Planning for a Vibrant Downtown Smithers
Charrette Report - Aug 20, 2008

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# Table of Contents

1. **Creating a New Vision for Downtown Smithers** ........................................ 1
   - Purpose of the Downtown Charrette ................................................................. 2
   - Goals ............................................................................................................ 2
   - Strategic Directions ..................................................................................... 2

2. **Charrette Team** ...................................................................................... 3

3. **Charrette Background & Process** .............................................................. 4
   - Background .................................................................................................. 4
   - Process ........................................................................................................ 4

4. **Study Area** .............................................................................................. 5

5. **Downtown Land Use and Public Realm Concept** .................................... 6

6. **Strategic Direction A: Land use, Form & Character** ............................. 17
   - Vision ......................................................................................................... 17
   - Strategies .................................................................................................. 17
     - Strategy 1: Create Incentives for retail investment on main street (C-1 zone) .... 18
     - Strategy 2: Encourage commercial development (C-1A zone) ...................... 18
     - Strategy 3: Encourage residential development (new DR downtown residential zone) .... 19
     - Strategy 4: Refresh Form and character Guidelines .................................... 19
     - Strategy 5: Research Incentives to encourage green buildings & infrastructure ... 20
     - Strategy 6: Reduce vandalism through crime prevention ............................ 21

7. **Strategic Direction B: Improving Gateways & Circulation** .................... 22
   - Vision ......................................................................................................... 22
   - Strategies .................................................................................................. 22
     - Strategy 1: Reinforce main street as the primary entrance to the downtown core .... 22
     - Strategy 2: Establish King & Queen as secondary entrances ....................... 23
     - Strategy 3: Recognize Alfred Park as a key town anchor ......................... 24
     - Strategy 4: Recognize Central Park as a historic & cultural town anchor ...... 24
     - Strategy 5: Respond to highway commercial ............................................ 25

8. **Strategic Direction C: Develop Sound Parking Management Systems** ... 26
   - Vision ......................................................................................................... 26
   - Strategies .................................................................................................. 26
     - Strategy 1: Change parking regulations in the zoning bylaw ....................... 27
     - Strategy 2: Establish a public parking commission .................................... 28
     - Strategy 3: Provide additional public parking .......................................... 28
     - Strategy 4: Awareness campaign ............................................................. 29

9. **Strategic Direction D: Create and Enhance Great Public Gathering Spaces** ................................................................. 30
   - Vision ......................................................................................................... 30
   - Strategies .................................................................................................. 30
     - Strategy 1: Develop a schedule of community events and activities ............ 30
     - Strategy 2: Plan, program and design a town square .................................. 31
     - Strategy 3: Activate Alfred Park, Central Park & vacant lands .................. 32
     - Strategy 4: Develop the downtown as a showcase for local agriculture ....... 32

10. **Priorities for Action** ............................................................................... 33
1. Creating a New Vision for Downtown Smithers

The Town of Smithers is a home for many long-term residents as well as a destination for many tourists. The downtown has been, and is envisioned to remain, the commercial, arts, and cultural heart of the community and region. Further, the downtown can also play a key role in the long term vitality, and sustainability of the community as a whole by concentrating and integrating a range of amenities and services, a diversity of housing, and great public places for gathering and community events into a compact, diverse, and vibrant downtown core.

While Smithers currently has a well-used and attractive downtown core, the Town of Smithers is exploring options for enhancing its vibrancy and resiliency. To this end, the Town held an intensive design workshop known as a charrette from June 25th-27th at the Smithers Legion. A charrette is an intensive, time limited design exercise focused on a specific, defined area. It generally involves collaboration with local stakeholders resulting in a comprehensive vision for land use, built form, the public realm and transportation, along with specific strategies and actions for achieving the vision.

The rationale for engaging in a design exercise is to respond to a community desire for continued downtown revitalization, specifically, for enhancing existing uses of Main Street as well as providing new opportunities for mixed-use development that includes more residential opportunities in the downtown core.

The Smithers downtown charrette was lead by a diverse group of local stakeholders that included residents, business owners, representatives from community organizations, and Town staff who were supported by a team of planning and design consultants. The results of the Charrette presented in this document are intended to guide, rather than determine, how Smithers plans and designs for the downtown. Relevant policies and implementation strategies resulting from the charrette will be woven into the Official Community Plan (OCP), which is being updated concurrently to the charrette process.
Purpose of the Downtown Charrette
The purpose of planning for the downtown area of Smithers is to enhance and build on the already well planned and designed town core to ensure that its vitality and vibrancy endures into the future. Specifically, the purpose of the charrette is to:

- To develop an exciting, achievable, and bold plan to enhance the vibrancy and walkability of downtown;
- To establish a clear path forward that is developed through a collaborative process;
- To raise public awareness around arts and culture;
- To offer solid recommendations and strategies to revitalize the downtown and enhance economic opportunities for local businesses; and
- To build a shared understanding about planning for a downtown amongst community members.

Goals
The overall goal of the charrette is to identify design strategies, policies and land use designations that support a compact, walkable, multi-use, and economically vibrant downtown core. Specifically, there are five main goals that guide the charrette:

1. Build a downtown that is accessible to all;
2. Incorporate and encourage a mix of land uses into the downtown core;
3. Support a diverse and healthy economy;
4. Be a model of green development; and
5. Create and enhance great public spaces.

Strategic Directions
Through the charrette process, the team came up with four strategic directions to revitalize the downtown. For each one of these directions, a vision and implementation strategy is offered. The strategic directions are:

1. Improve gateways and circulation;
2. Develop sound parking management systems;
3. Create and enhance great public gathering spaces; and
4. Incorporate a mix of land uses in the core.
2. **Charrette Team**

The Smithers Charrette team was comprised of residents of Smithers who are motivated to make positive changes in the community with a specific focus on the downtown. These members spent three intensive days with the design team in identifying opportunities and constraints as well as design and planning solutions for a vital downtown. The members of the Charrette team were:

- **Mark Allen** Town of Smithers, Director of Development Services
- **Mike Bovill** Downtown Merchant
- **Phil Brienesse** Downtown Merchant
- **Cathryn Bucher** Town of Smithers, Councillor
- **Dmitri Cody** Town of Smithers, Aboriginal Liaison Summer Student
- **John Fisher** Looking to Retire in Smithers
- **Heather Gallagher** Smithers District Chamber of Commerce
- **Susan Garbon** Community Member at Large
- **Bill Goodacre** Town of Smithers, Councillor
- **Glen Ingram** Community Member at Large
- **Zach Kline** Town of Smithers, Economic Development Summer Student
- **Harry Kruisselbrink** Official Community Plan Steering Committee Member
- **Tonya Malkow** Town of Smithers, Engineering Summer Student
- **Doug Montaldi** Commercial & Residential Property Developer
- **Paul Mott** Downtown Merchant
- **Jocelyn Pearce** Bulkley Valley Museum
- **Diana Reimer** Measuring Up the North Committee Member
- **Casda Thomas** Official Community Plan Steering Committee & Local Realtor
- **Fergus Tomlin** Director, Bulkley Valley Museum
- **Alison Walker** Town of Smithers, Planner
- **Andrew Watson** Sustainable Smithers Advisory Committee Member & Downtown Resident

The design team was made up of the Vancouver/Nanaimo based firm HB Lanarc and a representative from Canadian Housing and Mortgage Corporation.

- **Doug Backhouse** HB Lanarc (Principal)
- **Janine de la Salle** HB Lanarc (Project Manager)
- **Joaquin Karakas** HB Lanarc (Planner/Designer)
- **Derek Masselink** Masselink Environmental Design (Landscape architect)
- **Doug Pollard** Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation
3. Charrette Background & Process

Mixed-use development in rural communities doesn’t work. Or does it? The Town of Smithers, in partnership with CMHC, hosted a charrette that explored this fundamental question as a key strategy for continued downtown revitalization. The result was a comprehensive vision and set of integrated strategies for creating a vibrant main street supported by a range of options for ‘downtown living’ and an enhanced public open space network.

