



PART 1 INTRODUCTION AND VISION

Context and Existing Conditions

Purpose and Scope

Plan Process

Historic Downtown Vision

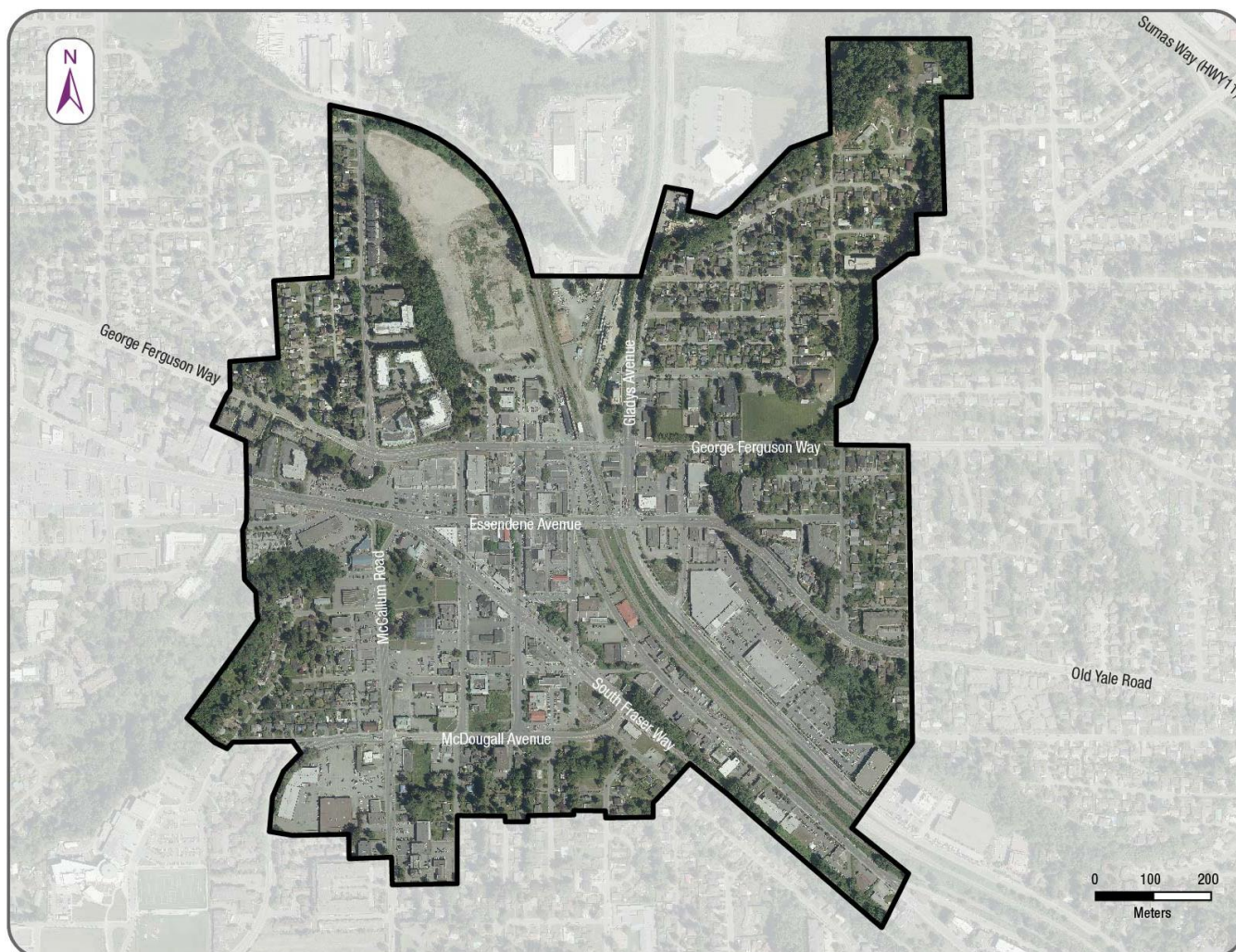


CONTEXT AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

Historic Downtown is set apart from other neighbourhoods in Abbotsford by its remnants of the past, including historic buildings and streets used by horse carriage and rail, before the arrival of vehicles. The history of this place both tells a story about Abbotsford’s past, and offers a unique foundation for its future.

The neighbourhood is located east of the City Centre along South Fraser Way, the CPR rail line, and George Ferguson Way. It is situated at the eastern-most and northern-most locations of the Primary Transit Corridor, and is approximately a 20 minute walk from the City Centre and Mill Lake. Historic Downtown was the original town site for the Village of Abbotsford, subdivided in 1891 and incorporated in 1924.

