



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Introduction

In 2007 the Town of Ponoka lead a process to evaluate and assess the potential for revitalizing the downtown area. The resulting report, Retooling Downtown Ponoka, put forward many suggestions and ideas on how to make downtown more attractive. It established a vision based on a conceptual drawing of a more fully developed, compact commercial and mixed use area with more activities and connections to the river valley.

Unfortunately, little happened after the 2007 report and downtown today largely remains very similar to what is it was like in 2007. Some positive changes did take place such as the addition of more retail space and residential units. The community has expressed a desire to make further progress and to that end the Heritage & Downtown Revitalization Committee was established in late 2015 to be the lead in these efforts. In late 2016, the Downtown Ponoka Action Plan process got underway to assist the Heritage & Downtown Revitalization Committee in their role.

Purpose of Action Plan

1. To re-affirm the overall vision for Downtown Ponoka based on the 2007 Retooling Downtown Ponoka report
2. To update the suggestions and directions of the 2007 Retooling Downtown Ponoka report
3. To provide a framework for decision making and action in Downtown Ponoka to guide the community's efforts

Structure of Document

This document has been written to supplement and update the 2007 Retooling Downtown Ponoka report. Many of its observations pertaining to the challenges and possible opportunities facing Ponoka and downtown remain relevant today. This document picks up at the beginning of Chapter 3 of the 2007 report to re-affirm the vision and provide a more detailed set of actions for implementation based on broad topics.

Neither the 2007 Retooling Downtown Ponoka report nor this document should be treated as a static document. As circumstances facing downtown change there will be a need to adjust. Some initiatives may yield immediate results and others will take more time to come to fruition. Levels of resources committed to the efforts, be it public funding or volunteer time, will fluctuate. There is no single, right way to move forward.

"just start somewhere...I feel there is a lot of talk but people only get enthusiastic about something when they see things taking shape." (2017 survey respondent)



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

A Vision for Downtown Ponoka

“It is 2043 and twenty-five years have passed since the creation of the first version of the Downtown Action Plan. Downtown Ponoka is a lively, clean and active area with plenty to see and do for residents and visitors alike. The many small shops and services cater to patrons’ needs and special events draw people to the area from far away. Downtown Ponoka is a top choice to visit, shop, hang out and socialize with friends and fellow residents. Patrons and visitors enjoy a pleasant, attractive urban setting characterized by comfortable and appealing streetscapes and public places.”

Goal: to maintain and enhance the downtown core as the primary retail and commercial district for the town and surrounding region by:

- Creating a mixed use environment by making an aesthetically pleasing place to shop, work, live and play;
- Creating a sense of place through the development of a safe, clean and pedestrian friendly environment;
- Attracting new investment and businesses to the downtown and supporting the development of vacant lots and underutilized properties;
- Encouraging the restoration and preservation of historically significant buildings;
- Providing an adequate supply of parking for customers;
- Working in conjunction with downtown merchants to address issues such as uniform shopping hours, customer service, business streetscapes and promotions; and
- Encouraging business owners to take a proactive role in creating engaging activities, special events and entertainment opportunities in the downtown core.

Master Plan Concept

Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of what the long term future development of Downtown Ponoka could be like. It includes many concepts and suggestions. The precise look of specific properties and streets may vary from the concept. It is intended as a means of relating the broad vision to the physical space and is not meant to give set direction on the development of individual properties.

The prime idea conveyed in the development concept is to create more critical mass in the form of building area and spaces to accommodate more activities and more people. This involves adding residential units, attracting anchor tenants and creating draws to the area. Working towards the development concept will take many years. Success will depend on the efforts made and the economic climate over those years.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Core ideas for the future of Downtown Ponoka include:

- Encourage building on vacant lots and more intense use (more floor area) of properties
- Create a central, civic square for celebrations and special events
- Improve the streetscapes and appearances of streets to make them more inviting and appealing
- Plant more trees along streets
- Build more pedestrian and bicycle connections and links to surrounding areas
- Put civic uses like the Town Hall in the downtown area
- Develop the River Valley to create attractions and draws to the area
- Promote mixed used development (example: residential and commercial in same building)
- Increase residential density in the downtown area
- Provide adequate, attractive and functional parking areas for customers
- Build up the main commercial corridor along 50 Street

Land Use Policy Areas

Different parts of the downtown area will play different roles in fulfilling the long term vision. Figure 2 shows six (6) distinct areas where varying land use policies and directions should be applied.

