



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Briefing Note

To: Council

File No.: 1407-20

From: Director of Development Services

Date: February 12, 2025

Subject: Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan Phase 1 Update

PURPOSE: To update Council on Phase 1 of the Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan (DVLAP) Communication Strategy.

BACKGROUND:

Council received the Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan Communication Strategy at the October 23, 2024 regular meeting of Council and endorsed the plan (Attachment 1).

Staff and Consultants have now concluded Phase 1 of the communication strategy and this report outlines what we heard from the working group. What we heard forms the planning principles that will guide the development of the DVLAP over the next few months as the project moves into Phase 2.

DISCUSSION:

Phase 1 of the project created a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis for the plan area (Attachment 2). During this process four districts with unique characteristics and planning opportunities were identified within the plan boundaries as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Planning Districts



The SWOT document provides situational analysis of the plan area as a whole as well as for the distinct districts and includes an inventory of land use, infrastructure and current development. The SWOT reviews existing documents, capital projects and infrastructure to identify big ideas to guide the development of the plan. The process identified the following Big Ideas:

- Reimagining the riverfront
- Activating Harmston Park and surrounding
- Strengthening the Downtown core
- Fitzgerald Corridor as a key corridor with unique place making and design considerations
- Remaining focused on implementing a number of the Downtown Playbook (2016) priorities including enhancing public spaces, improving connectivity, and supporting cohesive development.

As part of Phase 1 project engagement, working group members identified in the *Downtown Playbook: A Partnership Action Plan* (2016) were contacted for focused interviews in order to ensure the project team has a more complete understanding of study area attributes and external factors impacting the project’s success. These working group members are: Downtown Courtenay Business Improvement Association, Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce, Comox Valley Art Gallery, Comox Valley Arts, Sid Williams Theatre Society, Courtenay and District Museum and Palaeontology Centre, and two property owners (Central Builders properties and property owner of a number of properties adjacent to Harmston Park).

In preparation for the interviews, the SWOT was distributed to the working group members with the following questions:

- Looking at the SWOT, what's most important? Should we be elevating any of these identified issues or opportunities based on your perspective and/or specific interests?
- Did we miss anything?
- Is there anything you see in the SWOT that is no longer relevant or should be removed?

The interviews were conducted with each group to understand if the SWOT analysis captured the key ideas for the downtown and what aspects of the SWOT analysis required further technical review for the development of the DVLAP. The consultants produced a “What We Heard” document which is Attachment 3 to this report and Table 1 below summarizes the key findings.

Table 1 Key Interview Findings

| Key Themes: What We Heard from Interest-Holder Interviews | Planning & Design Considerations: How Feedback Can Inform the LAP Process |
|--|---|
| Recognize the Cultural District as a Focal Point | Identify the cultural district as a centralized activity hub/focal point and an existing gateway to downtown |
| Bring People Downtown | To support implementation of the LAP, the City may consider initiatives and investment to encourage downtown visitation such as expanded utility for events/programming, increased transit access, interpretive/historic signage, public art, wayfinding, and public realm enhancements |

| Key Themes: What We Heard from Interest-Holder Interviews | Planning & Design Considerations: How Feedback Can Inform the LAP Process |
|--|--|
| Enhance Greenspaces | Consider differences in type, distribution and function of parkland and greenspace in downtown (i.e., for recreation, public realm, access to nature, event programming) |
| Support Housing Development & Local Businesses | Consider opportunities to support denser forms of housing development in the downtown and pedestrian focused streets to enhance walkability and liveability |
| Utilize Strength of Community Groups & Potential Partnerships | Include community group involvement as a strength to implementation of the LAP and explore opportunities with KFN and other planning partners |
| Align with other Plans & Strategies | Ensure that strategic objectives within the Cultural Plan and provincial housing legislation are referenced and/or integrated into all downtown planning efforts |

The findings from both the SWOT analysis and the “What We Heard Report” confirm that the vision and number of specific ideas and projects for the downtown as identified in the Downtown Playbook (2016) and incorporated into the Official Community Plan (OCP) remain a strong foundation for the development of the DVLAP. The plan when completed will focus on identifying key projects to include in future financial planning and implementation.

As part of Phase 1 a project page has been developed to launch on Social PinPoint which provides a project schedule, documents, how to provide comments or questions, and how the public can get involved. This project page for the DVLAP can be found on engagemoxvalley.ca/Courtenay.

Staff have reached out to K’omoks First Nation (KFN) to initiate a discussion with KFN on preferred engagement and partnership approach.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

The table below provides an overview of the next stages of DVLAP planning process including communication and engagement milestones and timelines.

| Tasks | Estimated Timeline |
|---|---------------------------|
| PHASE 2: Key Directions & Concept Plan | |
| Prepare Urban Design Framework and draft policies for public and interest holder input including the following but not limited to: project implementation options for each District, overall hierarchy of public spaces, green network, circulation, place-making strategy, areas of cultural value, new residential and mixed-use development location and massing, reimagining vacant properties. | February – March 2025 |

| | |
|--|---|
| Public Interest and Intergovernmental engagement session. A one-day session that will bring together interest holders, intergovernmental interests and the general public through the use of creative engagement techniques similar to the OCP 2020 Ideas Fair. Interest holders including intergovernmental will have a separate session for more technical discussion on the same day. (public open house) | April 2025 |
| Virtual Engagement (Social PinPoint): Online survey and input opportunity | Will run for two weeks around the time of the public open house |
| What We Heard Summary and Draft DVLAP for Council consideration | May 2025 |
| PHASE 3: Refinement & Draft Plan | |
| Virtual Engagement (Social PinPoint) with focused questions on plan refinement | June 2025 |
| Public Interest and Intergovernmental follow-up meeting | June 2025 |
| Staff report to Council on engagement findings and recommended DVLAP for adoption | August /September 2025 |

RECOMMENDATION: THAT Council receive the “Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan Phase 1 Update”.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. October 23, 2024 staff report “Downtown Local Area Plan Communication Strategy and Workplan and endorsed the community strategy”
2. Courtenay Downtown & Harmston Park Local Area Plan – SWOT Analysis
3. Phase 1 What We Heard Report

Prepared by: Nancy Gothard, RPP MCIP, Manager of Community and Sustainability Planning

Reviewed by: Marianne Wade, RPP MCIP, Director of Development Services

Concurrence: Geoff Garbutt, M.Pl., MCIP, RPP, City Manager (CAO)



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Staff Report

To: Council

File No.: 1470-20

From: Director of Development Services

Date: October 23, 2024

Subject: Downtown Local Area Plan Communication Strategy and Workplan

PURPOSE: For Council to receive the report and endorse the Communication Strategy for the Downtown Local Area Plan (DLAP).

BACKGROUND:

At the regular meeting of Council held on July 17, 2024 staff provide a report on the consolidation of Harmston Precinct, Downtown Playbook, OCP Downtown Centre and provided a new boundary for a Downtown Local Area Plan (DLAP) which Council approved. Staff indicated they would report back to Council with a Communication Strategy for the DLAP and staff is seeking Council's endorsement of the proposed plan in accordance with the community engagement and consultation requirements of the Local Government Act.

DISCUSSION:

The DLAP is intended to inform and amend the Official Community Plan which triggers consultation requirements pursuant to Section 475 of the Local Government Act in addition to the requirement under Section 477 (3) (c) for the subsequent bylaw amendment.

The proposed communication strategy and actions is outlined in Attachment 1 and provides an overview of the engagement approach. The strategy will provide opportunities, with a variety of methods and utilizing communication tools, to provide early and on an ongoing consultation to form a draft local plan for Council to consider in 2025. This project is intended to implement the OCP and provides and aligns with Council's Strategic priorities. This work has been incorporated into staff's workplan and has been identified in the 2023-2026 financial plan.

In accordance with the legislation, the communication strategy includes broad public and engagement with parties with a direct interest in the DLAP study area. This strategy is designed to reflect the Public Interest will include the general public and groups including but not limited to: Downtown Business Association, Chamber of Commerce, Comox Valley Arts Council, and local property owners. In order to engage with intergovernmental authorities who have an interest in the plan area the strategy includes contact with School District 71, CVRD, MoTI and BC Transit. With respect to K'omoks First Nation, a detailed engagement plan will be developed through following direct contact with the Nation to determine their level of interest in the study area as well as to determine how they would like to be involved in the project and subsequent consideration of the OCP amendment.

Table 1 below is a high-level summary of the three phases of the communication strategy which supports the development of the local area plan by the project team. Staff have initiated the development of the communication strategy and engaged on the first two tasks in Phase 1 in order to provide the strategy to Council and seek endorsement of the plan.

TABLE 1 Summary of Communication Strategy Plan

| |
|--|
| <p>PHASE 1: Planning Context & design Foundations Engagement Planning Workshop (with project team) Communications Strategy Plan (developed with Team) Public Interest and Intergovernmental Interviews</p> <p>Summary of what we heard Material preparations for Social point</p> <p>PHASE 2: Key Directions & Concept Plan Public Open house/Pop-up Virtual Engagement Public Interest and Intergovernmental follow-up What we Heard Summary</p> <p>PHASE 3: Refinement & Draft Plans Virtual Engagement (Social Point) Public Interest and Intergovernmental follow-up meeting Engagement Analysis & Report</p> |
|--|

This communication strategy supports the development of the local area plan while building upon the work undertaken through the OCP and Downtown play book as discussed at the July 17, 2024 council meeting. Tools being utilized include virtual, in person, survey, and interviews. The engagement will be summarized and utilized to inform the development of the local area plan. Staff will report back to Council at the end of Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the communication strategy to provide status updates and to outline how the engagement is informing the local area plan. These steps will be taken prior to the DLAP being presented for consideration of the OCP Amendment Bylaw.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

Section 475(1) in the *Local Government Act* that during the development of an amendment to the Official Community Plan (OCP) the proposing local government must provide one or more opportunities it considers appropriate for the consultation with persons, organizations and authorities it considers will be affected.

- For the purposes of subsection (1), the local government must*
- (a) consider whether the opportunities for consultation with one or more of the persons, organizations and authorities should be early and ongoing, and*
 - (b) specifically consider whether consultation is required with the following:*
 - (i) the board of the regional district in which the area covered by the plan is located, in the case of a municipal official community plan;*
 - (ii) the board of any regional district that is adjacent to the area covered by the plan;*
 - (iii) the council of any municipality that is adjacent to the area covered by the plan;*
 - (iv) first nations;*
 - (v) boards of education, greater boards and improvement district boards;*

(vi)the Provincial and federal governments and their agencies.

*(3) Consultation under this section is in addition to the public hearing required under section 477
(3) (c).*

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The 2023-2026 financial plan includes \$150,000 for the Harmston Local Area Plan. The Downtown Local Area Plan includes the Harmston Local Area Plan and has incorporated a number of strategic priorities like the Duncan Mews to create a comprehensive and coordinated local area plan to guide implementation of key actions that have been identified in the Downtown Playbook and OCP. To date \$45,000 has been spent on the first phase of the DLAP to create a SWOT analysis which is required to initiate and inform the communication strategy with the development of the DLAP.

MODUS has provided a proposal to support the DLAP process of \$45,000 plus additional \$10,000 to build the Social point page (Virtual Engagement) and monitor the page throughout the engagement process. The total cost to support the DLAP process is \$55,000 which leaves \$50,000 in the budget. The \$50,000 will be utilized for EKISTICS support to complete the DLAP. Any additional requirements outside of this plan would require additional funds.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

This project is being delivered with a combination of staff resources from Development Services and external consultants. Internally the project will require support from Communications to utilize city social media, webpages, media and newsprint where required. This project will include input and support from all city departments in the development and implementation of the DLAP.

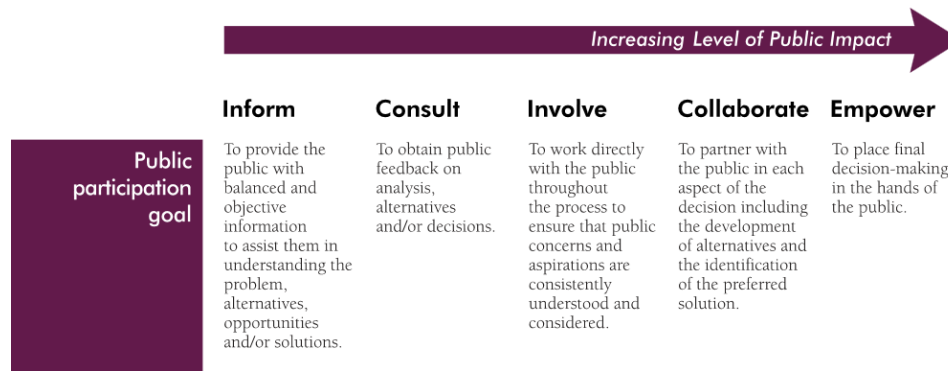
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Streets and Transportation - Improve Cliffe Avenue and 5th Street intersection pedestrian facilities
- Streets and Transportation - Plan and implement bike parking and secure storage
- Buildings and Landscape - Update Zoning Bylaw - review maximum building heights
- Buildings and Landscape - Develop a local area plan for Harmston Avenue Civic Precinct
- Buildings and Landscape - Implement Duncan Commons/Downtown Courtenay Playbook, 5th Street staging/phasing
- Buildings and Landscape - Review and update land use regulations and bylaws for consistency with OCP

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Based 2 Spectrum the communication strategy will inform, consult, involve and collaborate.



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As discussed at the July 17, 2024 Council meeting, Staff is utilizing the engagement undertaken to date from the Downtown Play Book and the OCP to inform the development of the DLAP.

The DLAP will amend the OCP and the amending bylaws to the OCP will be prepared for Council's consideration after the conclusion of the communication strategy that supports the development of the DLAP.

Staff anticipate initiating and completing the Social Point page to be live and completing the public interest and intergovernmental agencies interviews in November 2024.

Phase 2 would be initiated in February 2025 followed by Phase 3 in April 2025.

OPTIONS

1. THAT Council receive the report on the Downtown Local Area Plan Communication Strategy and Workplan and endorse the communication strategy outlined in Attachment 1 in order to guide community and and interest holder engagement;

THAT Council pursuant to section 475 and 476 Local Government Act, Council will provide opportunities it considers appropriate for consultation with persons and parties it considers will be affected, including the Comox Valley Regional District, Town of Comox, Village of Cumberland, First Nations, and the province/provincial agencies and pursuant to section 476 Local Government Act, Council will consult with Comox Valley School District 71 prior to considering amendments to City of Courtenay Official Commuity Plan Bylaw No 3070, 2022.

2. THAT Council provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Communication Strategy Downtown Local Area Plan
2. July 17, 2024 SDDR Local Area Plan Update - Staff Report

Prepared by: Marianne Wade, Director of Development Services
Concurrence: Geoff Garbutt, M.Pl., MCIP, RPP, City Manager (CAO)

Phase 1: Planning Context & Design Foundations

| | |
|------------|--|
| 1.1 | Engagement Planning Workshop (with project team) |
| 1.1.1 | background review (of LAP work to date, other resources, etc.) |
| 1.1.2 | facilitate workshop to plan the "what, when, who & how" of engagement |
| 1.1.3 | prepare notes from workshop |
| 1.2 | Communications & Engagement Strategy |
| 1.2.1 | draft plan (including timeline, key messages, etc) |
| 1.2.2 | finalize plan |
| 1.3 | Public, Interest-holder and Intergovernmental/Agency Interviews |
| 1.3.1 | coordination & preparation for interviews/meetings |
| 1.3.2 | facilitation (assumes 10) |
| 1.3.3 | summary of interview notes and key takeaways |

Phase 2: Key Directions & Concept Plan(s)

| | |
|------------|--|
| 2.1 | Public Open House / Pop-Up |
| 2.1.2 | coordinate open house logistics and preparations |
| 2.1.3 | facilitate event (includes travel) |
| 2.2 | Virtual Engagement |
| 2.2.1 | develop public survey & other online engagement tools through Social Point |
| 2.3 | Follow-Up w/ Public, Interest-holder and Intergovernmental/Agencies |
| 2.3.1 | coordination of meeting |
| 2.3.2 | preparation of materials |
| 2.3.3 | facilitation of meeting |
| 2.4 | Analysis and Reporting |
| 2.4.1 | analysis of all feedback in phase 2 |
| 2.4.2 | draft engagement summary |
| 2.4.3 | final engagement summary |

Phase 3: Refinement & Draft Plan

| | |
|------------|--|
| 3.1 | Virtual Engagement |
| 3.1.1 | develop short form survey for comments/feedback on draft plan |
| 3.2 | Follow-Up w/ Public, Interest-holder and Intergovernmental/Agencies |
| 3.2.1 | coordination of meeting |
| 3.2.2 | preparation of materials |
| 3.2.3 | facilitation of meeting |
| 3.3 | Engagement Analysis & Reporting |
| 3.3.1 | analyze feedback from phase 3 |
| 3.3.2 | Prepare a short summary of final comments/recommendations to support plan refinement |

Project Management

| | |
|--|---|
| | Regular Project Meetings |
| | Project Admin (project setup, invoicing, processing expenses and |



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Staff Report

To: Council

File No.: 3030-01

From: Director of Development Services

Date: July 17, 2024

Subject: Update Local Area Plan Harmston Civic Precinct and Downtown Centre

PURPOSE:

To update Council on the Strategic Priorities for Harmston Avenue Civic Precinct Local Area Plan and the implementation of the Duncan Commons/Downtown Courtenay Playbook, including 5th street staging and phasing that are scheduled for 2024, 2025, and beyond.