The study area is approximately 130 hectares (320 acres) and includes a complex overlay of topography, land uses, and networks of movement, open space, green infrastructure, and more. At the centre of the study area is a core area of retail high streets that comprise a destination for both residents and visitors.



Map 1 – Plan Boundary



Historic Downtown Through the Years

10,000 years

Stó:lo (people of the river)
 Long before Abbotsford existed as a community and Canada as a country, the Stó:lo (people of the river) occupied the land called S'ólh Téméxw in the Fraser Valley. They lived in this large geographic area from Yale to Vancouver and spoke Halq'eméylem, also known as the upriver dialect. The Fraser River, its tributaries and fertile lands continue to be essential to the Stó:lo way of life.

1891 - 1924

Townsite Established and Village Incorporated
 In 1891, a town site was established in the location of Historic Downtown, and the Canadian Pacific Railway and several buildings followed. While fire destroyed many of the earliest buildings, several buildings have survived such as the Copping Block (1909) on Essedene Avenue. In the 1920s and 1930s, Abbotsford was incorporated, Jubilee Park was established, and many more buildings were constructed including Hansen's Barber Shop, Trinity Memorial Church, and the Royal Canadian Legion.

1950s - 1960s

Development Boom
 In the 1950s and 1960s, other additions that remain today include: the Courthouse, the Post Office, Hub Motors Garage, the Royal Bank, the Bank of Montreal, Saans, and more. With this influx of development, the Village installed several hundred feet of sidewalk and over 200 parking meters, beautified Five Corners, planted the Christmas Tree, built the Jubilee Park band shell, and opened the MSA Centennial Library.

1970s - 1990s

The Rise of Strip Malls
 However, the decades that followed this development boom saw major shifts in the development pattern of Abbotsford and central Fraser Valley area, which was characterized by automobile-oriented strip malls and enclosed shopping malls. Although the City of Abbotsford had planning policies to support Historic Downtown, these external forces led to a decline in the vibrancy and vitality of the historic area.

1990s - 2000s

The Abbotsford Downtown Business Association Forms
 The Abbotsford Downtown Business Association (ADBA) was formally created and registered as a society in 1989. Sidewalk improvements on Montrose Avenue and other investments were made in Historic Downtown in the late 1990s, and improvements to building facades were seen in the early 2000s. Ongoing improvements and new development began to take hold, remaining steady into the 2010s.

Now

Growing Together
 Today there are many active and interested groups opening new businesses, proposing new developments, and participating in the resurgence of the area. This renewed enthusiasm in the area comes along with the challenge of aligning goals for what the next chapter will be in this cherished neighbourhood. This Plan process was an opportunity for residents, businesses, visitors, and government to come together and establish a path for the future.



Historic Downtown Today

The data presented in this section, unless otherwise noted, draws on a larger surrounding community area beyond the neighbourhood plan boundary shown in Map 1. This area can be considered Historic Downtown’s primary commercial trade area and provides a broad representation of neighbourhood characteristics.

Population and Demographics

Historic Downtown has been experiencing population growth in recent years, growing faster than the city overall. Between 2006 and 2016, the neighbourhood grew by approximately 10%, and currently has over 9,700 residents. Historic Downtown is anticipated to grow to a population of approximately 21,900 residents in the next 25 years, doubling the current population.

The population density is about 28 people per hectare, near the minimum density (32 people per hectare) required to see shifts in transportation modes away from predominantly vehicle use. Today, vehicles are the predominate mode of transportation to work, with only 9% of trips by an alternative mode. The majority of this residential density exists around the edges of the area, with almost no people living in the historic commercial core.

Historic Downtown has a relatively balanced population age mix. There is a greater proportion of young adults and a lower proportion of children compared with Abbotsford overall. The result is a smaller average household size than Abbotsford overall, with 2.1 persons per household in Historic Downtown.