Background

The Town of Smithers is situated in the Bulkley Valley of Northwest British Columbia. Set against the backdrop of the Hudson Bay Mountain, the “Town for all Seasons” offers outstanding outdoor recreation pursuits, including skiing, fishing, hiking, coupled with a range of urban features including cultural and indoor recreational opportunities. The vibrant downtown and active community further adds to the charm of Smithers and its reputation as a great place to live. Currently, the Town is experiencing a housing shortage. A low vacancy rate of less than 4% has raised concerns about the supply and affordability of housing. In addition, as Smithers experiences pressure to grow and develop, particularly on the periphery of town, there is a demand for both diversified housing options that meets the needs of all Smithers residents both now and in the future and for a more walkable community where there are viable transportation options to the automobile. Innovative, efficient and affordable development within existing built areas is required to address these challenges. The charrette represents an opportunity for the residents of Smithers to help determine what role the downtown will play in achieving overall community sustainability in planning for the future. Discussions have already taken place regarding how the Town may grow “better” not “bigger. This view has led to the idea of creating a mixed-use, walkable, and vibrant downtown.

Process

The charrette process involved brainstorming, discussion, drawing and policy development. The three-days were broken down into three main elements: talk, doodle, and draw.

Day 1 Talk: The charrette team brainstormed opportunities and constraints for downtown Smithers. This included a walking tour of the downtown and concluded with a public launch and feedback session in the evening.

Day 2 Doodle: After brainstorming opportunities and constraints, the charrette team began to loosely translate the ideas to drawings. In the evening, the design team presented the ideas and drawings to the Mayor, three councilors, and senior Town staff.

Day 3 Draw: The design team began drawing the planning ideas for the downtown while the charrette team worked together on developing the necessary policy changes to support the design ideas. The charrette concluded with a public presentation.
4. Study Area

The study area for the charrette covered the downtown area of Smithers that included Queen Street to King Street (North-South) and the train station to Central Park (East-West). The downtown is currently comprised of several different uses including a mix of retail and office uses along Main St., some older single family residences mixed with some commercial uses along secondary streets, civic and institutional uses towards the West, and some Highway oriented commercial uses along Hwy. 16 to the East. The current OCP designation for the Downtown study area is almost entirely Downtown Commercial, comprising over 60 acres of land (net). This designation encourages commercial as a primary use, with residential permitted as a secondary use on upper floors. For more detailed information on the study area, please see the attached design brief in the appendix.

Map: Local Context
5. Downtown Land Use and Public Realm Concept

The downtown Smithers concept plan represents a synthesis of the concepts and ideas developed at the Downtown Charrette. It represents a “big-picture” vision for future land use, transportation, and open space, and identifies places of special interest for the community. It encompasses the goals and key strategies of the charrette with regards to community identity, downtown revitalization, mixed-use development, housing, transportation, open space, and environmental quality. The land use and public realm concept features a retail focused Main St., a secondary retail street on Broadway Ave., a community greenway along 3rd Ave., innovative forms of mixed-use development, new and enhanced plazas and squares, and key gateway features incorporated with public and civic space enhancements. The concept diagram and following descriptions of key elements, along with the illustrative plan, provides guidance for the City wide OCP planning process currently under way.
Concept Symbols, Elements, and Descriptions

Main Street

Main Street is Smithers’ core pedestrian and retail high street, playing a key role in the overall identity and economy of the downtown and the Town as a whole. Main Street is a focus of the downtown’s active retail businesses including small niche retail shops, restaurants, office space, and cafe’s with residential uses above. Main Street is multi-modal, with on-street parallel and angled parking, with priority given to pedestrians and cyclists. Main Street should receive the highest level of public realm amenities in the area.

Secondary Retail Street

Secondary retail streets serve as important routes for pedestrian and vehicle activity in the downtown, have a mix of commercial uses including office, and are the focus of more intense land use activity. Secondary retail streets include Broadway Ave., and new frontage streets with street fronting commercial uses adjacent to Highway 16. Secondary retail streets include on-street parking and a range of commercial uses including office uses, with residential uses encouraged above. These streets may receive a higher level of public realm amenities than other streets in the area.

Town Greenway

The greenway along 3rd Ave. is a major east-west pedestrian and bicycle connector to the downtown. The greenway prioritizes pedestrian and cyclist traffic by incorporating special features that may include marked bicycle lanes, enhanced street tree treatments, special paving, or storm water features.

Primary Vehicle Circulation

These routes are the primary vehicle circulation routes and access points into the downtown. These routes are also significant pedestrian and cyclist routes with amenities that include wide sidewalks, street trees, and marked lanes for cyclists.

Community Gathering Places

These are primarily squares or plazas that are focal points for residents and visitors alike to gather. These squares and plazas are supported by adjacent active uses such as cafe’s, restaurants rants, the community post office, etc. Focal points may have special architectural or landscape features including special paving treatments, benches, landscaping, and public art.
Community Arts and Culture Nodes

Main Street is book-ended by two community arts and culture nodes that include a range of arts and culture facilities located within existing parks and open spaces. Alfred Park includes the relocated library and the Cenotaph, and is connected to City hall with an extended plaza and to Main street with a new, enhanced pedestrian connection where the west side of the Provincial Court building is currently located. Central Park includes the tourist info centre, and the museum, which may be incorporated into a future arts and culture facility. Other tourist amenities include on-street parking facilities for motor homes, and may include a covered gazebo and a relocated Aplinehorn Man located adjacent to Highway 16.

Downtown Gateways

Gateways are located at key places or intersections and identify the entrance to the downtown area. Development adjacent to gateways should contribute to the sense of entry and level of importance through signature architecture, appropriate building scale, character, and orientation. Right-of-way features such as landscaping, public art, landmarks or special signage, lighting or paving may be used to help signify gateways.

Centralized Town Owned & Managed Parking

Centralized Town owned and managed parking is part of an overall downtown parking management strategy for on and off street parking premised on reducing the burden of off-street parking requirements on downtown development projects, and on creating a pedestrian focused Downtown overall. Centralized parking is located to encourage residents and visitors who drive to the downtown to park once and walk to all of their downtown destinations. The downtown parking strategy also acknowledges the challenge off street parking poses to the design quality of buildings and the adjacent public realm, the role parking plays in overall transportation patterns, and the economic feasibility of downtown development and revitalization.

Downtown Charrette Study Area Boundary
Conceptual Land Use Designations

Discussion

Land use designations describe the overall vision with regards to future land use, while land use zones describe what is currently permitted “as-of-right”. Any changes in the allowable use, height and density from what is permitted under existing zoning would therefore require that property owners apply for rezoning, with the Town considering the merits of each application through the public rezoning process. Commercial, mixed use and multi-family proposals also need to demonstrate how they meet the established Development Permit Area design guidelines associated with each use/zone. The Town may require the development of a set of standards and guidelines for any proposal to create housing forms that are new to the community.

As a result of the charrette, three new land use designations were identified for the downtown to better articulate land use opportunities with regards to achieving the overall vision for the downtown. Following is a description of these new land use designations, identifying the intent/objectives, permitted uses, and higher level siting, form, and design considerations. This is to clearly establish the key elements and lead directly to the development of appropriate zoning schedules and design guidelines associated with each new recommended designation.

Other desired land uses identified at the charrette and included in the conceptual plan are as per existing designations associated with these uses.

**Downtown Commercial**

**Intent:** to encourage a greater intensity and mix of uses (commercial and residential) and active pedestrian oriented streets in the downtown through development that incorporates a range of ground floor, pedestrian oriented commercial uses (e.g. retail, office, restaurants, café’s, etc.) integrated with residential uses above.

