



# Town of Ponoka Downtown Action Plan Background Report



January 2017



Town of Ponoka Downtown Action Plan – Background Report

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# PART A: STUDY AREA AND CONTEXT

## Introduction

This report provides an overview of the present characteristics and issues facing Downtown Ponoka. While it is not intended as an exhaustive reference for all matters, it provides key information that informed the analysis and process leading to the creation of implementation plans for the Downtown. The document provides a summary of field research and the review of existing documents and available information. It provides material for discussion and analysis around key issues critical to the future success of redeveloping and enhancing the Study Area.

## Defining the Study Area

Figure 1 on the following page shows the boundaries of the Study Area for the Downtown Action Plan superimposed over a 2015 air photo. The area has been selected based on the boundaries of the Downtown described in the Town's Municipal Development Plan and the adjacent portion of the valley along the Battle River.

The Study Area uses 57 Avenue as its north limit, the rear parcel boundaries of properties lying east of the river valley as its eastern limit, Highway 53 as the south boundary and 54 Street/Highway 2A as its western boundary. The purpose of the Study Area limits is to focus efforts on a select area in need of attention. Features beyond the Study Area boundary are still taken into account when looking at the long term future for the Downtown.

One key item not reflected in the 2015 air photo is the re-alignment of 50 Avenue/Veterans' Way, now named Siding 14 Crossing, over the Battle River. This newly constructed road and bridge is just north of the 50 Avenue road allowance that is shown in the air photo.

## Context of Study Area within Ponoka

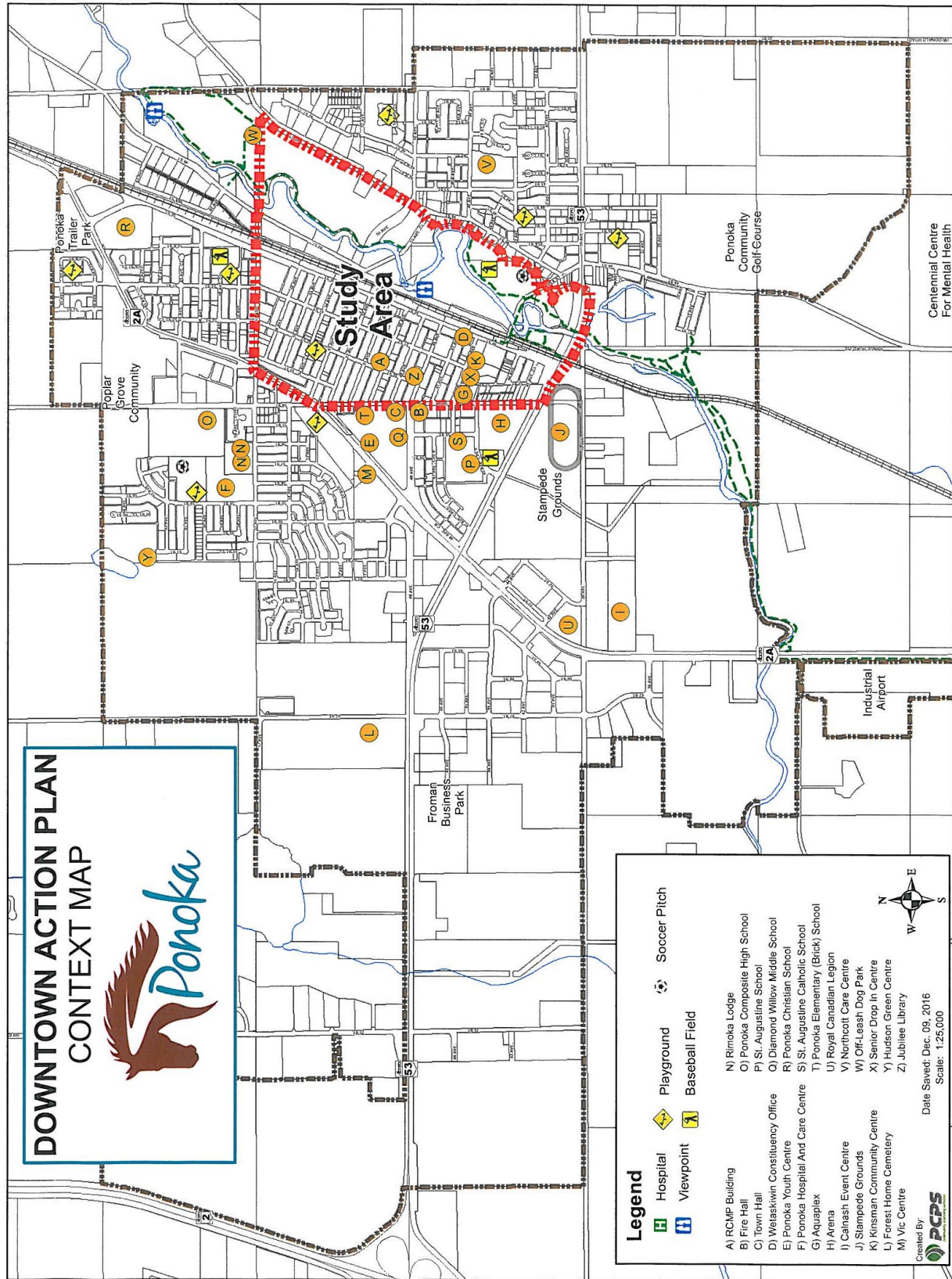
Ponoka is one of several prosperous towns located in the Central Alberta region. The Town's population was 6,773 as of the last census in 2011. Growth and expansion of the community over the past twenty years has been characterized as slow and stable with population increases averaging between one and two percent per year.

The town has several functions as an urban centre in the region. It is home to several of oil and gas service companies and has strong roots as a service centre for surrounding agricultural activities. Proximity to Red Deer offers employment for those choosing to work in a larger centre while residing in a small town. The Town is a local service centre in terms of commercial needs and services provided to town and area residents as well as passers-by along Highway 2A, the QEII Highway and Highway 53. Ponoka is also home to the Centennial Centre, a major employer of health care professionals, and centre of excellence for mental health treatment. The Ponoka Stampede is a widely recognized and renowned event that is hosted annually in the town and is a significant draw for tourists.

Figure 1: Study Area for Downtown Action Plan



Figure 2: Context Map



The Study Area is located generally in the central and east part of the existing developed portion of Ponoka (please refer to Figure 2). It contains many of the town's commercial business operations that provide goods and services to the area. Immediate access off Highway 2A and Highway 53 provides a key connection to patrons residing beyond the town boundaries. Indirect access from the QE2 Highway is provided via Highway 53. For many first time visitors to Ponoka, the Study Area is not the first part of Ponoka that they experience as the majority of the area is located off the main thoroughfares.

The broader area surrounding the Study Area has been developed for a variety of uses. Generally, lands to the north and east of the Study Area are occupied by residential uses with a small industrial area lying north east along the railway. Lands to the south and southwest of the Study Area are occupied by public uses and the Stampede Grounds. West of the Study Area consists of public uses such as the complex of schools, highway commercial areas, major open space in the form of Centennial Park and residential areas.

Key community facilities and features within and surrounding the Study Area are shown on the Context Map.

The Study Area is bisected by the Canadian Pacific Railway which runs in general north to south direction through Ponoka. The Battle River lies east of the railway and meanders through a shallow valley approximately 350 m to 400 m in width.



*Photo: View of River Valley from point near intersection of Highway 53 and 50 Street*



## **PART B – EXISTING PLANS, POLICIES AND PREVIOUS STUDIES**

This portion of the Background Report provides an overview of existing approved plans and policies and previously completed studies relating to the Study Area. The contents of each document have been paraphrased. The full discussion pertaining to the Study Area is available in the respective source document.

### **Town of Ponoka Corporate Strategic Plan**

This plan is intended to identify Town and Council priorities and set direction for a 2 year period, in order to achieve the long term vision for the Town of Ponoka. The plan outlines goals, guiding principles and target accomplishments. These include:

- Goal: achieve a vibrant downtown core with increased lights, signs and other aesthetics downtown and at entrance points
- Guiding principles pertaining to the Battle River: work together to care for the health of the natural environment including the Battle River and we enjoy well-cared for facilities, green spaces and parks
- Guiding principles pertaining to the Downtown: plan for a vibrant downtown core to bring people together
- Short term goals: lay groundwork and begin work on new community wellness centre, assess the status of recreation buildings and develop a maintenance or replacement plan, improve the expanded trail system, identify areas where Town aesthetics can be enhanced and improved, way finding signs, begin downtown and heritage revitalization, incorporate first impressions report and landscaping plans into signs, entrances and downtown planning
- 10 year goals: community wellness centre phase one completed, ongoing event planning and increased vendor participation in the downtown core, continue work on the downtown revitalization and heritage plan, Ponoka has a wow factor as a clean, green and pretty western town
- 20 year goals: completed community and wellness centre, trail partnerships in place

### **Municipal Development Plan**

The Municipal Development Plan (MDP) outlines the Town's vision for growth and development, as well as the objectives and policies the Town will follow to obtain the desired development. There are visions and policies within the MDP directly related to the redevelopment and function of the downtown area.

Economic development policies include utilizing the existing reports and studies such as the Avi Friedman report for a municipal designation program, and creating positive first impressions in the area

through the use of signage and landscaping to direct people into the area and create a positive first impression.

Residential development policies include placing higher density developments within the downtown close to community amenities and creating a walkable community. This also includes placing care homes in the downtown area close to the community amenities easily accessed by the populations within the special care homes. The policies also encourage infill development and redevelopment of underutilized sites to use areas which are already serviced with community infrastructure.

There is a section of the MDP dedicated directly to the downtown area, with a main goal to maintain the downtown core as the primary retail and commercial district of the Town and region. The policy tools to support this goal are:

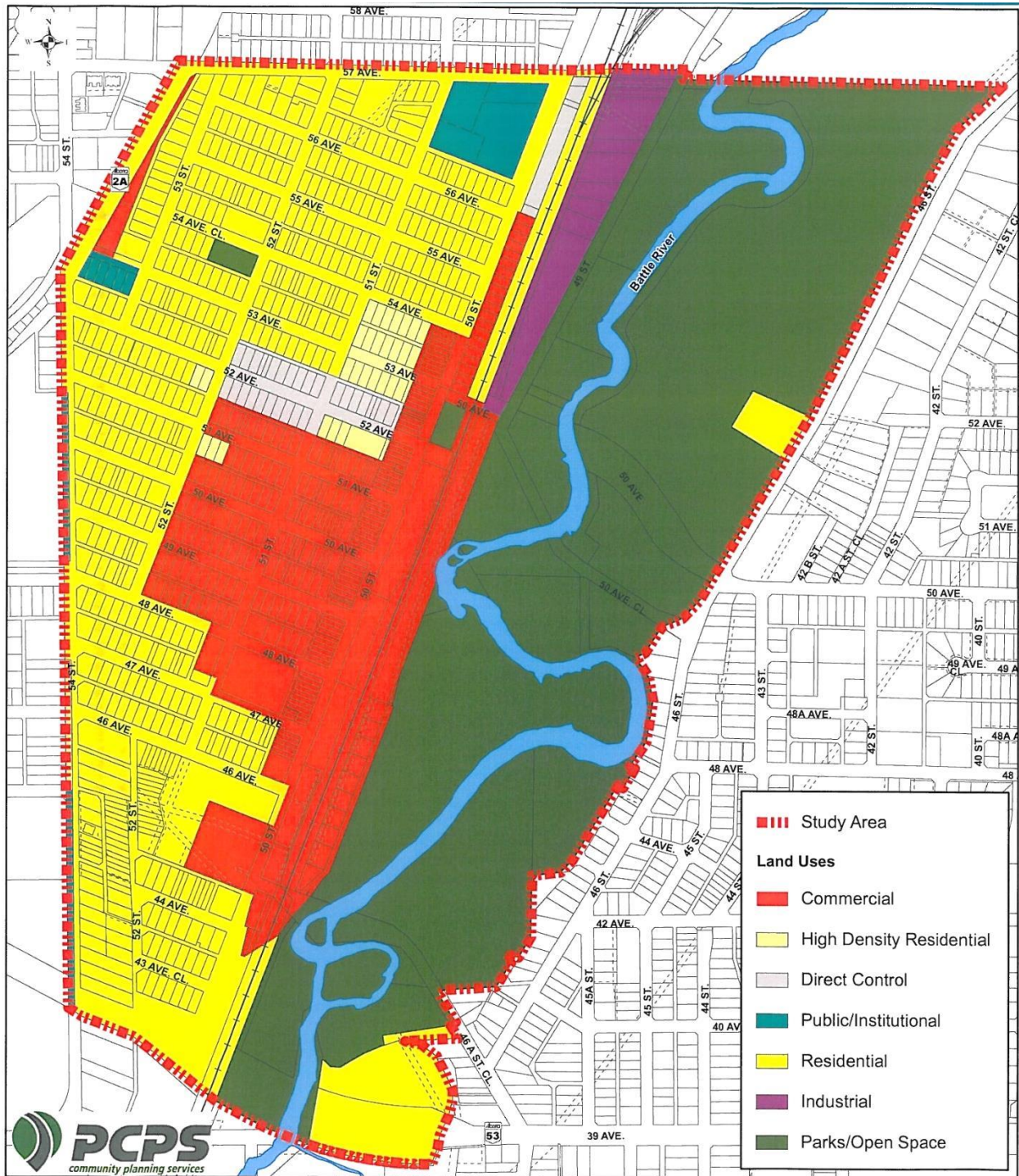
- Rejuvenation of the downtown through promotion and sustainable commercial and retail development Promoting mixed-use development in existing buildings and encouraging new developments to incorporate mixed-use elements through work-live units
- Establishing downtown design guidelines to aid in recognising historic buildings and their preservation to create a visually pleasing and unique downtown streetscape.
- Increasing the walkability of the downtown through pedestrian connections and corridors, and landscaping to soften the built environment.
- Encouraging institutional uses to relocate to the downtown to draw the working population and utilize the commercial blocks
- Seeking to relocate incompatible uses outside of the downtown area where more suitable uses may be more appropriate

With industrial lands identified within the north east of the Study Area, policy support has been provided to encourage developers to use the vacant lands, through access to the rail spur line and planning and economic development support.

The Battle River Valley is the main focus of future recreational development and opportunities. The river valley will be the main artery for the trail system through the Town, with pedestrian linkages to the east and west side running through the valley. The objective of the Town is to protect the river valley as a natural land form and amenity within the community. The Battle River valley will continue to be developed as a linear trail and park system through the town with compatible recreational developments.

The Town of Ponoka strives to be a community for all ages by removing barriers preventing people from participating in the community. Policy support includes promoting mixed use development for close proximity to amenities, and encouraging infill development to create small residences for seniors and live work units. This includes promoting walkability and pleasant micro climates to encourage people to be active and create an aesthetically pleasing streetscape.

**Figure 3: Land Uses Assigned by Municipal Development Plan**



## Town of Ponoka Land Use Bylaw 013-97

The Land Use Bylaw provides more specific direction for the use and development of individual properties throughout the Study Area. It is the main tool for implementing the policies adopted by the Town through their Municipal Development Plan and other policy plans. The Land Use Bylaw is used by the Development Authority to make decisions of development permits as proposed changes are submitted.

Several land use bylaw designations apply to the Study Area. These are described below and their geographic areas that are subject to each designation are shown on the map titled “Current Land Use Bylaw Designations.”