A central aspect is the development of a commercial and mixed use core that encompasses the existing development between 50 Street and 51 Street and extends along major travel routes. This includes a long term focus on 50 Street and the opportunity to add an anchor/draw to the north end and gradually fill the space between. Similar commercial expansion or transition along 48 Avenue continues the trends already started along this entranceway to the core area.

Residential areas will play a key role in the provision of a more intense pattern of residential development over time. In the residential areas closest to the commercial/mixed use it may take the form of medium and high density using multi-family residential types of buildings. It may also take the form of residential use in combination with other uses within the mixed use/commercial area.

Parks and Open Spaces and Recreation sites provide opportunity for interesting areas with their own unique character and can draw people to the area. Existing spaces are shown on Figure 2 with the Battle River Valley being the most significant asset.

The existing industrial park is acknowledged and is not likely to be relocated. While close to downtown, the industrial use does not pose a significant barrier to revitalization of the overall area.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Role and Function of Streets

The public street is the one item that can tie the various parts of the downtown together to move towards the future vision. Well designed and attractive streets convey customers, visitors and residents through the area. The uniform and regular use of design elements like landscaping, sidewalk patterns and light standards gives a sense of a unique place in the community. Attractive, tree lined streets appeal to pedestrians and help blend what can sometimes be a diverse architecture along a street.

Figure 3 lays out the anticipated function and approach to the many streets within downtown. These include:

Provincial Highway – major thoroughfare managed by the Province and subject to functional plans for future intersection changes and landscaping upgrades; opportunity to approach the Province about incorporating similar landscaping and streetscape elements once a design is selected

Major Road – Through Traffic – streets that allow for the flow of traffic into and through the downtown area; for the most part existing streets are attractive and already tree lined with the intent to maintain their character and function

Major Commercial Street – Full Streetscape Treatment – streets that connect most of the mixed use and commercial core and intended to be redeveloped over time to create a more pleasant and attractive space based on the selected streetscape design

Major Commercial Street – Transitional Streetscape Treatment – streets that link the residential areas to the mixed use and commercial area and form an edge or boundary between these areas and intended to be redeveloped using a reduced version of the selected streetscape design; also, proposed to serve as a major connection route to the Community Wellness Centre and Aquaplex sites

Residential Street – streets that mainly have residential uses along them and are intended to retain their existing tree lined character

Industrial Street – street that serves the existing industrial park and not intended for redevelopment based on the selected streetscape design

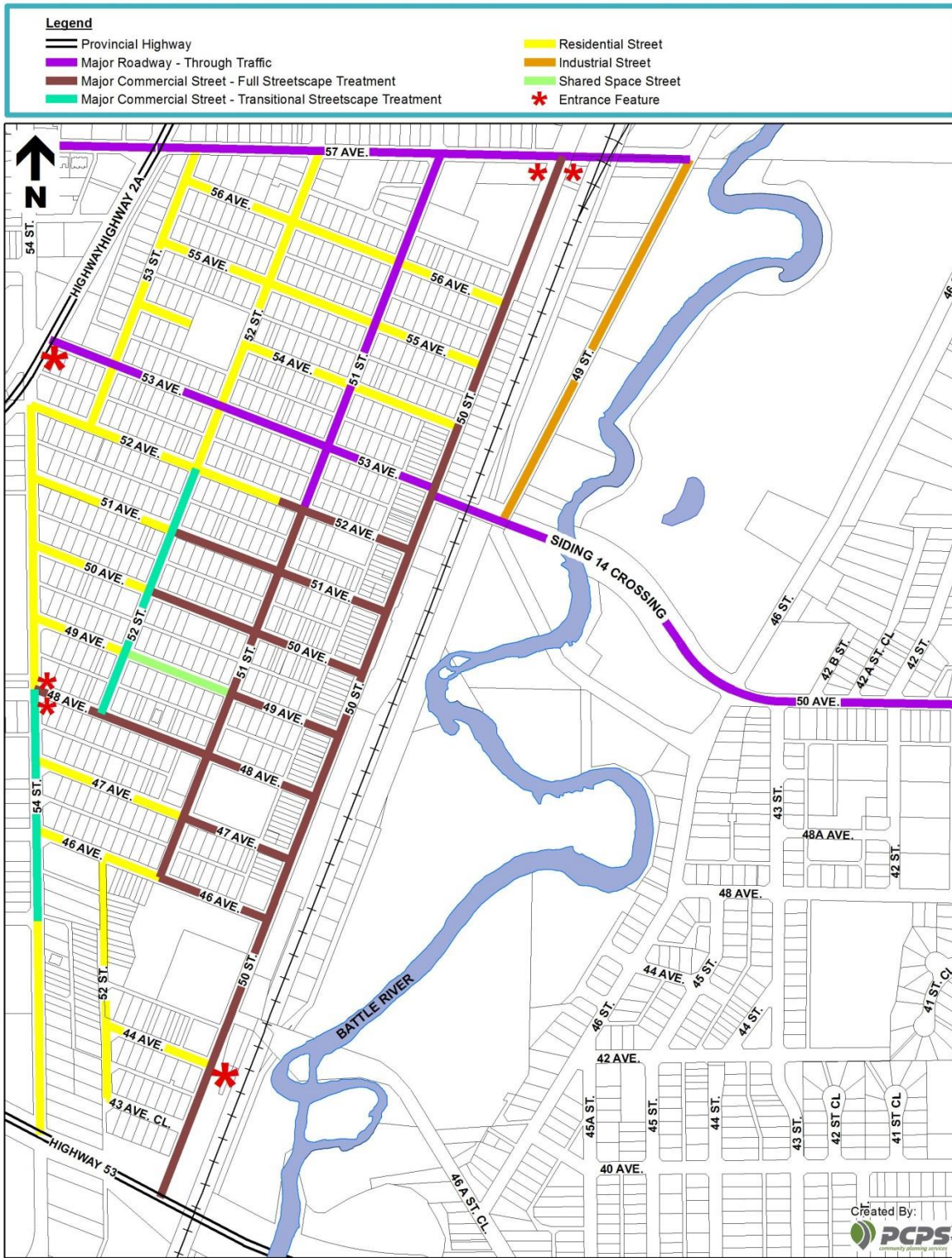
Shared Space Street – street that is intended to provide local vehicle access but have the ability to be closed off to favour pedestrian only use during special events; design of the space may draw on elements used in the selected streetscape design for the major commercial streets and may include its own unique elements such as textured or patterned road surface