BACKGROUND:

In September 2016, Council adopted the Downtown Courtenay Playbook. The “Playbook” outlines the vision, five strategic goals, high-level planning principles, and detailed actions necessary to initiate goal implementation. Each goal specifies actions, desired outcomes, involved parties, and timelines. The document acknowledges that further detailed analysis is needed to implement actions, which will require budget allocation. While some actions, such as the Sidewalk Patio Policy and Downtown Parking Analysis, have been implemented, others require more detailed analysis and could benefit from a more cohesive plan.

The *Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 3070, 2022* builds on the 2016 Downtown Playbook goals and actions and identifies Harmston Avenue Civic Precinct as a Local Area Plan to be initiated in 2024 and 2025. This is in the departments workplan for 2024 and 2025. In the 2024 Financial Budget \$150,000 was approved for the Harmston Local Area Plan. Further that the 2024 financial plan identifies budget for the design and construction of Harmston Park.

Council’s 2023-2026 Strategic Priorities identify building and landscape priorities:

1. “Develop a Local Area Plan for Harmston Avenue Civic Precinct for 2024 and 2025”
2. “Implement Duncan Commons/Downtown Courtenay Playbook, 5th street staging/phasing for 2025 and 2026 and beyond”.

At a regular Council meeting in November 2023, Council passed a resolution for staff to bring forward a report on the Duncan Avenue Summer Pilot project outlining considerations and financial implications for implementation in 2024. Staff were also directed to collaborate with the Duncan Avenue working group to review options for the design, implementation and evaluation of the pilot, and include recommendations informed by the consultation in the report back to Council.

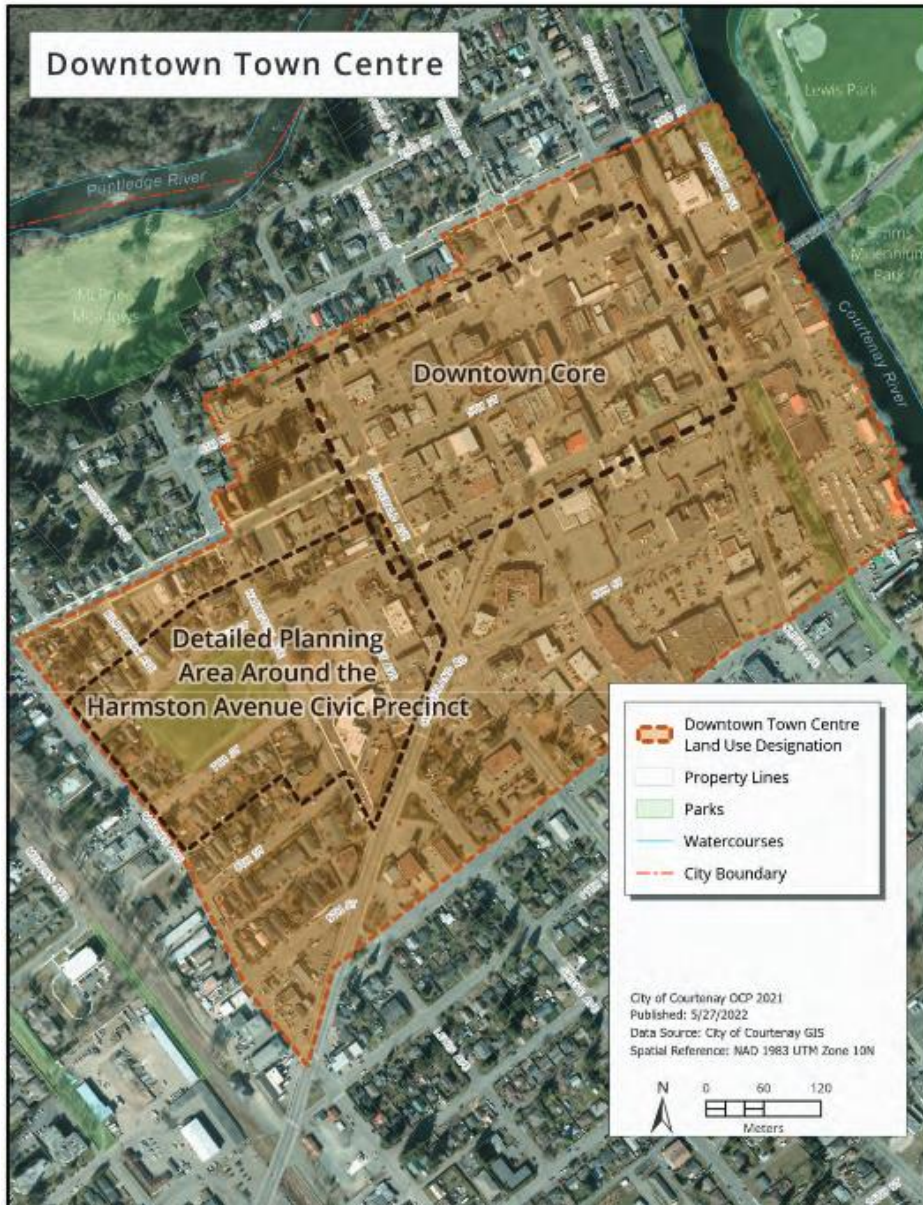
In January of 2024, staff initiated conversations with the Duncan Avenue working group Liaison, the Executive Director of Comox Valley Arts, to discuss the Duncan Commons program. Following these initial discussions, several factors including changes to provincial legislation, enhanced understanding of infrastructure challenges, and the transition from Wednesday markets to “Pulse on the Plaza”, necessitate an adjustment to the overall land use and community planning approach for the downtown core.

DISCUSSION:

To develop an effective process for informing the Downtown Town Centre in a coordinated and structured manner, staff are proposing the consolidation of the Harmston Avenue Civic Precinct with the Downtown Playbook to create a comprehensive Local Area Plan. This plan aims to build upon the five strategic goals and actions outlined in the Downtown Playbook, as well as the Official Community Plan (OCP) policies for Harmston Avenue Civic Precinct and the Downtown Centre. The plan will also incorporate the Harmston Park design principles to guide construction.

Figure 1 (below) illustrates the existing Downtown Town Centre from the OCP and identifies the Harmston Civic Precinct and the Downtown Core.

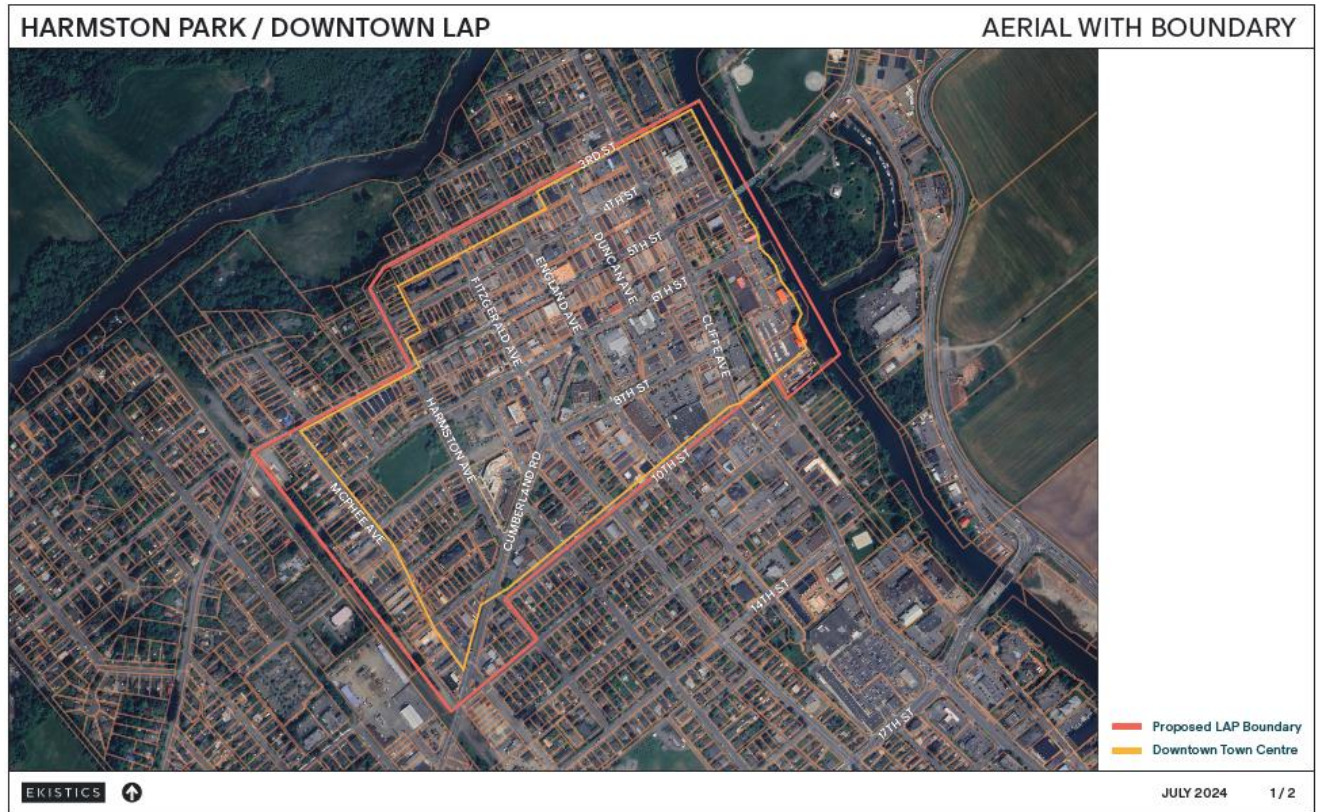
Figure 1: Downtown Town Centre



Map B-2 Downtown Town Centre

Figure 2 (below) illustrates the consolidated local area plan in dark orange encompassing the existing Downtown Town Centre Plan in light orange.

Figure 2 Consolidated Local Area Plan



This proposed consolidated Local Area Plan connects and coordinates two strategic priorities for 2024, 2025 and beyond, integrating strategic priorities from various City departments.

Projects such as the Duncan Commons require capital investment to develop the necessary infrastructure for activation and programming. Through the consolidation of existing plans, there is a greater opportunity to align and advance strategic and capital projects, like those actions currently identified in the Downtown Playbook. Through an all-encompassing Local Area Plan, the infrastructure planning can be developed to support activation of programming, connection to the downtown, and to seek opportunities for partnerships for capital investment.

The first phase of this Local Area Plan is to understand the land through Inventory and analysis, workshop with City departments exploring the plan area, a SWOT Analysis with City staff that will outline:

- *Strengths*: Positive attributes of a location that can be leveraged to enhance the success of a project.
- *Weaknesses*: Negative attributes of a location that can hinder the success of a project.
- *Opportunities*: External factors that can favorably affect the project's success.
- *Constraints (Threats)*: External factors that may have a negative impact on the project's Success.

After this analysis work is completed, an engagement plan will be developed for interaction with the community, associations, and agencies for initial discussions on the SWOT analysis. The outcome of Phase One will inform Phase Two which is the development of design principles, partnerships, and incentives.

Ekistics Town Planning has been retained for Phase one of the Local Area Plan. The inventory and analysis are completed, first city inter department workshop was held in June, and the SWOT analysis is underway with a city inter department workshop to be held in late July. Figure 2 below identifies the Local Area Plan boundary based upon this analysis in the orange line and the yellow line represents the Downtown Town Centre boundary from the OCP. Adjustments have been made to incorporate stronger connections to the ICF and River and neighbourhood connectivity.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

This Local Area Plan address objective 4 of the Official Community Plan “Sub-area planning provides more direction on growth” and will assist in guiding the implementation of the newly adopted Residential-SSMUH zone along with identifying zoning to support the Downtown policies in the OCP.

Further this consolidated Local Area Plan addresses thematic policies in the Official Community Plan that address: Parks and Recreation along with Arts; Cultural and Heritage policies; Streets and Transportation; Social Infrastructure; and Local Economy.

The consolidated Local Area Plan addresses the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Section 3.2.2 Conduct Park Plans:

- Harmston Park is identified as requiring a park plan and is identified as a short term priority in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Implementation Strategy.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The budget for this Local Area Plan is in the 2024 Financial Plan under Development Services Community and Sustainability Special Projects Harmston Local Area Plan for \$150,000. Phase 1 contract is \$35,000.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

The development of the Local Area Plan involves all departments and crosses over many strategic priorities for 2024 and 2025. This is a strategic approach to coordinating Infrastructure, natural environment, building, housing, active transportation, to provide informed analysis and priorities to the consolidated area to support programming of space.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

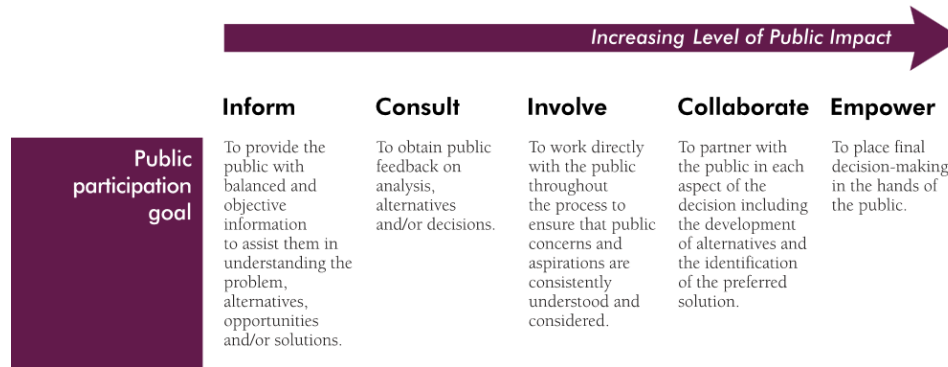
This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Buildings and Landscape - Develop a local area plan for Harmston Avenue Civic Precinct
- Buildings and Landscape - Implement Duncan Commons/Downtown Courtenay Playbook, 5th Street staging/phasing
- Buildings and Landscape - Review and update land use regulations and bylaws for consistency with OCP
- Buildings and Landscape - Update Zoning Bylaw - review maximum building heights
- Parks and Recreation - Optimize active public spaces to respond to density increases and increased park use

- Buildings and Landscape - Support investment and redevelopment in downtown core: Review and evaluate Downtown development incentives e.g. fast tracking/density bonuses/DCC

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

An engagement plan will be developed and brought back to Council for endorsement based upon the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation.



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OPTIONS:

- 1) THAT Council receive the report "Update Local Area Plan Harmston Civic Precinct and Downtown Centre"; and

THAT Council direct staff to consolidate the Harmston Precinct, The Downtown Playbook, and the Downtown Centre with related land use plans, community plans, and policies into a comprehensive encompassing Downtown Area Plan.

- 2) THAT Council receive the report "Update Local Area Plan Harmston Civic Precinct and Downtown Centre" and provide alternative direction to staff.

Prepared by: Marianne Wade, Director of Development Services
Concurrence: Geoff Garbutt, M.Pl., MCIP, RPP, City Manager (CAO)

COURTENAY DOWNTOWN & HARMSTON PARK LOCAL AREA PLAN



SWOT ANALYSIS
NOVEMBER 2024



City of
Courtenay

EKISTICS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The City of Courtenay respectfully acknowledges that the lands to which this Local Area Plan applies are on the Unceded territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, the traditional keepers of this land.

Why do we make land acknowledgements?

Acknowledging human relationships to place is an ancient Indigenous practice that continues today.