**Description:** Commercial is the primary use allowed by this designation, and is required on the ground floor, and permitted on upper floors. Residential is allowed as a secondary use on upper floors.

**Design Considerations:** Buildings should be sited with little or no setback from the fronting street, and should incorporate upper story step backs to minimize shadowing on, and view impacts from, the fronting street. A building height of up to four stories is allowed, with lot coverage to be no greater than 80%. Small frontages with frequent entrances and transparent shop fronts are encouraged on the ground floor to create street vitality.
Main Street Commercial

**Intent:** To enhance Main St.’s status as the retail high street for Smithers and environs, and to encourage pedestrian activity past usual business hours, by focusing active, pedestrian oriented retail uses and services along the ground floor with up to three storeys of residential uses above.

**Description:** Commercial is the primary use allowed by this designation, and is required on the ground floor, and allowed on upper floors. Ground floor uses are limited to active retail uses, restaurants, café’s, and other uses that promote significant pedestrian activity past usual business hours. As such, office uses are not permitted on the ground floor, but are permitted on upper floors, under this designation. Residential is allowed as a secondary use on upper floors.

**Design Considerations:** Buildings should be sited with little or no setback from the fronting street, and should incorporate upper story step backs to minimize shadowing on, and view impacts from, the fronting street. A building height of up to four stories is allowed, with lot coverage to be no greater than 80%. Frequent entrances and transparent shop fronts are encouraged on the ground floor to create street vitality and safety.

Downtown Residential

**Intent:** To encourage new, compact, ground oriented residential development in the downtown area in specified areas that provide the opportunity to incorporate specified commercial uses on the ground floor if desired by the owner or occupant, and to provide adaptability and flexibility in use over time.

**Description:** Residential is the primary use allowed by this designation and is permitted on all floors. Some forms of commercial uses (as deemed appropriate, e.g., retail, office, light manufacturing, etc.) are permitted as a secondary use and are to be located on the ground floor.

**Design Considerations:** Buildings should be sited with a 3 metre setback from the fronting street to allow for a transition area between the building face and the fronting public street. Buildings should incorporate upper story step backs to minimize shadowing on, and view impacts from, the fronting street. A building height of up to four stories is allowed, with lot coverage to be no greater than 80%. The ground floor should be designed for use as a commercial retail space by incorporating large shop front windows, awnings, etc., to allow flexibility in use (residential/retail/office) of the ground floor. Additionally, the building should be designed to allow ground floor retail uses to expand horizontally into the ground floor of adjacent buildings/units.
Conceptual Illustrative Plan

The illustrative plan represents one possible result of implementing the conceptual land use plan and policies. It is not intended to be a rigid straight jacket but rather an aid to understanding what the possible results of new plans and policy might be.
Key Elements

Central Park Arts and Culture Node

- Relocated tourist information centre
- Fire hall retrofitted to house future community arts and culture centre
- Secondary retail uses continue north of Hwy. 16
- Farmers market highly accessible to travelers passing through
- Park with Gazebo is a gathering place and tourist rest stop at the top of Main St.
- Alpinehorn Man located at Hwy. 16/Main St. intersection announces gateway into downtown core
- On-street parking for motor homes and trailers

Downtown Highway Commercial Corridor

- Pedestrian oriented, street fronting retail introduced along Hwy. 16 incorporating multi-way boulevard concept to enhance entrance/gateway experience.
- Hwy 16 Frontage Rd.
Downtown Squares and Plazas

Vacant lots and contaminated sites located along Main St. are opportunities for introducing future squares and plazas at key locations along Main Street.

Future public space at old service station and abandoned building (contaminated site) at corner of Main and Broadway are opportunities for enhanced gateway feature and gathering places.

Vacant lot at corner of Main and Second (clock tower) great opportunity for plaza with active uses fronting on to it in central location along Main St.

Limiting ground floor uses exclusively to active retail, restaurants, etc. key to enhancing day and night time vitality of Main St.

Special paving materials and raised ground plain announce heart of Main St.

Plaza could be closed to cars for special community events such as out-door public performances.
Downtown Residential

Flex use residential zone encourages downtown living while allowing choice and change of use of the ground floor over time: a key strategy for supporting continued downtown revitalization.

Retail form and character of ground floor ensures flexibility of use for either residential or commercial uses.
Alfred Park

Alfred Park framed by city hall, court house and future re-located library with Genotaph located at centre, creating a formal civic square at foot of Main St.

Reconnecting Main St. through to old train station re-establishes pedestrian connection and visual anchor at foot of Main St.
Sensitive integration of large format retail

"Wrapping" large format retail with smaller shops creates more sensitive integration and interface with public realm.

Elements of a “great street”
6. **Strategic Direction A: Land use, Form & Character**

Land use, form and character are key ingredients for creating a downtown that encourages and supports local businesses, has great gathering places, accommodates multi-modal transportation, supports downtown residential development, and has a look and feel that reflects the community. To this end, the charrette team developed six land use, form and character strategies to create a vibrant downtown. These strategies are:

- **Strategy 1:** Create incentives for retail investment on Main Street
- **Strategy 2:** Encourage commercial development
- **Strategy 3:** Encourage residential development
- **Strategy 4:** Refresh Form and character guidelines
- **Strategy 5:** Research incentives to support green buildings and infrastructure
- **Strategy 6:** Reduce vandalism through crime prevention

**Vision**

To increase the density of downtown Smithers with a mixture of land uses while maintaining the existing block structure and celebrating the community history of downtown.

To focus commercial activity in the core, emphasize retail on Main Street, encourage office use on second floors and side streets, promote a mix of uses including residential and create a consistent and pleasing form and character for downtown.

**Strategies**

The six land use, form and character strategies are discussed below in two parts per strategy: 1) description and discussion on the rationale for the strategy and 2) policy and implementation ideas. Please note that policy and implementation ideas are not prioritized and have not been filtered as to remain inclusive of all of the discussion during the design charrette. A prioritized list of implementation ideas is offered in the last section of this report.
**STRATEGY 1: CREATE INCENTIVES FOR RETAIL INVESTMENT ON MAIN STREET (C-1 ZONE)**

**Description & Discussion**
- Attract retail businesses to the downtown core through supportive land-use designations, better parking regulations, and enhancing the public realm.
- Ground oriented office use on Main Street is detracting from the active use of the street, especially after business hours.

**Policy & Implementation Ideas**
- See Strategic Direction C (Parking Management)
- Consider the development of tax shift strategies to encourage downtown investment.
- Tax forgiveness: Consider a tax holiday for 2nd floor redevelopment.
- Develop land use designation for Main St. that encourages retail uses on the ground floor.
- Consider the use of vacant lots for infill and/or interim community uses.

**STRATEGY 2: ENCOURAGE COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT (C-1A ZONE)**

**Description & Discussion**
- Land use in the downtown must be able to attract and support commercial activities.
- Commercial activity in Smithers should be concentrated in the C-1A zone.

**Policy & Implementation Ideas**
- See Strategic Direction C (Parking Management)
- Consider establishing heritage restoration grants as an OCP policy.
- Tax forgiveness – tax holiday for second floor development but single story commercial is allowed as long as it is built to accommodate future second floor (flex space).
- Pursue a Broadway Avenue improvement scheme that uses Main Street standards i.e. on-street angle parking, green street aspects, pedestrian uses.
- Consider density bonusing to secure community amenities.
**STRATEGY 3: ENCOURAGE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT (NEW DR DOWNTOWN RESIDENTIAL ZONE)**

**Description & Discussion**
- More residential opportunities downtown are important to increasing the density and building a compact downtown community.
- A diversity of housing types and tenures are important to the entire community of Smithers.