Figure 3 also shows the location of future entrance features. These serve as key markers to convey the sense that one is entering a distinct part of the community. The feature may include signage tying into an overall wayfinding scheme and unique items like banners or a marker post.



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Figure 3: Street Classifications





Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Pedestrian Circulation and Connectivity

The ability to walk and move through downtown without relying on an automobile is a key part of the long term vision. An attractive and well connected pedestrian circulation system is critical in getting people out of their cars and walking about. Figure 4 shows the overall concept for pedestrian circulation.

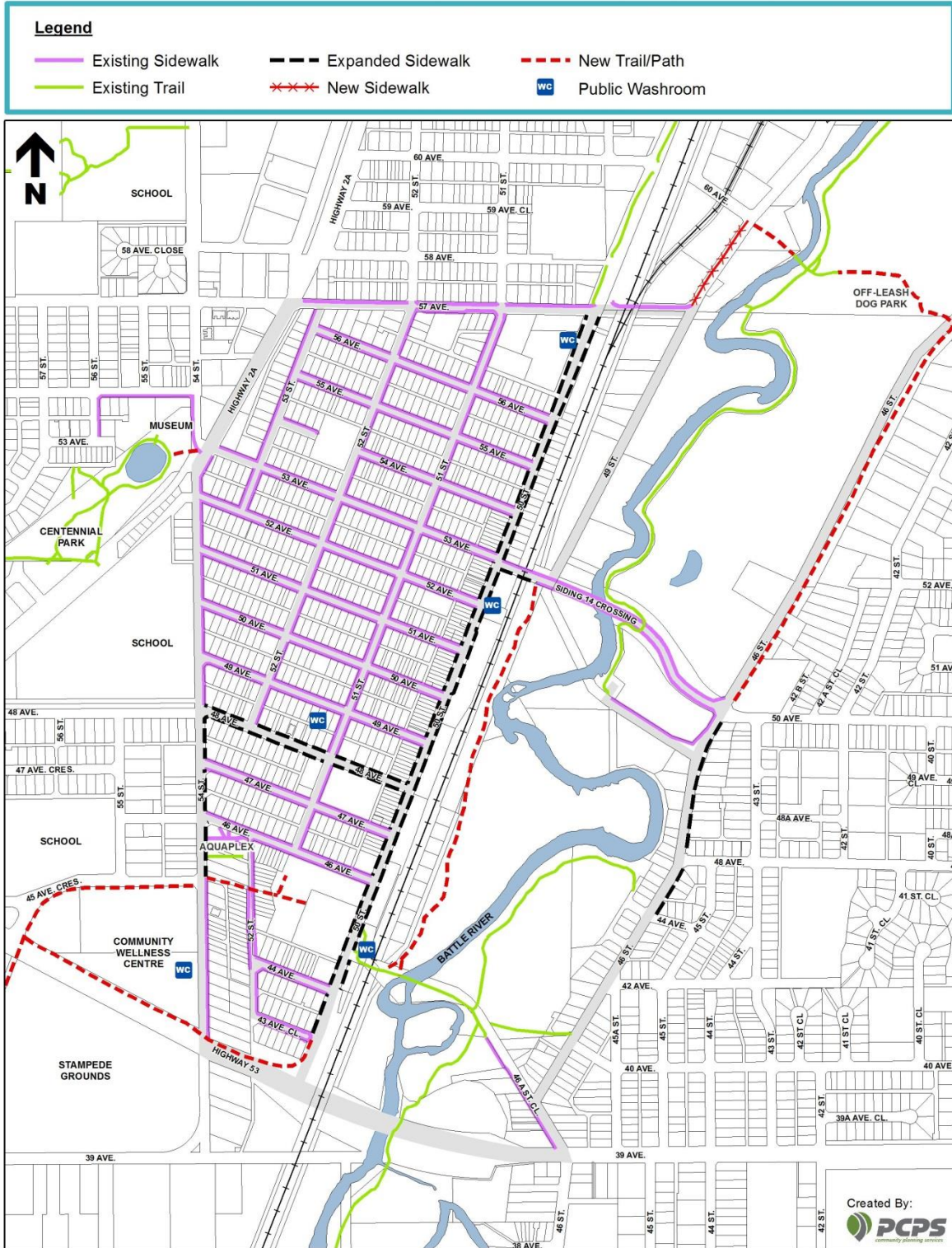
Key ideas and directions are:

- Maintaining the grid network of existing local sidewalks throughout the residential and mixed use and commercial areas
- Creating more connections and opportunities for different routes into and through downtown
- Filling in gaps in the sidewalk and trail network such as connecting the paths in Centennial Park to the sidewalk along 53 Avenue
- Providing a path and sidewalk from the IGA site to 45 Avenue Crescent and then along 45 Avenue Crescent to the Stampede Grounds
- Providing a path connection from the south end of 50 Street along the north side of Highway 53 to access the Community Wellness Centre and Stampede Grounds
- Providing expanded sidewalks (meaning a minimum 6ft width) along key routes such as 54 Street, 48 Avenue and 50 Street to make better connections to the trail system
- Adding new sidewalks, expanded sidewalks and trails to the trail system within and just outside the river valley to strengthen the connection to downtown and provide more walking route options; includes a new trail connecting to the gazebo by the old dam site
- Providing public washroom facilities at key locations to encourage walking and longer visits to the downtown



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Figure 4: Pedestrian Circulation Concept





Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Topic: Attracting People to Downtown Ponoka – The Customer Experience

Context:

The success of Downtown Ponoka depends on the ability to attract people to the area. The reasons people come to Downtown are varied and a broad, multi-faceted approach will be needed. Some people will come to enjoy the pleasant physical setting; some people will come to their favorite restaurant or retailer. Others will come for special events or to visit a friend who lives close to Downtown. Some people will come out of desire to support local business and some people will visit as part of a weekend day trip based on word of mouth or a sense of exploration.

There is no single action or solution that will make Downtown Ponoka successful. It will take efforts on many fronts. The two most important ingredients for this effort are a determination to succeed and perseverance.

Suggested Actions:

- Action A1: Provide a high quality experience. This relates to the nature of the goods and services provided and the type of customer experience that is offered.
- Action A2: Expand business hours beyond 6pm to the highest degree possible. Communicate regularly about the businesses and services that a customer can access after 5pm.
- Action A3: As businesses, coach and support each other in offering high quality experiences to all customers; even if they do not make a purchase. Hold “business after hour” events or “café sessions” to encourage as much cross-marketing between businesses as possible.
- Action A4: Demonstrate pride and quality by creating an attractive store front appearance that draws people in. This can include the quality of building architecture, the use of window displays, clear and attractive signage, seasonal decorations, and flower pots and benches in front of the business.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Topic: Built Heritage and Architectural Guidelines

Context:

Downtown Ponoka hosts many of the community's historic buildings and sites. The heritage inventory conducted under the Alberta Municipal Heritage Partnership Program provides a starting point for decisions on individual sites. The architectural guidelines supplied through the Alberta Main Street Programme provide direction on how renovation of existing and new building construction can reflect traditional commercial building design.