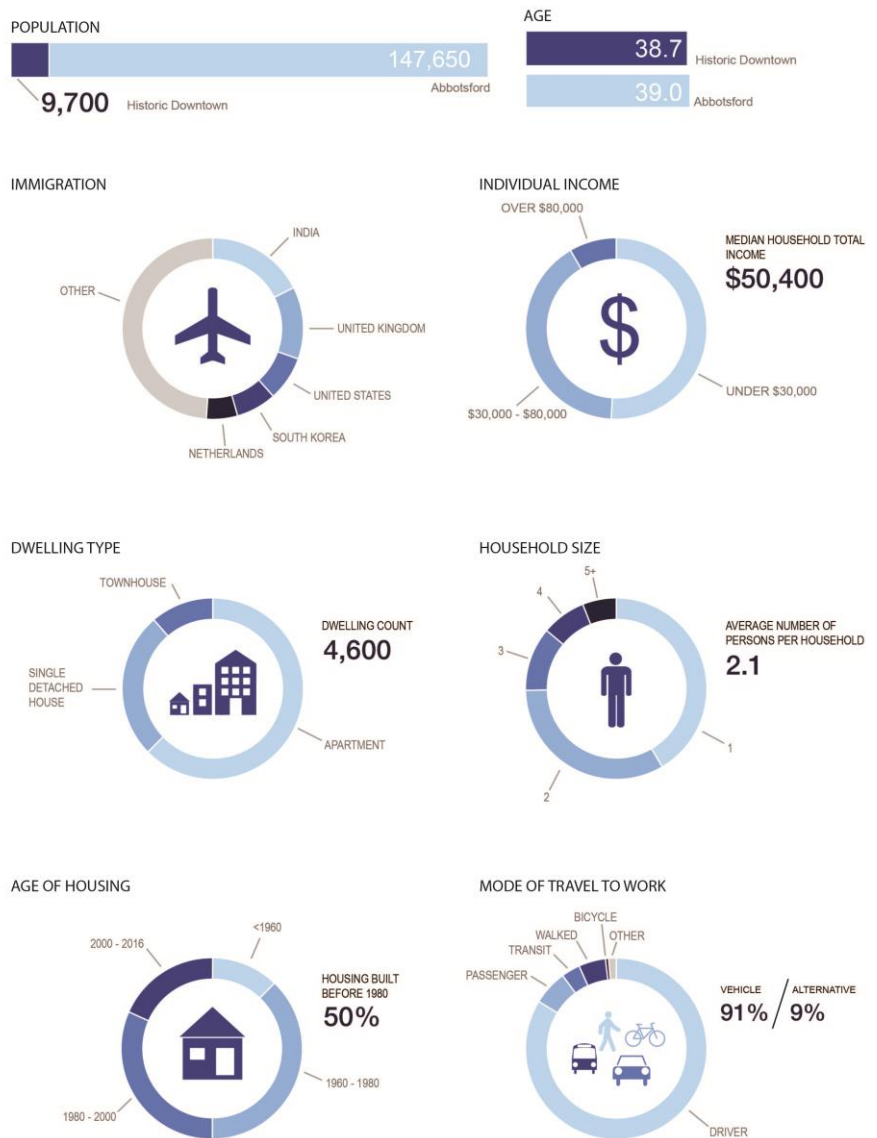


Figure 1 – Neighbourhood Profile (2016 Census)

There are fewer immigrants in Historic Downtown compared to the city-wide number, at 15% of the population compared with 27% city-wide. Of the residents who are immigrants, the largest number are from India, followed by the United Kingdom and the United States.



Historic Downtown displays a large diversity of income among individuals, with approximately half earning less than \$30,000, although the household median income of just over \$50,400 is below the city-wide average.

Almost 2/3 of homes in Historic Downtown are apartment units, compared with only one quarter across Abbotsford overall. The remaining housing units are a mix of single detached, duplexes, and townhouses. In addition, about half of all housing units were built before 1980, representing a significant portion of the older housing stock in Abbotsford overall.

Commercial Space

Historic Downtown is a key commercial node in the city, with its commercial uses focused on four dense urban blocks of specialty retail and offices that act as the neighbourhood's commercial and cultural core. Although Historic Downtown achieves relatively low market capture from much of Abbotsford – with 9% of the city's retail and service space – it has a unique identity, strong branding, and appealing venues that bring a unique and dedicated set of tenants and customers to the neighbourhood (Table 1).