*Central Commercial (C1)* comprises the majority of the downtown core area, permitting a wide range of retail and service uses, institutional uses, and accessory residential uses in a mixed use setting; discretionary uses include after hour uses such as establishments serving alcohol as well as residences not associated with a commercial use. The majority of the commercially used lots within the Plan area occur within this land use district.

*Direct Control (DC)* occupies 5 block faces within the Study Area, uses and developments within the Direct Control district are approved by Town of Ponoka Council, with regulations determined at the time of development for each specific site. Currently within these blocks the majority of uses are residential and institutional with several vacant properties including the former Town Hall site.

*Low Density Multi-Family Residential (R2)* is intended for detached dwellings and side-by-side duplexes and manufactured or modular homes at the discretion of the Development Authority. Currently the majority of the district area is developed in residential uses as detached dwellings.

*Medium Density Residential (R3)* district is intended for medium density residential development in the form of side-by-side duplexes, row houses and four-plexes, detached houses and manufactured/modular homes may be developed at the discretion of the Development Authority. Currently the majority of the district area is developed in residential uses with a concentration of duplexes, and multi-unit development is the form of row houses and multi-plexes in the south part of the Plan area, and detached dwellings dispersed throughout the district area.

*High Density Residential (R4)* is intended for development as apartments higher than 2 floors, this district also includes over-under duplexes, row housing but is the only to include apartment buildings. Currently the district area is used for residential development, with all the existing apartment complexes located within the district as well as several 4 multi-unit developments and detached dwellings.

*Heavy Industrial (M2)* is intended for industrial and commercial which may be objectionable in other areas due to noise, dust, odour, vibration and heavy traffic. The North East Industrial park is located on 49 Street within the Study Area; the west side of the street is developed as industrial uses while the east side has 3 residences and a large vacant lot.

*Institutional and Public Uses (IPU)* is intended for municipally owned lands, places of worship, health care facilities and facilities intended for public use. There are 3 areas in the Study Area designated IPU including the old hospital site, the Kinsman Hall area and a pump station on 53 Avenue west.

Currently the IPU uses within the Plan area extended beyond the designated areas, including church sites, the Provincial Building, former Town Hall site, community recreation facilities, RCMP and Post Office, and community infrastructure sites.

*Floodplain District (FP)* this district is intended for lands subject to flooding to be used productively without permitting buildings and uses that could be damaged by floods. All of the lands within the Battle River Valley which are affected by the floodplain of the river have been designated FP. Currently the majority of the land within this designation is being used as open space with only one residence located within the area.

*Downtown Design Guidelines* provisions are contained within Section 11 of the Bylaw, and indicate that properties located within the 10 blocks bounded by 50 Street and 52 Street and 51 Avenue and 47 Avenue, shall be subject to the Downtown Design Guidelines either through a review committee or by the Development Authority review of the guidelines. However, the Land Use Bylaw does not contain specific guidelines.

Figure 4: Current Land Use Bylaw Designations



## Retooling Downtown Ponoka, Alberta – Avi Friedman Report

The Retooling Downtown Ponoka report is intended to provide a vision for downtown Ponoka along with ideas and tools for implementation. It contains a review of existing conditions, evaluation of socioeconomic factors and proposed a master plan for the area. The public was consulted through the process, with a Town Hall session held as a visioning opportunity for the community.

The report's review of existing conditions revealed that the population of Ponoka will need to increase in order to support an expanded commercial core. The Town will need to attract young families to support the local businesses as the baby boom population segment ages. It recommends the Town attract another major employer to support the mainly business and community service labour force. Further, the report notes that offering local choice of competitive products will be needed to retain the expenditure of Ponoka families within the community.

Successes of downtown Ponoka noted in the report include:

- convenient regional location between Red Deer and Edmonton
- pleasant and vibrant place with few abandoned or vacant commercial locations
- ample parking is available near or behind buildings
- celebrated history and large heritage buildings.

Noted barriers to downtown Ponoka development include:

- not a regional draw with few anchors
- few residences within the downtown core
- disconnect from the river by the rail line
- lack of Civic Square as a gathering place
- too many empty lots
- rail line divides downtown from eastern neighbourhoods
- negative visual effect of vacant lands adjacent to rail line
- noise generated by trains
- no direct link with the Stampede grounds
- no planning for winter conditions such as low temperatures and strong winds
- IGA acts as a pole pulling consumers away from the core of the downtown businesses
- the Co-Op lot and building as a dominating feature within the area
- lack of trees
- lack of architectural guidelines to make places unique
- few signature buildings
- rough edges of buildings exposed by vacant lots

Recommended strategies for downtown Ponoka redevelopment include:

- introduce recreational, tourist and cultural activities in the river valley
- add more medium and high density housing
- explore possibility to add overpasses to facilitate crossing of the rail line
- create a civic square
- begin a process and program to encourage building on empty lots
- permit introduction of innovative housing to include apartments above stores, senior residences, live-work homes, bachelor units with new buildings having two to four floors
- encourage construction of buildings along 50 Street

- construct noise barriers along rail line
- create direct connection between the Stampede grounds and downtown
- plan and design downtown as a year round destination
- find an anchor to counter balance the pole of the IGA and create a corridor
- redesign the Co-Op structure's exterior and its lot to reduce the negative visual impact
- continue tree planting
- introduce design guidelines
- consider the introduction of a signature building
- begin a mural program to cover empty walls and celebrate local culture

The Conceptual Plan of the report identifies 50 Street as the major commercial strip with commercial anchors at the IGA in the south and a second anchor in the north above 53 Avenue. A civic square has been identified at the old Town Hall location, with major pedestrian corridors on 50 Avenue running east-west and pedestrian path to the Stampede Grounds on 51 Street and 54 Street. The Battle River Valley has been imagined as the main recreational area with trails and recreational facilities.

Phase 1 was scheduled to span 3 years from 2007 to 2010 with the majority of the work to be carried out by the Town. Phase 2 was scheduled for 5 years from 2010 to 2015 with the work split between the Town and Private Sector. Phase 3 was scheduled for 5 years from 2015 to 2020 with the majority of the work to be completed by the Private Sector. Phase 4 was the last scheduled phase over 5 years from 2020 to 2025 also with the Private Sector conducting the majority of the finishing work.

Sites selected specifically for redevelopment include:

- the Town Hall site as a new Civic Square
- the Battle River Valley adjacent to the downtown area as a new recreational centre with a central square
- Chipman Avenue infill development as a mixed use development
- the vacant rail lands east of 50 Street as new commercial units

## **First Impressions Community Exchange - Final Report**

The First Impressions Community Exchange (FICE) program is intended to provide the Town with visitors' or outsiders' perspective and impression of the community. The visiting members provided feedback on community entrances, development, amenities, and identifying areas for improvement. The Town participated in the program in 2011. The following are the comments received from the exchange program participants:

- 5 minute impression of the community is it is very open and spread out with well-maintained parks and green spaces but would be difficult to get around in without a vehicle
- Suggested increasing the availability of apartments and rental housing to attract more young people and families
- Received low overall quality for low income housing available in the Town



- Noted the presence of alleys in most residential areas and that some were paved which is viewed as an asset
- Noted the amount of well-maintained green spaces and the presence of sidewalks, desirable in communities
- Received low scores for appeal of housing for single and young adults and low income housing options, need to increase attainable housing options within the community
- Noted several medical clinics offering an arrangement of services which is good, but can never have too many, did not note an optometrist
- Received a low score for availability of child care services, suggest better signage or attracting more providers
- Locating the downtown area was easy based on flow of roads, only signage was for Town Hall
- Noted the downtown was clean and quaint but could be upgraded in terms of roads and sidewalks and business access
- Variety of shopping options in the downtown received a high rating
- Suggest an upgrade of signage so it is more visible, did appreciate the historical plaques that were visible on some buildings
- Received a low score for mixed use development within the downtown, no residential development noted or recreational facilities
- Noted ample parking and no issue finding parking on a business day
- Suggested that heritage buildings can play a greater role in the downtown with interpretive walk
- Downtown would be a desirable place to live based on walkability
- Noted a lack of public restrooms within the community, and a lack of benches and drinking fountains
- Suggested the Battle River valley could be transformed into a tourist attraction

## **Town of Ponoka Growth Study**

The Town of Ponoka undertook a Growth Study in 2010 to identify the future land needs of the Town based on residential, commercial and industrial growth. The main purpose was to support the Town's annexation proposal for land running west along Highway 53. The study identified the growth rates and current developed land, and predicted the future land base needed to support the population growth. The study anticipated 57 Avenue to be developed into a major east west collector and provide new access out of the North East Industrial Park. Figure 10 of the study identifies 50 Street, 57 Avenue and 54 Street as major roadways within the downtown area. It projected that commercial land consumption in the future would reflect the existing rate of 28.6 acres for every 1,000 people.

## **Town of Ponoka Master Servicing Study**

This study was undertaken in 2013. It notes that the current municipal infrastructure (water supply, water distribution, water pumping, water storage reservoirs, sewage treatment and sewage pumping) should meet the needs of a population of more than 16,000 people to service all lands within the 2011 Town boundaries.

Specific infrastructure improvements identified within or close to the downtown area include upgrading the 100mm main at 43 Avenue and 50 Street to a 150mm main. It notes that street rehabilitation in the downtown has been ongoing each year since 2005 with one goal being to eliminate infiltration in the pipe joints and service connections.

The study notes that most of the town's piped storm drainage systems are designed for a 1:5 year storm event and development is required to construct a 1:100 year surface runoff capability with depressed low areas holding no more than 0.30m of water. There are areas of downtown which do not conform to this standard resulting in flooding during short term intense storms (short term upgrades, address design and construction needs for localized 51 Street flooding).

Both 50 Street and 57 Avenue have been identified as major undivided arterial roads while 53 Avenue and 48 Avenue have been identified as major collector roads. Finally the study proposes a rail crossing at 57 Avenue and two new signalized intersections; one at 57 Avenue and Highway 2A and one at 50 Street and Highway 53.

## **Recreation and Culture Master Plan**

The purpose of this plan is to provide guidance and policy framework for the redevelopment of the Town's recreational facilities, and future cultural and recreation opportunities. Through this planning process an assessment of the current facilities and opportunities was completed along with a review of the existing policy and budget support for recreation and culture, emerging trends in populations, activities people engage in, demographic evaluation and social values.

The plan has identified the downtown area as being central to the network of recreational and cultural opportunities; with a community centre at the current arena site, a new Town Hall complex and a park system along 50 Street all linked by sidewalks and trails. The plan strives to create a safe environment

for citizens, access to a wide range of opportunities and services, and be age friendly for participation by all age groups.

A key principle of the plan is downtown revitalization through recreational and cultural facilities located in places that bring more people through the downtown, adding to the core. Specific amenities within the plan that have been identified within the downtown area are:

- a neighbourhood park at 54 Avenue Close: small child focused parks that are family oriented and located in residential areas with low traffic volumes
- a community park within the Battle River valley: consists of sports fields, ideally accessed off a residential collector street with on-site parking
- relocation of the existing pool to the community complex area also relocating the tennis courts to this site, outside of the downtown area
- increase in trail maintenance for safety
- former Town Hall site to be redeveloped as a plaza and culture centre and relocation of the library to this site, to be the heart of the downtown; the recreation and culture plan has identified the library and arts centre to be implemented by 2025
- expansion of the existing Battle River trail system to complete a loop of the town with the rail lands adjacent to 50 Street to be redeveloped as a linear park system downtown connected to the Battle River system

## **Ponoka Downtown Design Guidelines**

The Downtown Design Guidelines were created in 2002 as part of the Main Street Program which the Town participated in from 1995 to 1999. The guidelines are intended to be used as a reference tool for decision makers. The guidelines give a background on the history and design development, offers approaches to rehabilitation, restoration and designing new infill development to suit the character of the existing buildings.

The first part of the guidelines is used to identify the significant features, materials and character defining elements of the buildings in the downtown area. The guidelines have identified 6 architectural styles in Ponoka, these being; Boomtown 1904-1910, Early Commercial 1904-1920, Edwardian Classic Revival 1904-1930, Late Commercial 1920-1950, Moderne 1930-1960 and Post 1960 Stylistic Trends. After identifying the architectural styles the guidelines outline the character defining building materials; painted wood, brick, stone and cast stone, pressed metal, glass, cast iron and stucco. The significant features identified within the architectural types include; horizontal and vertical alignments, storefronts and entrances, awnings, signs and flagpoles. After defining the architectural styles and the significant elements associated with historic construction, the guidelines offer a process for renovating historic buildings.

First is researching the history of the building and a building analysis, to understand the features of the building, such as parts of the façade. Once the history and features have been mapped, design options are presented for Minimal Alteration, Moderate Alteration and Significant Alteration. Minimal Alteration can be achieved through preservation by repair the building and replacing missing features. Moderate Alteration can be achieved through Restoration, removing applied surfaces, repairs and replacing missing features, and Enhancement through additions or alterations to complement the building. Significant Alterations can be achieved through Restoration, Enhancement or Redevelopment by additions and alteration to enhance the streetscape.

The second part of the guidelines is intended to illustrate and provide information for the actual constructive work to the buildings. By going through each of the design features and elements of the buildings and identifying the common inappropriate alterations, preservation and restoration techniques and guides. The preservation standards are given for the Lower Façade, Upper Façade, and Signs, Awnings and Façade Accessories.

These guidelines are intended to be used when approaching the redevelopment or rehabilitation of the historic buildings within the downtown. They offer techniques for preservation and restoration of existing buildings, as well as how to design new development in the downtown to it fits with the existing streetscape and historic design elements.

## **Highway 53 Functional Plan (2005)**

The functional plan for Highway 53 outlines the ultimate goal and function of Highway 53 through the Town of Ponoka. This is a plan prepared by Alberta Transportation. There are currently 2 direct accesses into the downtown area from Highway 53 (54 Street and 50 Street). Once the functional plan is implemented there will only be one (1) direct access off of Highway 53 located at 50 Street.

A traffic safety overview undertaken for the report suggested the relocation of signs at 54 Street intersection to improve sight lines on the north approach to Highway 53; improved pavement markings on 50 Street approach and stop ahead sign for southbound traffic approaching the intersection and relocation of guard rails to improve sight lines to the east for southbound traffic.

The final report has identified the closure of 54 Street north of Highway 53, to terminate in a cul-de-sac. The intersection at 50 Street will be retained off of Highway 53 as the Town plans to extend the street south of Highway 53. Due to concerns respecting sight distances to the east from the south approach due to the south bridge rails on the CPR overpass; the overpass will eventually be widened to accommodate the addition of a 6m wide median and a possible westbound right turn lane at the intersection. Plans show the installation of dedicated right and left turn lanes from both the east and west approaches.

## **Highway 2A Functional Plan (2006)**

Highway 2A will eventually be twinned with a centre median through the Town, closing 16 of the 24 direct access points. Several improvements have been outlined for the portion of Highway 2A running at the boundary of the downtown area (from 54 Street to 57 Ave). Immediate spot improvements include the closure of Highway 2A frontage road accesses located 125m and 20m south of 57 Ave on the east

side. Implications of this functional plan are, there will only be 2 direct accesses into the downtown area from Highway 2A (53 Avenue and 57 Avenue). The residential parcels backing onto Highway 2A will no longer have lane access onto Highway 2A or 57 Avenue.