**Policy & Implementation Ideas**
- OCP policy: Define DR (Downtown Residential) land use designation
  - **Flex Space:** Main floor to accommodate both commercial and/or residential.
  - High density required.
  - Allow for a diversity of tenure types (affordable housing, strata, market housing, rental, multi family, seniors housing).
- Remove grandfather clause in the zoning bylaw that allows for single family dwellings in the downtown to encourage higher density development (Please refer to table 5.2.2 in the zoning bylaw)
- Possibly expand the designation of the downtown core from King to Dominion Street as market dictates.
- Consider regulatory tools such as tax incentives to encourage residential development in the DR (Downtown Residential) zone.

**STRATEGY 4: REFRESH FORM AND CHARACTER GUIDELINES**

**Description & Discussion**
- Building form and character should be both diverse and unified to allow buildings to have their own identity, while fitting into the overall scheme for downtown.
- The character of the public realm including streets and open spaces should be appealing and create great spaces for both residents and visitors.

**Policy & Implementation Ideas**
- Continue form and character guidelines (Development Permit Area No. 1) along all side streets in study area – revise to be consistent, clear and enforceable.
- Consider winterization strategies such as awnings over sidewalks.
- Update the design guidelines in the OCP to:
  - Reflect an updated and authentic version of the Alpine theme.
  - Consider First Nations’ architecture, traditional plants, and art.
  - Define setbacks appropriate for different zones in the downtown core e.g.: DR (Downtown Residential) - 3 meter setback, C1 - 0
**Strategy 4: Refresh Form and Character Guidelines**

- Define clear signage guidelines for the downtown.
- Define architecture forms for new developments and retrofits.
- Define a unified landscape strategy that considers native plant species and is inherently low maintenance.
- Incorporate green building standards, where appropriate.

**Strategy 5: Research Incentives to Encourage Green Buildings & Infrastructure**

**Description & Discussion**

- Buildings and infrastructure should incorporate green features.

**Policy & Implementation Ideas**

- Pursue further research to identify local solutions for new buildings and retrofitting projects (i.e. green building checklists).
- Town to apply for green building retrofitting grants for public infrastructure.
- Educate property owners on available funding to support green projects.
- Incentives for LEED accredited (or similar) developments (e.g. density bonusing)

*Figure 1: Weather Protection*
STRATEGY 6: REDUCE VANDALISM THROUGH CRIME PREVENTION

Description & Discussion
→ Downtown Smithers should be a place both residents and visitors feel safe and vandalism is minimized.

Policy & Implementation Ideas
→ Consider installing a webcam on Main Street.
→ Incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies into design guidelines.
→ Encourage “eyes on the street” through residential intensification.
→ Provide ongoing support for the graffiti removal bylaw and crime prevention strategy.
→ Continue to work with community groups to establish downtown neighbourhood watch programs, patrols, etc.
7. **Strategic Direction B: Improving Gateways & Circulation**

Highway 16 sees a lot of car and pedestrian traffic and is a key opportunity to direct highway traffic down into Main Street where people can shop, eat, socialize, and visit Smithers attractions. Similarly, the railway station at the end of Main Street may become a critical passenger and goods node as fuel prices continue to increase, the new port is constructed in Prince Rupert, and traffic increases at the train terminal. Through improving the gateways into Main Street, both from the highway and from the train station, the downtown will be more active and able to support the businesses there. There are five strategies for improving the gateways and circulation in downtown Smithers. These are:

- **Strategy 1:** Reinforce Main Street as the primary entrance to downtown;
- **Strategy 2:** Establish King and Queen Streets as the secondary entrances to downtown;
- **Strategy 3:** Recognize Alfred Park as a key town anchor;
- **Strategy 4:** Recognize Central Park as a historic & cultural town anchor; and
- **Strategy 5:** Respond to highway commercial.

**Vision**

To re-establish and connect the historic town anchors (Central Park and the Rail Station), with Main Street as the primary, pedestrian oriented gateway and King and Queen as secondary vehicular gateways.

**Strategies**

The five gateway strategies are discussed below in two parts per strategy: 1) description and discussion on the rationale for the strategy and 2) policy and implementation ideas. Please note that policy and implementation ideas are not prioritized and have not been filtered as to remain inclusive of all of the discussion during the design charrette. A prioritized list of implementation ideas is offered in the last section of this report.

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**Strategy 1: Reinforce Main Street as the primary entrance to the downtown core**

**Description & Discussion**

- Main Street is suitable for a mix of pedestrian, cyclist, and car traffic.
- Redevelop the entrance from Highway 16 to Main Street, with the Alpine theme in mind to reinforce Main Street as the primary entrance.
- Consider increasing the density/height along Main Street (please refer to the concept plan and the conceptual land use designations for downtown commercial and residential).
- Consider moving the Alpenhorn Man to provide more access (pictures for tourists) and increase the visibility from the highway.
- Focus on the Main Street Turnaround as an anchor and point of interest.
**Strategy 1: Reinforce Main Street as the Primary Entrance to the Downtown Core**

**Policy & Implementation Ideas**

→ Use pavers to visually connect Main Street across hwy 16.

→ Consider street scaping elements along hwy 16 between King and Queen (i.e. multi way boulevard on south side) to facilitate the movement of both hwy and local traffic while enhancing the public realm and indicating to travelers that they are in a special place.

→ Include a governance policy in the official community plan to work with MOT to improve gateway elements on hwy 16.

→ Develop a comprehensive signage plan that has community directory-mini maps to direct people into downtown and tourist centre. This plan should use universal symbols/colours, place signs e.g. Timber frame sign “welcome to downtown Smithers”, e.g. “Park and walk” with a walking map.

→ Create visual events on the corners of Main Street and Hwy 16 on both sides of hwy (north and south).

→ Consider rounding off the corners of Main Street and Hwy 16 to improve entrance to Main Street.

**Strategy 2: Establish King & Queen as Secondary Entrances**

**Description & Discussion**

→ King and Queen streets are more suitable for vehicle circulation due to the absence of stop signs and road width.

→ King and Queen streets could potentially accommodate a higher level of traffic including larger vehicles such as RVs.

→ Important that King and Queen are safe pedestrian environments due to their close proximity to schools and the downtown.

**Policy & Implementation Ideas**

→ Enhancing hwy corridor between King and Queen though street scaping and signage (See Strategy 1)

→ Define cross walk areas on King and Queens with corner bulges and install sidewalks where appropriate (Third Avenue and Broadway).

→ Consider traffic calming on Queen Street.

→ Develop signs to direct traffic to parking areas and use park and walk signage to get traffic off the road prior to school zone.

→ Consider a park and walk parking lot on the corner of King Street and Third Avenue.

→ Consider reverting Fourth Avenue back into a two way street.
STRATEGY 3: RECOGNIZE ALFRED PARK AS A KEY TOWN ANCHOR

Description & Discussion
→ The government building has cut off the historic railway station, a downtown landmark.
→ There is a great opportunity to create an active public open area at the foot of Main Street.

Policy & Implementation Ideas
→ Create a visual draw and venue at the foot of Main Street.
→ Remove chain link fence around government building.
→ Remove planters and replace with sidewalk, enhance as a more natural walkway.
→ Library redevelopment - more active participation (see public spaces strategies)
→ Directory sign at the railway station to direct traffic down Main Street for shopping, restaurants, attractions.

STRATEGY 4: RECOGNIZE CENTRAL PARK AS A HISTORIC & CULTURAL TOWN ANCHOR

Description & Discussion
→ Central park is a key area for arts and culture in Smithers.
→ Establishing bookends to the downtown core will support the active use of Main, King, and Queen Streets.