Retail category	Historic Downtown		City-wide	
	Total (ft ²)	%	Total (ft ²)	%
Grocery & Supermarkets	35,800	4%	813,200	100%
Pharmacy	3,200	4%	85,000	100%
Alcohol	11,700	19%	61,200	100%
Services	91,000	20%	454,400	100%
Financial Services	14,800	6%	253,500	100%
Healthcare Services	25,300	15%	164,900	100%
<i>Convenience Retail</i>	<i>181,800</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>1,018,300</i>	<i>100%</i>
Apparel	34,600	7%	508,600	100%
Cosmetics, Health, Beauty	3,000	3%	117,000	100%
Electronics & Appliances	6,900	3%	264,700	100%
Footwear & Accessories	2,700	4%	60,000	100%
Home Furnishings	42,300	9%	455,300	100%
Home Improvement	2,600	1%	378,400	100%
Jewelry & Watches	2,200	20%	11,200	100%
Multimedia & Books	7,800	18%	43,500	100%
Sports & Recreation Goods	14,600	8%	189,800	100%
Pet Goods, Toys, Hobbies	37,200	17%	220,600	100%
<i>Comparison Retail</i>	<i>153,900</i>	<i>7%</i>	<i>2,249,000</i>	<i>100%</i>
Food & Beverage	95,400	15%	634,900	100%
Entertainment	21,500	10%	219,100	100%
Leisure	17,100	7%	228,800	100%
<i>Restaurants & Entertainment</i>	<i>134,000</i>	<i>12%</i>	<i>1,082,800</i>	<i>100%</i>
Vehicles & Parts	2,200	1%	364,400	100%
Auto Service	21,400	8%	273,800	100%
Gas Stations	1,000	1%	146,700	100%
<i>Auto Related</i>	<i>24,600</i>	<i>3%</i>	<i>785,100</i>	<i>100%</i>
Vacant	101,300	23%	438,500	100%
Total	595,600	9%	6,387,600	100%

Table 1 – Commercial Space Inventory (2017)

Between 2017 and 2040 the market capture of the neighbourhood is expected to increase slightly, and an estimated 160,000 ft² of new retail space demand is forecasted (Table 2). In the same period, an estimated 100 rooms (or one hotel) is projected to be needed in either Historic Downtown or City Centre (Table 2).



Historic Downtown has 18% of Abbotsford's office space, and offices in the area account for 32% of the total commercial floor space in the study area. Office tenants tend to be smaller, locally owned businesses such as medical offices and accounting or design firms. Between 2017 and 2040, an estimated 86,000-98,000 ft² of new office space demand is forecasted (Table 2).

Retail category	Growth Intervals (ft ² , new per period)				
	2017-2020	2021-2025	2026-2030	2031-2035	2036-2040
Convenience Retail	0	1,100	15,000	17,900	21,600
Comparison Retail	0	0	7,700	12,700	11,300
Restaurants & Entertainment	12,500	8,600	13,800	16,400	19,800
Auto Service	0	0	2,000	2,400	2,800
Office	0	34,000 to 44,000		52,000 to 53,000	
Accommodation	0 rooms	100 rooms	0 rooms	0 rooms	0 rooms

Table 2 – Commercial Space Forecasted Growth

Characterized by a mix of old and new, the neighbourhood is sparking a renewed wave of interest within the development community after years of modest growth. With an emerging group of developers and small business owners spearheading the next phase of renovation and reclamation of Historic Downtown, the neighbourhood is continuing to transition into a city-wide specialty shopping and dining destination, which is bringing spending back into the area.

Transportation

Historic Downtown is a car dependent neighbourhood with 90% of residents commuting to work by car either as drivers or passengers. Since Historic Downtown has a strong pedestrian-oriented urban fabric, it is likely that many residents are employed in other parts of the city, which may be inconvenient to reach by foot or on transit. As such, these choices are likely also a reflection of mobility challenges in Abbotsford generally.

The blocks that make up the core of Historic Downtown are small and laid out on a grid, a structure that is characteristic of pre-World War II planning, before the rise of the automobile. Moving outward, the evolution of blocks reflect later development patterns both in terms of their large size and their configuration (i.e. incorporation of cul-de-sacs). While block structure in the retail core is fine-grained and highly connected, surrounding industrial and residential lands have reduced permeability and resulted in larger travel distances by foot.

Within the retail core of Historic Downtown, between George Ferguson Way and South Fraser Way, pedestrian-oriented storefronts and streetscapes create a comfortable human scale. However, much of the public right-of-way is devoted to automobiles and many sidewalks are narrow with few pedestrian amenities or places for storefront activity to spill outdoors.

The five minute walking distances from where Essendene and Montrose Avenues intersect – which is the centre of the core retail area – demonstrate that the downtown core has good connectivity, with nearly all retail areas being within convenient walking distance of one another.

The existing cycling network is limited to the northeast and south edges of Historic Downtown. At present, the only marked bicycle lanes exist on McDougall Avenue / South Fraser Way (southeast of McDougall Avenue) and George Ferguson Way (east of Gladys Avenue).