In the spirit of reconciliation, the City of Courtenay makes this land acknowledgment to raise awareness of ongoing Indigenous presence and land rights in the territory that includes and encompasses Courtenay. It invites us – a settler government – to reflect on how we might be perpetuating colonial processes that are ongoing and from which we have benefited, as well as the changes we will make to honour the Indigenous peoples and their lands that we inhabit.

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EXISTING LAND USE & CHARACTER
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EXISTING LAND USE & CHARACTER
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BACKGROUND

This **Local Area Plan** for Downtown and Harmston Park (DLAP) builds upon the vision established by the Official Community Plan (OCP, 2022) and the Downtown Courtenay Playbook (2016) of a complete and connected Downtown with a higher residential population, celebrating and connecting to the rivers, establishing a heart through public placemaking, all while working together for success.

Since the Playbook, a number of studies and significant infrastructure and development initiatives have been undertaken that together will comprehensively evolve the downtown. These include: the construction of the 6th Street Pedestrian Bridge, proposed green shores along the Courtenay River, proposed BC Transit exchange along 8th street, a number of larger mixed-use and multi-residential developments under construction or in application process, and the initiation of the Cultural Strategic Plan and Cultural Facilities Assessment. These initiatives will influence placemaking opportunities for the downtown and will become fixtures in the community around which to inform future planning and community input.

The DLAP will identify implementation actions for physical improvements necessary to support the creation of an Urban Design Framework to guide development. Opportunities to incorporate social dimensions of culture, social connectedness and supporting those vulnerable, such as those without homes, will also emerge from the process.

This SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis provides a situational analysis of the downtown local planning area that includes an inventory of land use, infrastructure, and development. The SWOT looks back on existing context, and identifies big idea projects for consideration. The SWOT is used to discuss with Downtown Playbook partners what is still relevant from the 2016 Playbook, what should be removed as we implement for the future, and what is missing in order to inform development of the DLAP and future public and interest-holder engagement.

STUDY AREA

The boundaries of the plan area are informed by the OCP and Downtown Playbook. The combining of plan boundaries across these two plans allows for a more comprehensive planning process that incorporates the high activity hub of the downtown commercial and mixed-use core as an anchor surrounded by key lands and waters that inform the history and character of the downtown. Within the comprehensive planning area are opportunities to develop distinct planning districts: the Courtenay riverfront to the east, the Fitzgerald Avenue corridor on the edge of the core to the west, and Harmston Park neighbourhood beyond including industrial employment generators, significant municipal lands, public parkland and established residences.



— STUDY AREA

POLICY CONTEXT

As a type of town centre, the **Downtown and Harmston Park** area is intended to function as the local, citywide and regional centre of cultural, civic, culinary, economic, and public life with the widest range of activities and attraction for residents and visitors, day and night, throughout the year. Identified needs in the downtown are more housing, more space for special events and gatherings, more access to and integration with the Tsolum and Puntledge rivers, and better opportunities to get to and circulate within the downtown – particularly by foot, transit, and cycling.

Notable Downtown OCP policies informing the LAP:

1. Continue to support a diverse range of land uses within the downtown including diversity of multi-residential housing choices, small scale commercial uses, and other supportive uses to promote the establishment of a complete community and 10-minute neighbourhood.
2. Locate new government facilities downtown.
5. Consider and study the option of eliminating off-street parking requirements throughout the downtown.
6. Ensure more public and semi-public gathering spaces are incorporated into new developments.
7. Consider future use of public lands to promote community goals including for affordable housing, community gathering and open space.
8. Ensure compatibility of land uses between the downtown and adjacent urban residential neighbourhoods by providing transitional form, character, and densities.
10. Improve physical and visual connections to, along, and across the rivers, integrating nature and recreation with the downtown.
11. Support uses and activities that encourage both daytime and nighttime activation.

13. Work towards the vision of a public plaza in the form of a Common and Mews as the public heart of the downtown, providing for informal gathering and formal social and cultural events.

14. Seek opportunities to establish unique character districts.

15. Establish and promote distinctive character designations for the core downtown streets.

Notable Harmston Park OCP policies informing the LAP:

1. Initiate a process to develop a local area plan for the precinct in order to provide clarity of development goals for the publicly owned lands as well as direction to the development of privately owned lands. This plan will include:
 - a) community-wide consultation
 - b) a mix of land use and tenures
 - c) exploration of different types of housing opportunities
 - d) neighbourhood park function
 - e) consideration to the temporary or permanent closure of Harmston Avenue between 6th and 7th Streets
 - f) general urban design guidelines
 - g) exploration of Indigenous perspectives and worldviews, including K'ómoks First Nation traditional use and practices

Other Notable OCP policies informing the LAP:

Parks and Recreation 7: Develop a parkland acquisition strategy to provide equitable access to community amenities for residents.

Arts, Culture, and Heritage 7: Continue to support the downtown as the region's arts, culture, and heritage hub.

Food Systems 2: Work with the Comox Valley Farmers Market Association to secure a permanent site and facility for its year-round operation in a suitable and accessible location with necessary supportive amenities, preferably near the downtown.

EXISTING AREAS OF INTEREST



- 1 CITY HALL
- 2 CENTRAL BUILDERS
- 3 FLORENCE FILBERG
- 4 SID WILLIAMS THEATRE
- 5 NATIVE SONS HALL
- 6 COURTENAY MUSEUM
- 7 CV ART GALLERY
- 8 VI REGIONAL LIBRARY
- 9 COMMUNITY GARDEN
- 10 HARMSTON PARK
- 4TH (Market Street)
- 5TH (Shopping Street)
- 6TH (Green Street)
- STUDY AREA

DOWNTOWN COURTENAY PLAYBOOK (2016)

The **Downtown Courtenay Playbook**, informed by extensive community engagement in 2015 and 2016, serves as a roadmap for downtown revitalization. It outlines a shared vision for the area, along with principles, goals, and a toolbox of strategies to achieve them. Recognizing the collaborative nature of this endeavour, the Playbook positions itself as a living document, open to ongoing review and adaptation as the community works together to bring new life to downtown Courtenay. Building upon this foundation, the Urban Design Framework does not aim to replace the Playbook, but rather to provide a more detailed and technical lens to translate its vision into actionable projects.

The public process resulted in five strategic planning goals to guide the community through review and implementation of the downtown revitalization projects identified in the Playbook, which remain relevant today:

Organize for Success | Partnerships and integrated City work-programs are to be the foundation for revitalization efforts and be structured to promote successful working relationships.

Establish Downtown as the Community's Heart | With an explicit emphasis on creating attractive gathering place and public realm, downtown will feel like it is designed with people's comfort and enjoyment first.

Encourage More Downtown Residents | A diverse mix of housing and associated services is to be increased throughout the greater downtown area.

Make it Easier to Get to and Be Downtown | All modes of transportation are conveniently able to access, circulate, and park within the downtown.

Celebrate and Connect to the Rivers | Connections to, along, and across the rivers are to be improved to ensure that nature and recreation are integrated into the downtown experience.

As a part of the Playbook's process, five "Catalyst Projects" were identified as transformational ideas for downtown to demonstrate City commitment, reinforce the community vision, and stimulate future investment. A number of these Catalyst Projects have been advanced, are completed, or are under review. Through the current Downtown Local Area Planning process, these projects will be reviewed, refined, and may be modified based on technical review and public feedback.

1

DUNCAN MEWS + COMMONS

"Create the Heart" project proposes Duncan Commons as a central hub for events. This includes a car-free Art Gallery Plaza, a pedestrian-oriented Duncan Mews street (a "Woonerf"), and a potential "Market Park."

2

ESTABLISH 4TH / 5TH / 6TH STREET CHARACTERS

This project characterizes the designated streets by name and theme, with 4th as a market street, 5th as a shopping street, and 6th as a green street.

3

PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION TO, ALONG, AND ACROSS THE RIVER

By improving access and creating a visual connection, this project aims to revitalize the riverfront and attract people to the area's natural beauty. This includes the approved 6th Street Active Transportation Bridge.

4

RIVERFRONT DISTRICT BETWEEN 5TH AND 6TH

The Playbook proposes a riverside district (5th-6th) honouring the Courtenay River's significance. Public access, artisan vibes, and an "industrial character" street aim to reconnect downtown and revive the waterfront.

5

INFILL HOUSING

This project explores zoning changes, incentives, and designs to create more housing options on underused land.



OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN (2022)

While the majority of current OCP land use within the LAP is defined as Downtown, the extension of the boundary includes existing Urban Residential, Neighbourhood Centre, and Urban Corridor.

DOWNTOWN

As a type of Town Centre, the downtown is intended to function as the local, citywide and regional centre of cultural, civic, culinary, economic, and public life with the widest range of activities and attraction for residents and visitors, day and night, throughout the year. Identified needs in the downtown are more housing, more space for special events and gatherings, more access to and integration with the Tsolum and Puntledge rivers, and better opportunities to get to and circulate within the downtown – particularly by foot, transit, and cycling.

URBAN RESIDENTIAL

These neighbourhood areas are largely residential neighbourhoods comprised mainly of ground-oriented single-detached residential buildings. "Gentle infill"* will be permitted in such areas in the form of an additional secondary residence. This may take the form of a secondary suite, or duplex, or carriage home or garden suite on lots with suitable access characteristics. Triplexes, townhomes, and small apartments will also be supported within these areas, particularly along the Frequent Transit Network, on a case-by-case basis and subject to rezoning applications. Limited small-scale commercial services will also be supported on a case-by-case basis and subject to rezoning applications.

NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE

This area includes smaller-scale mixed-use areas (than that include a diversity of destinations and housing choices. Commercial and community amenities are within easy walking and cycling distance and more residential density could be accommodated to support transit frequency and use.

URBAN CORRIDOR

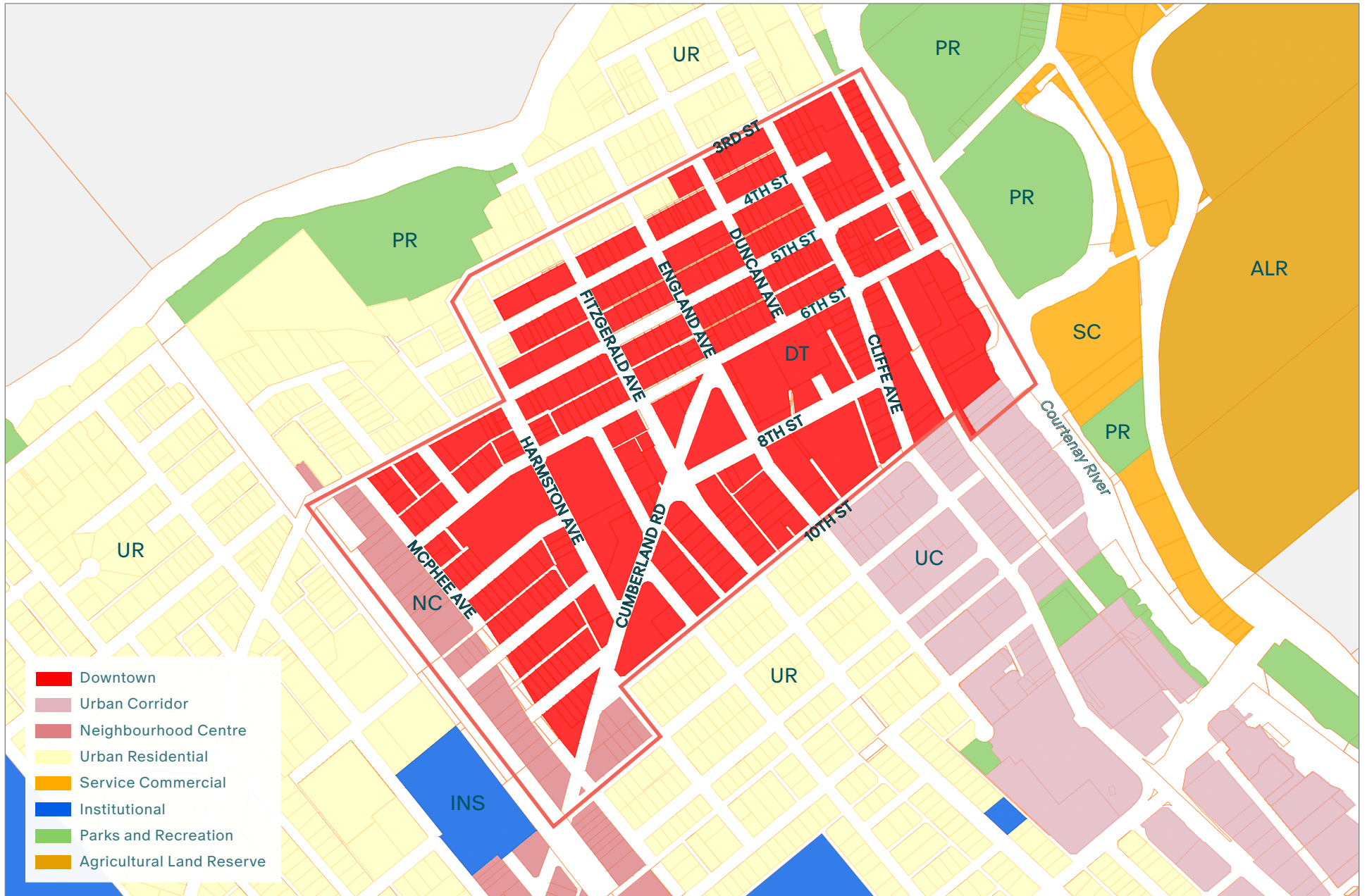
The Urban Corridor is intended to be a primary focus of commercial and residential densities outside the downtown. These areas will support a mix of uses that include a variety of higher-density housing choices as well as regional retail destinations.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Parks, trails, recreation facilities, and natural areas with limited accessory uses.

**While the OCP includes language regarding gentle infill, Bill 44 has provided additional direction to this type of development in the form of Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing (SSMUH).*

OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN MAP



CURRENT ZONING

The following zones are prominent within the Downtown LAP area. These zones will be reviewed as a part of the LAP process to align with the OCP land use designations, creating a Downtown of greater housing choices, increased development density, and mix of uses:

COMMERCIAL ONE (C-1)

C-1 is the defining zone of the Downtown area, allowing for a wide range of commercial uses, as well as multi residential dwellings.

Height: No building in this zone shall exceed 13.5 m

COMMERCIAL TWO (C-2)

C-2 also allows for a wide range of commercial uses, with the allowance for Building Supply Store use. The riverfront Central Builders parcels fall within C-2.

Height: No building in this zone shall exceed 9.5 m except for a combined commercial-residential building, in which case the height of a building shall not exceed 13.5 m.

PUBLIC USE AND ASSEMBLY ONE (PA-1)

Primarily institutional, permitted uses include assembly hall, care facility, cemetery, church and religious centre, facility for adults with a disability, government office and facility, hospital and related facility, utility facility, and school. Harmston Park is currently zoned as PA-1, as opposed to being zoned as a park under PA-2.

**Floor Area Ratio is the ratio of a building's total floor area to the size of the land it's built on.*

RESIDENTIAL FOUR B (R-4B)

This zone allows for single residential dwellings, secondary suites, duplex dwellings, multi residential dwellings, accessory buildings and structures, day care, and home occupation. The majority of residential parcels surrounding Harmston Park are zoned as such.

