Policy & Implementation Ideas
→ Consider OCP policies to support the revised concept plan for Central Park.
→ Support construction of a new museum that is combined with tourist information centre.
→ Support the re-location of the Fire Hall or open the ROW adjacent to Fire Hall.
→ Consider OCP policy to acquire private lands for improving circulation from Hwy 16 around central park if or when the opportunity arises.
→ Improve traffic circulation around hwy 16 and Queen Street.
→ Utilize Town lands to place visual cues, landscaping, signage to draw people into Central Park.
→ Establish Central Park as a cultural precinct (e.g. information on First Nations History, performing arts theatre).
STRATEGY 5: RESPOND TO HIGHWAY COMMERCIAL

Description
→ Commercial activity on the hwy should not be limited to fuel and convenience type activities

Policy & Implementation Ideas
→ Develop OCP policy to provide a land use designation along the highway (C-3 zone) that allows for a diversity of businesses (e.g. similar to the C-1 zone)

→ Enhance frontage road by having a retail edge nearer to the street level development with boulevard
8. **Strategic Direction C: Develop Sound Parking Management Systems**

Parking management has been identified as a key issue in Smithers in terms of how the current regulations are prohibitive for retail businesses and provide a strong disincentive for any building upgrades (as they the parking regulations are triggered by any changes to buildings). The charrette team developed four parking management strategies that are designed to support local retail businesses and meet parking demands for the downtown. These are:

- **Strategy 1:** Change parking regulations in the zoning bylaw
- **Strategy 2:** Establish a public parking commission
- **Strategy 3:** Provide additional public parking
- **Strategy 4:** Conduct a public awareness campaign

**Vision**

Parking regulations that encourage development and support a cyclist and pedestrian oriented downtown.

**Strategies**

The four parking management strategies are discussed below in two parts per strategy: 1) description and discussion on the rationale for the strategy and 2) policy and implementation ideas. Please note that policy and implementation ideas are not prioritized and have not been filtered as to remain inclusive of all of the discussion during the design charrette. A prioritized list of implementation ideas is offered in the last section of this report.
### Strategy 1: Change Parking Regulations in the Zoning Bylaw

#### Description & Discussion

- Parking regulations in the zoning bylaw need to be changed in order to promote retail business in the downtown area and promote a pedestrian oriented downtown area.

- Strategy 1 will precede strategy 2 (establishing a parking advisory committee) in order to address the key parking issues in a timely manor.

#### Policy & Implementation Ideas

- Amend zoning to allow for shared parking based on peak times rather than non-concurrent uses.

- Differentiate requirements based on C-1, C-1A and C-1B zones.

- Change how requirements are calculated. For example change requirements in residential areas DR (Downtown Residential): from 1.5 to 1.0 stalls per dwelling unit on the main floor, and 0.5 stalls per dwelling unit on the second floor.

- Reduce the overall parking requirements, especially for retail in the C-1 Zone.

- Provide incentives for retail instead of parking requirements for business along C-1 zones. Consider that offices must provide off street parking.

- Establish minimum and maximum parking requirements for commercial retail.

- Revise landscaping and design standards to incorporate native shrubs and trees.

- Consider parking credits for bike racks or other elements to encourage active transportation.

- Consider a percentage decrease of required parking requirements for green development (e.g. LEED accredited buildings).

- Evaluate implementation of the above mentioned policies after 12 months (potential role of the parking advisory commission)

- Payment program for cash-in-lieu – spread out over taxes.

- Town to focus on acquiring land to develop off-street parking.

- Consider replacing cash-in-lieu with a tax levy for downtown businesses.

- Consider a Business Improvement Area
**STRATEGY 2: ESTABLISH A PUBLIC PARKING COMMISSION**

**Description**

→ A public commission would decide (but not be limited to) where parking revenues would be allocated.

**Policy & Implementation Ideas**

→ To establish a public parking advisory commission.

→ Create a terms of reference on how the parking advisory commission would operate, their scope of influence, governance structure, and define how they report back to the public.

---

**STRATEGY 3: PROVIDE ADDITIONAL PUBLIC PARKING**

**Description & Discussion**

→ Additional parking downtown is a consideration as the downtown grows and experiences growth and increased traffic.

**Policy & Implementation Ideas**

→ Consider on-street angle parking along Broadway Avenue.

→ Provide better parking signage for visitors. It is especially important to direct larger vehicles such as RV’s to suitable spots.

→ OCP policy to support Town-owned land to be developed as parking.

→ Consider multi-use design when planning for public parking spaces (i.e. picnic spaces, market space).

→ Require on-street angled parking where appropriate.

→ Consider incentives for developers to provide angled parking that counts as a parking credit (Town would have to stipulate no signage from businesses in order to not limit who can park in those spaces).
## Strategy 4: Awareness Campaign

### Description & Discussion

- There is generally no shortage of downtown parking, just a need to better manage existing parking assets. This needs to be communicated to the residents of Smithers.

- Education and promotion around non-automotive transportation options is key to enhancing the multi-modal transportation systems in Smithers.

### Policy & Implementation Ideas

- Undertake an outreach and education program that clearly defines the opportunities and constraints around parking as well as outlining the Town is aiming to address these constraints.

- To provide pedestrian, cyclist transportation options in the downtown of Smithers
9. **Strategic Direction D: Create and Enhance Great Public Gathering Spaces**

Public gathering places are important for hosting community events, informal socializing, and town beautification, among others. In order to enhance existing and create new public gathering spaces, the charrette team developed four strategies for doing so. This are:

- Strategy 1: Develop a schedule of community events and activities
- Strategy 2: Plan, Program and Design an Town Square
- Strategy 3: Activate Alfred Park, Central Park, and vacant lands
- Strategy 4: develop downtown as a showcase for local agriculture

**Vision**

To design accessible open areas for relaxing, socializing, entertainment that enhances downtown walkability, and connectivity with residential areas and community amenities.

**Strategies**

The four public space strategies are discussed below in two parts per strategy: 1) description and discussion on the rationale for the strategy and 2) policy and implementation ideas. Please note that policy and implementation ideas are not prioritized and have not been filtered as to remain inclusive of all of the discussion during the design charrette. A prioritized list of implementation ideas is offered in the last section of this report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strategy 1: Develop a schedule of community events and activities</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description &amp; Discussion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ There is a community need for more public events that celebrate the diversity of Smithers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy &amp; Implementation Ideas</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ List of events compiled and coordinated through collaboration between stakeholder groups in town.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Provide a space/venue for spontaneous events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Town to facilitate the set up of the event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Provide a place both physical and virtual to post and promote the schedule of events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Ideas list for events:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Art:</strong> Public Art, Aboriginal Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lights on Main Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Festivals:</strong> Mid summer Festival, Spirit of Mountains, Summer Arts Festival, Jazz Festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Events:</strong> Show and Shine, Midnight Madness, Skateboard Demos, Farmers markets, Streaming events on-line, Culture crawl, Bulkley Valley Folk Music Society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STRATEGY 2: PLAN, PROGRAM AND DESIGN A TOWN SQUARE

Description & Discussion

→ A public plaza along Main Street would provide a much needed space for socializing and events.

Policy & Implementation Ideas

→ Vacant lot at Second Avenue and Main Street is ideal.
→ Consider the Town of Smithers to acquire land.
→ Square theme to be a reflection of the community (e.g. First Nations History, Main Street history, local art, natural features, etc)
→ Design elements can include:
  • Consider raising the square by 6” for traffic calming and using interlocking brick pavers to distinguish public space from the street.
  • Consider planting shade trees, movable stage, outside area (winter), Town directory, supervised children’s play area, public washrooms, bandstand, storage area
  • Consider design features for year round use (e.g. winter design features).
→ Orient adjacent buildings to have views onto the park

Figure 2: Concept drawing for Main St. Plaza
**Strategy 3: Activate Alfred Park, Central Park & Vacant Lands**

**Description & Discussion**
→ Increase the use and safety

**Policy & Implementation Ideas**
→ Consider the development of a concept plan for Alfred Park with stakeholders. Elements of this plan may include:
  * Connection from Main Street to the train station as a gateway;
  * Pedestrian walkways oriented to Main street through the court buildings or build on existing walkway;
  * Redesigning the government building to reconnect the train station to Main Street (if the opportunity arises);
  * Create a transportable bandstand;
  * Create a landmark at the end of Main Street to draw traffic and interest to the end of Main Street and to soften the appearance of the government building;
  * Identify an area where to hold community events, celebrations, memorials ceremonies etc; and
  * Identify the park infrastructure necessary for the park to be used as a larger venue.
→ Revisit and revise the current Central Park Concept Plan to improve the gateway as an attraction and maximize site usage.
→ Investigate the creation of an arts centre.
→ Consider the leasing or acquisition of vacant lands for public uses.