Historic Downtown is well served by bus transit with four major (high frequency) and five minor (local) bus routes connecting through the study area. An on-street transit exchange is located on one block of Montrose Avenue between Laurel Street and McDougall Avenue.

A staff survey of parking indicates that parking supply accommodates parking demand in Historic Downtown as a whole. However, parking demand is unevenly distributed, with the highest demands in the central part of the neighbourhood where some on-street parking capacity is met or exceeded on weekday morning, weekday afternoon, and Saturday peaks.

Natural Features

Historic Downtown is located in a natural bowl-shaped depression between the central Abbotsford uplands and the eastern slopes up to McKee Peak and Sumas Mountain. The result of this topography is numerous steep slopes, watercourses, and floodplains in and around the area. The landscape also creates spectacular views of distant mountains to the north and south east, as well as to the City Centre skyline.

Public Spaces and Amenities

Jubilee Park is an important, centrally-located park space in the neighbourhood that includes programming such as pickle ball courts, a playground, and spaces for community events. Recent capital investment has been completed to add important pathway connections and improved parking facilities. Other parks in Historic Downtown include Walnut Park and Switzer Park. Just outside of Historic Downtown to the west is Ravine Park, with trails that connect to Mill Lake Park through Farrant Crescent.

Historic Downtown is a magnet for people and events, including the annual Christmas Tree Lighting celebration, Jam in Jubilee, Berryfest, and Classic Car Show. A key cultural destination in Historic Downtown is the weekly Abbotsford Farm and Country Market, which is a street market that occurs Saturday mornings from May to October.

Public art throughout Historic Downtown celebrates Abbotsford's history, culture, and setting, including through sculptures, murals, and artistic street benches.

Other community amenities and services in Historic Downtown include a fire hall, school, event spaces, and several social services, places of worship, and other community organizations.



PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Official Community Plan

In 2016, City of Abbotsford Council adopted a new Official Community Plan (OCP) through a process called 'Abbotsforward'. The OCP brings together two years of background research, growth scenarios, and broad community engagement. The engagement activities effectively reached a significant number of diverse residents and its results continue to inform city policies and practices.

The OCP paints a picture of what Abbotsford will be like at 200,000 residents and includes a vision that speaks to '7 Big Ideas', and each Big Ideas is a policy section in its own right with the second entitled 'Establish Distinct and Complete Neighbourhoods'.



Establish Distinct and Complete Neighbourhoods

Historic Downtown is undergoing revitalization as one of Abbotsford's premier distinct and complete neighbourhoods. It is being rediscovered due to its commercial distinctiveness, walkable streets, attractive built form, and unique character. It is a place where people gather to celebrate a community that's set apart from other places – one that is embracing change while seeking to preserve its unique qualities.

To build on this momentum and help implement the Official Community Plan, the City worked with the community to develop a vision for the future of this neighbourhood, and a plan to bring the vision to life.

Urban Structure and Growth Plan

The OCP provides clear guidelines about how and where the City will grow in coming years. Abbotsford's urban structure is defined by a hierarchy of mixed use centres which are connected by a primary transit corridor (Figure 2). Historic Downtown is identified as an Urban Centre within Abbotsford's Urban Core, which is where redevelopment and intensification of uses are focused. More broadly, 75% of new residential growth will be directed to existing built up areas of the City, the majority of which will be in the Urban Core.



Urban Centres like Historic Downtown are secondary to the City Centre in terms of intensity and scale. However, in addition to serving surrounding neighbourhoods, they also have city-wide draw and function. Historic Downtown in particular has distinct character for community gathering, employment, and destination amenities.