Floor Area Ratio*: 1.0 (apartments), 0.7 (all other residential)

Height: 13.71 m (apartments with underground parking), 10.0 m (apartments otherwise), 9.15 m (all other buildings)

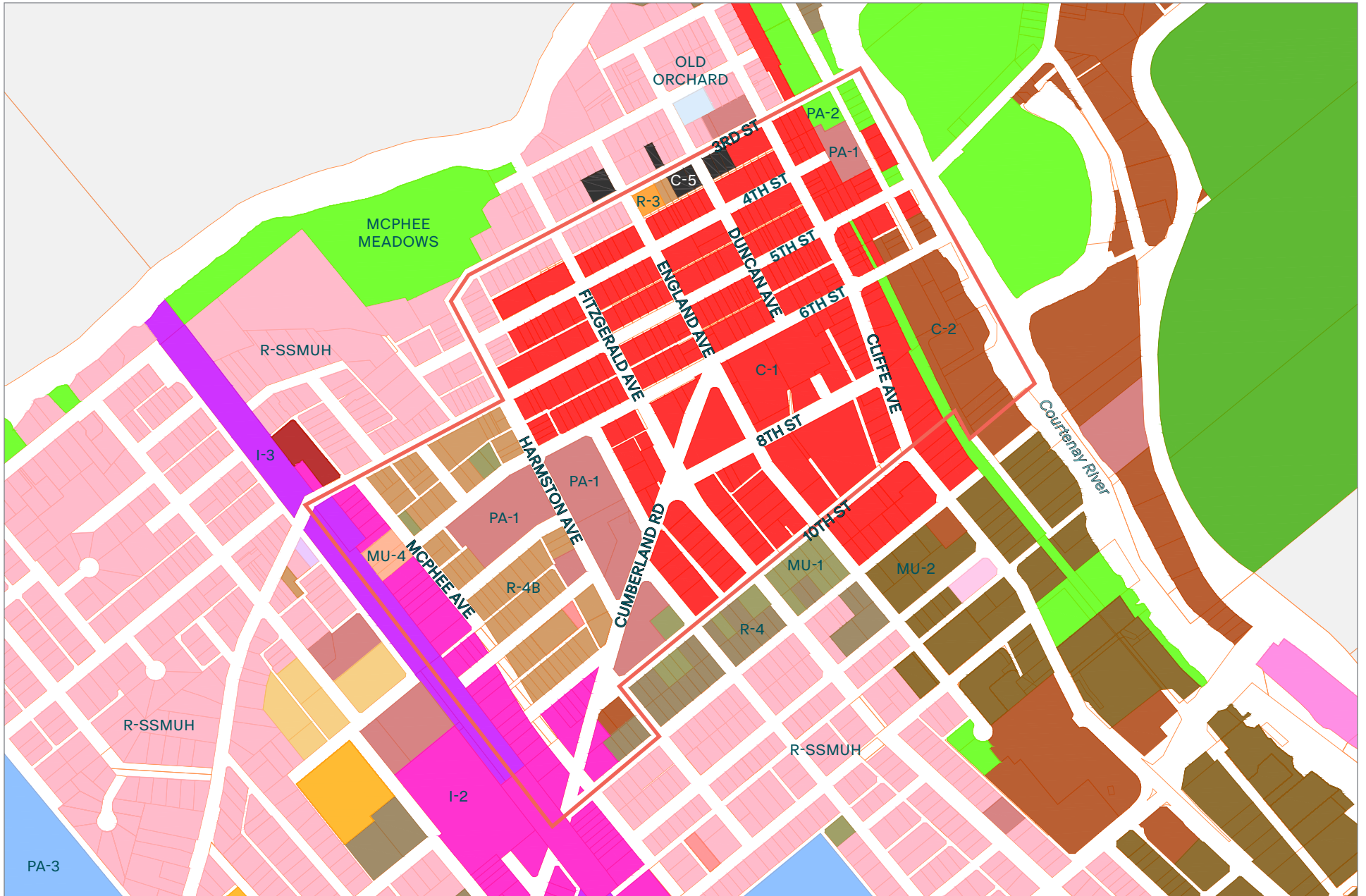
Parking: One space per residential unit

RESIDENTIAL SMALL-SCALE MULTI-UNIT (R-SSMUH)

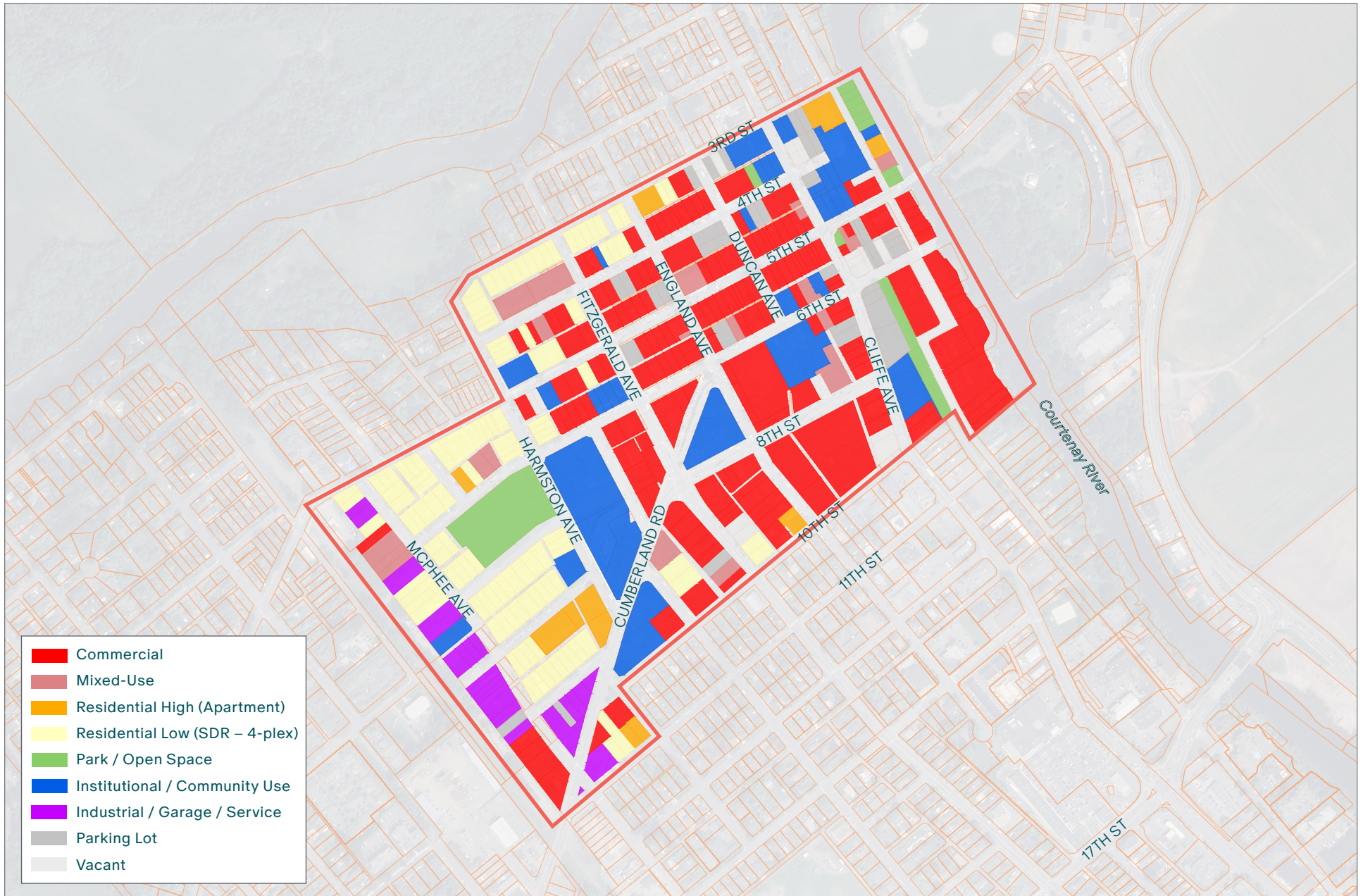
Allowances for residential uses including single residential dwellings, duplexes, townhouses, small-scale multiple unit housing and infill development.

| | |
|---|--|
|  A-1 Agricultural One |  PA-1 Public Use and Assembly One |
|  C-1 Commercial One |  PA-2 Public Use and Assembly Two |
|  C-2 Commercial Two |  PA-3 Public Use and Assembly Three |
|  C-2A Commercial Two A |  R-SSMUH Residential Small-Scale Multi-Unit |
|  C-3 Commercial Three | |
|  C-5 Commercial Five |  R-3 Residential Three |
|  CD-9 Comprehensive Dev. 9 |  R-3A Residential Three A |
|  I-1 Industrial One |  R-3B Residential Three B |
|  I-2 Industrial Two |  R-4 Residential Four |
|  I-3 Industrial Three |  R-4A Residential Four A |
|  MU-1 Multiple Use One |  R-4B Residential Four B |
|  MU-2 Multiple Use Two |  R-5 Residential Five |
|  MU-4 Multiple Use Four | |

CURRENT ZONING MAP



EXISTING LAND USE



PARKS & TRANSPORTATION CONTEXT



LAND OWNERSHIP

CITY

The following are notable municipally-owned parcels within the LAP:

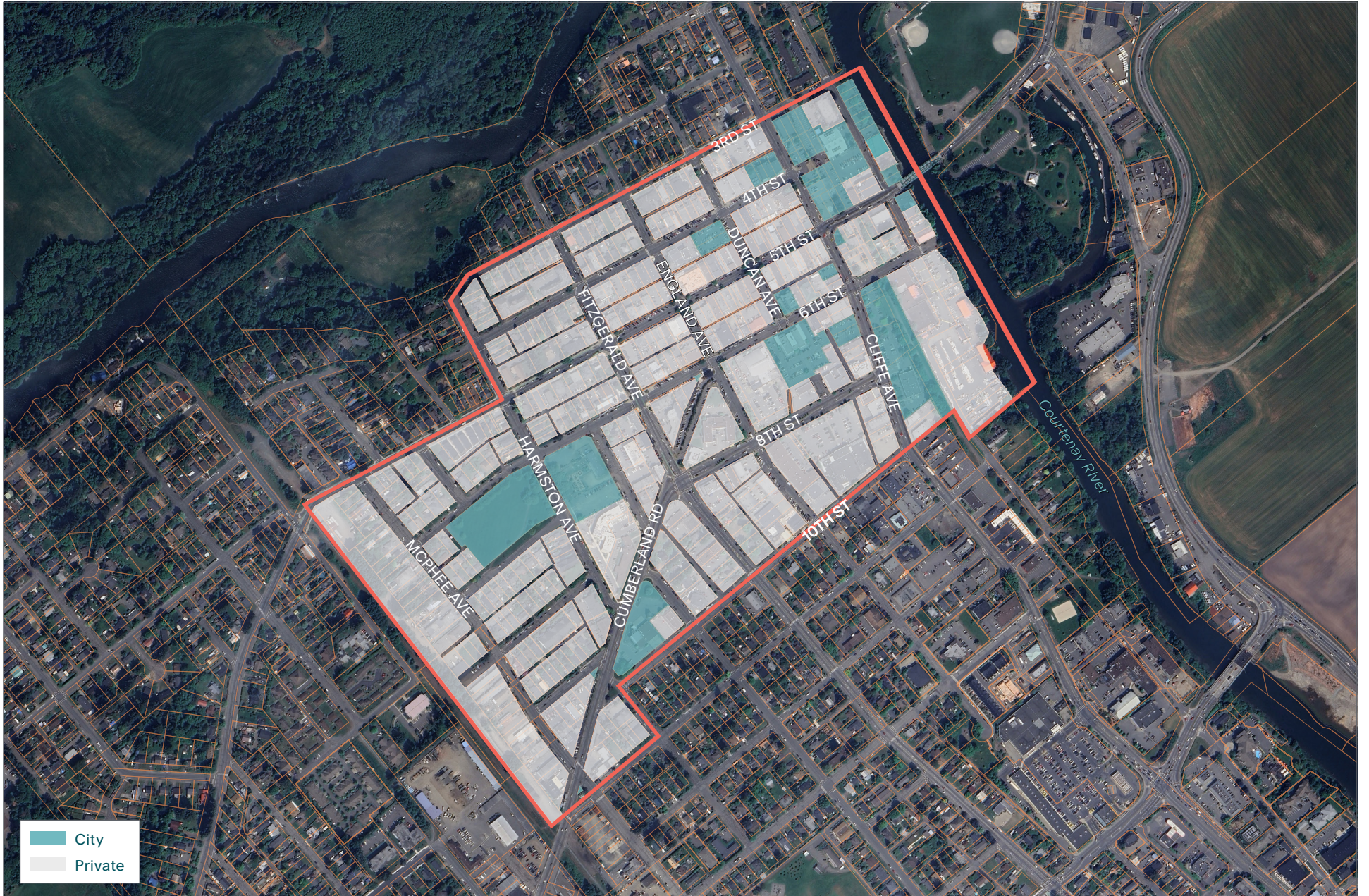
- Harmston Park (003-797-058)
- Share the Harvest Community Garden (030-871-191)
- Native Sons Hall (Multiple Parcels)
- Sid Williams Theatre (Multiple Parcels)
- Florence Filberg Centre (010-227-474)
- Courtenay & District Museum (Multiple Parcels)
- Comox Valley Art Gallery (028-799-925)
- Vancouver Island Regional Library (024-933-074)
- Courtenay City Hall (024-220-914)
- 90 5th Street, The Bridge (001-815-091)
- Parking Lot on Duncan & 4th (005-036-429, 005-036-445)
- Parking Lot on Cliffe between 5th & 6th (001-657-666)
- Parking Lot on Cliffe between 6th & 8th (005-100-992, 005-101-018)
- Riverfront parcels north of 5th (Park)

PRIVATE

The following are notable privately-owned parcels within the LAP:

- Large collection of singularly-owned parcels south of 5th Street
- Collection of singularly-owned residential parcels southwest of Harmston Park





SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT UNDERWAY

357 5th Street | *Completed in 2024*

Palace Place, a mixed-use, 4-storey building with 39 apartments and ground floor retail.

291 4th Street | *Under Construction*

Coastal Community Credit Union, interior and exterior upgrades, increased height.

574 Cumberland Road | *Building Permit Issued*

Mixed-use, 3-storey building with 38 studio apartments (312 sq ft), 11 one-bedroom units (700 sq ft), 3 two-bedroom units (775 sq ft), and 3 commercial spaces.

419 & 407 4th Street | *Development Permit, Height Variance Application Submitted*

4th and England, a mixed-use, 4-storey building with 39 units and 4 commercial spaces.

578 & 584 Cliffe Avenue | *Development Permit Variance, Application Submitted*

16-unit multi residential/combined commercial development, downscaled from 34 units to avoid contaminated soil on 590 Cliffe, with minor variance for front landscape buffer.

120 & 125 11th Street | *Rezoning Application, Third Reading*

104-unit rental building. *Rezoning application to change current Commercial Two (C-2) and Multiple Use Two (MU-2) Zones to a Comprehensive Development Zone Forty-One (CD-41)*



INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

UTILITY CAPITAL PROJECTS

- Leighton Ave Storm Drain Replacement
- McPhee Ave Sanitary Main Replacement
- Alley between 5th & 6th, England to Duncan, Storm / Sanitary / Water Replacement
- Alley between 4th & 5th, Duncan to Cliffe, Storm Replacement
- Anderton Lift Station
- Decommissioning Sanitary River Crossing

ENGINEERING PROJECTS

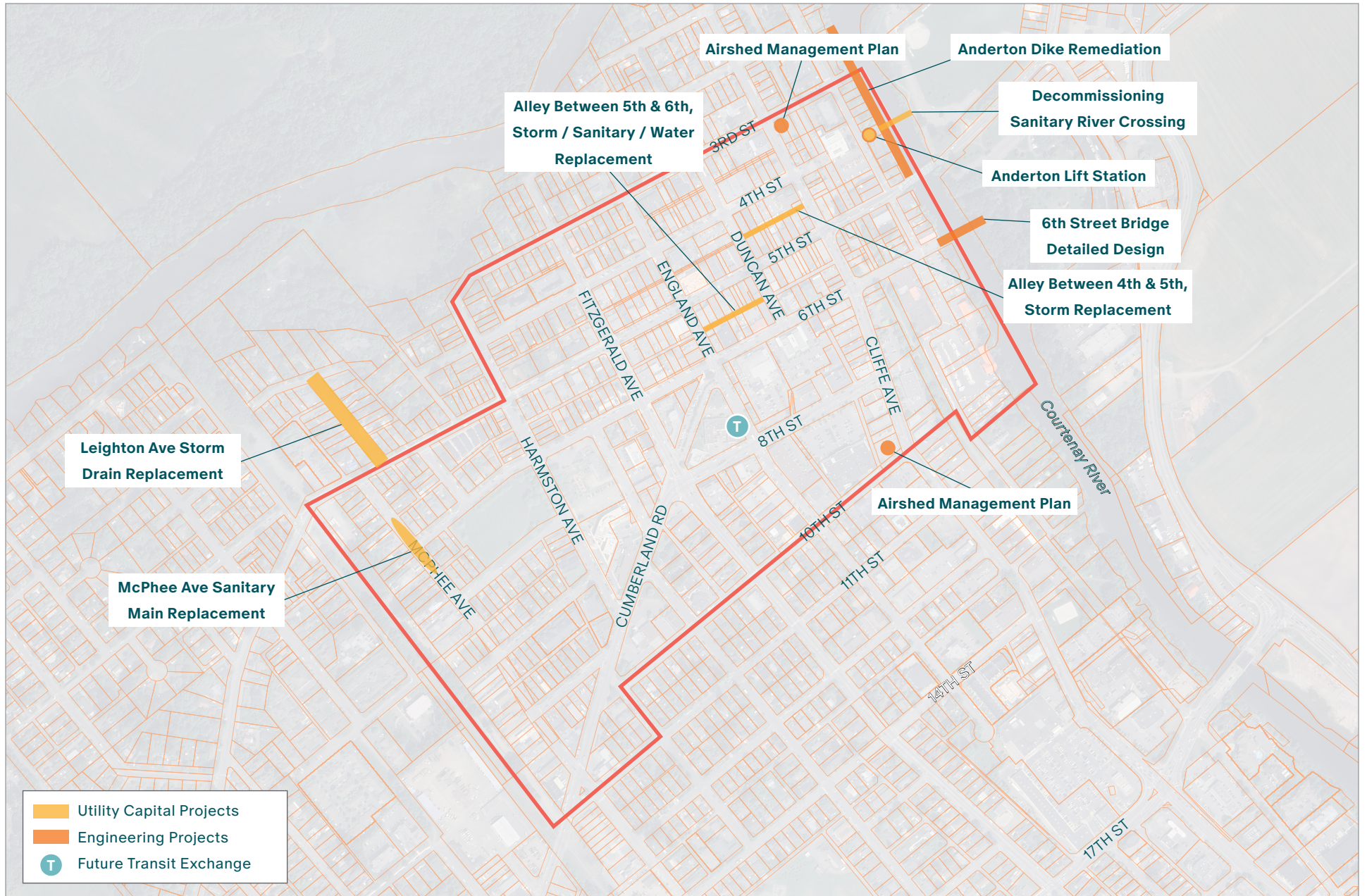
- Airshed Management Plan
- Anderton Lift Station
- Anderton Dike Remediation
- 6th Street Bridge Detailed Design (Construction starting in 2025)
- McPhee Meadows Park