The plan calls for 54 Street on the west side of Highway 2A to be terminated with a cul-de-sac, making the intersection of 53 Avenue and Highway 2A a T-intersection. It also upgrades the 53 Avenue intersection to accommodate future twinning of the highway and the provision of a future pedestrian actuated traffic signals. Planned improvements to the 57 Avenue and Highway 2A intersection include possible traffic signals in the future. The plan also calls for improvement of the aesthetics adjacent to the Highway from south of 53 Ave to south of 57 Avenue, which involves removing guard rails and installing concrete bollards, and upgrading landscaping along the corridor and installing raised curbs at accesses north of 53 Avenue.

Forecasts indicate traffic signals at the 53 Avenue and the 57 Avenue intersections will be required within the next 20 years.

## **Municipal Heritage Inventory – Part 1**

This heritage inventory was completed through funding from the Alberta's Municipal Heritage Partnership Program, aimed at identifying, evaluating and managing heritage resources. There are no requirements associated with this inventory for historic sites to be maintained as such, or preserved. Recommendations of the report are to setup a framework for instigating a municipal designation program and creating a town database to flag properties where any proposed intervention may affect the site.

Figure 5 identifies the locations and addresses of each building contained within the Heritage inventory (see lettered items under *Heritage Buildings on figure*). Sixteen heritage sites were identified, fifteen of which are within the Study Area. For each site the building's integrity was evaluated, description of the place, the heritage value and the character defining elements were documented.

For example, the F.E. Algar Building located at 5020 50 Street is listed as high integrity due to its corner location, brick construction and design elements (rectangular plan single storey, high parapet walls with metal cornices, recessed entrance with large display windows). The building was constructed in 1914, and associated with the settler Algar family. This building was the visual anchor for the Main Street program from 1996-1999.

## **Ponoka Twentieth Century Landmarks**

This inventory was created in 2000 in association with the Alberta Main Street Programme. The index documents all of the historic sites and buildings within the downtown area and gives a brief description of each site and its historic value. It should be noted that all of the sites included in the Municipal Heritage Inventory are also included within this list. This list also includes some buildings and places that no longer exist; they have either been lost through redevelopment or were abandoned and demolished. Several of the downtown sites do have commemorative plaques in place, which are indicated in the inventory, though not all. There are 53 sites specified in this inventory, of which 45 are located within the Study Area.

Figure 5 identifies all of the heritage sites within the landmark inventory that are within the downtown core area (see numbered items under *Heritage Site on figure*).

**Figure 5: Heritage Properties**



## **Battle River Watershed Alliance - Ponoka Riparian Restoration Program**

The Battle River Watershed Alliance in partnership with Cows and Fish implemented a riparian restoration program in 2015 for the Ponoka stretch of the Battle River. This includes lands in the County of Ponoka and Town of Ponoka. This was a 2 year program run from 2015 to 2016, with a final program report to be released in 2017. Through water quality monitoring, index of biological integrity and aerial videography, it was determined that this stretch of the river is in poor health. The intent of the program is to provide funding to landowners, including those within the Town of Ponoka, for the improvement of riparian health through stewardship initiatives, such as shoreline plantings, shoreline fencing and off-site watering systems.

## **Riparian Health Summary Final Report – Battle River Town of Ponoka**

The Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society (Cows and Fish) in partnership with the Battle River Watershed Alliance, in 2015 completed an inventory of riparian health along properties adjacent to the Battle River in the Town of Ponoka. Five riparian inventory sites were selected along the Battle River in the Town of Ponoka, equalling 4.45 km of stream distance and 25 hectares of riparian habitat. This stretch of the river has been found to contain poor water quality and poor fish population/biodiversity in the Index of Biological Integrity Report 2004 by Alberta Environment and Parks and Alberta Conservation Association.

By evaluating eight vegetative and seven soil/hydrological parameters each site was given a rating of healthy, healthy but with problems or unhealthy. Of the five sites inventoried one (20%) was rated healthy, four (80%) were rated healthy but with problems and none were given a rating of unhealthy. Overall the project area received a rating of healthy but with problems. The area-weighted riparian health rating was 70% healthy but with problems, by area being 1.9 hectares of habitat rated healthy and 22.7 hectares rated healthy but with problems.

Collectively the riparian areas are well vegetated with a diversity of native and non-native species. Tree cover represents 25% of the area, shrubs 32%, grass and grass-like plants 92% and forbs 29%. Detracting from the vegetative health of the riparian areas is the high proportion of disturbance-caused grasses and forbs which cover approximately 59% of the project area. A low proportion of total canopy cover of woody species also detracts from the vegetative health score. Detracting from the overall soil/hydrological health is the lack of deeply rooted native plants along banks and high percentage of alterations to both riverbanks.

The Battle River is a recipient of Town of Ponoka storm water run-off, and although no specific issues were identified resulting from outfalls and water addition, it should be noted that overall water quality and timing may be affected. Channel processes such as scouring, sediment loading and erosion can be negatively influenced by timing and volume; as well water quality may be impacted through contaminants. The majority of the lands within the Battle River floodplain are managed for recreational purposes, the walking and bike trails that are within the riparian area are adequately setback from the wet portions of the riparian areas.

Beavers are also present within the project area, with a dam located just south of the 46A Street Close pedestrian bridge. Beavers work to manage riparian areas through the construction of dams. These dams can be beneficial in storing water, but can cause flooding problems for roads and culverts. There

are various management tools now available to mitigate these issues while allowing the beavers to remain within the area.

*Management Objectives for the project area include:*

- protect and maintain native riparian vegetation
- increase native woody plant cover
- encourage community group involvement with riparian enhancement and restoration projects
- prevent an increase in disturbance-caused plants
- monitor and control invasive plants
- prevent additional riverbank modifications and restore altered channel reaches where possible
- continue to promote limited access to the riverbank and active floodplain
- avoid any future permanent structure development within riparian areas
- encourage adoption of upland low impact development practices.



***Photo: Beaver activity in river valley***



***Photo: Beaver dam south of pedestrian bridge***



## PART C – CURRENT SITUATION

### Brief History: What has happened since 2006?

The Friedman Report was undertaken in 2006 and finalized in 2007. The purpose of this section is to outline what has happened in the Downtown area over the course of the subsequent decade in terms of new development or notable physical changes.

Town records indicate that a total of 182 building permits were issued for properties within the Downtown area over the last 10 years. This includes permits for new construction, demolitions, small and large additions and accessory buildings.

For low density residential uses there were 4 single detached dwellings and 11 duplex dwellings constructed. Medium density residential development has taken the form of 5 four-plex developments, 1 six-plex and 1 apartment building containing 22-24 units. In some cases this involved the removal of an existing modest dwelling and in other cases it was infill activity on previously undeveloped land resulting in an overall net gain in the number of residential dwelling units in the area.

Commercial building permits have been mostly for improvements to existing buildings. Three new commercial projects have occurred in the form of the expansion of the Shoppers Drugs Plaza, medical centre addition to the IGA and a replacement building on the south side of Chipman Avenue.

Other notable changes in the Downtown area include:

- The redevelopment of the plaza at the corner of 48 Avenue and 51 Street (contains the Dollar Tree) and an addition on the south side.
- The Town Office that was at the corner of 48 Avenue and 51 Street was recently (2016) demolished after being condemned.
- The Tamarack Court residential building on 52 Avenue was constructed and is the most recent large scale multi-family residential building in the Study Area.
- Based on the 2007 Friedman Report the Town started to acquire the residential parcels along the south side of 49 Avenue between 51 Street and 52 Street to have space to implement the plaza/civic square recommendations.
- The Town's recycling centre on the east side of 50 Street is closed and relocated to the Transfer Station site thereby creating opportunity for some future use of the site.
- Duplexes oriented to seniors have been constructed south of the Aquaplex on 52 Street on lands that were previously undeveloped.
- The funeral home at the corner of Chipman Avenue and 52 Street underwent a substantial expansion.

- Boulevard trees were planted along the east side of 50 Street south of Chipman Avenue to the skate park.
- MainStreet Hardware (operated by PeaveyMart) on 50 Street is a new addition to the strip plaza that came in 2015.
- New 3 storey mixed use building (retail at grade and residential on second and third floors) constructed on the south side of Chipman Avenue.
- Renovations to existing buildings such as the law office at the corner of 49 Avenue and 51 Street.
- Installation of benches and waste receptacles as part of a project was undertaken in 2012/2013 to make it easier and more appealing to walk.
- Legion moved out of Downtown; the cenotaph at the south end of 51 Street is no longer used for November 11 ceremony as it is hosted at the Legion's new location on Highway 2A.

## **Current Land Uses**

Figure 6 shows the present uses of the various parcels within the Study Area and an overview of each category is provided below. Existing uses on a site may or may not match the Land Use Bylaw designation assigned to the site.

### Vacant Land

The greatest numbers of vacant or undeveloped properties are within the central commercial core. This includes the rail lands adjacent to 50 Street, the former Town Hall site and a block of several vacant lots on Chipman Avenue. The number of vacancies suggests there is a greater opportunity for new commercial and mixed use development within this area. Most of the remaining vacant and underdeveloped lands are within the residential areas, representing parcels which are underutilized with undersized or old structures, or undeveloped lands.

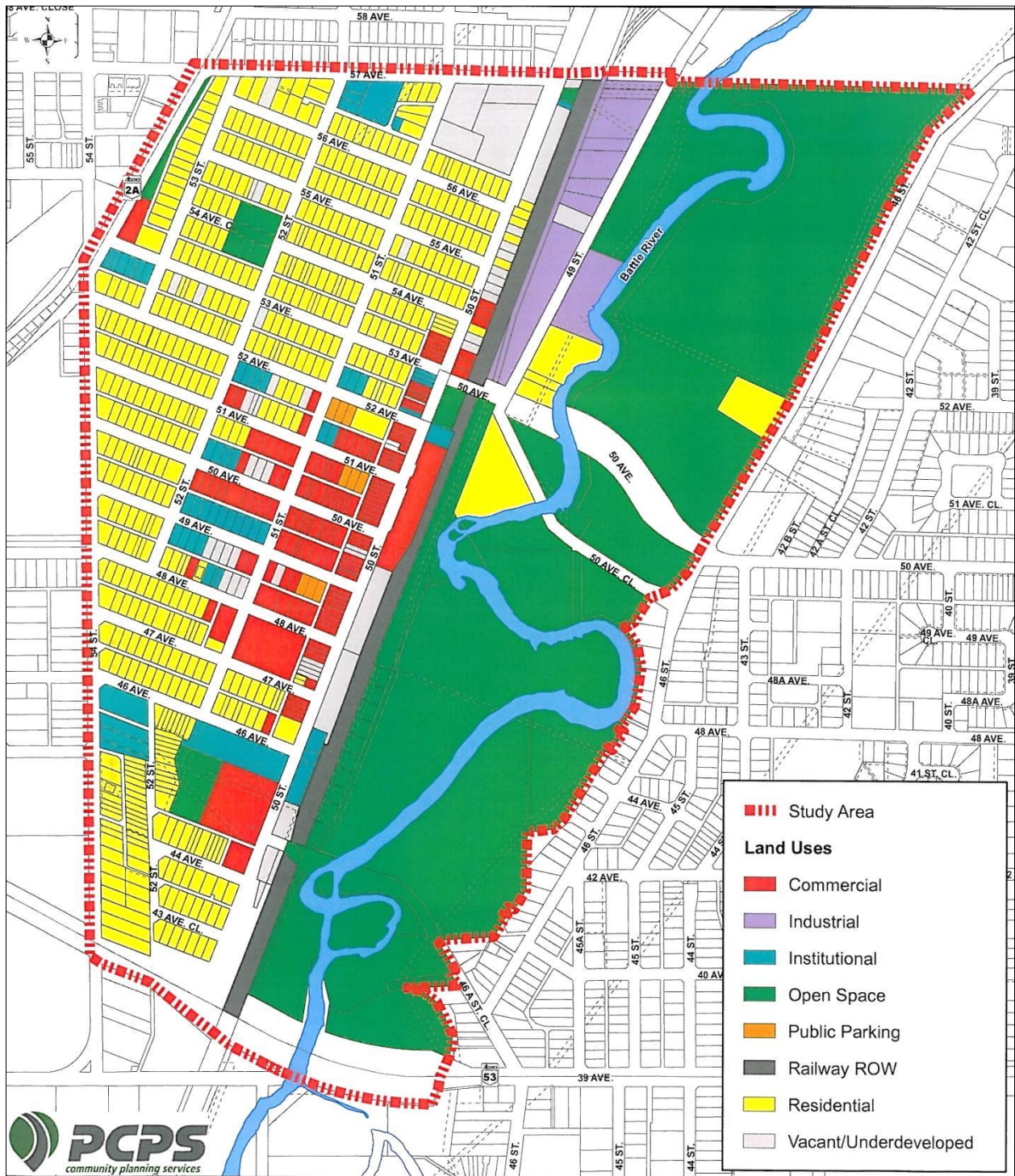
### Institutional Land Uses

Institutional uses are for public or quasi-public development, municipal buildings or infrastructure and recreational facilities. There is also a greater amount of land in the Plan area being used for institutional purposes than the parcels that are zoned for institutional use. These institutional uses include the 3 churches, Provincial building, RCMP station, Post Office, former Town Hall site, Municipal infrastructure parcels, and community facilities. The majority of the institutionally used lands are within the central portion of the Study Area amongst the commercial uses, and away from the predominantly residential blocks.

### Commercial Land Uses

The majority of the existing commercial development is within the central commercial designated lands. The commercial development within the Plan area has been concentrated in the core, concentrating the economic activity within the central blocks.

Figure 6: Current Use of Land in Study Area



### Residential Land Uses

More than half of the land within the Study Area is developed in residential land uses, with the greatest concentration in the north, west and south portions of the plan area. Within the central commercial core area there are a few limited which are currently being used for residential purposes. The majority of the existing dwelling units are outside of the central commercial core.

### Open Space Land Uses

Open spaces are those that are maintained as green spaces and also undeveloped land in a natural state. The major open space area is the Battle River valley, which is both publically and privately owned. The majority of this area has not been developed and left in a natural state or used for agricultural purposes. The river valley comprises over 1/3 of the overall downtown Study Area. Within the developed plan area there are 3 maintained green spaces; Centennial Park, the park behind the Drop-In Centre, and the west side park.

### Industrial Land Uses

The lands off of 49 Street in the north portion of the Study Area are currently being used for industrial purposes. The Town has an operations facility and there is a cement facility on the west side of the street. These lands are separate from the main downtown area by the rail line which runs directly west of the developed industrial lands. Though all of the lands on 49 Street are zoned for heavy industrial use, the east side of the street has largely been left undeveloped.

## **Building Massing, Structure and Patterns**

Building massing refers to the overall size and shape of a structure, which can affect the perception of the amount of space a building uses. The size of the main façade, using the width of the parcel, and the height can create a different impression on the streetscape.

Figure 7 inventories the height of each structure within the Study Area. The majority of the structures are one floor in height, which is mostly accounted for by existing residential structures. Within the downtown core area, where most commercial structures are located, there is more variation in building height. The majority of commercial and non-residential structures are also one floor in height, but there are also many two floor structures and a few three floor structures scattered through the commercial area. With the increased height, the perceived mass and sense of enclosure along a streetscape increases.

Increased building height in the downtown area can also create more living space, with commercial uses on the bottom floor and residential rental units on the upper floors. An example of this is the infill development on Chipman Avenue which is identified as one of the three floor structures.