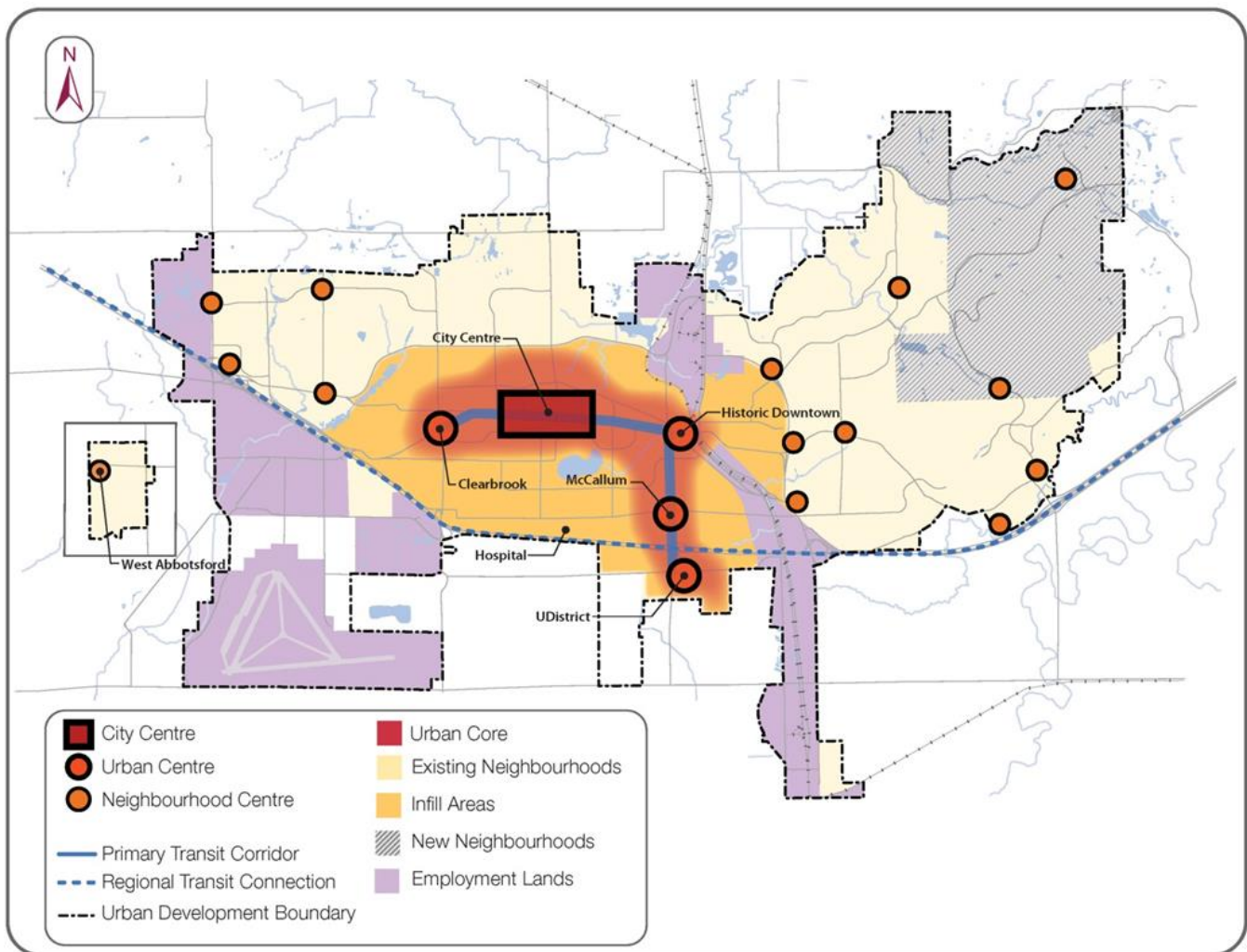


Figure 2 – Official Community Plan Urban Structure

OCP Conformance

When adopted by City Council, the Historic Downtown Neighbourhood Plan (HDNP) will form part of the City's OCP. As part of the OCP, the HDNP must be consistent with the overall policy framework and demonstrate how it conforms to the plan, realizes the 'Big Ideas', and supports the urban structure and overall growth objectives. However, regulations within this Neighbourhood Plan will supersede the OCP and prevail in cases where it provides greater detail or differs from the OCP. Where the HDNP does not contain guidance or direction the OCP continues to apply.



Plan For 200K

The creation of several Neighbourhood Plans is part of a broader City initiative called Plan For 200K. The initiative coordinated City departments as they updated master plans and strategies to reflect the vision and objectives of the OCP.