TRANSIT EXCHANGE

- England Ave between 6th St & 8th St
 - 2025 Construction

RECREATION, CULTURE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

- Harmston Park Development
- Cultural Facility Feasibility Studies
- Strategic Cultural Plan



ANALYSIS | OVERVIEW

Building on the contextual research and groundwork established in this study, the following analysis provides a focused examination of the study area. To facilitate a detailed and organized approach, and as demonstrated on the following page, the area has been divided into four distinct planning districts, each representing unique characteristics and opportunities within the broader landscape:

Riverfront

Downtown

Fitzgerald Corridor

Harmston Park

This section includes an overview of specific land uses in each planning district, paired with a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis to identify key factors influencing future planning and development. By exploring these elements, the analysis lays the foundation for actionable recommendations tailored to the needs and potential of each district.

While each planning district is unique, the analysis has revealed several overarching themes that apply to the entire study area, offering a cohesive lens for understanding its broader challenges and opportunities:

STRENGTHS

- Grid urban form
- Cultural hub
- Centrally located with proximity to the river
- Several municipally-owned parcels
- Significant privately-owned parcels open to cohesive development planning

WEAKNESSES

- Limited existing green space
- Lack of focal point or centralized activity hub
- Lack of 'gateways' to Downtown
- Aged and vacant building stock

OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop clear strategies to create or enhance green space, street trees, and the urban forest
- Reimagine public spaces and pedestrian environment
- Encourage cohesive development planning
- Advance Indigenous reconciliation through arts and culture

THREATS (CONSTRAINTS)

- Upgrading infrastructure may be challenging
- Economic shifts impacting development viability
- Increased traffic pressure as the city grows
- Current public safety perceptions

PLANNING DISTRICTS



RIVERFRONT | EXISTING LAND USE & CHARACTER

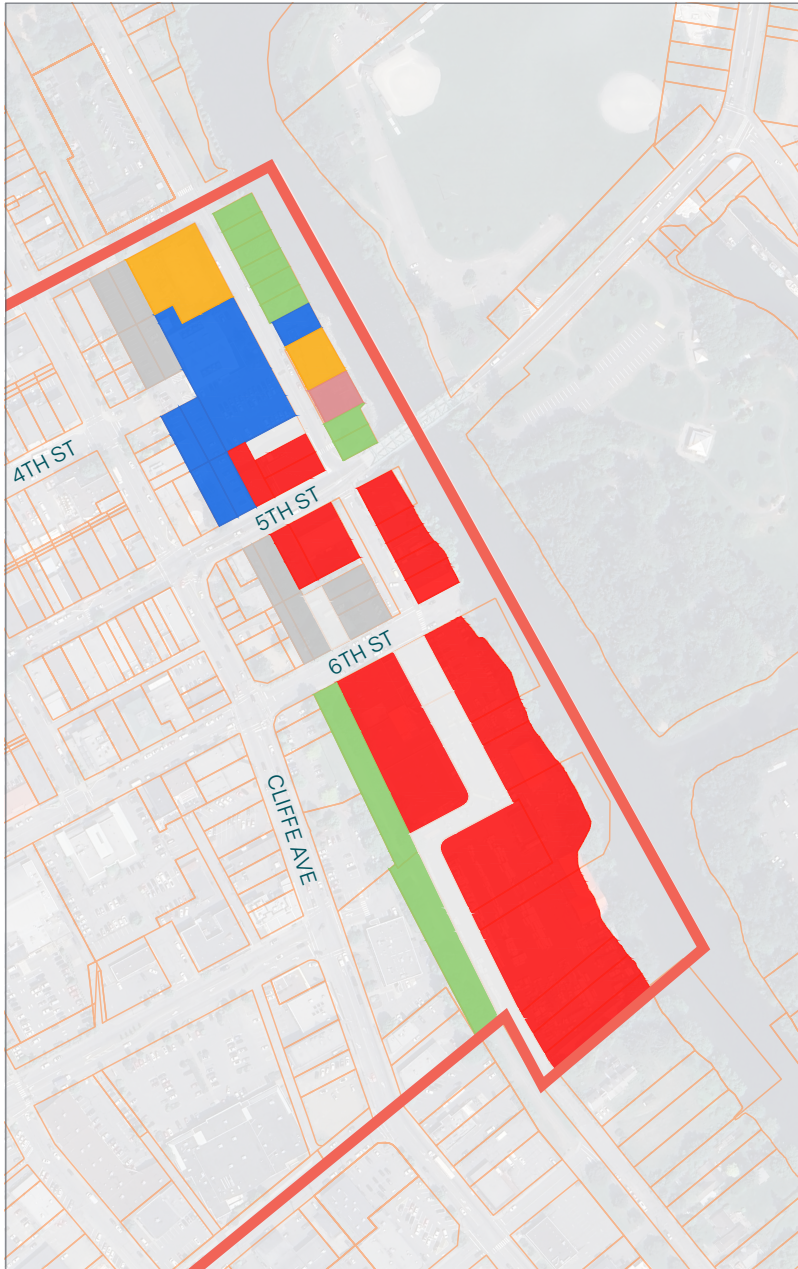
The Riverfront district, as the name suggests, encompasses all parcels on the river's edge, and extends inland to the Courtenay Riverway trail in the southern portion, and the steep bank adjacent to the Florence Filberg Centre in the northern portion.

Existing Land Use

- Riverside Park*
- Anderton Arms Apartments (426 Anderton Ave)*
- Mixed-Use (440 Anderton Ave)
- Florence Filberg Centre*
- Commercial / Services (5th St)
- The Bridge Building (90 5th St)*
- Central Builders - Home Hardware
- Courtenay Riverway Trail*

* Publicly-owned





- Commercial
- Mixed-Use
- Residential High (Apartment)
- Residential Low (SF – 4-plex)
- Park / Open Space
- Institutional / Community Use
- Industrial / Garage / Service
- Parking Lot
- Vacant

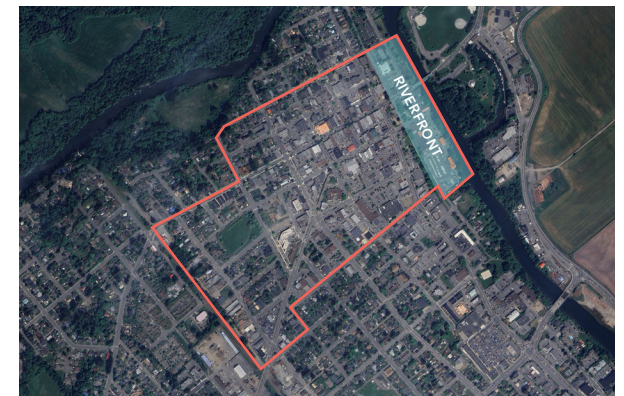
RIVERFRONT | SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

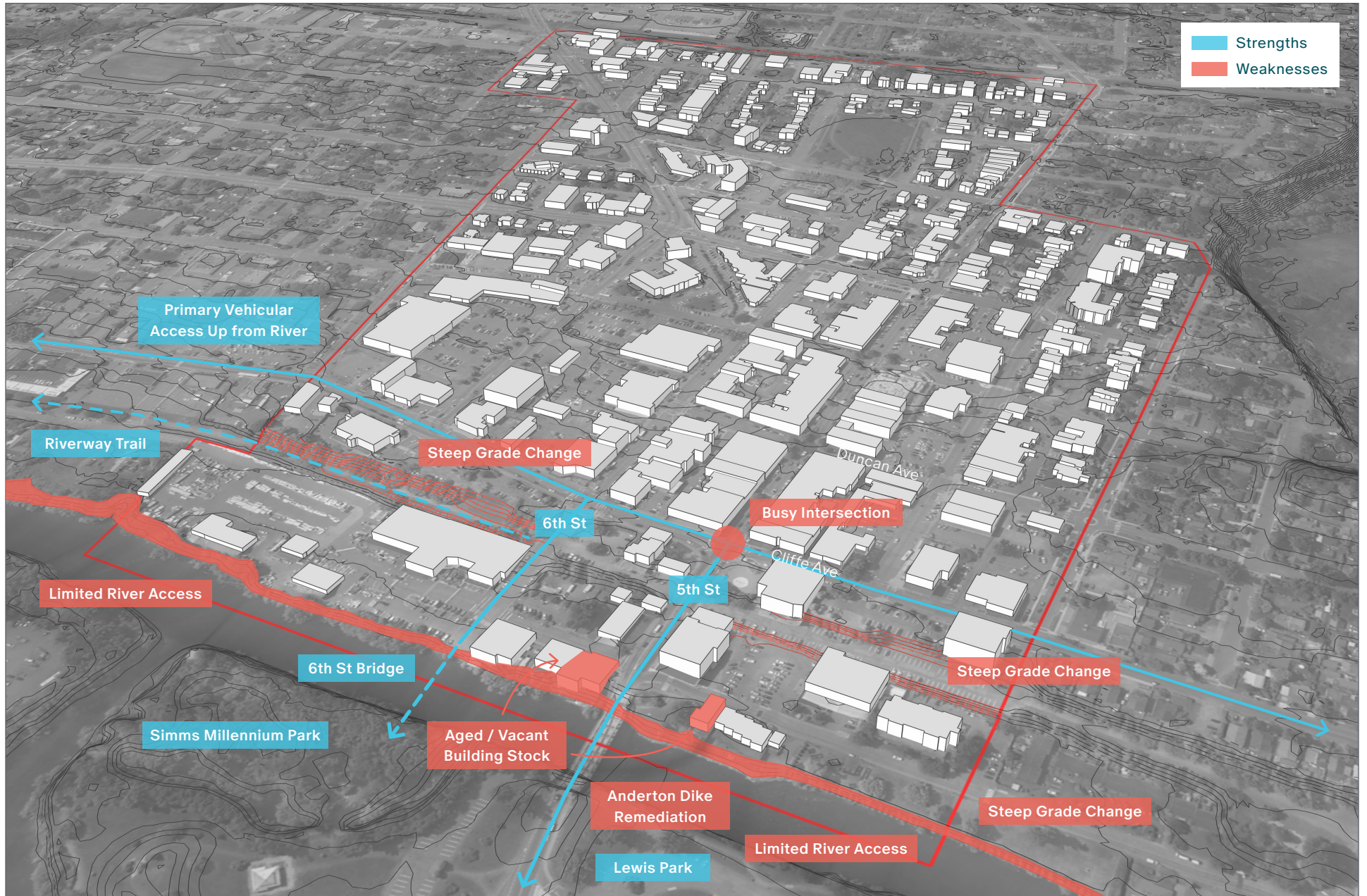
- Scenic area with significant natural beauty, attracting both residents and tourists
- Existing parks and trails along riverfront provide recreational opportunities
- Funding secured for 6th Street Active Transportation Bridge (construction to be completed in 2025)
- Riverfront district is opposite significant municipal parks:
 - Lewis Park
 - Simms Millennium Park
- Primary vehicular circulation at Riverfront is 2nd block back from the water
- 5th Street Bridge acts as 'gateway' to Downtown
- Riverway trail connecting south of Courtenay

WEAKNESSES

- No direct interaction with the water's edge
- Steep grade changes
- Proximity to river poses a flood risk, which could limit development potential or require costly mitigation measures
- Underutilized spaces
- Limited existing green space
- Lack of focal point / centralized point of activity
- Vacant building stock
- Aged building stock poses increased fire risk
- Busy, auto-oriented 5th & Cliffe creates barrier between Riverfront and Downtown



RIVERFRONT | SWOT ANALYSIS



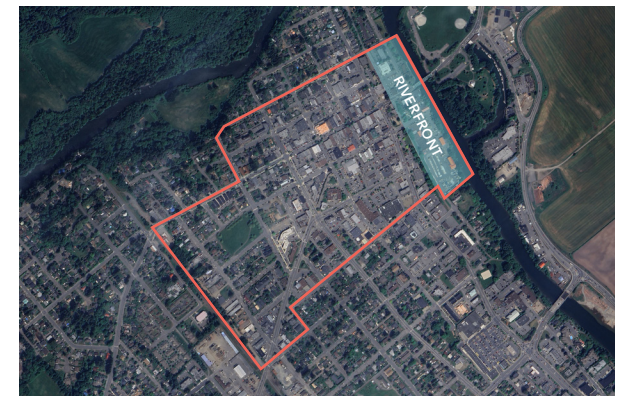
RIVERFRONT | SWOT ANALYSIS

OPPORTUNITIES

- Reimagined riverfront access - becoming a destination
- Central Builders - large collection of Riverfront parcels owned by CBS Land Corp with interest in relocation
- Several municipally-owned parcels
- Potential greenways
 - East / West on 6th Street (Harmston Park – Riverfront)
 - North of Courtenay Riverway on Anderton Avenue
- Underutilized spaces with Commercial zoning (Riverfront)
- 8th Street connection, continuing grid urban form
- Riverfront access for tubing
- Advancement of Indigenous reconciliation through arts and culture (consulting with K'ómoks First Nation, urban Indigenous groups, Métis)

THREATS (CONSTRAINTS)

- Stability of Riverfront land
- Flood risk along Riverfront
- Upgrading infrastructure could be a challenge for a unified development vision