The challenge for Downtown Ponoka is to preserve its connections to its past as part of what sets Ponoka apart from any other Central Alberta town. This sense of history can be an attraction or draw for some; however, not all structures were constructed or maintained in a manner that will allow their continued use. Reinvestment to create useable commercial and mixed use space and resulting changes to individual buildings and sites is expected.

Suggested Actions:

- Action B1: In setting the expectations for building construction and redevelopment combine aspects of preserving the best examples of traditional building style and providing direction to new buildings to fit in with the street or add visual interest on their own.
- Action B2: Create a heritage themed interpretative walk or self-guided tour brochures/website.
- Action B3: Implement the Downtown Design Guidelines created through the Main Street Program and the Retooling Downtown Ponoka report for the mixed use/commercial precinct. The intent is to give direction to building owners and the developers of new buildings about the community's expectations regarding the traditional elements that are favoured in design and appearance of buildings. This includes adding the guidelines to the Town's Land Use Bylaw. (see accompanying Central Commercial District).
- Action B4: Ensure that proposed demolition of buildings that are on the heritage inventory receive sufficient scrutiny prior to approval of any proposed demolition or renovation. In the case of demolition, this should include the ability to slow the process and allow the Town to determine if it wishes to intervene to preserve the building. Intervention by the Town may include purchase of the property and building or a conditional grant to refurbish and maintain the building. (Note: see accompanying heritage overlay)



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Action B5: If a building on the heritage inventory is not structurally sound and cannot be salvaged for meaningful, continued use then the replacement building should incorporate some elements of the original building's appearance and design. This may include echoing rooflines, window and door spacing, use of similar building cladding and similar approaches.

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Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Topic: Urban Design and Site Layout

Context:

The proper placement of buildings on a site and their relation to the public space can make a significant contribution to the attractiveness and sense of comfort in an outdoor space. In a traditional downtown setting, this means framing the street with buildings along the edge to form a street wall. The sense of uniformity and enclosure gives the area a different feel. Building mass, especially at grade, is an important ingredient to making downtown feel compact and full of activity. In a residential setting, sensitive design it can mean providing for a gradual transition from one form of housing and density to another.

Suggested Actions:

- Action C1: Promote the development and infilling of street walls wherever possible within the mixed use and commercial area. Many of these opportunities are shown in the Master Plan Concept (Figure 1). The Land Use Bylaw should include requirements to pull building fronts to the front of their lot and extend across the entire lot frontage.
- Action C2: On-site parking, if desired by the developer of a property, should be located behind or to the side of buildings. Parking along the edge of a sidewalk should be separated through the use of a low fence, hedge or landscaping bed. On larger sites, a liner building (narrow building) should be considered to shield the view of the parking area.
- Action C3: Favour building construction at grade over parking lot construction. Create a parking management plan for Downtown addressing the supply and operating considerations for private and public parking (see accompanying document). Update the parking management plan as needed.
- Action C4: Where a property has access to a rear lane, this access should be used as much as possible for on-site parking and utilitarian functions such as solid waste collection. Where the building itself cannot shield these items from view from the public street, screening in the form of fencing and landscaping should be provided.
- Action C5: Take advantage of opportunities to create terminating vistas at the end of streets. This can be accomplished with building placement and with permanent or temporary placement of landscaping or a key feature such as a piece of public art.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Action C6: Encourage two storey building construction throughout the mixed use and commercial area. Building construction greater than two floors should be encouraged to locate in the central part of the mixed use and commercial area.

Action C7: Consider the effects of micro-climate when siting buildings and mitigate negative impacts on pedestrians, such as winter winds, as much as possible.

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Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Topic: The Battle River Valley

Context:

The valley along the Battle River offers tremendous potential for an interesting open space area along the entire east edge of Downtown. Parts of the river valley are publicly owned and are being used for public activities such as the existing trails, ball diamonds and soccer pitch. Other parts remain under private ownership and may be farmed or kept in a natural state.

The river valley area forms the floodway for the Battle River; it poses significant constraints on the nature of uses appropriate for the area. Activities which directly impact the bed and shore and function of the river itself require consultation and approval of Federal and Provincial government departments. Concerns about the health of the river and the impact of future uses should be a prime consideration in setting out the long term use of and investment in the river valley lands.