**Strategy 4: Develop the Downtown as a Showcase for Local Agriculture**

**Description & Discussion**
→ Enhancing and celebrating local foods is a key strategy for sustainable communities.

→ Celebrating the strong local agricultural production of the Bulkley Valley in Smithers allows for a connection between the town proper and the surrounding regional district.

**Policy & Implementation Ideas**
→ Support the existing coop abattoir.
→ Consider special places for marketing local produce outside of the farmers market and in the off-season.
→ Support neighbourhood gardens on vacant lands.
10. Priorities for Action

Based on the policy and implementation ideas that emerged during the charrette several key actions stand out as priorities. Given that the revitalization of downtown will occur in many phases over a long period of time, it is important to take some first initial steps that will create the conditions for further improvements. These priorities are suggested here for consideration by the community and by Town Council.

**Priority 1: Parking regulation changes**

The Town of Smithers should consider:

- Amending zoning to allow for shared parking based on peak times rather than non-concurrent uses.
- Differentiating requirements based on C-1, C-1A and C-1B zones.
- Changing how requirements are calculated. For example change requirements in residential areas DR (Downtown Residential): from 1.5 to 1.0 stalls per dwelling unit on the main floor, and 0.5 stalls per dwelling unit on the second floor.
- Reducing the overall parking requirements, especially for retail in the C-1 Zone.
- Providing incentives for retail instead of parking requirements for business along C-1 zones. Consider that offices must provide off street parking.
- Establishing minimum and maximum parking requirements for commercial retail.
- Revising landscaping and design standards to incorporate native shrubs and trees.
- Establishing parking credits for bike racks or other elements to encourage active transportation.
- Incentivizing green building by setting a percentage decrease of required parking requirements for green development (e.g. LEED accredited buildings).
- Acquiring land to develop off-street parking.
- Replacing cash-in-lieu with a tax levy for downtown businesses.
- Setting up a Business Improvement Area for downtown.
- Evaluating implementation of the above mentioned policies after 12 months (potential role of the parking advisory commission)

**Priority 2: Land use designation changes**

The Town of Smithers should consider:

- Adopting new downtown designations, as identified in this report, as part of the OCP update process
  - Downtown residential (Four storey)
  - Main Street commercial (Four storey)
  - Downtown commercial (Four storey)
- Consider incentives identified in this report for attracting ground floor retail on Main Street for adoption in the updated OCP
- Amend existing CI-A zone to remove grandfather clause for single family housing

**Priority 3: Public Realm & Gateway Improvements**

The Town of Smithers should consider:

- The undertaking of a master plan for the Alfred and Central Parks
- Acquisition of the clock tower parcel for development of a town square
- Establishing an agreement with the old fuel station for and interim use of the site as a public park that also enhances the appearance of the highway gateway into main street.
- Developing a comprehensive signage plan that has community directory-mini maps to direct people into downtown and tourist centre. This plan should use universal symbols/colours, place signs e.g. Timber frame sign “welcome to downtown Smithers”, e.g. “Park and walk” with a walking map.
- Establish dialogue with MOT on enhancing gateways into Main St.
Charrette Overview

The charrette is an intensive, integrated, and highly collaborative design workshop where a multi-disciplinary team of professionals and stakeholders work together to make decisions about how to achieve a set of pre-determined goals and objectives through a process of creative thinking and consensus building.

The downtown charrette is a direct result of a joint brainstorming session between Town Council, the Town of Smithers Economic Development Committee and the Planning and Design Committee who saw the need for downtown revitalization strategies and affordable housing. It is also an important part of the 2008 OCP review process as illustrated in the diagram below. As such, the charrette is an important public engagement exercise that will shape future policy development for the downtown.

In partnership with CMHC, the focus of the charrette is on revitalization strategies and future planning initiatives for the downtown core - how to build on its assets and address its challenges. The charrette will result in a set of preliminary policies and guidelines, along with implementation and phasing strategies that support the concepts.
The Charrette Team

The role of the Charrette team is to partake in the full charrette process (including design time). The charrette team will be present for the majority of the charrette - providing the design team with constant feedback and ideas. Participants include residents, business owners, youth, Town Staff, and others with an interest in the future of downtown Smithers. The charrette team will collectively develop one or more concept plans for the Downtown over a 3-day period incorporating:

- Public and stakeholder input gathered to date;
- Best practices in sustainability and urban design; and
- Key background, policy and technical documents.

Charrette Team (currently expanding):

1. Harry Kruisselbrink, OCP Steering Committee
2. Casda Thomas, OCP Steering Committee & Calderwood Realtor
3. Diana Reimer, Measuring Up the North Committee member
5. Andrew Watson, Sustainable Smithers Advisory Committee & Downtown Resident
6. Paul Mott, Downtown Merchant
7. Mike Bovill, Downtown Merchant
8. Phil Brienesse, Downtown Merchant
9. Doug Montaldi, Commercial & Residential Property Developer (Burns Lake, Houston, Smithers)
10. Jocelyn Pearce, BV Museum
11. Fergus Tomlin, Director, BV Museum
12. John Fisher, former Councillor and Mayor in Ontario, looking to retire in Smithers
13. Bill Goodacre, Councillor
14. Cathyrn Bucher, Councillor
15. Mark Allen, Town of Smithers, Director of Development Services
16. Alison Walker, Town of Smithers, Planner
17. Tonya Malkow, Town of Smithers, Engineering Summer Student
18. Dmitri Cody, Town of Smithers Aboriginal Liaison Summer Student
19. Zach Kline, Town of Smithers Economic Development Summer Student
20. Doug Poliard, Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation

Design Team:

- Doug Backhouse, HBLanarc (Principal)
- Joaquin Karakas, HBLanarc (Designer)
- Derek Masselink, Masselink Environmental Design (Landscape architect)
- Janine de la Salle, HBLanarc (Project Manager)
The Agenda

June 24 - Pre-charrette session
9:30am - 4:30pm  Unprogrammed day
6:30pm - 8:30pm  Charrette team meeting @ Town Hall: meet/greet, review charrette outline, anticipated outcomes

Confirm vision + goals of the charrette
(Exercise: 1-2 sentences of what we want to achieve together)

June 25 - Day 1: Talk
9am - 12pm  Session 1: Exploration of opportunities & constraints (land use, public realm, etc) organize into themes (Policy, design, program, economic restructuring)
Session 2: Smaller group discussion on themes
Session 3: Report back - develop a common understanding of the opportunities & constraints
12pm- 1pm  Lunch Break
1pm - 5:30pm  Walking tour to generate conversation
Talk about what we have seen
Evening prep
5:30pm- 6:30pm  Dinner Break
7pm - 9:30pm  Public launch of the charrette
Slide presentation (Highlight how this ties in with the OCP process)
Use workgroup sessions from the morning to engage the community in an opportunities & constraints discussion.
Report back on opportunities and constraint- make boards or set up as slides
Outcome: Community engagement in the Charrette/OCP process and refinement of the opportunities & constraints

June 26 - Day 2: Doodle
9am - 12pm  Session 1: Develop policy and design responses to the opportunities and constraints.
Group responses into main issue areas (e.g. increasing mixed use, enhancing the public realm, thinking of a better system for parking, improving housing choices in the downtown core)
Session 2: Smaller group discussion on themes
Session 3: Report back - share ideas on how to address opportunities and constraints
12pm - 1pm  Lunch Break
1pm - 5:30pm  Design + Production: Inventory and analysis drawings
Evening prep
5:30pm- 6:30pm  Dinner Break
7pm - 9:30pm  Presentation to charrette team + council
Discussion
Flag any issues that emerge
Outcome: General consensus on what the draft plan(s) will be.