RIVERFRONT | SWOT ANALYSIS



DOWNTOWN | EXISTING LAND USE & CHARACTER

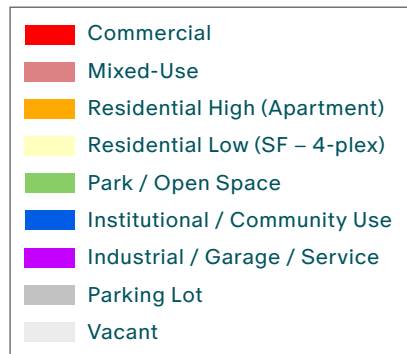
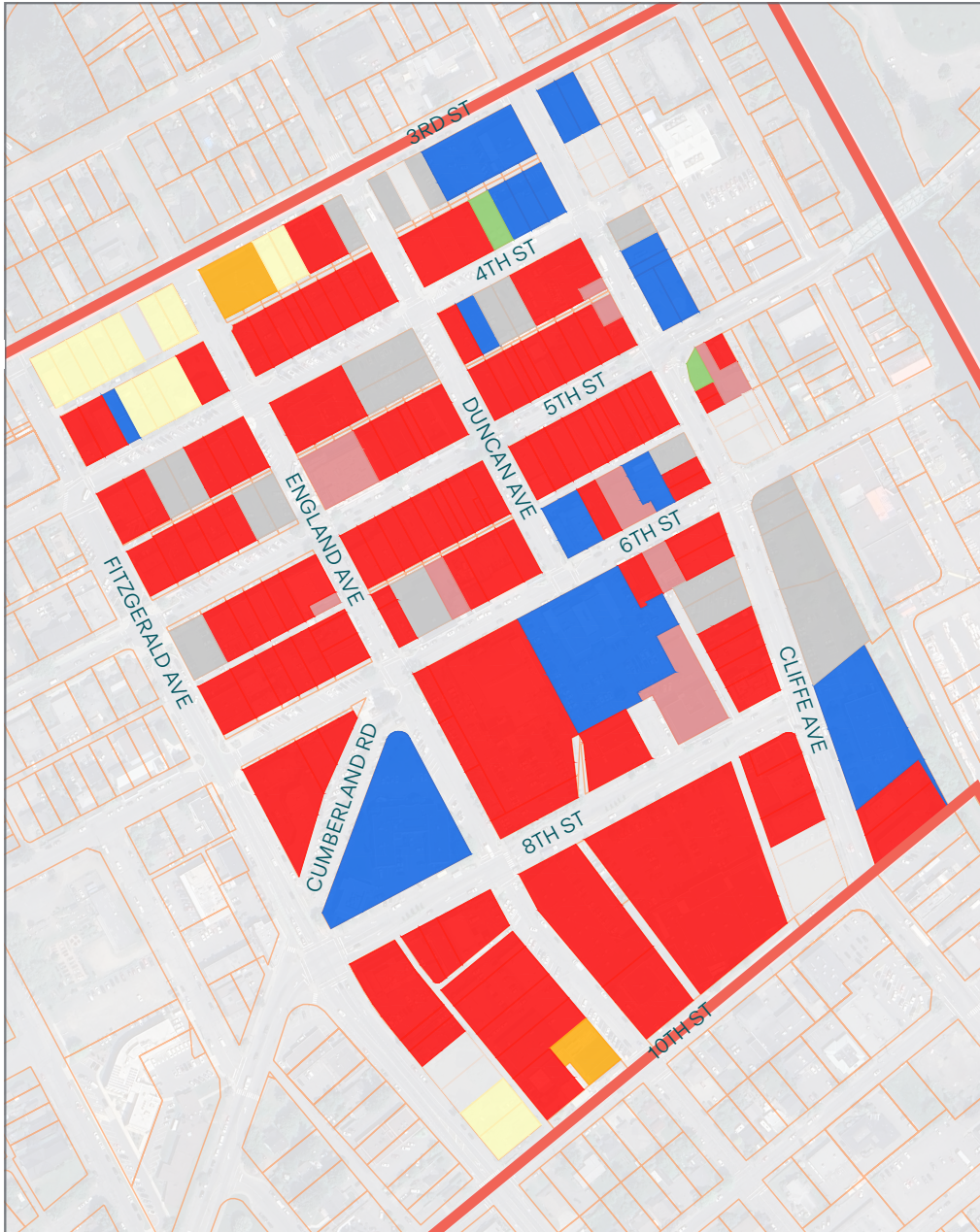
The Downtown district is the most established area within the LAP, guided by the vision outlined in the Downtown Playbook. Character opportunities have been identified for 4th, 5th, and 6th Streets as Market, Shopping, and Green streets, respectively, with predominantly commercial and mixed-use developments. The district's eastern edge is anchored by institutional and community uses, including the Native Sons Hall, Sid Williams Theatre, and Courtenay City Hall. Both the northern and southern boundaries feature a mix of low and higher-density residential properties.

Existing Land Use

- Small-Scale Commercial and Mixed-Use along 4th, 5th, and 6th Streets
- Native Sons Hall*
- Sid Williams Theatre*
- Courtenay City Hall*
- Courtenay & District Museum*
- Courtenay Courthouse*
- The Old Farm Market
- Vancouver Island Regional Library*

* Publicly-owned





DOWNTOWN | SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

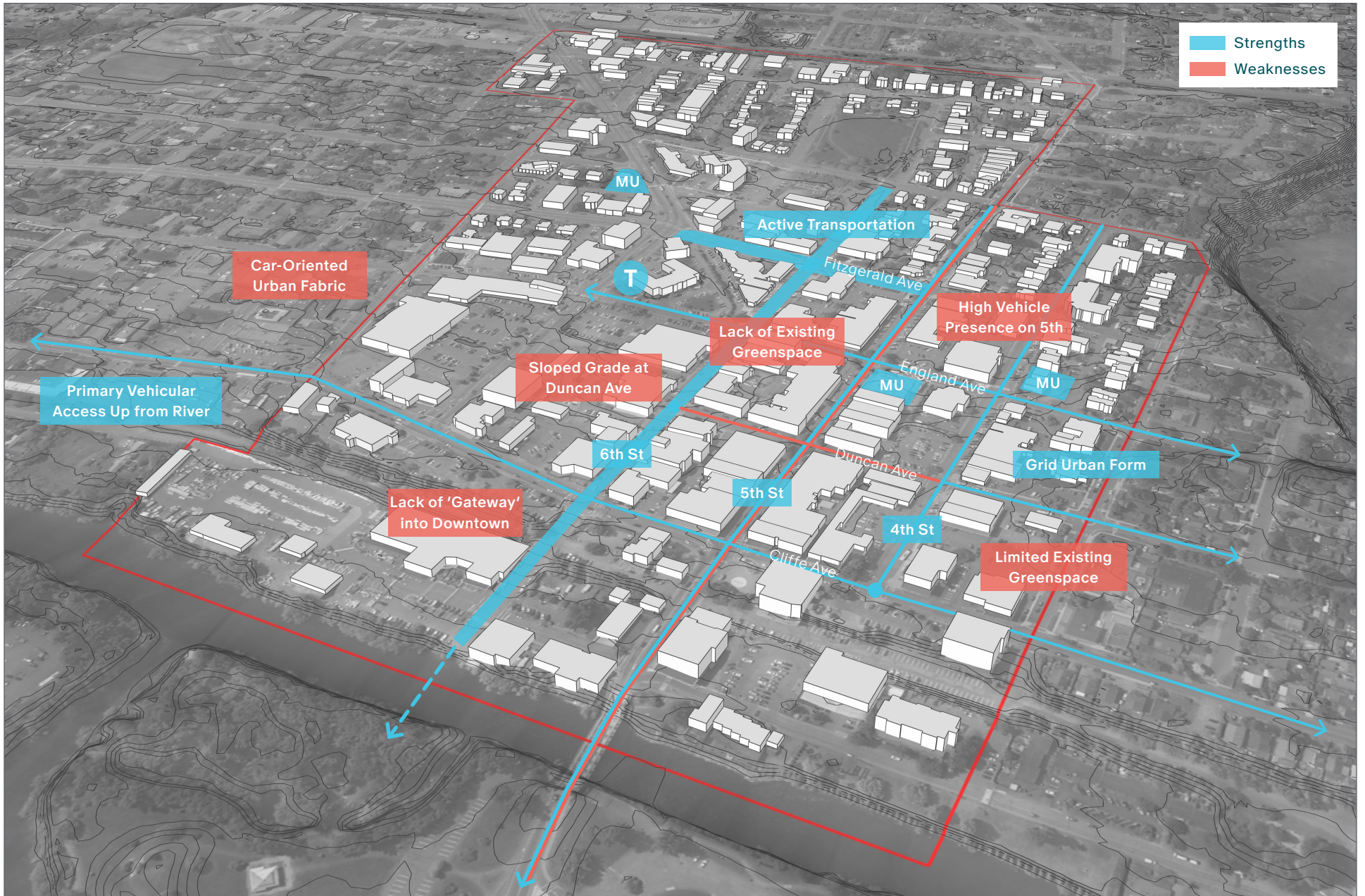
- Centrally located, making it accessible and a focal point for both commerce and cultural institutions
- Character identities of 4th, 5th and 6th Streets (Downtown Playbook)
- Cultural hub (Courtenay & District Museum, Comox Valley Art Gallery, Sid Williams Theatre, Centre for Performing Arts)
- Strong presence of government services (City Hall, Vancouver Island Regional Library, Comox Valley Regional District)
- Strong presence of social services (Island Health, non-profits)
- Grid urban form
- Primary vehicular circulation at Riverfront is 2nd block back from the water
- Mixed-use, residential and commercial developments are underway Downtown
- Active transportation upgrades and street beautification on Fitzgerald Avenue
- Approved future transit exchange on England Avenue + 8th Street

WEAKNESSES

- Limited existing greenspace, street furnishings, street trees, and urban forest
- Sloped grade and lack of utilities along Duncan Avenue (for purposes of Duncan Commons)
- Aged and vacant building stock poses increased fire risk
- Underutilized public spaces, such as the Randy Wiwchar Plaza
- High vehicle presence, especially along 5th Street
- South of 6th Street is very car oriented
- Lack of focal point / centralized point of activity
- Lack of 'gateways' into the Downtown area
- Cliffe Avenue feels physically separate from Riverfront district



DOWNTOWN | SWOT ANALYSIS



DOWNTOWN | SWOT ANALYSIS

OPPORTUNITIES

- Potential greenways / multi-modal corridors
 - East / West on 6th Street (Harmston Park – Riverfront)
- Continue to strengthen identity of 4th, 5th, and 6th Streets
- Enhance pedestrian environment
- Reduced traffic congestion with investment in pedestrian, cycling and transit infrastructure
- Strategic Cultural Plan and Cultural Services review
- Build upon existing wayfinding program
- Revitalize aging infrastructure through development approval
- Develop clear strategies to create or enhance green space, street trees, and urban forest
- Consider relocating City Hall to 'Municipal Hub'
- Advancement of Indigenous reconciliation through arts and culture (consulting with K'ómoks First Nation, urban Indigenous groups, Métis)

THREATS (CONSTRAINTS)

- Changes and shifts in the economy could impact the viability of traditional retail and office spaces
- Competition from other commercial areas
- Upgrading infrastructure could be a challenge for a unified development vision
- Parking: On-street parking in Downtown reaches over 80% occupancy during peak hours (11:30 AM to 2:30 PM on weekdays), which could strain parking availability and deter visitors arriving by car during busy periods.



DOWNTOWN | SWOT ANALYSIS



FITZGERALD CORRIDOR | EXISTING LAND USE & CHARACTER

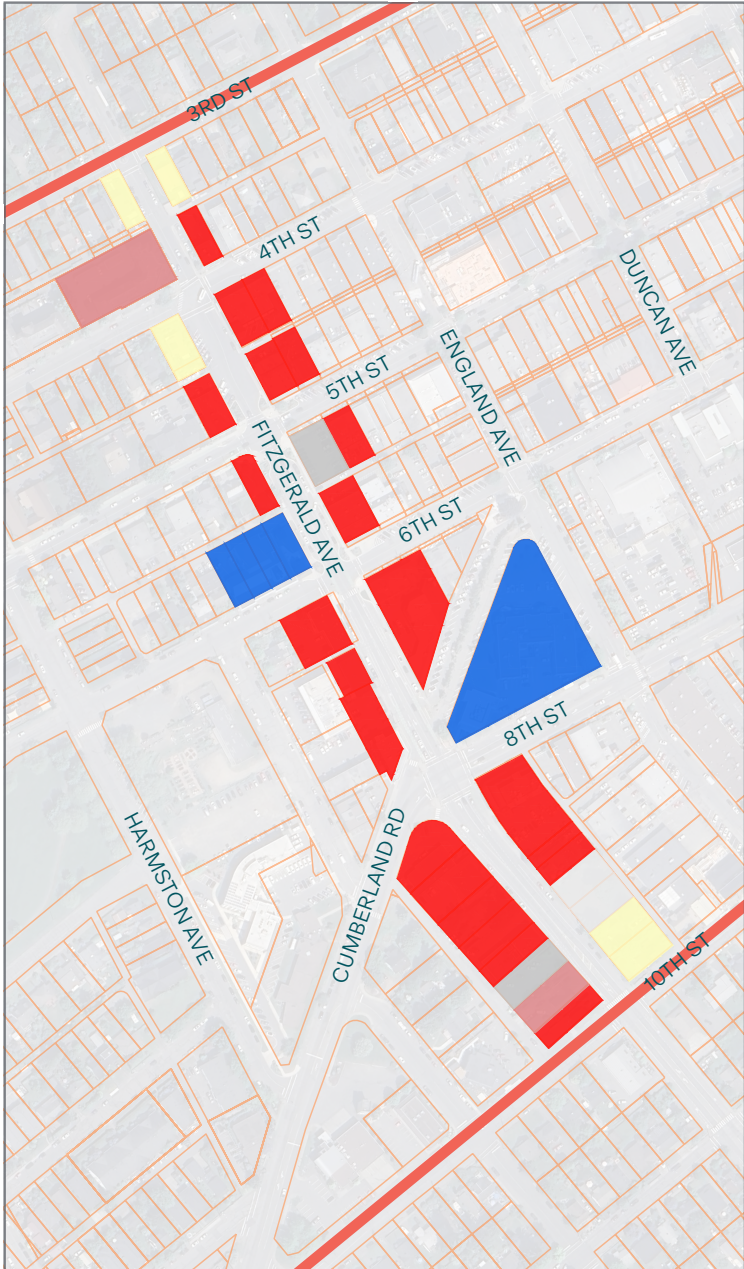
Fitzgerald Corridor acts as a natural divide between the Downtown and Harmston Park Districts. Fitzgerald Avenue itself is a significant collector road with commercial use fronting, along with active transportation and street beautification in progress. As with the Downtown district, the northern and southern edges feature residential uses.

Existing Land Use

- Mixed-Use at 4th St
- Commercial, Service, and Retail fronting Fitzgerald Ave
- St. George's United Church
- Banks, Financial, and Legal Offices
- Courtenay Courthouse*

* Publicly-owned





- Commercial
- Mixed-Use
- Residential High (Apartment)
- Residential Low (SF - 4-plex)
- Park / Open Space
- Institutional / Community Use
- Industrial / Garage / Service
- Parking Lot
- Vacant



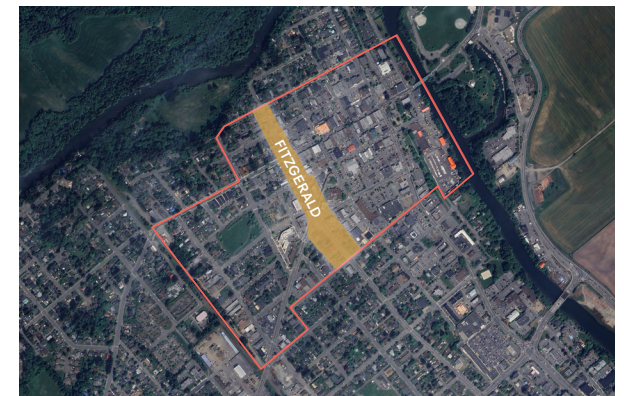
FITZGERALD CORRIDOR | SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