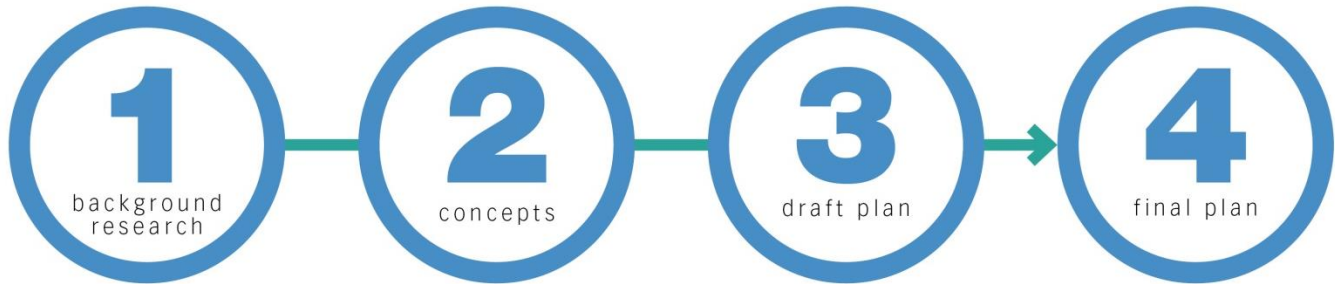
In this sense, the HDNP and other Neighbourhood Plans have an opportunity to work alongside and contribute to the development of nearly 20 other plans. The alignment between departments ensures implementation is focused, planned, and smooth. Master Plans and strategies that have a direct impact on the HDNP include:

- Transportation
- Transit
- Parks, Recreation & Culture
- Zoning Bylaw
- Housing
- Utilities



PLAN PROCESS

The Neighbourhood Plan was completed through a four stage process, as illustrated below.



Stage 1 – Background Research

This stage included analysis of current conditions to better understand the necessary tools and priorities to make the Historic Downtown a vibrant and complete neighbourhood.

Stage 2 – Concept

This stage focused on exploring options and preparing a preferred concept to form the structure of the HDNP. This was done through an engagement process framed by concept options created from the planning issues identified in Stage 1.

Stage 3 – Draft Plan

This stage involved preparing the first draft of the new HDNP using the technical and engagement findings from Stage 1 and 2. It also included a technical analysis of infrastructure needs and market feasibility of development.

Stage 4 – Final Plan

This involved refining the new HDNP and preparing it for adoption as a bylaw by Council.



Community Engagement

Community Vision, Goals, and Ideas

The first phase of the Historic Downtown Neighbourhood Plan process involved a number of community engagement activities in 2017 that sought input on goals and ideas for the future of the neighborhood. Activities included interactive Conversation Boards that were hosted in businesses throughout Historic Downtown over a two-week period, and were also used to engage at community events such as Berryfest and the Farmer's Market. Overall, each board received comments from an average of 230 participants. A Concepts Workshop and Public Open House were also held, allowing for additional participation from City Councilors, Abbotsford Downtown Business Association members, City staff, additional stakeholders, and the general public. This engagement enabled the co-creation of ideas, goals and a vision, all of which provided the foundation for the final Neighbourhood Plan.



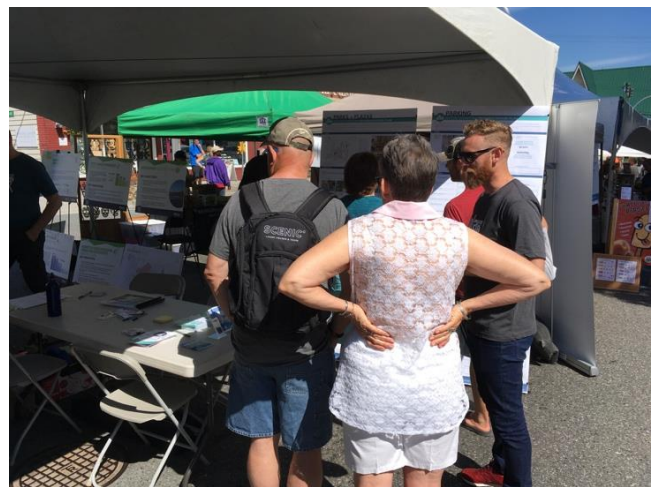
Public Open House at the Jam in Jubilee



Concepts Workshop



Conversation Boards at the Berry Fest



Conversation Boards at the Saturday Farmers Market



Developing the Plan

Many of the ideas developed in the early engagement gave shape to draft concepts for land use, mobility, open space, built form, shopping and amenities, and more. Through an online survey in 2018, **over 6,200 participants** provided their input on these ideas, which were used to prepare the draft Plan and will help guide implementation.