June 27 - Day 3: Draw
9am - 12pm  Production
12pm - 1pm  Lunch Break
1pm - 5:30pm  Production
5:30pm - 6:30pm  Dinner Break
7pm  Public presentation of draft concept plan - single vision
Collect feedback (form)
Outcome: Public feedback on the draft plan
The Design Brief

The Design Brief pulls together a vast array of background information to guide the work of the Charrette Team. Information includes a review of planning and policy documents, design standards, and other background information relevant to the task at hand. It represents a set of directives in the form of principles and goals, to be used by the design team over the course of the charrette in order to produce an informed concept plan. The Design Brief does not provide answers to any of the issues, rather these answers are left to the design team to generate over the intense 3-day period.

The Study Area

Local Context

The Town of Smithers is situated in the Bulkley Valley of Northwest British Columbia. Set against the backdrop of the Hudson Bay Mountain, the “Town for all Seasons” offers outstanding outdoor recreation pursuits, including skiing, fishing, hiking, coupled with a range of urban features including cultural and indoor recreational opportunities. The picturesque downtown adds to the charm of Smithers, appealing to both residents and visitors alike. The alpine theme and concentration of businesses along Main Street sets downtown Smithers apart from other northern communities, adding to its reputation as a great place to live.

History

The Town of Smithers was surveyed in 1913 and a street grid pattern was established that is still evident today. Historically, intensive development has been oriented towards Main Street as the prime commercial focus with residential development radiating outward from the commercial core. The traditional downtown was punctuated by important civic structures - the (old) Courthouse at the intersection of Main Street with Highway 16 or by community focal points - the Canadian National Railway station at the western end of Main Street. This pattern has been sustained by the preservation of the old courthouse, with establishment of a major civic park in Central Park, and with the on-going restoration of the CN railway station as a community resource centre.

Study Area Description

The 36.9 ha (91.17 acre) study area encompasses the majority of downtown Smithers. Bordered by King and Queen Streets, Railway Avenue and Highway 16, this location is in close proximity to many of Smithers services and amenities.

Demographics

The Town of Smithers has a population of Smithers is 5,217 (based on the 2006 census). Statistics indicate that the population of Smithers has been declining, though minimally, over the last decade. Varying economic conditions in the forestry and public service sectors, coupled with an aging population have driven this modest, though consistent, population decline. Overall, the Town of Smithers saw a decline of 0.7% on an average annual basis. The Smithers region, as represented by
the boundaries of School District 54 (Bulkley), declined a slightly slower average rate of 0.4%.

Demographically, population decline in Smithers has tended to occur in the younger age groups (44 and younger), primarily the 25-44 year old age group. In contrast, declines in these younger age categories were mitigated somewhat by gains in the older (45 and above) age categories.

The prevailing trend in these figures indicates that the community is rapidly aging. Between 1996 and 2006, the median age of the Town of Smithers has increased by 4.5 years from 31.6 to 36.1. This is also a significantly faster than the rate of increase for the province as a whole. During the same period, BC saw its average age increase by 3.5 years.

Over the next 25 years, BC Stats projections suggest that population change in Smithers will shift from decline to modest growth. Forecasts indicate future population growth of the Smithers region will average between 0.3% and 0.1% annually to 2031.

**Housing**

*Housing Type & Tenure*

Housing types in downtown Smithers are made up of mostly of detached single family residential. This is the dominant housing type in Smithers. Mixed use development, a combination of commercial and residential units also exists in the downtown core along with limited secondary suites. Most dwellings in Smithers are owned (68%) and about 70% of the housing stock is more than 20 years old. Compared to the provincial average, Smithers housing stock consists of greater proportion of detached dwellings units.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Privately Occupied Homes (2006 Census)</th>
<th>Smithers</th>
<th>BC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single detached</td>
<td>66.3%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi, row homes</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartments</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Real Estate**
The real estate market in Northern BC is currently very active. The Smithers’ real estate market is consistent with this trend. With virtually static population growth over the past 10 years, demand for new housing has been small, although since 2006 vacant residential lots including the Town’s Willowvale subdivision have experienced a significant spike in sales. There has been a 23% increase in the number of all properties sold in the first nine months of 2007 compared to 2006.

In Smithers, growth in housing prices has steadily increased after a dramatic decrease in prices in 2001. At that time, the Town saw average prices fall approximately 25% due to a provincial restructuring initiative and related sudden decline in local employment. Since then, prices have steadily appreciated, though at a more modest rate than that seen in some other northern BC communities. As of April 2007, the average price of a single-detached home was approximately $177,600, compared to $160,866 a year earlier, a 10.4% increase (BC Northern Real Estate Board, April 2007). As of April 2008, this average has increased to approximately $188,000.

| Average House Prices in Select Northern BC Communities (Northern Real Estate Board, 2007) |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Kitimat-Terrace                 | $144,349                        |
| Prince Rupert                   | $152,336                        |
| Smithers                        | $177,597                        |
| Fort Nelson                     | $219,569                        |
| Williams Lake                   | $191,505                        |
| Prince George                   | $232,951                        |
| Fort St. John                   | $294,907                        |

**Housing Affordability**
Although the housing costs have increased throughout British Columbia, including the Bulkley Valley, Smithers is one of the most affordable communities to live in the entire province. According to the BC Statistics, thirty-four percent (34%) of households in Smithers spend more than 30% of their income on rent alone. The average proportion of income committed to home ownership in Northern BC was 32% whereas 74% of income was necessary to own a home in Vancouver, and the provincial average HAI (Housing Affordability Index) is 68.5%.

A low vacancy rate of less than 4% signifies a shortage of affordable housing in Smithers. The average price for a 2-bedroom apartment is $512.50. The King Street apartment is the most affordable at $275 for a bachelor suite with a shared bathroom. According to a report on homelessness and housing published for the Smithers Community Services Association, several low-cost housing options have disappeared in Smithers. Identified housing gaps identified were:

- More people need affordable housing than is available;
- Little housing is available for singles at a good rate;
- No housing options for people with FASD, mental health or active addiction issues;
- No centralized housing resources for people looking for housing;
- No safe, affordable housing for people trying to maintain sobriety;
- Current emergency shelter for men is not adequate or accessible;
- No support services available for emergency shelter.

**Land Use**

**Official Community Plan & Zoning Bylaw**
The majority of the study area is designated as “Downtown Commercial” in the Official Community Plan (OCP) along with pockets of “Other Recreational”, “Parks and Open Space” and “Mixed Residential”. The OCP identifies the downtown as the primary location for retail, personal service, civic uses and offices. The OCP also designates the entire study area as a Development Permit Area, where any exterior changes must be in accordance with the Alpine Theme Design Guidelines. First established by Council in 1972, the idea was that the downtown area should reflect its alpine setting by encouraging, “our business district architecture to relate to our mountain and winter sport heritage that particularly belongs to the Town of Smithers”.

A number of land use Zones exist in the downtown core. The majority of land is zoned for commercial use with a small portion of public use and residential. Within the downtown core there are also a number of specified parcels that can either be R-1 (Single Family Residential) or commercial. Presently, these lots vary from being vacant, commercial, or residential (see map).
The General Provisions section of the Zoning Bylaw outlines general requirements for each zone, which include parking, loading, landscaping, design and maintenance standards. In particular, parking is often cited as the main barrier to future development or renovation to buildings on Main Street as many of them are non-conforming with a high percentage of lot coverage. Property owners required to provide parking have three (3) options: supply parking on site, pay $5,500 cash-in-lieu per spot, or provide parking on another site within 225m along with the registration of a parking covenant.