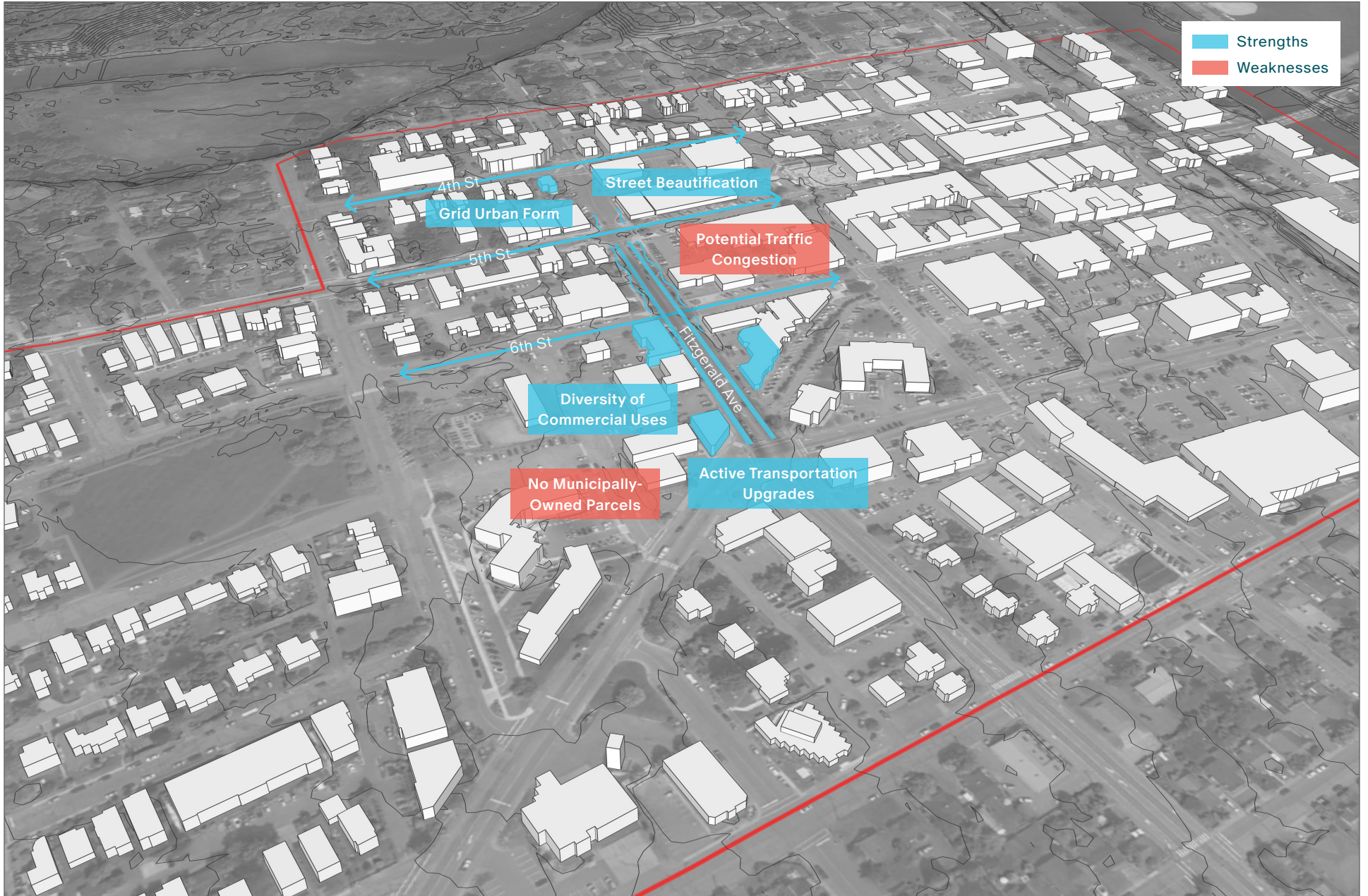
- Strategic location and key thoroughfare, providing access to various parts of the city and serving as a connector between neighbourhoods
- Active transportation and transit upgrades
- Street beautification has begun
- Grid urban form
- Diversity of service and commercial uses fronting Fitzgerald
- Acts as natural divide between Downtown and Harmston Park

WEAKNESSES

- Active transportation upgrades are constrained between 5th and 8th Streets
- As a major corridor, Fitzgerald Ave may experience traffic congestion, particularly during peak hours
- Acts as natural divide between Downtown and Harmston Park
- No municipally-owned parcels along Fitzgerald Ave



FITZGERALD CORRIDOR | SWOT ANALYSIS



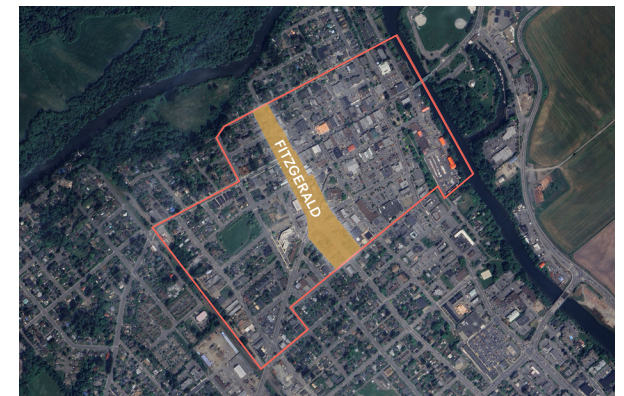
FITZGERALD CORRIDOR | SWOT ANALYSIS

OPPORTUNITIES

- 'Gateway' to Downtown
- Further active transportation upgrades and streetscape enhancements for pedestrians and cyclists
- Increase presence of commercial and mixed-use activity
- Potential for infill development, particularly on the northern and southern extents of the planning district
- Build upon existing wayfinding program
- Advancement of Indigenous reconciliation through arts and culture (consulting with K'ómoks First Nation, urban Indigenous groups, Métis)

THREATS (CONSTRAINTS)

- Commercial land owners could be difficult to incentivize towards increased development
- As the city grows, Fitzgerald Ave could face increased traffic pressure, exacerbating congestion and potentially reducing safety for pedestrians and cyclists
- Upgrading infrastructure could be a challenge for a unified development vision



FITZGERALD CORRIDOR | SWOT ANALYSIS



HARMSTON PARK | EXISTING LAND USE & CHARACTER

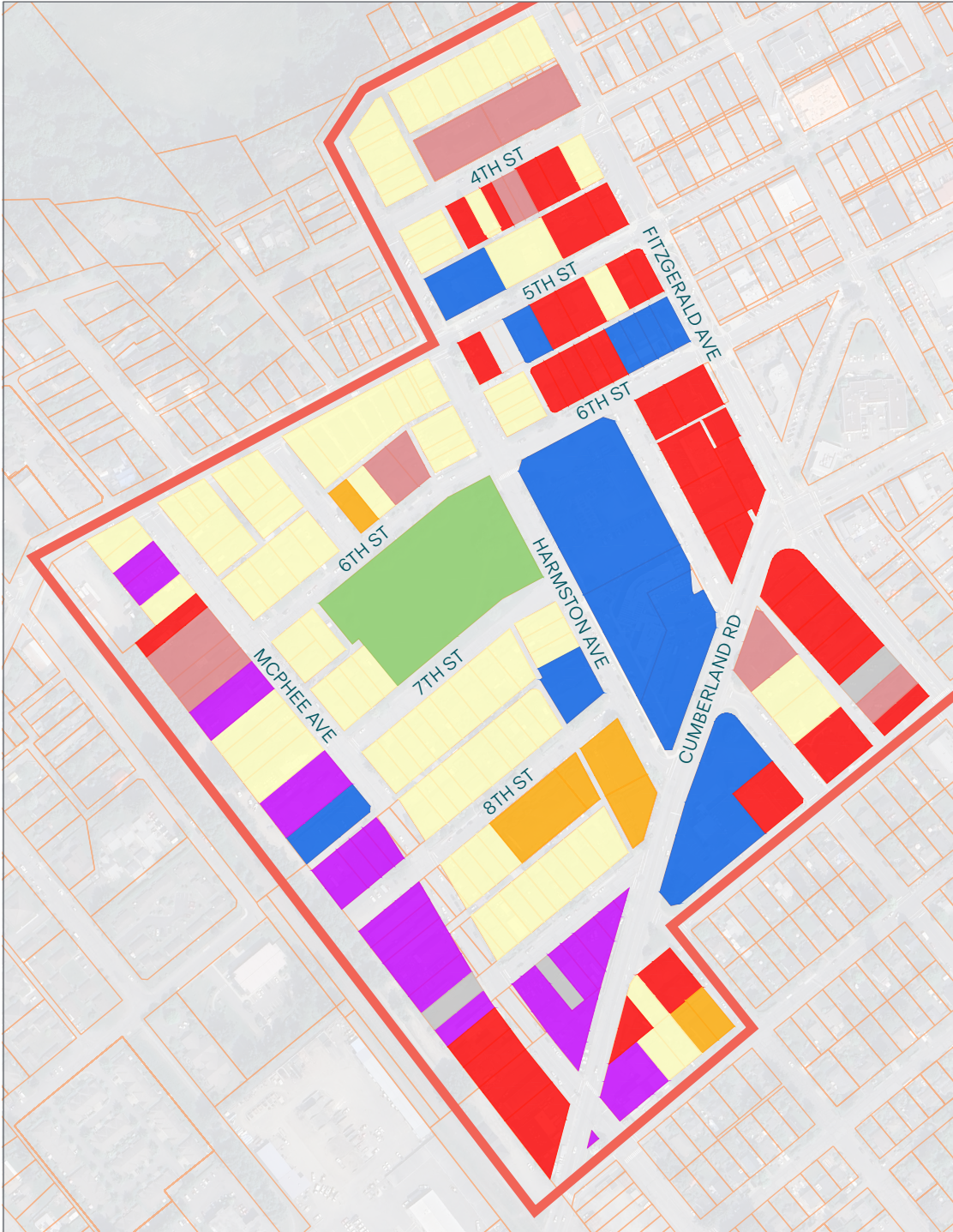
The Harmston Park district is a mosaic of land uses. At its heart lies a park surrounded by low-density residential neighbourhoods featuring primarily single-family homes and townhouses. To the west, light industrial buildings fronting McPhee Avenue and backing onto the Rotary Trail contribute to the area's character. On the eastern edge, a vibrant community hub emerges with the Share the Harvest Community Garden, Old Church Theatre, and essential institutional buildings housing the Comox Valley Regional District, School District 71 offices, and the Courtenay Fire Hall. Commercial establishments along Fitzgerald Avenue complete the district's diverse landscape.

Existing Land Use

- Harmston Park
- Single-Family Residential
- Fourplex Townhomes
- Light Industrial / Garages on McPhee Ave
- Share the Harvest Community Garden*
- Old Church Theatre
- Comox Valley Regional District*
- School District 71*
- Courtenay Fire Hall*

* Publicly-owned





- Commercial
- Mixed-Use
- Residential High (Apartment)
- Residential Low (SF - 4-plex)
- Park / Open Space
- Institutional / Community Use
- Industrial / Garage / Service
- Parking Lot
- Vacant



HARMSTON PARK | SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

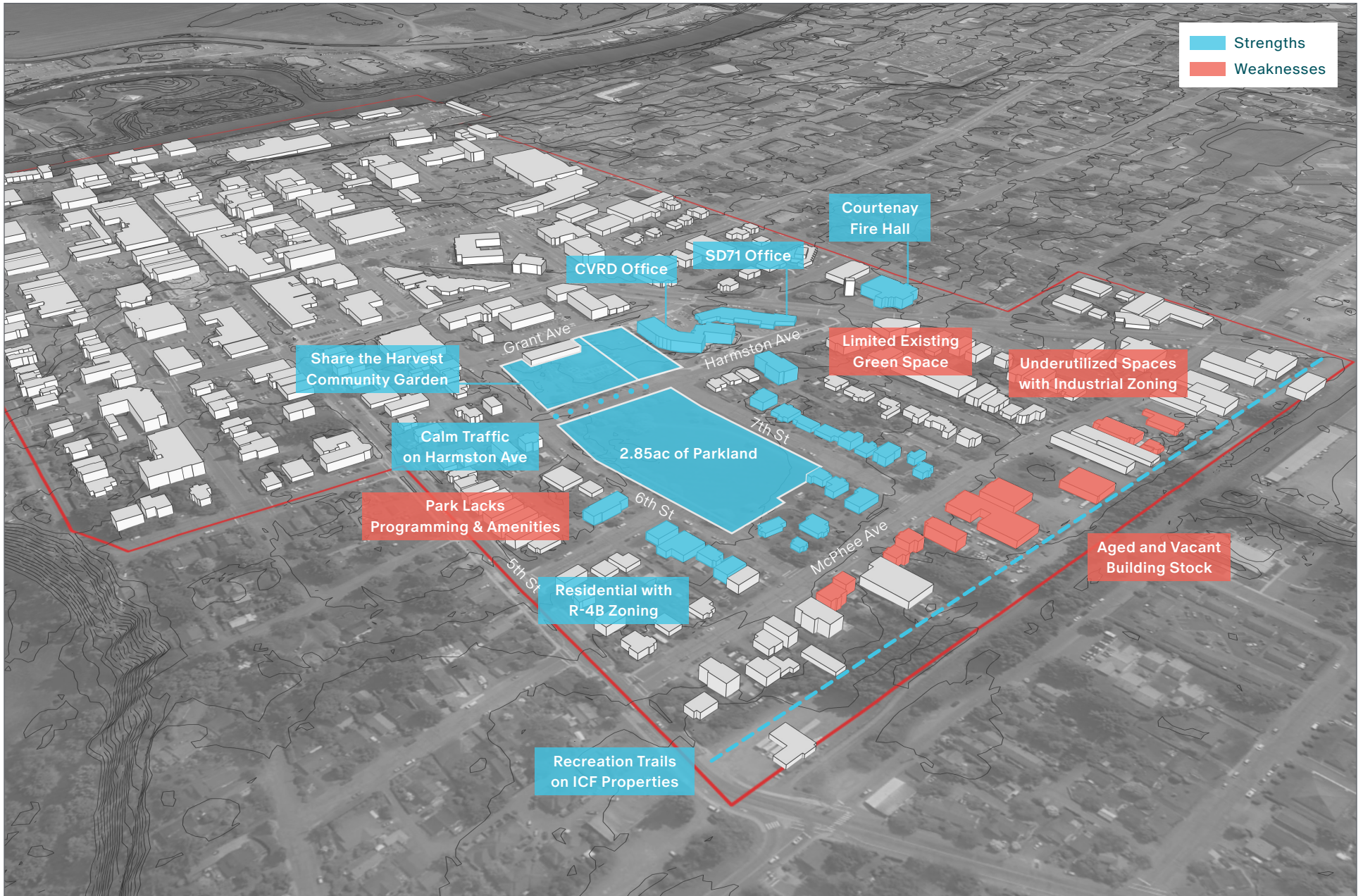
- 2.85 acre (1.15 hectare) parkland surrounded by residential use with favourable zoning, in close proximity to Downtown
- Active community garden (Share the Harvest) adjacent to Harmston Park on municipally-owned land
- Strong presence of both institutional and community land uses
- Calm traffic patterns on Harmston Ave
- Recreation trails on Island Corridor Foundation properties

WEAKNESSES

- Park lacks programming, modern amenities, and facilities, limiting its attractiveness for a broader range of activities and events
- Underutilized spaces, specifically Industrial zoned land fronting on McPhee Ave
- Limited existing green space
- Aged and vacant building stock



HARMSTON PARK | SWOT ANALYSIS



HARMSTON PARK | SWOT ANALYSIS

OPPORTUNITIES

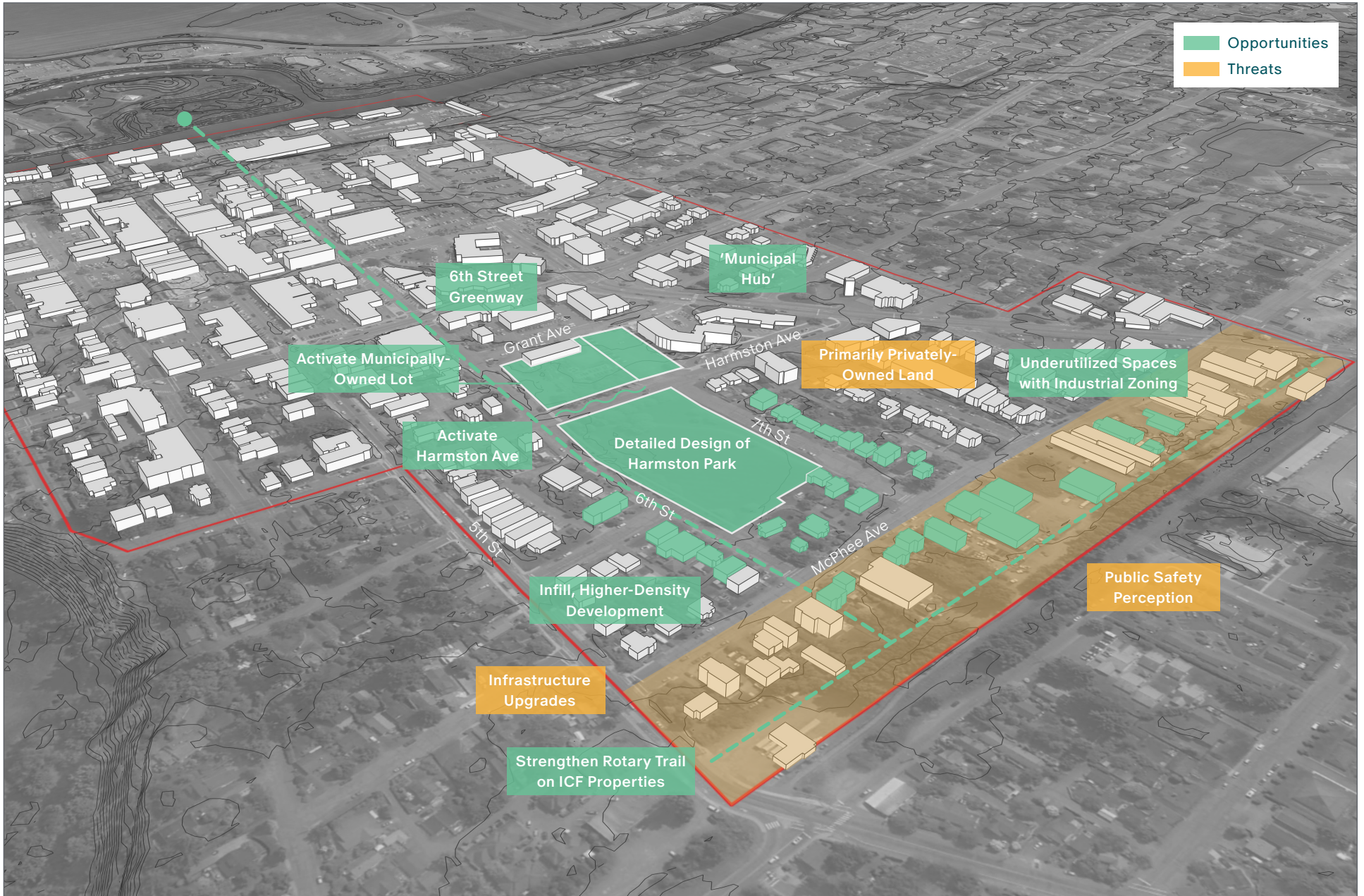
- Detailed design and development of Harmston Park
- Activating Harmston Ave and municipally-owned lot
- Introducing regular programming, enhancing the park's role as a community hub
- Potential greenways
 - East / West on 6th Street (Harmston Park – Riverfront)
- Infill, higher-density development surrounding parkland
- Partner or collaborate with local organizations and businesses to sponsor events and/or amenities
- Underutilized spaces with Industrial and Mixed-Use zoning
- Establishing a 'Municipal Hub', including the relocation of City Hall
- Strengthen Rotary Trail (and connections to trails) on Island Corridor Foundation properties
- Placemaking infrastructure
- Partial closure of Harmston Avenue in order to help activate park and municipally-owned lot (retaining fire access)
- Advancement of Indigenous reconciliation through arts and culture (consulting with K'ómoks First Nation, urban Indigenous groups, Métis)