The building footprint can also have an impact on building massing with how much of the parcel the building consumes. Figure 8 represents each current structure within the Study Area, and the area of the parcel the structure uses. In the commercial area most of the existing developments have footprints which consume a large portion of the parcel area. The wide building footprints give the impression of a continuous streetscape and façade, with increased architectural detail and false front elevations and facades, the massing can be calmed to be not as imposing to pedestrians from the street.

Figure 7: Building Height

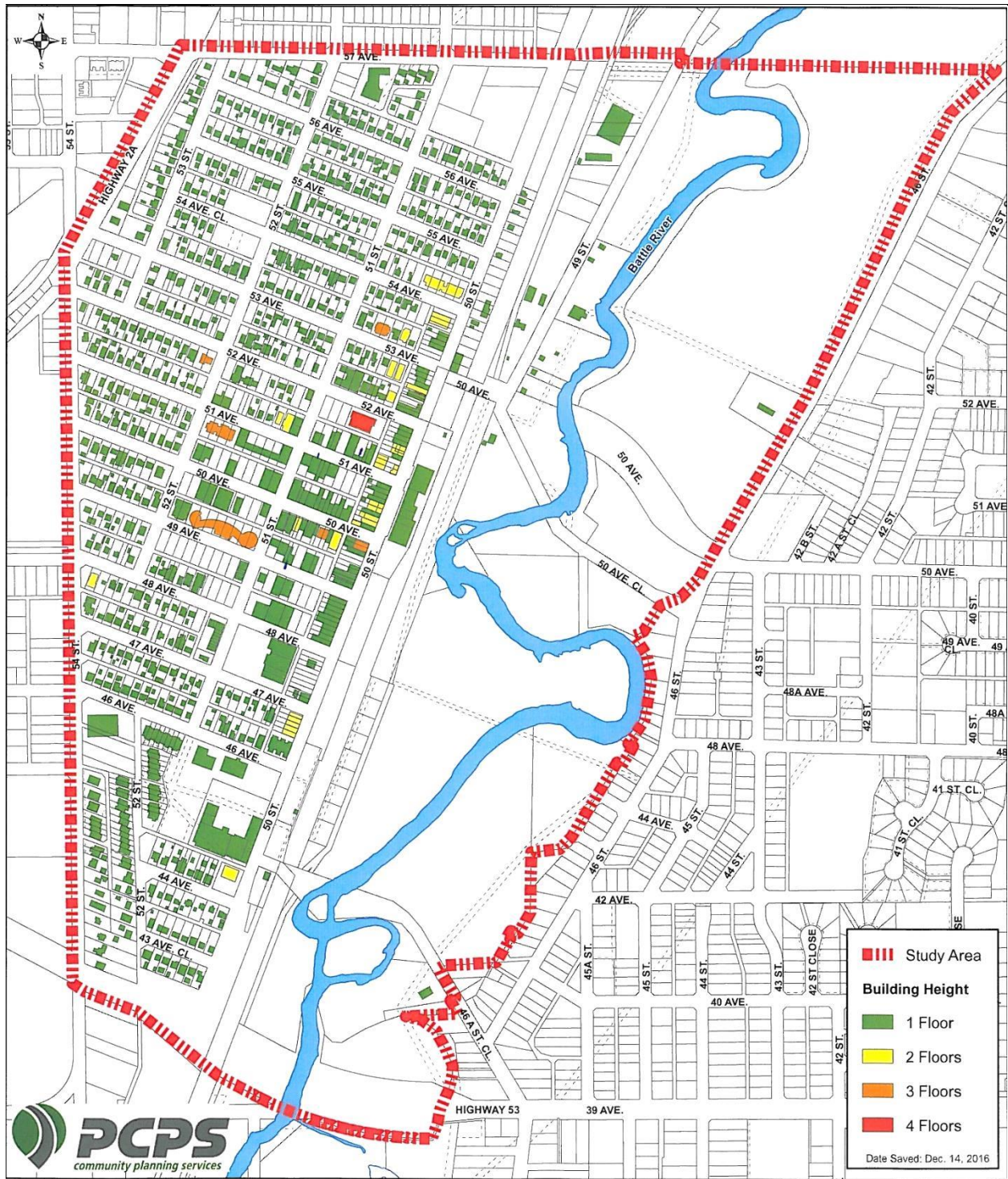
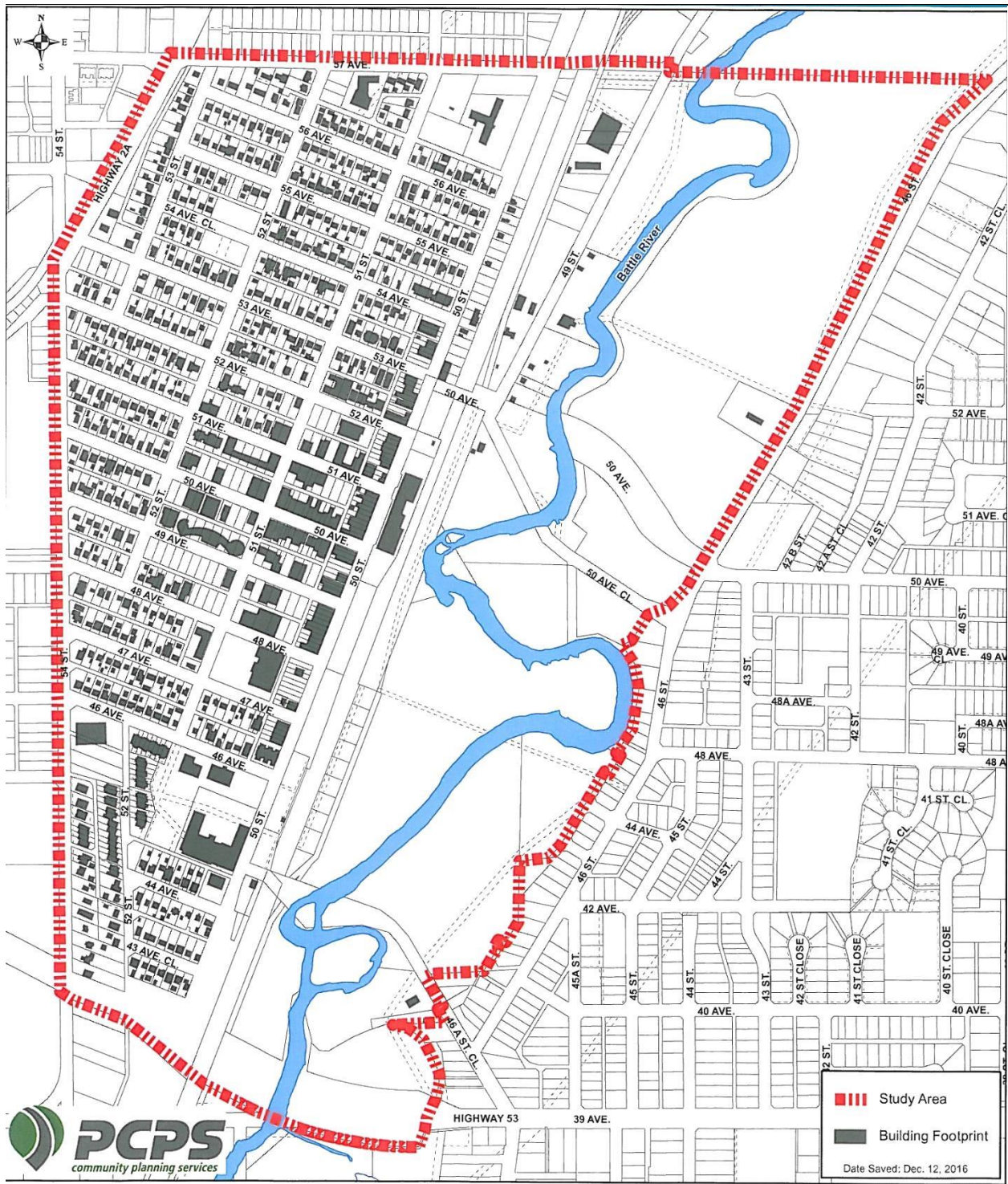


Figure 8: Building Footprints



The building foot print also offers a glimpse of how efficiently the development is using the available parcel. In areas where there is space available on the parcel, parking could potentially be accommodated on site, or an expansion of the structure.

By evaluating the building footprint we can calculate a gross floor area for each type of use within the commercial area. With a total of 136 buildings used for commercial purposes there is a gross total of 468,224 sq. ft. of commercial space within the downtown area. Of that gross total approximately 40% is being used for retail, 5% is being used for restaurants, 14% is currently vacant premises, 35% is being used for offices or some type of service, and the remaining 6% is being used for entertainment and hotel establishments.

## **Municipal Utilities**

The Town of Ponoka provides water, wastewater, storm drainage and electrical services to the Downtown area. Water, wastewater and storm drainage lines are mainly located within the road rights of way with service provided to the fronts of buildings and properties. These services make use of laneways in some select locations.

Electrical service is provided through a series of overhead lines typically running in the lanes behind properties. Underground feeds come off this system to reach the street lights located in the streets and avenues and individual buildings.

The piped storm drainage system in the Downtown area is designed to handle frequent, small rain events. Larger events are conveyed to a receiving water body through use of curb and gutter along the streets and avenues. Intense rainfall events result in local ponding of water.

The Town is undertaking a life cycle assessment of all municipal infrastructure in 2016 with preliminary results expected in May 2016. This will provide the basis for a capital improvement plan using priorities based on the infrastructure needing the earliest attention. At this point, it is expected that water line replacement throughout Downtown area will form part of the capital improvement plan. Wastewater mains would be relined rather than fully replaced depending on condition of individual segments of main. The same assessment will address increased capacity in the storm drainage mains to alleviate local flooding.

In addition to the electrical distribution system, the Town maintains street lights and traffic signals. The three sets of traffic signals in the Downtown area are older equipment that needs to be replaced. This is tentatively scheduled for 2017 once an overall streetscape plan is complete.

## Open Space and Trails

The Study Area contains parcels that form part of the community wide open space system. The most prominent, as seen on Figure 9, is the river valley along the Battle River. This area consists of publicly owned land that has been put to recreation use and private lands that have been left in a natural state.

Public recreation activities in the river valley include three ball diamonds, a soccer pitch, picnic areas, an outdoor fitness park and part of the Diamond Willow Trail network. Most of these occupy Town land but portions of the trail along the river shoreline make use of an easement over private lands.

The trail network in the south part of the river valley provides good access into the south end of the Downtown for residents east of the river by way of the pedestrian bridge and pedestrian crossing over the railway. The only other trail access into the Downtown is on the sidewalk at Siding 14 Crossing which links to the sidewalk along the west side of 50 Street.

The old dam site is accessible by way of a gravel road leading south from 50 Avenue. At the end of the road are a small parking/turnaround area and a gazebo with a picnic table.

The second open space area is the unnamed park that is west of IGA and south of the Seniors' Drop In Centre. This area is largely grass with an established tree canopy. A small part of the area is occupied by horseshoe pits.

Central Park is located in the northwest part of the Study Area and serves as the community playground for the surrounding residential area. The park contains a sand pit/beach volleyball court, playground equipment, and a basketball half court.



*Photo: Siding 14/Tractor Park*

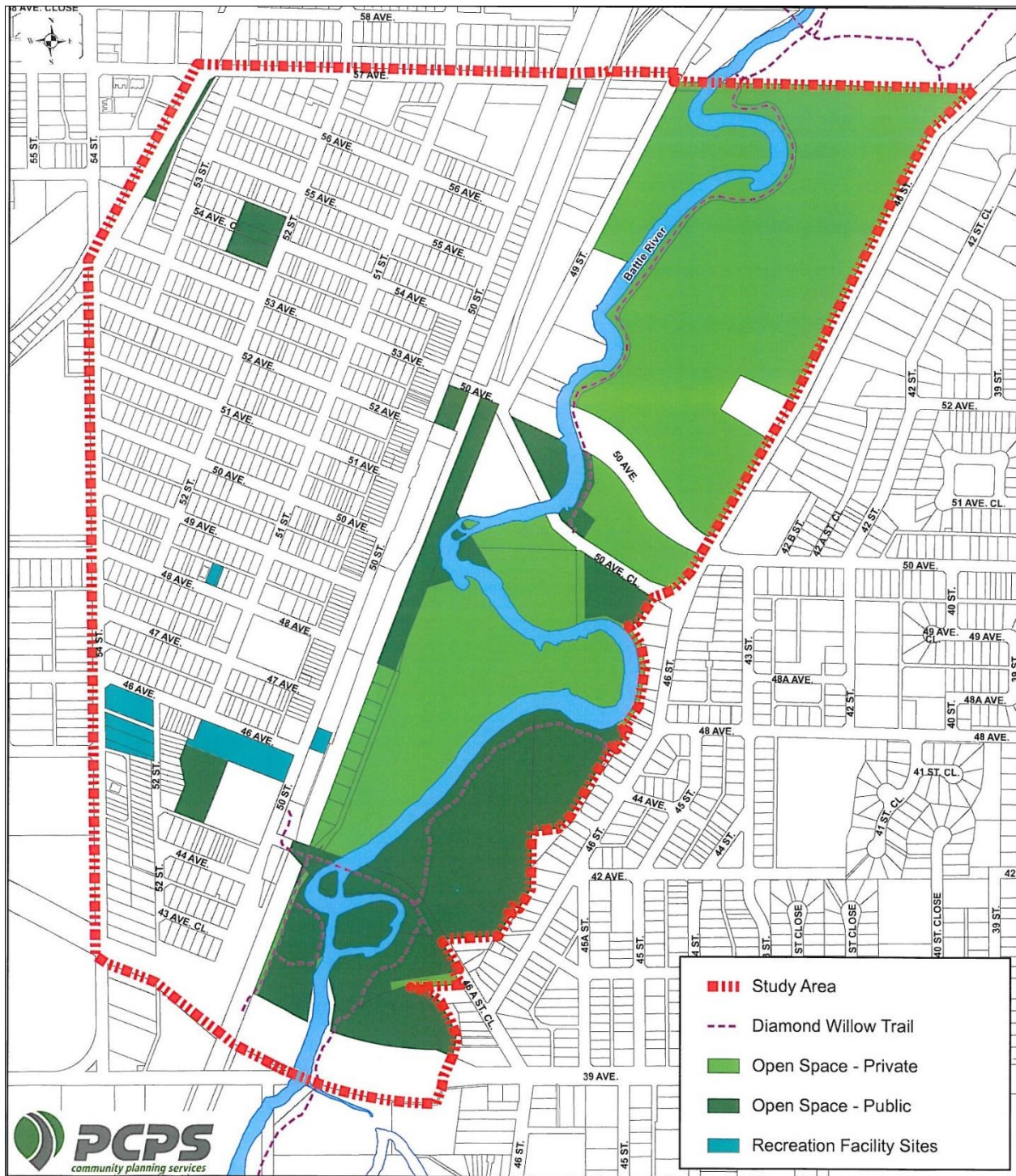


*Photo: Central Park*

The fourth significant open space area is Siding 14 Park/Tractor Park at the southeast corner of 50 Street and 50 Avenue. Originally started as the garden for the railway station the park has taken on a different persona over the years. It contains examples of farm equipment and service station equipment from earlier eras which have led to it being referred to as "Tractor Park."