Suggested Actions:

- Action D1: The Town should start a process to negotiate public access to or acquire ownership of all lands in the river valley that are not currently owned by the Town. The top priority should be lands needed to create a new trail running north-south along the east side of the railway.
- Action D2: The trail system in the river valley should be expanded to add a new trail running north-south along the east side of the railway. This trail segment links the two crossing points from 50 Street into the river valley, connects to the gazebo near the old dam site and establishes more route options for trail users. In combination with the improved sidewalk on the east side of 50 Street it provides a loop connecting activities on 50 Street to the river valley.
- Action D3: Recreation, tourist and cultural oriented activities should be added to the river valley lands over time as more publicly owned parcels become available. This may include opportunities for:
- skating, snow shoeing and cross country skiing in winter;
 - canoe launching facilities;
 - viewing platforms and fishing opportunities;
 - camping and day picnicking areas;
 - natural trails;
 - additional dog park or off-leash area; and
 - interpretative signage programs spanning natural environment and cultural features.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

- Action D4: Prior to any large, significant public investment in new facilities in the river valley, a more detailed design process should be undertaken to program the available lands and confirm the suitability of proposed activities for an area subject to flooding.
- Action D5: Trail user amenities within the river valley such as benches, landscaping and waste receptacles should be sited to create points of interest and comfort. For example, bench locations should be spaced to provide opportunities to rest, enjoy a view, be protected from strong winds and provide some protection from exposure to the sun. A review, and where necessary, enhancement of existing amenities should be carried out.
- Action D6: Continue to organize an annual river clean up along the banks of the Battle River and throughout all public lands in the river valley.

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Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Topic: Increasing Residential Downtown

Context:

The addition of housing and people residing within the mixed use/commercial precinct of Downtown and within the adjacent residential precincts can be of great benefit to Downtown. It adds people to the area for all hours of the day and increases the level of activity in the area. For some household types, proximity to the shops and services of Downtown fits well with their life circumstances and household needs.

There is potential to increase the amount of residential. Very few of the buildings in the mixed use/commercial precinct have a second floor containing residential units. The surrounding residential precincts have been experiencing some intensification as small detached dwellings have been replaced with duplexes or fourplexes.

Suggested Actions:

- Action E1: Allow residential dwellings in the mixed use/commercial areas either on floors above commercial space or located behind a commercial space on the ground floor. If necessary, amend the Land Use Bylaw to achieve this mix of use on individual sites.
- Action E2: Allow more medium and high density housing up to four floors in height in the areas between 50 Street and 51 Street north of 52 Avenue.
- Action E3: Encourage the development of secondary suites in the low density residential areas.
- Action E4: Recognize that the transition to more intense forms of housing along individual streets may take time and create a blend of housing forms and densities as properties undergo transformation one at a time. The long term goal is increased housing units rather than being fixed at present patterns of residential development.
- Action E5: Encourage a sensitive shift from one form and density of housing to another by regulating the transition in height and building mass and using streets and lanes as points of transition.
- Action E6: Promote the use of interesting architectural treatment of front and visible side façades for all new residential infill and intensification in the residential areas.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Action E7: Ensure that new building construction in the residential areas does not remove existing boulevard trees and retains mature front yard landscaping as much as possible.

Action E8: Explore the possibility of creating a housing construction incentive program for the creation of new residential units above the main floor within the mixed use and commercial area.

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Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Topic: Civic Plaza and Shared Space Street

Context:

There is broad recognition in the community that Downtown Ponoka needs a strong focal point and a well-defined gathering space capable of hosting scheduled events or just available for hanging out. A well done civic plaza can be a source of community pride and an attraction. Following the 2007 Retooling Downtown Ponoka report, the Town of Ponoka began acquiring land along the south side of 49 Avenue to construct a civic plaza. The recent demolition of the Town Office and pending relocation of the public library provides further opportunity for the design of a plaza.

In addition to a civic plaza, there is opportunity to change the nature of 49 Avenue and the parking area on the west end of the block to create a shared space street. This street would accommodate vehicle use and could be blended into the plaza to create a larger space for special events during which vehicle access would be restricted.

Suggested Actions:

Action F1: Explore the possibility of creating a civic plaza and shared space street that incorporates 49 Avenue between 50 Street and 51 Street and the publicly owned lands along the south side of the block. If the project appears possible, undertake a detailed design process.