THREATS (CONSTRAINTS)

- Current public safety perception of industrial area southwest of Harmston Park
- Privately-owned land around Harmston park could restrict the implementation of a cohesive redevelopment plan
- Upgrading infrastructure could be a challenge for a unified development vision
- Implementation of LAP will need to consider CVRD Regional Growth Strategy



HARMSTON PARK | SWOT ANALYSIS



LOOKING AHEAD | BIG IDEAS

The analysis of the study area has provided a detailed understanding of the unique opportunities and challenges facing the Downtown Local Area Plan.

While the Riverfront, Downtown, Fitzgerald Corridor, and Harmston Park planning districts possess distinct identities, several overarching themes have emerged, such as the need to enhance public spaces, improve connectivity, and support cohesive development. These insights form the foundation for a series of transformative actions that can shape the future of the area.

Through the Urban Design Framework process, the following Big Ideas will be further explored, refined, and adapted to align with community priorities and technical considerations. This approach ensures that each initiative is not only visionary but also grounded in feasibility and broad stakeholder support, setting the stage for meaningful change across the study area. While the following list highlights key ideas, it is not exhaustive and will continue to evolve through ongoing collaboration and planning:

1 Reimagine the Riverfront

Transform the Riverfront into a vibrant, accessible destination by improving public access, enhancing recreational amenities, and fostering development that integrates natural and cultural assets. This includes activating underutilized spaces and implementing flood-resilient infrastructure.

2 Activate Harmston Park and Surrounding

Design and develop Harmston Park as a dynamic community hub, supported by enhanced programming and infrastructure. Opportunities for higher-density housing and innovative uses for adjacent municipal lands, such as partial street closures, can further integrate the park into the community fabric.

3 Strengthen the Downtown Core

Revitalize the Downtown through strategic investments in public realm enhancements, green space creation, and improved pedestrian infrastructure. Initiatives such as gateway features and the potential establishment of a central 'municipal hub' could reinforce the Downtown as a cultural and civic heart.

4 Fitzgerald Corridor as a Key Connector

Elevate Fitzgerald Avenue's role as a key connector between districts with further streetscape improvements, active transportation infrastructure, and the promotion of mixed-use development. Establishing Fitzgerald as a welcoming gateway to Downtown will ensure it supports the broader vision for the area.





**City of
Courtenay**



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City Of Courtenay
Downtown Local Area Plan
What We Heard Report - Phase 1

January 2025

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The City of Courtenay is evolving to meet the needs of a growing community and accommodate new residents and businesses through a comprehensive approach to land use and community planning in the downtown core.

Building upon the vision established by the Official Community Plan (OCP, 2022) and the Downtown Courtenay Playbook (2016), the **Local Area Plan (LAP) for Downtown and Harmston Park** will provide a detailed understanding of the physical constraints and opportunities to support community development and implementation in the downtown.

By strategically guiding development, partnerships, and capital projects, the LAP will include actions to support residential and commercial growth, activation of civic spaces and programming, and more connection through downtown so that Downtown Courtenay and Harmston Park can become a vibrant, beating heart of the community.

To facilitate more detailed exploration, the LAP is organized into four distinct 'districts' – each representing unique characteristics and opportunities within the broader study area – including: the Riverfront, the Downtown, the Fitzgerald Corridor and Harmston Park.



Downtown LAP 'SWOT' Analysis

A 'SWOT' analysis of the study area was undertaken as a first step and included policy context and physical analysis of each district, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities for community planning. The SWOT Analysis provided the basis for discussion and initial feedback in this first phase of engagement.

ENGAGEMENT PURPOSE

Public and interest-holder engagement will support the planning and design efforts and communication across all three project phases. Engagement opportunities will be used to gain a better baseline understanding of the study area (phase 1), to inform design directions and draft concepts (phase 2), and to help refine the final LAP and its implementation (phase 3).

Engagement in Phase 1 focused on sharing the Downtown LAP SWOT Analysis with key interest-holders and ensuring the project team has a more complete understanding of study area attributes and external factors impacting the project's success.

Feedback from Phase 1 informed the final SWOT Analysis, the Communications and Engagement Strategy, and the Draft Design Framework.

| | PHASE 1 DESIGN FOUNDATIONS | PHASE 2 KEY DIRECTIONS & CONCEPTS | PHASE 3 DRAFT PLAN & REFINEMENT |
|-------------------|---|--|---|
| engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Interest-holder meetings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Public Website Launch □ Community Open House □ Virtual Survey □ Interest-holder follow up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Virtual Survey □ Interest-holder follow-up |
| outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Communications & Engagement Strategy ■ Final SWOT Analysis ■ Draft Design Framework | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Draft Downtown Local Area Plan □ Public Engagement Report | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Final Downtown Local Area Plan |
| | <i>December 2024 – January 2025</i> | <i>February – March 2025</i> | <i>April - June 2025</i> |

ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

Interviews were scheduled with individuals and groups based on their availability and regular meeting times and were conducted by phone and/or videoconference. Participants were provided the draft Downtown LAP SWOT Analysis (SWOT) and associated questions ahead of time to help them prepare for the meeting.

Generally, each meeting included a brief project introduction from City staff to provide context, project background, and answer any clarifying questions about the project scope. MODUS then led the discussion by walking through key elements of the materials provided and recording feedback guided by the following questions.

- Looking at the SWOT, what's most important? Should we be elevating any of these identified issues or opportunities based on your perspective and/or specific interests?
- Did we miss anything?
- Is there anything you see in the SWOT that is no longer relevant or should be removed?

Interview questions were intended to guide the conversation but were not explicitly answered as interest-holders provided general feedback based on their own priorities and experiences.

Five meetings and interviews in this first phase allowed the team to collect qualitative information from individuals and groups representing organizations most impacted by the future LAP. This included the following groups:

| Organization | Method | Meeting Date |
|--|---|--|
| Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce | Interview (virtual) | December 20, 2024 |
| Arts & Cultural Service Providers (Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce, Comox Valley Art Gallery, Comox Valley Arts, Sid Williams Theatre Society, Courtenay and District Museum and Palaeontology Centre) | Group Meeting and follow-up emails | December 5, 2024 |
| Downtown Property Owners (2) | Interview (virtual) Interview (in-person) | December 19, 2024 December 20, 2024 |
| Downtown Courtenay Business Improvement Association (DCBIA) | Group Meeting (in-person) | January 13, 2025 |

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Through conversations with interest-holders, several key themes emerged that should be emphasized in the draft Design Framework. The chart below provides an overview of key themes identified from interviews and considerations to inform the planning and design process. This section also includes descriptions of each key theme and comments from different interest-holder groups.

Overview of What We Heard and Planning Response

| Key Themes: What We Heard from Interest-Holder Interviews | Planning & Design Considerations: How Feedback Can Inform the LAP Process |
|--|---|
| Recognize the Cultural District as a Focal Point | Identify the cultural district as a centralized activity hub/focal point and an existing gateway to downtown |
| Bring People Downtown | To support implementation of the LAP, the City may consider initiatives and investment to encourage downtown visitation such as expanded utility for events/programming, increased transit access, interpretive/historic signage, public art, wayfinding, and public realm enhancements |
| Enhance Greenspaces | Consider differences in type, distribution and function of parkland and greenspace in downtown (i.e., for recreation, public realm, access to nature, event programming) |
| Support Housing Development & Local Businesses | Consider opportunities to support denser forms of housing development in the downtown and pedestrian focused streets to enhance walkability and liveability |
| Utilize Strength of Community Groups & Potential Partnerships | Include community group involvement as a strength to implementation of the LAP and explore opportunities with First Nations and other planning partners |
| Align with other Plans & Strategies | Ensure that strategic objectives within the Cultural Plan and provincial housing legislation are referenced and/or integrated into all downtown planning efforts |

Recognize the Cultural District as a Focal Point

- Arts & culture providers stressed the importance of Courtenay's existing **community-built cultural and heritage assets**, including the theatre, art gallery, museum and Native Sons Hall. The LAP can better consolidate, connect and expand these spaces to further establish a cohesive Cultural District. This would strengthen its function as a focal point for downtown and its role in wellness, tourism and economic growth.

Planning & Design Considerations: Identify the cultural district as a centralized activity hub/focal point and an existing gateway to downtown

Bring People Downtown

- A key challenge identified by the Downtown BIA and Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce was the **limited access to power/utilities** in the downtown, limiting the number of spaces to host public events. This is also important for existing park programming such as the farmers market.
- Many interest-holders expressed the **limited parking capacity** as a current weakness in the downtown. More parking is needed to support visitation, especially for events and art and culture programming. There were suggestions to improve public transit options through a downtown shuttle (that is more frequent and accessible) in addition to "park and ride" lots located outside of the downtown.
- Strengthening the sense of place in the downtown was very important to arts and culture providers and Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce. More **wayfinding** can help lead visitors to and from key destinations, shops or public spaces within the downtown. As the LAP takes shape, the Downtown BIA commented on the need to unify the entire downtown as the '**heart of the Comox Valley**' and cautioned against placing too much focus on creating a unique character or branding for specific streets.
- Other public amenities can also help visitors enjoy the downtown and the riverfront. There were suggestions for more **seating** (benches, picnic tables, hammocks) along the riverfront and pedestrian pathways to enjoy the scenery as well as **shaded areas** with tree canopy (Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce).
- Along the riverfront, the Downtown BIA recommended additional amenities such as **washrooms, waste infrastructure** and **waterfront recreational activities** (i.e., kayaking, swimming, etc.) to encourage visitation. Designating space for **interpretive**

signage and public art (i.e. installations, sculptures, murals) - particularly along the riverfront - is a priority for some groups to enrich the city's vibrancy, build community identity, and work with local First Nations to reflect pre-colonial history of the land (Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce).

- Downtown Courtenay BIA emphasized the opportunity for downtown to be not only a local destination, but also a regional 'heart'. **Pedestrianizing sections of the downtown** and directing visitors to local businesses can support this vision, along with **expanding transit connections** and **cycling infrastructure** (i.e. bikeshare) to create more opportunities for people to access the area.
- One property owner identified **perception of safety** as a current barrier to downtown investment, visitation and residential growth. Cases of vandalism and vehicle break-ins were cited as examples that may deter people from spending time downtown.

Planning & Design Considerations: To support implementation of the LAP, the City may consider initiatives and investment to encourage downtown visitation such as expanded utility for events/programming, increased transit access, interpretive/historic signage, public art, wayfinding, and public realm enhancements

Enhance Greenspaces

- Many interest-holders emphasized the goal to preserve and expand parkland and greenspace throughout downtown. The City can utilize finance tools like Development Cost Charges to ensure public amenities comes with growth (i.e. more green space with more housing density).
- One property owner commented on the opportunity to **expand Harmston Park** with higher density development, providing more green space for residents and recreational amenities.
- Suggestions included expansion of green and public gathering spaces that are closer to commercial streets to support retail and visibility of downtown businesses. **Public events in central green spaces** like Duncan Commons or Duncan Mews can help activate downtown, where Harmston Park is fairly removed from existing businesses (Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce).
- Throughout downtown, greenspace should be increased to **enhance the public realm** and enjoyment of the scenery/surroundings – through tree canopies, grassy areas, etc. (Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce).

Planning & Design Considerations: Consider differences in type, distribution and function of parkland and greenspace in downtown (i.e., for recreation, public realm, access to nature, event programming)

Support Housing Development & Local Businesses

- Downtown property owners, the Downtown Business Improvement Association and the Chamber of Commerce expressed support for **higher density development in downtown** to meet Courtenay's housing need, specifically around Harmston Park. This can be encouraged through **adjusting height restrictions** to allow for more storeys downtown and **streamlining development and permitting** (provincial archeology and environmental permits were mentioned as particularly challenging processes by one of the landowners).
- One property owner envisions **Harmston Park as a pedestrian-focused nodal** area by expanding both Mcphee Meadows Park and Harmston Park and closing off some laneways and arterial roads. Higher density development in this district could also create an opportunity for public housing (with BC Housing) and future civic projects, building more connection to the arts and cultural hub.
- To strengthen downtown as a key destination and support future residential density in the area, The Downtown BIA expressed interest in dedicating **5th Street as a high commercial** street that is pedestrian focused and closed to vehicles. This would require transportation studies, adequate and accessible parking nearby and could start with a pilot street closing during the summer months to test public interest and impact on businesses.
- Property owners also indicated opportunities for **development on City-owned or underutilized lands**. The Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce recognized the recent purchase of the hostel as an opportunity for the City to create more of an activated 'gateway' into the downtown. In the riverfront district, relocating industrial uses such as the Central Builders site could free up land for more riverfront access and/or development. A key challenge identified was the lack of industrial zoned land in the area, limiting where the existing site could be relocated.

Planning & Design Considerations: Consider opportunities to support denser forms of housing development in the downtown and pedestrian focused streets to enhance walkability and liveability

Utilize Strength of Community Groups & Potential Partnerships

- The involvement and **engagement of community groups** was identified as a strength to the process. These include partnerships between institutions such as the downtown farmer's market, Theatre, Museum, Downtown Courtenay BIA, etc. To ensure LAP meets diverse needs, it will be important to include Courtenay community groups and their networks in the planning through to implementation (Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce).
- Downtown BIA expressed the importance of planning lands, particularly around the riverfront, with **K'ómoks First Nation** and exploring opportunities with **Green Shores**.

Planning & Design Considerations: Include community group involvement as a strength to implementation of the LAP and explore opportunities with First Nations and other planning partners

Align with other Plans & Strategies

- Arts & culture providers noted that the LAP should be aligned with the recent **Cultural Strategic Plan**, which specifies facility improvements and investments, as well as the upcoming Cultural Facility Space Needs Assessment.
- The LAP should also respond to the updated **Official Community Plan** and **Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing (SSMUH) requirements** to identify where growth can- and should- go within the downtown. The downtown is targeted area for future development, and it will be important to specify how much new housing this study area can support (Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce).

Planning & Design Considerations: Ensure that strategic objectives within the Cultural Plan and provincial housing legislation are referenced and/or integrated into all downtown planning efforts

NEXT STEPS

Interest-holder feedback will be used to inform the Design Framework. In late February 2025, the City will launch a first round of public engagement to seek feedback on the design framework and key directions for the LAP. Opportunities will include an online survey and community open house. Draft materials and background information will be shared through the project's webpage.