Figure 9: Open Space and Major Trails



In addition to the open space areas described above, the Study Area contains recreation building facilities operated by the Town. This includes the Kinsmen Centre, Seniors Drop In Centre and the Aquaplex. These facilities form part of the “campus” of recreation facilities which includes the arena site just to the west on 54 Street.

## Property Ownership

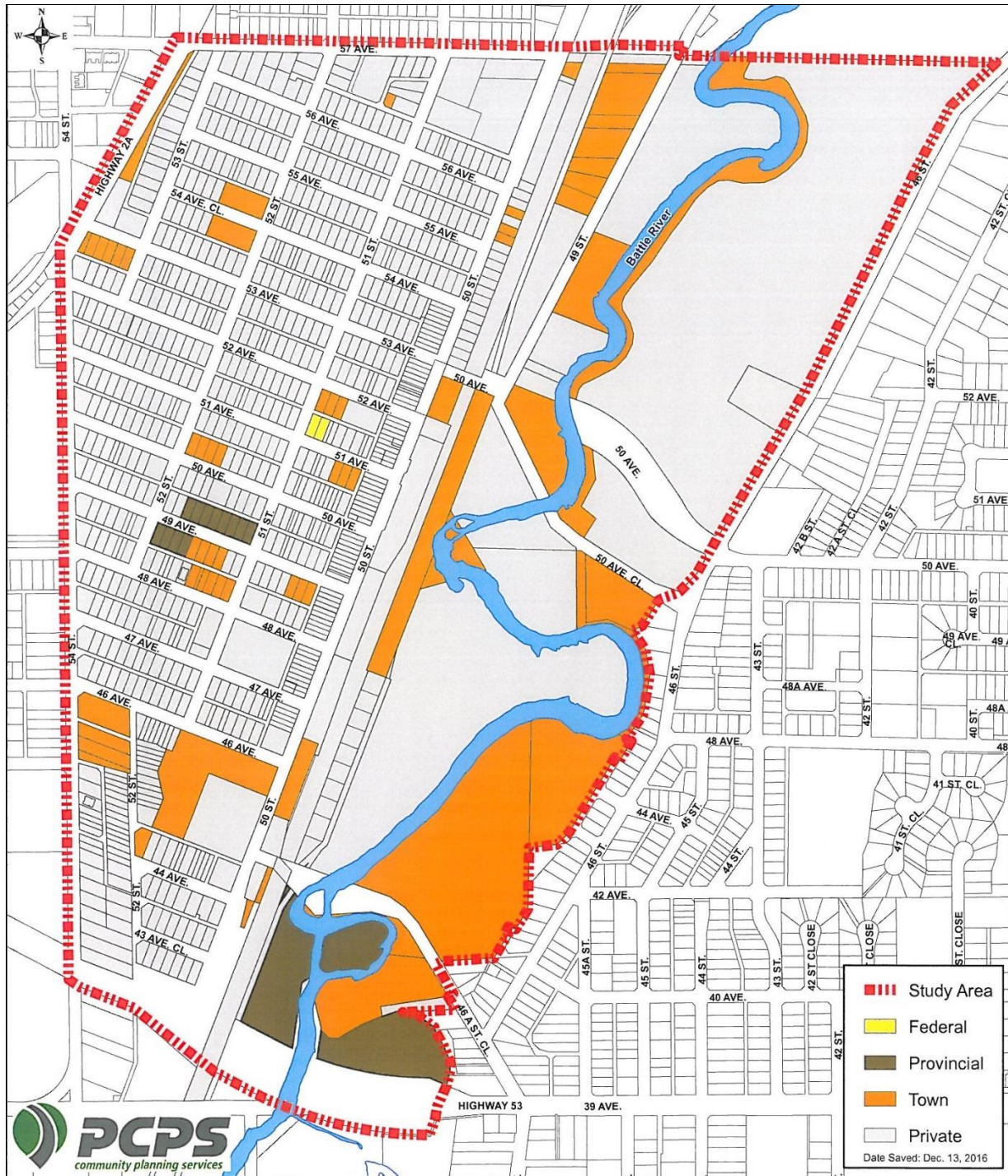
Figure 10 shows the various titled parcels in the Study Area that are publicly and privately owned. With the exception of Highway 2A and Highway 53, all road allowances fall under the ownership and control of the Town.

The areas owned by the Town represent a variety of public purposes. Some are the sites of Town recreation facilities or parks. Others have a special purpose such as the RCMP station, Central Pumping Station and Town Works Yard.

Two areas of note are the lands along the west side of the railway and the lands within the river valley. First, the gravelled areas along the west side of the railway are owned by Canadian Pacific Railway. As is typical in other Central Alberta towns, it is commonplace for the general public to treat these lands as publicly accessible despite private ownership. Second, large blocks of land in the river valley are privately owned. The perception that undeveloped green areas is under public ownership is also commonplace.

The property ownership patterns will have implications for the range of options to be implemented in the revitalization of Downtown Ponoka. In some cases, the added step of securing landownership will be required. In other others, the Town may already own the space for a proposed feature or activity.

Figure 10: Property Ownership

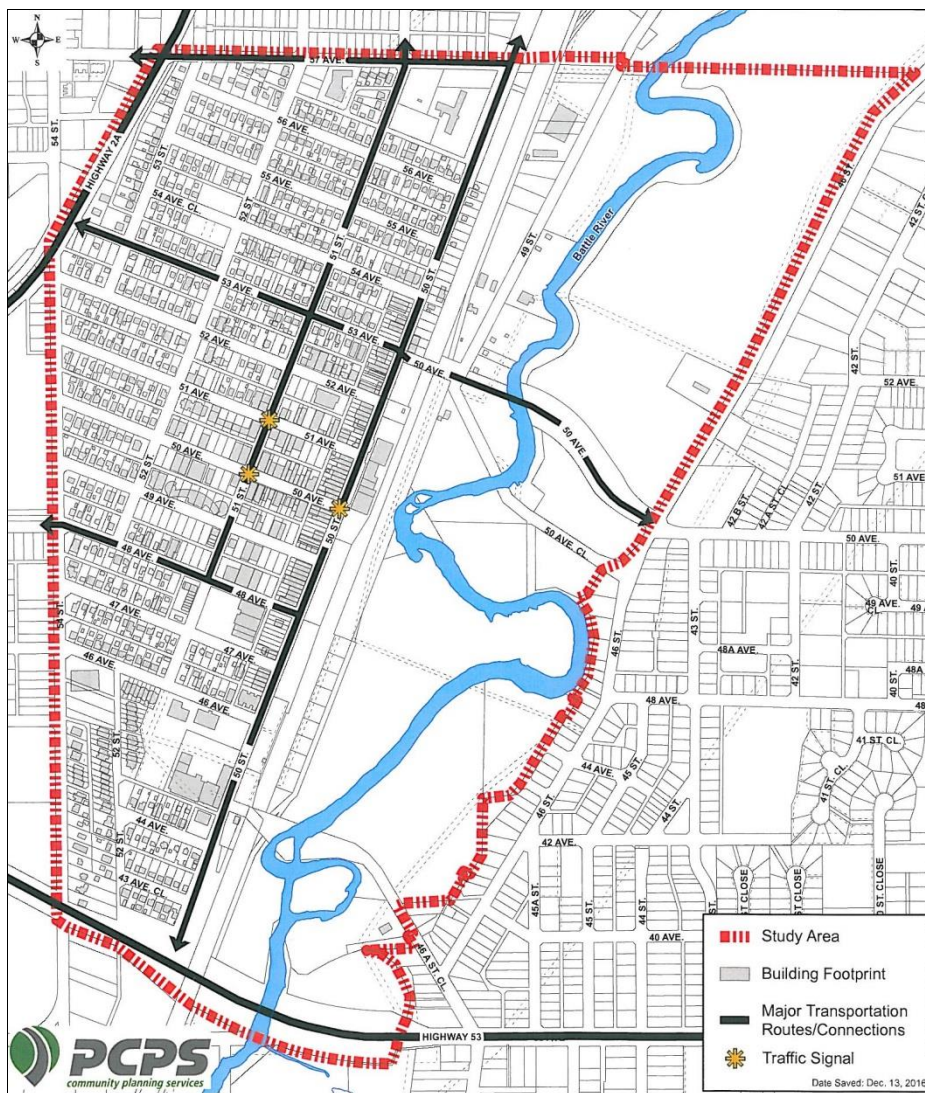


## Transportation and Circulation

Figure 11 shows the main roadways for vehicle and pedestrian traffic into and through the Study Area. Designated undivided arterial roads include 57 Avenue across the north boundary and 50 Street through the middle of the Study Area. Designated major collector roads are 48 Avenue and 50/53 Avenue/Veteran’s Way. These designations come from the Master Servicing Concept. The map also identifies 51 Street from 48 Avenue north as a major route based on observed traffic during the field investigation.

The majority of intersections in the Downtown area are managed through stop signs. Three intersections are managed with automated traffic signals. For the most part, traffic flow in the Downtown is rated as good and does not exhibit any regularly occurring trouble spots. The Town has started a traffic study (no transportation master plan presently exists) and the results are expected to be available in September/October 2017.

**Figure 11: Major Roadways**



Despite an overall good rating there are two intersections where traffic flow could be improved. One is the 4 way stop at Highway 2A and Veterans' Way (near FasGas) which has the highest collision record at 4 to 5 collisions per year. The second is the Highway 53 and 50 Street intersection which can be a problem for southbound to eastbound traffic due to limited visibility to the east (limited by crest of bridge) and high speed of oncoming traffic (does not give a lot of reaction time). This intersection is thought to have performed much better when the temporary 4 way stop was used in 2016 as part of the traffic accommodation plan for the north bridge replacement.

## **Road Cross Sections**

Regardless of their functional classification as an arterial, collector or local road, the majority of roads in the Downtown area have the same right of way width and very similar carriageway widths. Most also include a separate sidewalk with a boulevard, typical of residential streets, or a mono-walk sidewalk to facilitate pedestrian movements throughout the area. Avenues tend to have sidewalk on both sides of the street and streets may only have sidewalk on one side.

## **Traffic Count Data**

The Town does not have a routine traffic count program for local roads. Data is available from the annual Alberta Transportation counts on the highways. Based on a count conducted for the new bridge project the volume of traffic on Siding 14 Crossing is estimated at 2,200 vehicles per day.

Alberta Transportation traffic count data for 2015 records an annual daily average of 7,300 vehicle trips on Highway 2A north of the intersection with 48 Avenue. This number increases to 7,900 in summer months (May to September). A higher volume is experienced on Highway 2A south of 48 Avenue with average annual daily traffic of 9,510 and increasing to 10,290 vehicle trips in the summer.

Vehicles going east on 48 Avenue averages 5,210 daily vehicle trips and this figure increases to 5,640 in summer months. This traffic is a combination of those accessing the schools on 48 Avenue and those heading farther east to reach Downtown.

The average annual daily traffic on Highway 53 across the south end of Downtown is recorded at 7,920 to 8,600 vehicle trips. In summer months this increases to 8,570 to 9,300 daily vehicle trips.

The traffic count data gives a sense of the volume of potential passing customers that could be drawn into the Downtown area.

## Parking in Downtown Ponoka

There are few parking regulations in place in downtown. A one hour parking limit is in place along the west side of 50 Street between 50 Avenue and 52 Avenue. A 30 min limit is in place at the RCMP station and the Post Office. Beyond these areas, the only on street parking regulation relates to the location of fire hydrants and a few dedicated handicap parking stalls. There are no parking restrictions along Chipman Avenue.

The 1 hour parking restriction on part of 50 Street near Chipman Avenue is thought to have been put in place at the request of businesses to ensure employees and shop owners did not take up the on-street parking. This may have taken place approximately 30 years ago when the parking meters were removed from Downtown.

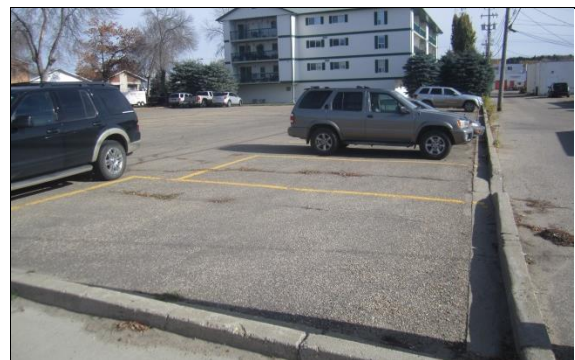
The Town owns and manages three off-street parking lots for general public use. One is on the south side of 52 Avenue east of 51 Street. Another is on the south side of 51 Avenue between 50 Street and 51 Street. The third is on the south side of 49 Avenue between 50 Street and 51 Street. These locations are shown on Figure 12 along with available on-street parking areas and larger private parking lots.

The 52 Avenue (or north) parking lot contains 47 marked stalls. The 51 Avenue (or central) parking lot has 40 marked stalls and the 49 Avenue (or south) parking lot has 40. Each parking lot is laid out in a pattern completely different than the other two. The north lot is a single internal loop. The central lot is two separate parking bays. The south lot is a one way internal loop using angle parking.

The three Town parking lots have been in place for many years. An exact time when these facilities were created is not known. There is minimal signage identifying the lots as Town-supplied public parking and no regulations relating to length of permitted stay are apparent.



*Photo: Town Parking Lot on 51 Avenue*



*Photo: Town Parking Lot on 52 Avenue*



**Photo: Town Parking Lot on 49 Avenue**

In addition to the three Town parking lots discussed above the Town manages parking lots for the library staff and users and the Kinsmen Centre/Seniors Drop-In Centre. These two parking areas account for approximately 110 stalls. The Kinsmen Centre parking lot is available for general public parking.

On-street parking on the various commercial blocks in the downtown area, as shown on the Parking Areas map, accounts for approximately 546 parking stalls. The vast majority of these spaces are unmarked and consist of available curb line not broken by driveways or parking bays that come directly off the street (for example, like the multi-bay building on 51 Street south of 49 Avenue). With the exception of Chipman Avenue, on-street parking spaces are parallel to the curb.

Based on the background collected for the Friedman Report, there are approximately 429 parking stalls within the major private commercial parking lots for customer and employee use.

In total, it appears that the supply of private and public parking available for use by customers and employees amounts to 1,212 stalls.

Not accounted for in the range given above are the many parking stalls at the back of properties off the lanes. Also not included is the dedicated parking lots meant for employee parking for the Provincial Building and RCMP station. Finally, the use of CPR lands near 49 Avenue as an informal parking area is not included.



**Photo: Parking off Lane**



**Photo: Parking on Street**

Figure 12: Public and Private Parking Areas





The Chipman Avenue design with angled parking on one side is occasionally a source of complaint as people find it difficult or uncomfortable to back out when they are beside a larger vehicle that obstructs their view. Patrons also have to approach the street from the west only if you wish to find an on-street parking stall without crossing the centreline. Many eastbound drivers do a u-turn mid-block to get into a parking stall and then a 3-5 point turn to straighten up in the stall.



*Angled On-Street Parking on Chipman Avenue*

## **Parking Use Survey**

On Wednesday, December 14, 2016 PCPS staff undertook a parking survey for the following areas:

- the three Town owned parking lots closest to Chipman Avenue on 49 Avenue, 51 Avenue and 52 Avenue;
- the on-street parking on Chipman Avenue between 50 Street and 51 Street; and
- the on-street parking areas along the west side of 50 Street extending one block north and one block south of Chipman Avenue.