Action F2: Take the following into consideration in designing the civic plaza and shared space street:

- micro climatic conditions such as the ability to favour sun exposure in the winter and shade in the summer;
- flexibility of space to accommodate a broad range of events;
- ability to frame or draw attention to the architecture of the Provincial Building;
- ability to visually draw people in from 48 Avenue (a main entranceway into the mixed use/commercial area);
- possible use of at least one water feature;
- ability to frame or define the edges of the plaza space with existing or planned buildings; and
- space for visitor amenities such as a publicly accessible washroom and drinking fountains.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Topic: Derelict Buildings, Vacancies and Property Upkeep

Context:

As Downtown Ponoka progresses towards its desired future, the pace of redevelopment and re-investment will vary from property to property. 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.

Suggested Actions:

- Action G1: Encourage realtors and property owners to market their vacant building space in a positive manner. This may include temporary blocking of window and doors with a screen, advertising as “coming soon” or available space, and cleaning up around the exterior to attract a potential tenant.
- Action G2: Inventory each block in the mixed use and commercial area for blank or roughly finished walls that are visible from the public sidewalk. Encourage property owners to make these walls more attractive through painting or installation of a mural.
- Action G3: As a stop gap measure, create a program to build false storefronts on vacant lots where there is a space between two buildings.
- Action G4: As a longer term measure, encourage building development on empty lots to close gaps in the street façade.
- Action G5: Work with the Canadian Pacific Railway to develop buildings along the west side of railway along 50 Street as shown in Figure 1. Buildings should be two storey constructions preferably with retail space at grade and offices on the second floor.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Action G6: 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. This can be achieved through a request for proposal process. As vendor of the land the Town can achieve more control of the final product compared to the development permitting process.

Action G7: 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. The aim is to facilitate the intensification of the use of lands within the Downtown area.

Action G8: Explore and if feasible implement a brownfield redevelopment program based on the recent changes to the Municipal Government Act. This may involve providing tax forgiveness to property owners who remediate and redevelop their sites.

Action G9: Establish a façade improvement program to encourage upgrading of the publicly visible fronts and sides of existing buildings. Launch the program on a block by block basis after the target block has had its streetscape upgraded.

Action G10: Ensure the Town's bylaws relating to unsightly premises and property upkeep are current and enforced where voluntary compliance is not forthcoming.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Topic: Desired Mixed/Commercial Uses and Activities

Context:

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. The changed nature of retailing, the dynamics of a more mobile customer base and the more regionally focused economy mean that some past retailers may not return. Instead, 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.

Suggested Actions:

- Action H1: Explore and if feasible establish an incubator space to encourage small scale business to locate in the downtown. The accommodated businesses may be home occupations that have become successful and require more space or start-up businesses.
- Action H2: 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. Use this information to inform possible business entrepreneurs and existing businesses about market potentials.
- Action H3: Market to a broad customer base throughout the Calgary-Edmonton corridor making use of multiple advertising platforms.
- Action H4: Create and implement a marketing strategy that can be used by businesses and the community to promote Downtown Ponoka to local and broader markets (see accompanying marketing strategy document). Periodically assess and update the marketing strategy.
- Action H5: Make sure the Land Use Bylaw is permissive and allows as broad a range of compatible uses in the mixed use/commercial areas of Downtown Ponoka as possible.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

- Action H6: 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. This may involve keeping the same building form as the existing building and making small modifications for commercial operations. It may also involve a diverse mix of stand-alone residential buildings and new commercial buildings as properties on a block gradually undergo re-investment and redevelopment.
- Action H7: A mixture of uses is encouraged along the commercial streets to add variety and interest for pedestrians and passers-by. Uses that do not generate much opportunistic or spur of moment shopping or benefit from having ground floor display windows, such as office functions, should be encouraged to locate on above grade floors. At grade or ground level floors should be available for activities such as retail, personal services, and food services.
- Action H8: 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. It is intended that promoting activity at this site will increase people and movement north and south along 50 Street through the centre of the mixed use/commercial area. The building at the corner of 57 Avenue and 50 Street should have a modern, attractive design to create a new signature building in the Downtown area.
- Action H9: 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. The corporation should have a long term focus (patient investors/money) and offer the opportunity for small scale investors to make a contribution.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Topic: Events and Programs

Context:

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.

Suggested Actions:

- Action I1: 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.
- Action I2: 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.
- Action I3: 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.
- Action I4: Make use of the street for space to host special events such as an outdoor farmers market.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Topic: Local Parks and Community Recreation Facilities

Context:

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.