**Existing Land Use**

Existing land use in the study area can be broken down into residential, commercial, mixed use (combination of residential and commercial), vacant land, parking, and public/park. The Town of Smithers owns several properties in the study area. A portion of Crown-owned land exists along Fourth Avenue.

Commercial land use is focused in the downtown area (primarily along Main Street and 1 block east and west) and Highway 16. The downtown area is the centre for retail, office and civic uses. The Highway 16 area caters to automotive uses, tourist support services (accommodation and restaurants) and some office and retail uses. Concerns have been expressed about the loss of key businesses from downtown to the Highway and to home occupations. Reasons for this have been identified as land assembly, site size, exposure to regional traffic/customers, and available parking. The number of building permits and business licenses give clues to the trend in development within the downtown core. Overall, the number of business licenses in Smithers has remained stable over the last 7 years with approximately 546 active licenses. From the graphs to the right, the following recent trends can be identified:

- The number of building permits in the downtown over the last 5 years have been Largely commercial in nature;

- There has been a decline in the proportion of total building permits that are for the downtown. However, this can be attributed to the recent increase in residential construction.
Comparing land uses from 1975 and 2008 also shows a number of trends illustrating the changing nature of the downtown. This is illustrated in the following table and maps:

### Downtown Land Use Changes Over the Last 33 Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1975</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Use</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public/Park</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Map: 1975 Land Use

Map: Existing Land Use (2008)

**LEGEND**
- Residential
- Commercial
- Mixed Use
- Public/Park
- Parking
- Vacant
Buildings & Layout
The majority of buildings along Main Street have a zero lot-line building setback, creating a cohesive street "wall" with a high number of buildings with 100% parcel coverage (see map of built form). The streets radiating out from Main Street, towards King and Queen have far less parcel coverage. This compact Main Street sets downtown Smithers apart from many Northern BC communities. All serviced residential neighbourhoods are within 1,200m of Main Street and Highway 16 and are within walking distance to its downtown core, civic and recreational facilities.
Crime
Crime in downtown Smithers consists mostly of vandalism, recently including:
- Ongoing “smash and grab” instances that happen after hours;
- Recent robbery at the Royal Bank
- Supervalue: Drunken in public, verbal assaults;
- Minor stabbing on Second Avenue;
- Tent camps on the wooden area on Fourth Ave;
- Vandalism of the Central Park Train, but the Farmer’s Market has seemed to have a positive influence;
- Vandalism behind the back alleys along Main Street (broken bottles, windows, graffiti, small property damage);
- Needles found behind the BiRight Building.
- Memorial Park: drunk in public

Graffiti is said to come in waves with spurts in the Fall 2007 and Winter 2008. This has since dropped off significantly in the last few months and is attributed to a few individuals. STAV Art is an initiative as part of a crime prevention strategy that is run by teenagers who do graffiti removal for businesses as well as outreach work.

Access & Movement
Road Network
Roads within the study area are designed following the “Geometric Design Standards for Canadian Roads and Streets”, as published by the Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) or unless otherwise stated in the Town of Smithers Subdivision Servicing Bylaw. Definitions include:

**Arterial Street**
Arterials are intended to carry large volumes of all types of traffic moving at medium, to high speeds. Controlled access to adjacent properties will be permitted, however direct access to single family development will not generally be allowed. Arterial streets include Provincial Highways.

**Collector Street**
Collector Streets provide both traffic service and land service functions. The traffic service function of this type of street is to carry traffic between local and arterial streets. Controlled access to adjacent properties will be allowed on collectors. Trip lengths are commonly in the range of 0.75 - 1.5km. Average daily traffic (ADT) volumes generally range from 1,000 to 12,000 vehicles.

**Local Street**
The main function of a local street is to provide land access. Direct access is allowed to all abutting properties. Local streets are not intended to move large volumes of traffic. Trip lengths are short, generally under 0.75 in length.

**Lanes**
Lanes provide service access to commercial and residential areas or as an extension of any existing system of lanes. Lanes shall not exceed a length of 150m unless accepted. Dead-end lanes shall not be encouraged, but, when accepted, shall include a turn-around area.
**Pedestrian Movement**
Due to its compact nature, the downtown is walkable. Pedestrian flow is good in the downtown core, especially along Main Street, however, becomes much less so once West of Highway 16 where development is car oriented and there is a lack of sidewalks and crosswalks. There have been cyclists using the sidewalk on Main Street, which has resulted in Pedestrian-cyclist conflicts and a number of complaints to the Town. There are no designated bike lanes/routes in Smithers.

**Gateways & Nodes of Activity**
The Farmer’s Market generates considerable activity during the summer months. Located in the parking lot beside the Central Park Building, the market runs every Saturday morning during the summer. Many people from the community walk, bike, or drive. Other hubs of activity are the Post Office, shopping malls, liquor store, and along Main Street. Generally speaking, the most active sections of Main Street run from Fourth Avenue to Broadway Avenue. The “Alpenhorn Man”, located on Main Street close to Highway 16, is a visible landmark into the downtown core (although there is no official gateway into the downtown area from the Highway). However, at the end of Main Street (at Alfred Avenue), there is nothing to direct or signify the end of the shopping district.
Opportunities & Constraints

The following is a preliminary summary of the opportunities and constraints of the downtown core.

Opportunities

- Already walkable and compact;
- Existing examples of mixed use;
- Already a place where both residents and visitors go to shop and socialize;
- Good mix of existing businesses;
- Regulations already support mixed use.

Constraints

- Changing nature of downtown businesses (retail to service-based/professional);
- Commercial development along Highway 16;
- Contaminated sites;
- Parking regulations have been regularly sited as a disincentive for development downtown;
- Downtown zoning allows certain properties to be either R-1 or C-1A Zone (see Map). These parcels range from being developed single family dwellings, vacant land, or converted into commercial space.

Charrette Directives

The purpose of the charrette is to develop concepts for mixed-use development in downtown Smithers followed by necessary regulatory changes. Overriding principles and goals in the development of these concepts include:

1. Create a downtown that is accessible to all
   - Goal: Design easily accessible public spaces
   - Goal: Have a strong focus on being pedestrian & cyclist friendly
   - Goal: Incorporate linkages to trail systems and paths
   - Goal: Design a recognizable “gateway” into the downtown core.

2. Create a downtown that incorporates a mix of land uses
   - Goal: Encourage a mix of housing types that addresses housing choice and affordability
   - Goal: Increase the density for residential and commercial land uses
   - Goal: Encourage adaptive reuse of existing buildings and infill development

3. Create a downtown that supports a diverse & healthy economy
   - Goal: Revise downtown parking requirements to encourage development
   - Goal: Increase residential population base to support commercial activities
   - Goal: Enhance viability of existing businesses

4. Create a downtown that is a model for “green” development
   - Goal: Provide incentives for development of environmentally friendly buildings
   - Goal: Use green building principles for new construction and renovation
   - Goal: Promote the development of green energy sources and green technology

5. Create a downtown with great public spaces that reflect the uniqueness of Smithers
   - Goal: Identify design features and amenities that are important for downtown living and winter climates;
   - Goal: Have a public space for people to meet and socialize
   - Goal: Highlight the cultural and natural scenery

Charrette deliverables include:

1. A vision for downtown Smithers;
2. Illustrative plan;
3. Conceptual land use;
4. Cross Sections;
5. Policy Recommendations
Resource Materials

A range of key documents exist that supplements the Design Brief and should be considered in preparation for the Charrette process. These include:

- Town of Smithers Zoning Bylaw (2002)
- Town of Smithers Official Community Plan (2000)
- Alpine Theme Design Guidelines
- Downtown Commercial Development Permit Area

List of Maps include:
- Official Community Plan
- Zoning
- Downtown Parking Covenants
- Infrastructure
- Pedestrian Plan
- Developed Sidewalks
- Contaminated Sites
- Road Network
- Ownership