The date of the survey was selected to correspond with auction day and the holiday shopping season. The weather conditions were overcast with a slight wind and a temperature of -26 degrees Celsius.

A license plate survey was carried out with observers driving/walking through the selected areas on a 30 minute cycle. The survey began at 9:00 am and ran until 5:00 pm. The license plate of the vehicle occupying the parking stall or space was recorded. Where marked stalls were available the observers matched the license plate with the stall occupied. Where marked stalls were not available, such as the parallel parking area on 50 Street, the parking spaces were approximated. In some cases the parking stall markings were obscured by a light covering of snow.

The key findings from the survey are presented in the tables below.

<b>Parking Lot</b>	<b>North 52 Avenue</b>	<b>Central 51 Avenue</b>	<b>South 49 Avenue</b>
Number of Available Stalls	47	40	40
Total Number of Users/Vehicles	31	55	13
Average Turnover Rate per Stall (vehicle/stall)	0.66	1.38	0.33
Total Parking Hours Available (hrs)	399.5	357	340
Total Parking Hours Used (hrs)	87	238	90
Total Capacity Used (%)	22	67	26
Average Length of Stay (hrs)	2.80	4.33	6.92
Length of Stay 2 Hours or Less	16	21	0
Length of Stay More than 2 Hours and Less than 4 Hours	4	6	0
Length of Stay 4 Hours or More	11	28	13
Peak Time of Use (time of day)	1:30 pm	1:30 pm	9:00 am
Capacity Used at Peak Time (% of stalls)	36	90	33

Observations for parking lots:

- capacity used over the observation period is below the 85% use mark that would suggest a highly used parking lot with no remaining capacity; North and South lots have substantial capacity available
- longer term stays greater than 4 hours represents majority of use; short term stays most prominent in Central lot

<b>On- Street Parking Area</b>	<b>50 Street</b>	<b>Chipman Avenue</b>
Number of Available Stalls	16	24
Total Number of Users/Vehicles	100	135
Average Turnover Rate per Stall (vehicle/stall)	6.25	5.63
Total Parking Hours Available (hrs)	136	204
Total Parking Hours Used (hrs)	70	137.5
Total Capacity Used (%)	51	67
Average Length of Stay (hrs)	0.70	1.02
Length of Stay 1 Hour or Less	104	123
Length of Stay More than 1 Hour and Less than 2 Hours	3	13
Length of Stay 2 Hours or More	2	6
Peak Time of Use (time of day)	11:30 am and 2:00 pm	11:30 am and 12:30 pm
Capacity Used at Peak Time (% of stalls)	69	96

Observations for on-street parking areas:

- 50 Street is only area surveyed with a parking time restriction; number of short term stays includes repeat visits at different points in day
- capacity used over the observation period is below the 85% use mark that would suggest a highly used parking area with no remaining capacity

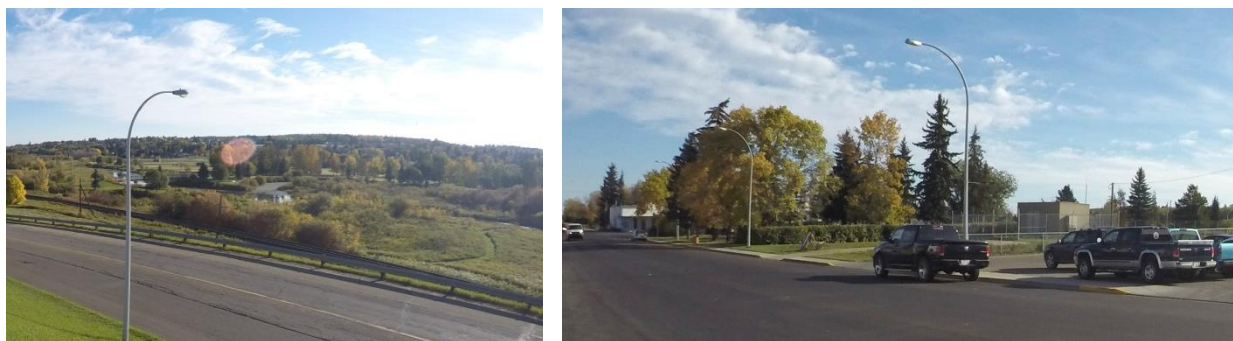
## Landscaping in Streetscapes - Existing Conditions

The overall visual impression of the landscape components within the study area varies based on the street location. Some streets have maintained a mature overhead street tree canopy, while others lack planting of any kind. Parallel parking on most streets provides pedestrian separation from travel lanes. Defined areas of the study area have enhanced landscape treatments from past efforts; however, the maintenance and upkeep of some elements such as tree grates, which now create tripping hazards. Decorative lighting, banners, and site furniture are modern and placed at typical corner and midblock locations. Street signs are typical specification and some require replacement.

Most buildings in the Downtown area have minimal landscaping and primarily are built to the edge of sidewalks. A change in the newer construction and box stores has taken some parking off the street and provided internal parking at storefronts.



Park and open space is mainly located along the railway edge with good access to the Battle River valley. The park space to the north of the Shoppers Drugs parking lot has a strong plant boundary that may need to be thinned out or removed in order to help blend the park into neighbouring properties.



The following outlines the districts within the study areas and their associated landscape elements.

### Downtown Commercial District

The landscape components within the Downtown include limited benches of assorted types but mostly modern style and recent installation. They are typically placed at the corners of the block or at pocket landscape areas that are out of the pedestrian circulation zones. The placement of the seating does lack any view or setting and are typically a functional position. Trash containers are also spread throughout the area and are different design types.

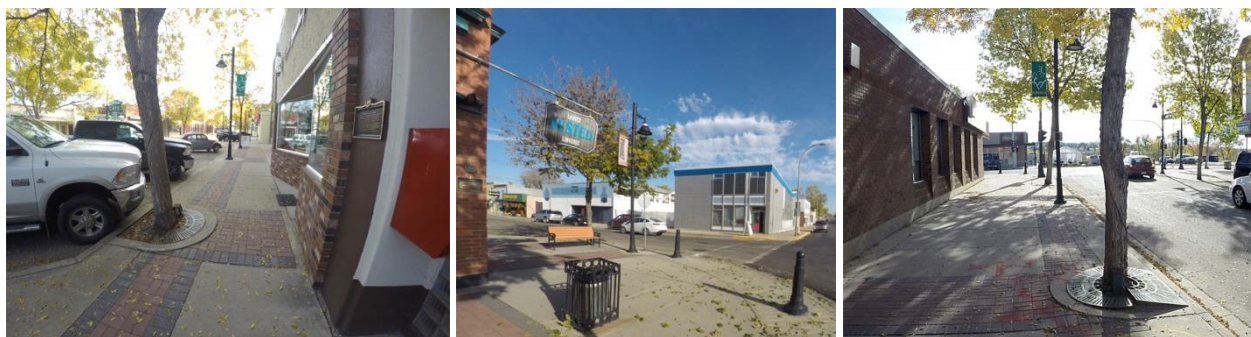
50 Street is the main north-south thoroughfare that provides sidewalk access along the entire west side of the street. The south side connection to Highway 53 (39 Avenue) lacks any pedestrian link due to grading and there is also a lack of any entrance feature or directional signage indicating the presence or gateway to the Downtown area. The views of the river valley, however, are enhanced dramatically based on the elevated location at this intersection.

The linear green strip along the railway line has had previous businesses that have become visual eyesores against a very natural backdrop. The overall area, aside from the skate park, is being used as parking. An attempt of border planting with recent planting of Crabapple trees, lilacs and sandcherry shrubs has been made to create a streetscape edge. There is no sidewalk or pedestrian pathway along this edge until midblock between 49 Avenue and Chipman Avenue.

Mature street tree planting and ornamental streetlights with banners are introduced at 49 Avenue as part of the Chipman block of businesses. Corner bulbs with bollards and coloured pavers in the sidewalk also contribute to adding some uniqueness and visual interest to this block along the west side. The east side of the block contains angled and parallel parking for the strip mall businesses and some scarce tree and shrub planting in front of Shoppers Drugs.

The Shoppers parking lot is bordered by a 4'high chain link fence that separates the parking from the utility lot to the north.

There may be potential to remove some of the fencing and hedges along the green space in order to open it up to expanded uses and shared parking. The west side of the street has sidewalk grade separation from most of the building entrances and no landscape items between 51 Avenue and 52 Avenue. Wide, plain sidewalks continue north along the businesses facing the park space and a bench and trash container are centered at the sidewalk along the park. Continuing north of 53 Avenue there is new sidewalk along the west side and an abandoned building at the intersection that is another visual eye-sore.



Each Avenue lacks any decorative landscape other than sidewalks and some tree planting that has remained through business redevelopments. Chipman Avenue (50<sup>th</sup>) is the exception as redevelopment efforts were undertaken to add paving patterns, decorative lighting and street tree planting. Sidewalk bulbs at the block corners and midblock provide seating areas and reduce street crossing distances for pedestrians. The gateway signage for the block is oriented from the west and could use similar signage at the east end. Currently some tree grates could be removed to prevent tripping hazards and the entire block could use additional site furniture and planters to increase the visual interest and pedestrian scale that the street has started to achieve.

### Residential Streets

These areas consist of mainly single family homes with mature landscaping in front yards. The traditional streetscape has been well cared for over time and results in established overhead canopied streets that are enviable and highly valued in current design standards.



### Future Design Considerations

Some fundamental and overall considerations must be included during the design process to contribute to a successful, long-term plan. These include:

#### Designing for a Winter Climate

- Decorative lighting
- Shade/Deciduous trees
- Storefront Awnings

#### Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

- Clear sightlines from within buildings
- Avoid creating hidden areas
- Implied ownership zones
- Quality/vandal proof materials
- Year round uses of space
- Avoid pedestrian/vehicle conflict areas

## Architectural Styles

### Commercial Architectural Styles

A variety of architectural styles have been used throughout the commercial development of the downtown core. These styles were identified in the Design Guidelines, and reflect the scale of development and common building materials of the day.

Boomtown – modest wood buildings characterized by the false front façade extending beyond the gable with a cap board at the top of the elevation. Typically one-storey structures with small front windows and a recessed entrance. The Ponoka Meat Market building is an existing representation of this style.



Early Commercial – this style of building had 3 distinctive parts, 1. Classic storefront with large display windows, recessed entrance and sign band 2. The upper field which contained either upper windows or decorative elements depending on the height 3. A cap, parapet or cornice atop the upper field as a decorative element. An existing example of this style is the former Bird Drug Company store, the large display windows can be seen, with a prominent sign band above, upper windows and topped with a cornice and parapet.

Late Commercial – this style largely resembles the Early Commercial style but with more simplified detailing. This style also incorporates large display windows with a recessed entrance in the lower portion, and a cornice or parapet in the upper. The Algar building on 50 Street is an existing example of this architectural style. The large display windows over the decorative bulkhead can be seen with the recessed entrance, transom windows are located above the display windows with a lower cornice, topped with an upper cornice and parapet in the upper field.





Moderne – this style is characterized by a streamline effect with often asymmetrical windows non-traditional window treatments, and the exterior treatments often favoured stucco. An existing example of this style is the Sweet Block building on Chipman Avenue. Typical characteristics include the horizontal stream lines, stucco finish, curved recessed entrances and asymmetrical storefront.

Post-1960 Trends – construction trends within the period were a rapid change in trends occurred. Several examples can be found within the downtown, with the Provincial Building being the most prominent. This building was constructed in curvilinear style, a great departure from the common rectangular construction with vertical and horizontal streamlines.





### Residential Architectural Styles

Within the Plan area the most common dwellings constructed were bungalow type detached dwellings. The massing in these structures was kept low, with the footprint spread across the parcel. The predominantly bungalow style dwellings creates a consistent streetscape in most areas of the downtown.



Throughout the Plan area there are also examples of 2-storey detached dwellings, with several exhibiting similar trends to the example.

Dispersed throughout the Plan area are examples of recent residential infill development, which display current residential trends, using natural building materials, detailed elevation design to decrease the massing effect, while maintaining consistency in the streetscape building heights.



## **Business Mix**

According to the Town's business license database there are 232 licensed businesses in the Town of Ponoka. Based on field investigation there are 118 businesses located in the Downtown area thereby accounting for a little over 50 percent of the local business community. Membership in the Chamber of Commerce numbers 159; which suggests that it is very likely that several businesses in the Downtown area are not a Chamber member.

Figure 13 provides a more detailed breakdown of the nature of the commercial activity observed in the Downtown area. Given the relative lack of second and third floors most activity occurs at ground or first floor level.

The largest single sub-category of commercial use is retail representing 44 of the 118 businesses. The second largest sub-category is personal services, covering such activities as hair salons and travel agencies, with 24 of the 118 businesses. The third largest sub-category is medical or health related businesses accounting for 16 of the 118 total. In combination these sub-categories represent 71 percent of the businesses in the Downtown.

The entertainment and restaurant sub-categories combined contain 14 businesses.

## **Business Hours**

Figure 14 shows the location of businesses that are open past 6pm on weekdays. Some 37 businesses are open after 6pm on weekdays. Another 11 businesses, mostly entertainment or food venues, are open after 9pm on weekdays.

Twenty-six (26) businesses are open for part of Saturday and part of Sunday.