Suggested Actions:

- Action J1: Central Park should continue to serve as a local/neighbourhood park serving residents of Downtown. Proximity to a play area in a local park will assist with attracting more multi-family residential to the area to the east. Re-investment in Central Park should incorporate similar themes as is used in the streetscapes for the major commercial streets. For example, similar planting beds and furniture could be added to the park.
- Action J2: 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. An entrance marker should be placed on the site along with wayfinding signage indicating how to get to the mixed use/commercial area of Downtown and the river valley via 53 Avenue.
- Action J3: Siding 14/Tractor Park should be redesigned to create defined pedestrian access to draw people into and through the park. It should otherwise retain its role as an ornament park with the addition of elements similar to those of the abutting streetscape design. The possible blending of the park with the utility site to the south to create the impression of a single park area should be explored.
- Action J4: 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. At a minimum, formal pedestrian access should be defined to encourage use by the general public. Landscaping beds and furnishings similar to that along the major commercial streets should be added.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Action J5: 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. The potential for a limited expansion of the park into the former recycling depot yard to the south should be explored.

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Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Topic: Safety Downtown and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

Context:

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.

Suggested Actions:

- Action K1: 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. Once a list is identified, the Town and RCMP should work with landowners and tenants on each block to implement those items having the greatest possible benefit to safety and security.
- Action K2: 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.
- Action K3: 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. For example, the Town should discourage the use of chain link fence to address site security in favour of more visually appealing and equally effective forms of fencing and enclosure.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Topic: Design and Function of Streets

Context:

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.

Well designed and attractive streetscapes can create a unifying impression for an area. The consistency and rhythm of common elements (boulevard trees, light standards, banners, landscaping, etc) can tie a diverse collection of buildings along a street together. Chipman Avenue is a well done local example in a commercial setting and streets like 55 Avenue are a good example for a residential setting.

Suggested Actions:

Action L1: Develop a comprehensive streetscape design for those streets identified as having a major commercial function as shown on Figure 3. (see accompanying streetscape designs)

Action L2: Consider the following in the streetscape design:

- wide enough sidewalks for pedestrian movement, plantings and furnishings, and signs;
- use of bulbs at corners to shorten crossing distances for pedestrians and create space for benches and low level landscaping;
- the addition of street trees to create a sense of continuity and soften the built environment for the enjoyment of pedestrians;
- use of landscaping strips across the frontage of vacant lots as a means of framing vistas at the ends of streets and avenues until a building is constructed;
- 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.

Action L3: Where sidewalks are sufficiently wide (at least 5 feet clear for pedestrian movement) 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

If necessary, make the required changes to the Town licensing bylaw and traffic bylaw (and any other bylaw regulating the use of the public street) to make these activities possible with minimal amount of formal approval requirements.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

- Action L4: Where sidewalks are not wide enough to accommodate a seasonal use of the sidewalk in front of a business, allow the use of temporary sidewalk diversions through the parallel parking spaces. Develop a program to manage this form of activity and, if necessary, amend Town bylaws to facilitate the selected approach.
- Action L5: Allow for the temporary closure of streets to host events like an outdoor farmers market, sidewalk sales, or block party. Create a process to obtain the required permission, notify affected property owners and arrange for the supply and set up of signage and barriers from the Town.
- Action L6: As part of the preparation of a community wide Transportation Master Plan, review the function of the various intersections in and around the Downtown area and assess the need for and nature of any improvements. This should include consideration of:
- 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
- Action L7: Boundary markers and entrance features should be designed and placed at select locations. Potential entrance feature locations are shown on Figure 3. These could be a single identifiable item or a collection of items signifying the boundary of the downtown area. Similar, smaller scale items can be placed to mark the edges of the downtown area.
- Action L8: A wayfinding program should be undertaken to create better directional signage for the Downtown. This includes how to get into Downtown and, once there, how to find key amenities like a banking machine or public washroom. The aim is to make Downtown as user friendly as possible. The program should also consider larger font street signs for key intersections and major streets.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

Topic: Pedestrian Connectivity and Amenities

Context:

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.

Suggested Actions:

- Action M1: Close the gaps between existing trail/path and sidewalk systems (quick easy fixes in some cases) as shown on Figure 4.
- Action M2: 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.
- Action M3: 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.
- Action M4: 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.
- Action M5: 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 as shown on Figure 4. The main crossing point into the Stampede Grounds should be considered in any intersection changes along Highway 53.
- Action M6: Add a series of public washrooms and drinking fountains throughout the downtown (see Figure 4) to provide for the basic needs of pedestrians and encourage longer stays in the area. These facilities can be part of a public use building or a stand-alone feature.
- Action M7: Provide benches and places for pedestrians to rest along all major pedestrian routes.



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

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



Downtown Ponoka Action Plan - 2017

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