bulbs at corners to shorten crossing distances and create space for benches and landscaping;
 - street trees to create a sense of continuity and soften the built environment;
 - landscaping strips across the frontage of vacant lots to frame vistas at the ends of streets;
 - setting aside spaces for the future installation of public art and wayfinding facilities;
 - ability to add and vary flowers and decorations on a seasonal and annual basis;
 - retaining as much on street parallel parking as possible; and
 - increasing universal access to buildings from the sidewalk.

3. Where sidewalks are sufficiently wide allow for the use of the sidewalk in front of a business for the following types of activity:

- flower pots and planters
- a-board signs
- display of sale items
- benches, chairs and small tables



4. Where sidewalks are not wide enough to accommodate a seasonal use, allow the use of temporary sidewalk diversions through the parallel parking spaces.
5. Allow for the temporary closure of streets to host events like an outdoor farmers market, sidewalk sales, or block party.
6. Review the function of the various intersections in and around the Downtown area and assess the need for and nature of any improvements, such as:
 - traffic control at the intersection of 50 Street and Highway 53
 - traffic control at the intersection of 48 Avenue and 51 Street
 - reducing the speed limit within the Downtown area
 - ensuring heavy truck traffic is not encouraged to use 50 Street



8. Boundary markers and entrance features should be designed and placed at select locations.
9. A wayfinding program should be undertaken to create better directional signage for the Downtown.



PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIVITY AND AMENITIES

Making Downtown more attractive for walking and making walking more convenient are crucial. The environment for pedestrians links to store fronts, parking areas, surrounding amenities and draws and the various public spaces. More connectivity and amenities to promote walkability is required.

1. Close the gaps between existing trail/path and sidewalk systems.
2. Add more trail looping around and in the river valley and incorporate the major streetscape treatment along 50 Street as part of the circulation loop.
3. As new sidewalks and trails are built, provide for universal access on the system including the creation of universal access into individual storefronts where possible.
4. Expanded sidewalks that have a role as a major pedestrian connector or corridor should have at least 6 feet width of clear walking surface consistently along the entire length of each block.
5. Provide formal path and sidewalk connections to the Stampede Grounds and the Community Wellness Centre along 54 Street, 48 Avenue and 45 Avenue Crescent and along Highway 53 to 50 Street.
6. Add a series of public washrooms and drinking fountains throughout the downtown to provide for the basic needs of pedestrians and encourage longer stays in the area.
7. Provide benches and places for pedestrians to rest along all major pedestrian routes.



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IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The overall implementation of the Downtown Ponoka Action Plan should consist of five parallel streams of activity. These are:

Capital Improvements – public space improvements led by the Town of Ponoka and private space improvements by individual property owners

Marketing and Promotions – ongoing efforts to get the word out about Downtown Ponoka and its offerings

Beautification – annual efforts on public and private lands to make Downtown attractive, inviting and safe

Special Events and Programming – annual efforts to bring people into the Downtown area

Stage Setting – research and initiatives that create the foundation for future changes

Within each category, a short list of projects should always be identified. As one project moves off the list another can be added. The selection of one-time projects for a given period may be based on available resources or expressions of interest by the volunteers who will be carrying it out. It is also important to be able to adjust and take advantage of unexpected opportunities that may arise.



The following is suggested as a starting point:

Capital Improvements

- Purchase and install benches and waste receptacles based on the approved streetscape design
- Identify the first one or two blocks to be redeveloped based on the approved streetscape design following assessment and identification of priorities for underground infrastructure upgrades; proceed with redevelopment (over several years)
- Design and secure funding for a civic plaza and shared space street along 49 Street; construct when funding available
- Design and install wayfinding facilities and signage

Marketing and Promotions

- Finalise theme and identity for marketing campaigns; convert website and prepare social media tools
- Develop marketing opportunities for a two year cycle and seek business support
- Launch first major promotion



Beautification

- Continue with hanging baskets and add low level planters where possible; encourage storefront additions (planters, bench) by individual businesses
- Continue with annual clean up events for commercial area and river valley; host volunteer barbeque in downtown
- Undertake CPTED and safety assessment for two blocks north and south of Chipman Avenue; continue throughout downtown
- Approach owners of buildings in need of repair to encourage regular maintenance

Special Events and Programming

- Establish calendar of events hosted throughout the community to find space for downtown events
- Arrange and host at least two small and one large event (e.g. outdoor farmers market throughout summer months and one larger festival type event like a sidewalk sale and celebration)

Stage Setting

- Start process to acquire lands in the river valley; acquire properties as financial resources allow
- Establish façade improvement and mural programs
- Explore creation of an incubator space
- Explore establishment of a community development corporation; if feasible create corporation



Thank you for attending the open house. Please fill in a comment form and share your thoughts with us.