Figure 13: Activities and Uses on Main Floor Level

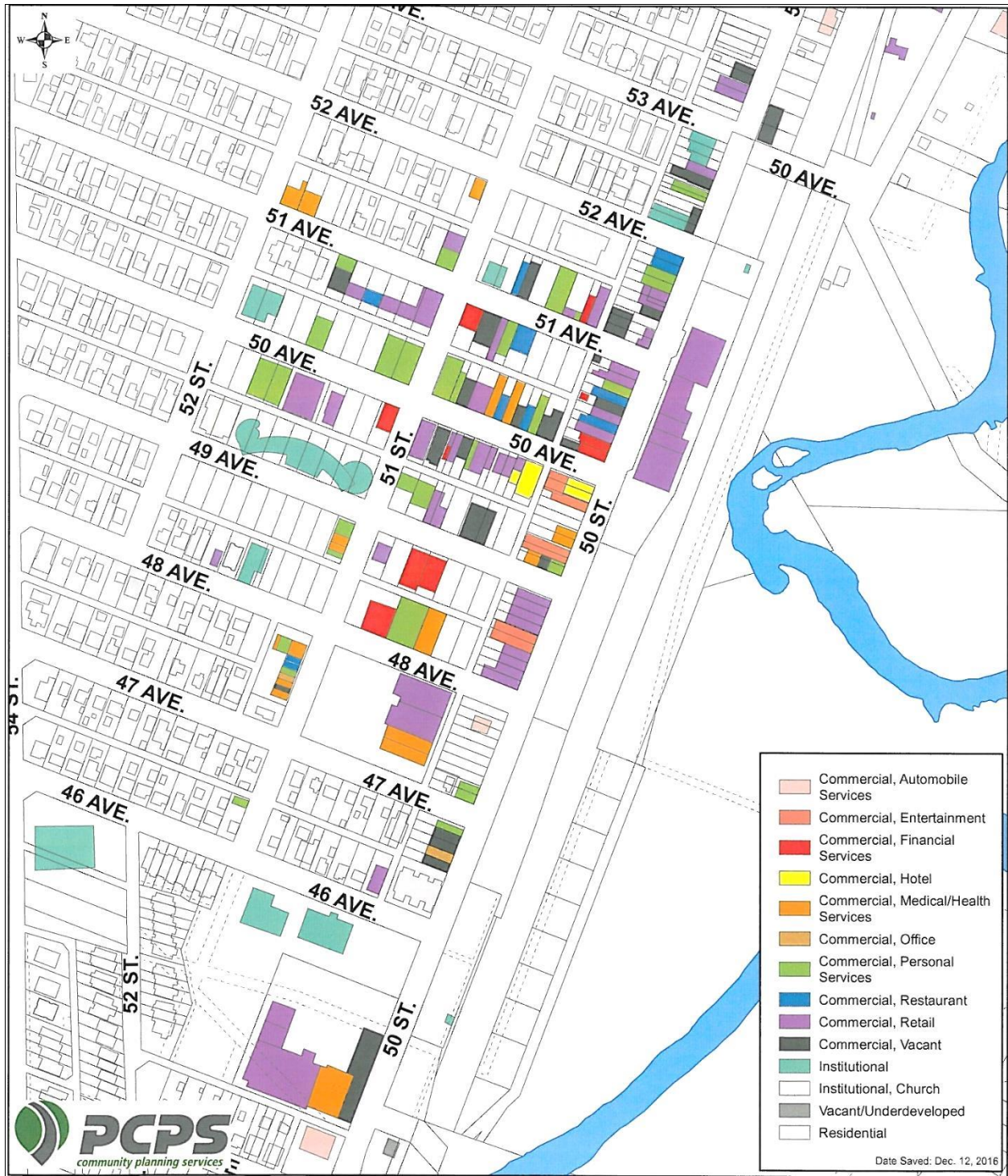
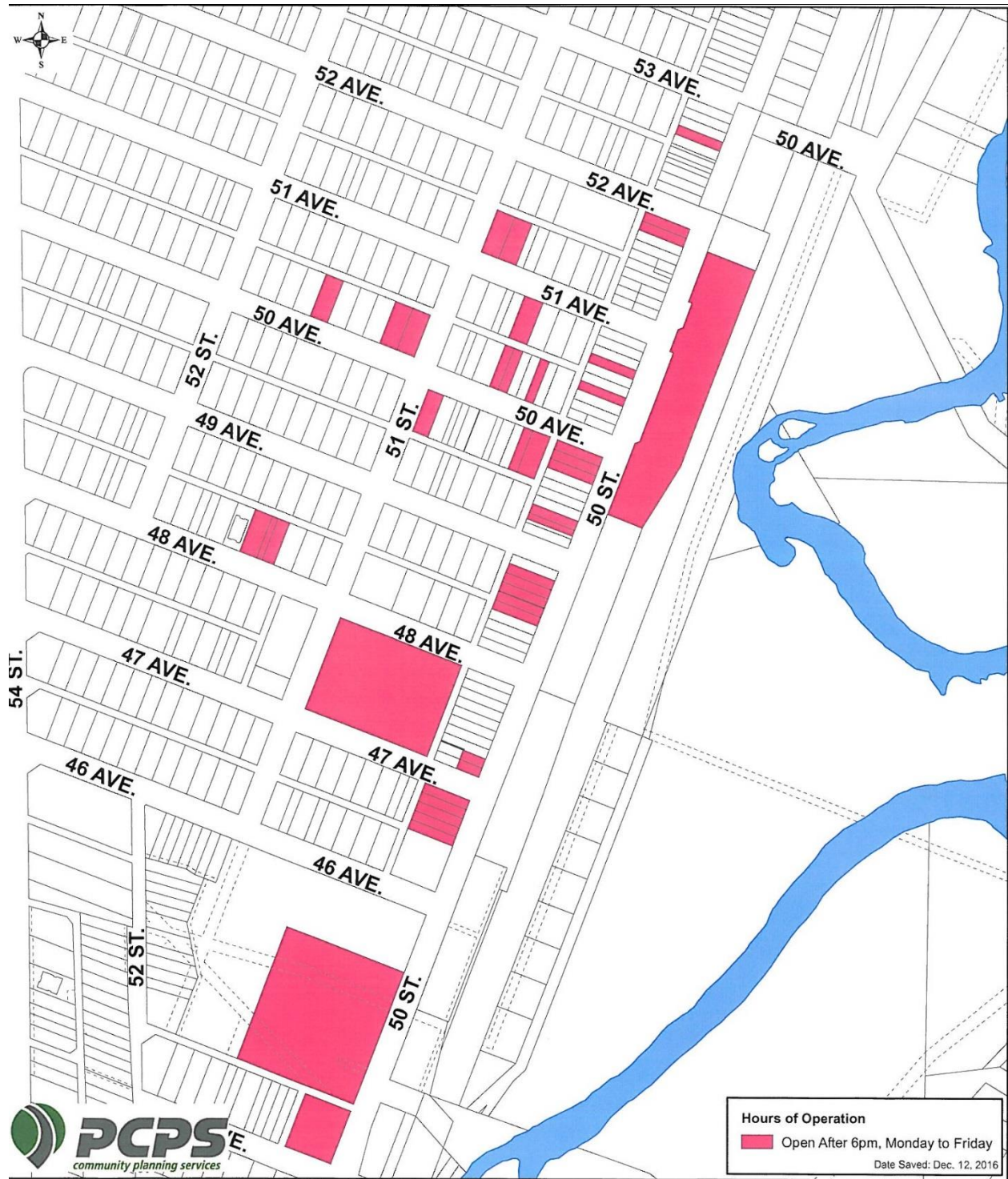


Figure 14: Business Open after 6PM on Weekdays



## **Vacancies and Lease Rates**

Local realtors estimate that there is at least 20,000 square feet of vacant building space in the Downtown area. Based on field investigation in late September 2016, the amount of vacant gross floor area could be as high as 64,500 square feet. This amounts to 13.8 percent of the estimated total gross commercial floor area in the Downtown. In terms of number of premises that are available to a new tenant it represents 25 out of 136 or 18 percent.

Figure 13 includes a representation of the amount and location of vacant building space as of late September 2016.

Present lease rates range from \$7.00/sq ft to \$12.00/sq ft depending on the size and quality of the space. Larger spaces in the 2,000 sq ft and up range have lower lease rates between \$7.00/ sq ft and \$10.00/sq ft. Smaller commercial bays closer to the 400 sq ft size, like those in the Old Public Works Building (corner of 48 Avenue and 51 Street), lease for \$10.00/sq ft to \$12.00/sq ft.

In comparison, some of the new commercial building space in the highway commercial areas is leasing at rates close to \$12.00/sq ft.

It is not uncommon for commercial lease opportunities and sale opportunities in Downtown Ponoka to stay on the market in excess of 120 days.

For many businesses in the downtown, owning their buildings rather than leasing represents the more affordable of the two options.

## **Building Values**

Information from the Towns Assessor indicates that the assessed value of commercial properties in Downtown Ponoka has grown by 13% between 2006 and 2016. Over the same time period the residential assessment values in the town have grown 60 to 65% and highway commercial properties have seen a 61% increase in assessed value. This is a reflection on the value of the building stock and the ability to derive income from leased space. It suggests that the value of the building stock in Downtown is not keeping pace with the rest of the community.

## Town of Ponoka Economic Indicators 2015

The Town of Ponoka is a member of the Central Alberta Economic Partnership (CAEP), which is a regional economic development alliance. As a member the Town of Ponoka receives an Economic Indicators report, which outlines the community demographics for the year.

### Income and Expenditures

- The average annual household income in Ponoka is \$75,000. For families the average annual income is \$90,000
- The average annual income for fulltime working males is \$67,000 while for fulltime working females annual average is \$47,000
- Average annual household expenditures breakdown as follows: \$31,119 on Shelter; \$21,543 on Tax/Insurance/Donations; \$14,248 on Transportation; \$9,118 on Food; \$5,474 on Pension Payments; \$4,513 on Recreation; \$4,488 on Health Care; \$3,976 on Clothing; \$3,396 on Other; \$1,907 on Education
- The annual disposable income per household is \$63,476 with annual discretionary income at \$47,474
- Ponoka has 377 households with annual income in the range of \$100,000 to \$124,999; 305 households with annual income in the range of \$125,000 to \$149,999; and 215 households with annual income over \$150,000

### Housing

- Ponoka's overall housing stock is made up on 2,442 detached and semi-detached dwellings, 517 apartment or multi-unit dwellings and 203 dwellings of other types
- The majority of homes, at 81%, are owner occupied and 19% are rented
- 1600 structures were built prior to 1980; 638 structures were built from 1981 to 2000; 703 structures were built after 2000

### Demographics

- The median age of males is 38.2 years and the median age of females is 40.6 years
- The four largest population cohorts are those between 55 to 59 years of age, those 20 to 24 years of age, those 50 to 54 years of age and those 30 to 34 years of age
- Historical population levels of Ponoka were 6,149 in 2001; 6,330 in 2006; and 6,773 as of 2011

- 18% of the population has a university level education, 20% has a college or equivalent level of education, 15% has a trade certificate or apprenticeship, 24% has high school or equivalent level of education and 21% has no certificate or diploma

## Housing and Residential Development

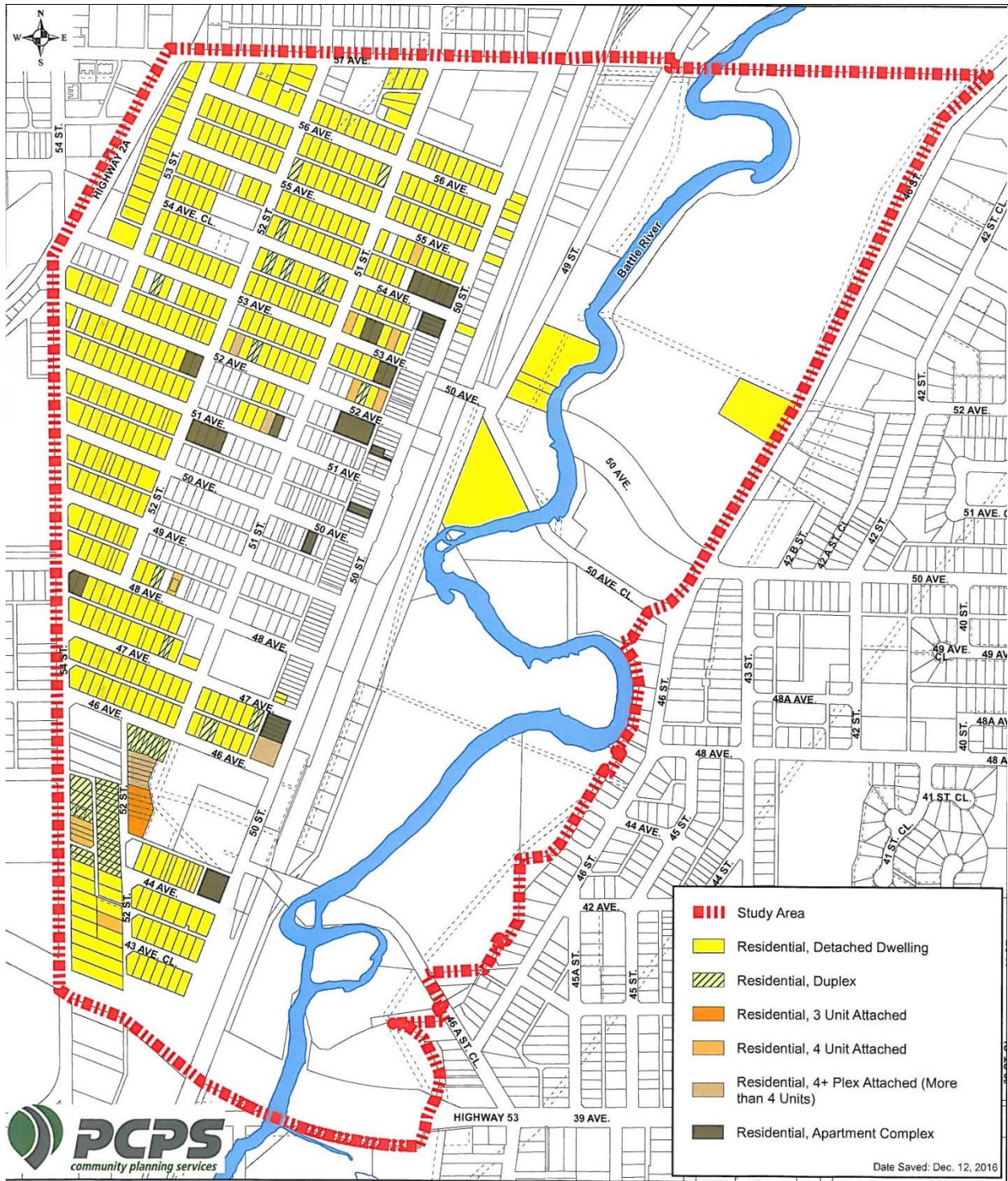
An inventory of the existing residential development was conducted in September of 2016. The inventory tallied each type of dwelling available in the area, being a detached dwelling, duplex, tri-plex, four-plex, row housing or apartment. Through this inventory a total number of dwelling units in the Study Area can be determined, along with a potential population.

Statistics Canada 2011 Census data for Ponoka states that the average number of persons in private households is 2.3 people. By multiplying the average household population by the approximate number of dwelling units the population living within the Study Area is estimated as 1,573 people.

Dwelling Types	Number of Buildings	Number of Units	Population
Detached Dwellings	428	428	984
Duplex	32	64	147
Three Unit Attached	2	6	14
Four Unit Attached	7	28	64
More than Four Unit Attached	4	25	58
Apartments	10	133	306

Figure 15 shows the types of residential dwellings throughout the Study Area. Infill development in the form of duplex and fourplex is taking place north of the commercial area. Much of the duplex and row housing development in the south portion of the Study Area is geared to seniors.

Figure 15: Residential Dwelling Types and Locations





## Vacant and Underdeveloped Lands

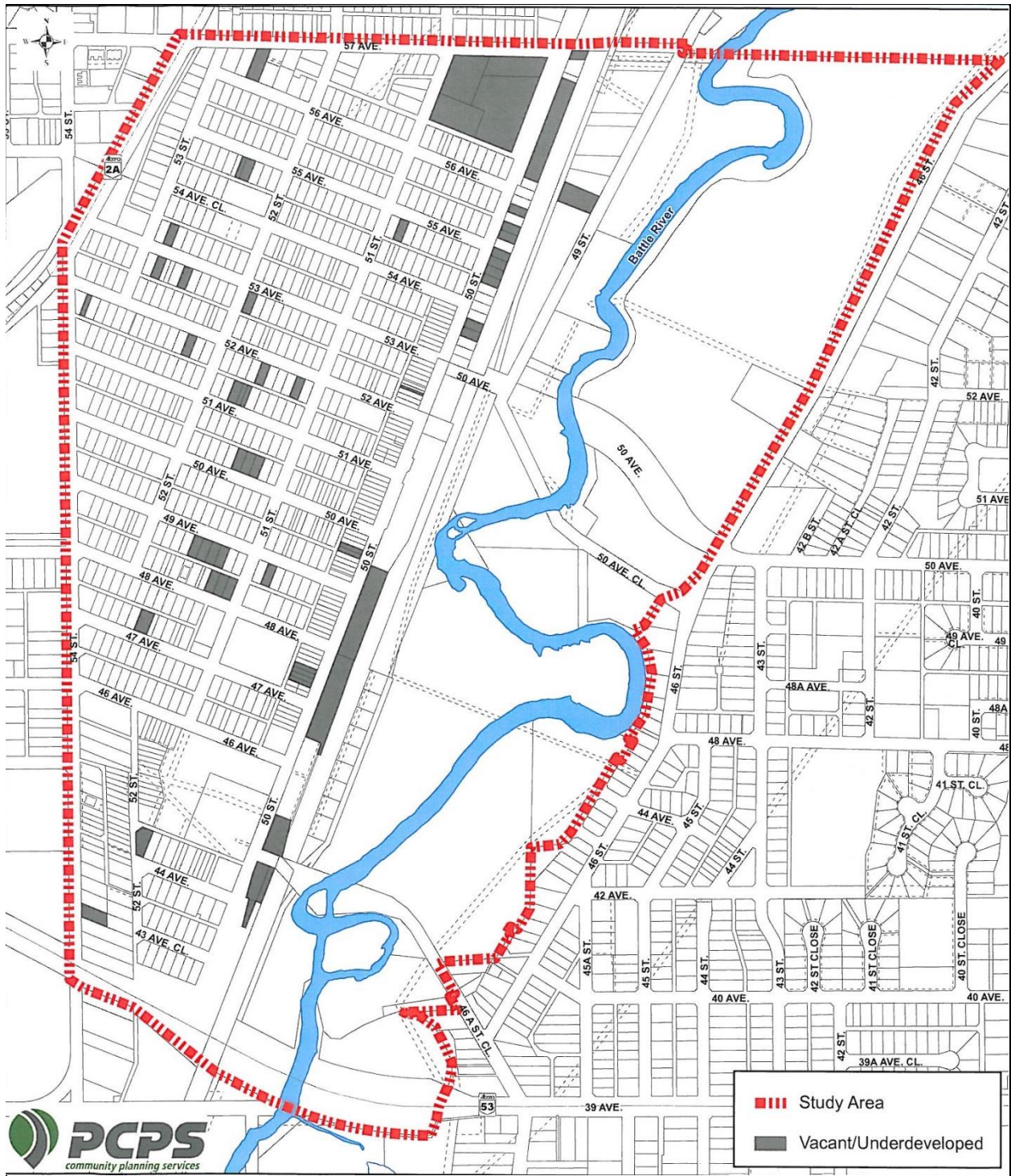
Within the Study Area, any lots which have been underutilized have been inventoried. These lots may be vacant, meaning there is no development on the site or underdeveloped meaning the lot has a capacity exceeding the current development. Figure 16 depicts all of the lots which were inventoried in the Study Area. The intent of identifying these lots is to target areas where redevelopment and infill would be best suited to use the existing infrastructure.

The parcels shaded in grey have been identified as lots which are developed in a manner that does not utilize the potential capacity. Either they are vacant with no development or development that is derelict and/or abandoned. These areas could potentially be targeted for redevelopment, filling voids in the downtown commercial core, and redeveloping sites which are already fully serviced to utilize the existing infrastructure.

Site specific examples include the old hospital site, which has the potential to be developed into multi use campus creating an anchor point in the north part of the Study Area. The vacant rail lands on the east side of 50 Street would be a prime commercial expansion area, filling in the vacant lands and completing the streetscape while providing a buffer for the active rail line. There is also an undeveloped section of Chipman Avenue west of 51 Street which should also be targeted for redevelopment to utilize the street location. The former Town Hall site across from the Provincial Building is another large vacant site within the downtown core.

Figure 16 also shows parcels in the residential parts of the Study Area. These are parcels that are currently underutilized as residential uses. The existing developments on these lots are older structures which may be at the end of their useful lives, and the lots are large enough to support a larger or more intense form of residential development. Examples of this have been found mainly in the west portion of the Study Area, in the form of lots with structures which could be replaced with new development. Some of these lots closer to the downtown core could potentially be redeveloped with higher density housing than the existing development to increase the number of households living in proximity to the commercial core of Downtown.

Figure 16: Vacant and Undeveloped Properties



## PART D – PERSPECTIVES ON DOWNTOWN

### Heritage and Downtown Revitalization Committee

The Heritage and Downtown Revitalization Committee (Committee) was formed in the fall of 2015 to provide input to Council regarding the enhancement and redevelopment of the Downtown. The purpose of the Committee is to; provide strategic direction, guidance and ideas to Council, determine a strategy to fund the initiatives of the Committee, promote buy-in to revitalization within downtown businesses, advise Council in decisions relating to building façade improvement and historical grants, develop architectural and design guidelines, and increase profile and identity of downtown.

To date, ideas and initiatives put forth by the committee include:

- Downtown Street Market on Chipman Avenue with street converted to pedestrian traffic only
- Meeting with Chipman Avenue business owners to discuss vacancies, storefront improvements, and events
- Cleanup the downtown with a clean-up week every May
- Feature a business in communications to the public from the committee
- Downtown business café to engage business owners
- Window painting project, have students paint murals on the business windows
- Downtown Passport program to draw people during Stampede Week

### Key Informant Interviews – Summary of Input

As part of the background research a series of key informant and stakeholder interviews were conducted. These interviews included members of the Heritage and Downtown Revitalization Committee, drawing on their collective representation of a variety of perspectives, as well as local realtors, and Town staff. Four broad questions were put to each interviewee focusing on valued aspects of Downtown Ponoka, challenges that are expected and vision or prospects for the future.

The summary below is based on the collective themes coming out of the interviews for each of the four interview questions. There is no order of priority in the presentation of the responses and individual comments have been paraphrased.

## **Question One: What 3 things or aspects of Downtown Ponoka do you treasure the most?**

Responses to this question focused on the following key themes:

### River Valley, Trails and Parks

A consistent mention was the role the river valley, parks and trails play in making downtown Ponoka an attractive and interesting area. This includes the natural beauty and greenery of the river valley and the activities that take there. Enjoying the trails and visiting the dog park were common references. The general sentiment is that the open space of the river valley is an asset that could be enhanced to create more appeal and draw people to the downtown area. Common suggestions for enhancement included more trail connections, good directional signage as well as interpretative opportunities pertaining to the natural landscape and human settlement of the area.

### Heritage Buildings and Older Style Architecture

Several respondents value the historic buildings and older architectural style reflected in the downtown commercial buildings. They point to the potential for a rich interpretative experience based on the contribution these properties made in the early development of Ponoka. While several mentioned interest in a formal heritage designation program, this also came with cautions about the challenges of making older buildings that are in various states of repair useable for new and existing tenants. Respondents also expressed interest in using the best examples of the past architecture in new buildings and being open to an evolution of commercial architecture.

### Access and Walkability

The ease of walking into the downtown area and walking around the downtown area was mentioned by several respondents. The perception is that downtown is an interesting and safe place to go for a walk as a form of recreation or means of accessing goods and services. The relatively compact nature of downtown with the broad range of activities makes it interesting to visit. Good connections exist between downtown and the larger community for tourists and customers to come to the downtown area.

### Selection and Range of Activities in the Area

Respondents highlighted the diverse selection of goods and services and types of activities available in the downtown area as one of its appealing aspects. It includes goods and services needed on a routine basis as well as surprise finds and unique experiences. Some respondents indicated that downtown's offerings need to be broadcast to a larger audience to attract more people to visit and patronize the area. It was also pointed out that downtown Ponoka has the physical space to grow and add to the existing selection and range of activities to make the area even more attractive in the future.

### Friendly, Community Feel and Customer Service

Downtown exhibits a strong sense of community. Respondents feel that it is characterized by friendly people who know and interact with one another and where customers receive a high quality of service and positive experience. The many locally owned and operated businesses contribute to the local, homegrown feel.

### Quality Residential and Commercial Streetscapes

Many respondents expressed appreciation of the tree lined streets and green canopies present in several parts of the downtown area. Most prominent are the tree lined residential streets and Chipman Avenue. Combined with the interesting architecture on the block, Chipman Avenue is viewed as a good starting point or example for the other commercial oriented streets in the area.

## **Question Two: What do you think are the 3 most pressing issues facing Downtown Ponoka?**

Responses to this question focused on the following key themes:

### Building Vacancies, Derelict Buildings and Under-Developed Properties

By far the most consistent response involved the number of empty commercial buildings and bays and derelict buildings. High vacancies give a negative impression and derelict buildings and properties that are not kept up properly (peeling paint, cracked windows, etc) detract from the area's appeal. There are opportunities to make use of the vacant or underdeveloped lots and make the larger parking areas more attractive. The general feel is that some activity or item needs to occupy the vacant spaces to create interest and draw people to downtown.

### Maintenance and Building Upkeep

Keeping streets, sidewalks, yards and lanes in a clean and tidy condition is an ongoing challenge that needs to be met. Store fronts that are not well kept are also part of this theme. Responding to issues of graffiti and building damage that is left unrepaired for long periods of time and unsightly properties is critical to building a positive image of downtown. Part of the issue is the challenge of keeping older buildings in a good state of repair. Financial assistance may be available for cosmetic issues but not structural or building infrastructure upkeep.

### State of Public Infrastructure

Concerns were expressed about the current state of municipal infrastructure such as water and wastewater lines and surface improvements. The ability of the water and wastewater system to address current needs and keep up with desired development requires an evaluation in light of occasional sewer back-ups and spot repairs. The overall impression of the sidewalks, road surfaces and boulevards in downtown, other than Chipman Avenue and parts of 50 Street, is that the area is worn and torn due to many cracks and patches.

### Ineffective Signage and Lack of Wayfinding Signage

The ability of visitors and customers to navigate and find the interesting elements of downtown requires more effort. Part of this relates to the quality of the public signage, or lack thereof, that helps people find their way. Another part relates to the type and quality of signage and the messaging used by businesses and activities in the area. Business names do not always reveal what is on offer and some signs portray a low quality experience or product based on the material and appearance of the sign itself. Wayfinding that helps visitors in other parts of Ponoka to find downtown and that entices them to visit is needed.

### Relatively High Cost for Floor Space

There is a general perception that the cost of floor space in the downtown area is higher than it should be taking into account the quality of the tenant space available. Whether leasing or seeking to purchase the costs appear prohibitive. Part of this may reflect on landlords or sellers not accounting for the cost of tenant improvements or operating costs in older buildings. Part of the cost may be in response to general Province wide trends in lease rates for commercial space rather than trends specific to the local market. New construction in the downtown area also faces financial hurdles such as assembly of land and demolition of existing structures.

### Missing Activities and Features

Respondents provided a lengthy list of activities that are absent in the downtown. It includes a lack of commercial and entertainment activity after 6pm on weekdays, few second floor residential opportunities, lack of quality public gathering space for festivities and celebrations, no available public washrooms, lack of designated parking for larger vehicles, and a lack of newer and trendier activities, etc. The general feel is that more activities operating over a period longer than the typical 9 to 5 work week would generate reason to come downtown and opportunities for increased social interactions.

### Undesirable Behaviours

There are some safety concerns and undesirable behaviour that occurs in the downtown area that deters people from coming to the area. Some of this relates to the physical setting such as low or poorly lit areas and many nooks and crannies creating unobservable spots. Some patrons of the downtown area may litter or conduct themselves in a poor manner (e.g. yelling, profanities, physical confrontation) which causes discomfort for other patrons.

### Lack of Common Vision or Theme and Commitment to Follow Through

Respondents desired more emphasis on a common vision to guide the future success of the downtown area and serve as a broadly supported goal for the community. Closely connected to this is a theme or set of defining features that can be used to create a sense of character and unity in downtown. Suggestions include architectural styles, street furnishings, street art and murals. There is a desire to move beyond study and get into implementation of ideas with a view to demonstrating that things can change for the better. Several respondents pointed out that overcoming apathy and a sense of helplessness (low sense of efficacy) may require real life physical improvements that are evident to community members.

## **Question Three: What opportunities exist or should be undertaken or further explored?**

Responses to this question focused on the following key themes:

### Improve Appearance of Streetscape and Public Spaces

Efforts need to be made to make public and private spaces in the downtown as attractive and visually appealing as possible. This includes items such as landscaping and seasonal plantings. Creation of an attractive, central gathering space or civic square, that could be used for events such as markets, concerts and celebrations would also aid in improving the area.

### Facilitate New Development, Activities and Events

There is a need to stem the flow of activities leaving the downtown area and introduce new events and reasons for coming downtown. Part of this may involve making the regulations and process to obtain permission to use public spaces less onerous. In terms of new development this may mean making regulations and expectations known and clearly articulated with as few requirements as necessary to achieve the desired outcome. Setting up a business incubator is one suggestion on how to entice new businesses into the downtown area.

### Build on History but Do Not Get Caught in the Past

While the historic buildings and heritage of the community are cherished features there is a need to be open to the addition of new buildings and activities. The past offers a story to be told that can attract patrons and tourists using such things as audio tours, QR coding and apps, brochures and vintage images from earlier years. The future of the entire area cannot hinge on the 17 historic buildings; new chapters of downtown's story have to be written.

### Encourage Longer Stays in Downtown

Efforts are needed to encourage people to stay longer in the downtown area. This means less focus on quick, convenience oriented services and more emphasis on longer experiences such as window shopping or entertainment based activities. Facilities such as public washrooms and benches are needed to help people choose to stay in the area longer. Improved signage to find these comfort amenities is needed along with directories to help locate the variety of experiences a longer stay in downtown has to offer.

### Build More Connections

Downtown needs more connections to other features and events in the larger community. This includes facilities such as the river valley, the outdoor sports fields, trail system, Stampede, Ag centre and museum. Cultural tourism through links with First Nations in the development of the river valley is also a possibility. Connections in terms of cross marketing and promotions are also required.

### Pick and Implement a Theme

A decision must be made on a theme and then it needs to be carried out. Western town and farm community elements may form a good base for the selected theme. It is a critical decision in bringing cohesion to the look and feel of the downtown area. Implementation may require incentive programs and public sector leadership by example.

### Create More Draws and Take a Big Market Approach

Success for downtown depends on creating more draws to the area and taking a broad picture of the potential market to be served. The traditional focus on the primary and secondary trading areas and local customers is not enough and is limiting. Day tourism and people's willingness to travel for a quality good, service, recreation or interesting life experience needs to become a focus for marketing and the types of business in the downtown.

#### **Question Four: What do you imagine a successful Downtown Ponoka to be like in 25 years?**

Responses to this question focused on the following key themes:

##### More Activity and Businesses

Downtown will have much more activity and many more businesses catering to a wide range of products, services, and recreational, educational and life experiences. The result is a vibrant, busy street life with plenty of evening and weekend activities, celebrations and special events and few vacancies. Small boutiques and larger stores focus on customer service and have become known across Alberta for their knowledge and offerings in their respective niche. People live above businesses and in close proximity to experience the benefits downtown has to offer.

##### Attractive and Green Streetscapes and Public Spaces

Downtown's streetscapes and public spaces, accented with trees and planters, are high quality, visually appealing spaces and a positive contribution to the sense that downtown is the place to be. Pride in property and place is evident through the cleanliness of the street and the well maintained appearance of building frontages. The river valley is a clean, easily accessed oasis and favoured route to enter the downtown area.

##### Strong Contribution to Ponoka's Image and Success

Downtown is a source of pride for the community and a showcase of all the best that Ponoka has to offer. Working with other venues and community attractions a visit to downtown Ponoka has become a "must do" on every visitor's itinerary. The various parts of downtown are unified through a consistent theme, look and feel that extends to other parts of the community.



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