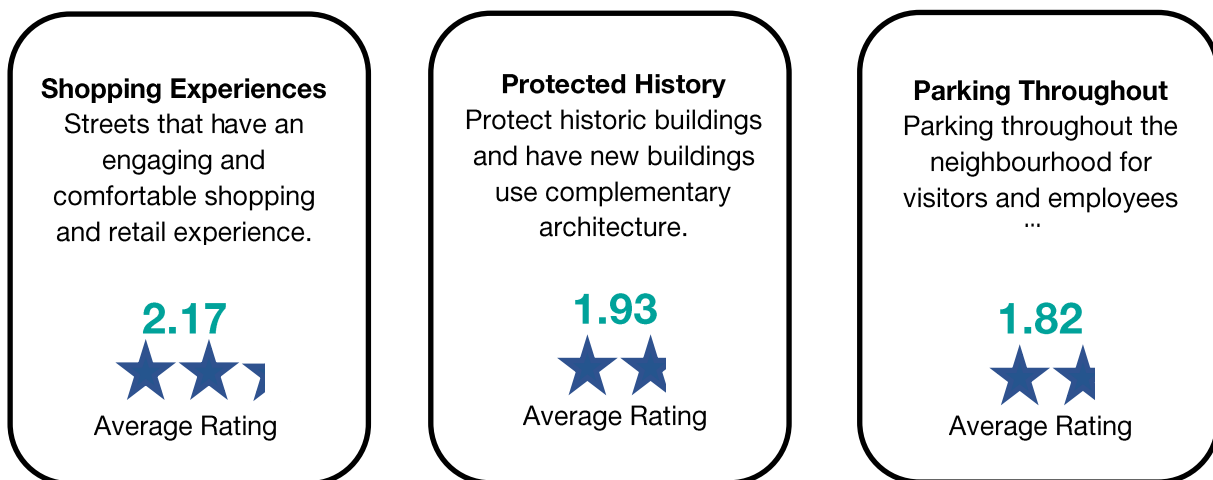
Most Favoured Themes

The following two themes that emerged from the previous engagement received the most favourable responses in this round of engagement:



Top Three Priorities

When asked about their top 3 priorities for the neighbourhood, participants rated **Shopping Experiences**, **Protected History**, and **Parking Throughout** as their highest priorities:



Top Three Projects

When asked about the top 3 projects that should be built in the neighbourhood, participants most frequently choose **Gateway Plazas**, **Redesign Essendene**, and **Trails and Pathways**:



Gateway Plazas
Create new gateway plazas to create a sense of arrival in Historic Downtown. This could include market space, patios, seating, and multipurpose seasonal event space.



Redesign Essendene
Provide more space for sidewalks, bikes, patios, and street trees on Essendene Avenue by reducing vehicle space and keeping on-street parallel parking.



Trails and Paths
Build trails and paths to and through the neighbourhood, connecting it to destinations such as Jubilee Park, Ravine Park, Mill Lake, the railway corridor, and the Discovery Trail.

Completing the Plan

The final phase of community engagement occurred in late fall 2018 at a popup storefront called the Downtown Gallery. A vacant storefront was set up as a temporary gallery space where display boards and visuals showed the draft neighbourhood plan. The event occurred over three days and overlapped with the Winter Jubilee Christmas Tree lighting celebration. A total of 750 visitors attended the gallery and approximately 130 comment forms were completed with 82% in support of the draft plan direction. This feedback, along with continued stakeholder meetings including the Abbotsford Downtown Business Association, was used to help refine the plan into a final bylaw for Council’s bylaw consideration.



The Downtown Gallery



Downtown Gallery attendees



HISTORIC DOWNTOWN VISION

Historic Downtown is the soul of Abbotsford. The historic buildings and streets offer a glimpse into the past, reinforcing a sense of shared history, identity, and civic pride. They also provide a backdrop and stage for bustling local businesses whose activities spill onto the streets, contributing to vibrant public life unfolding in public spaces. In this way, Historic Downtown also offers a glimpse into Abbotsford's future, as neighbourhoods increasingly evolve into places best experienced on foot, with unique experiences and events for residents and visitors alike.



Plan Goals

Five goals provide the building blocks of the vision, forming the foundation of the plan and an organizing framework for the policies.



A Historic Place

Historic buildings and streetscapes offer a sense of discovery, wonder, intimacy, and uniqueness, setting this area apart from other places in Abbotsford.



Diverse Destinations and Experiences

Eclectic events, vibrant businesses, and diverse spaces and places establish Historic Downtown as a people-magnet, and help create a neighbourhood in which people can live, play, work, socialize, and explore within walking distance of home.



People-Centred Streets

Pedestrians come first in this human-scaled, dynamic neighbourhood. The sidewalks and plazas of Historic Downtown provide the stage for rich public life, while the buildings provide the backdrop.



Transportation Choices

People come to Historic Downtown to stroll and discover. Visitors and residents travel safely, comfortably, and delightfully on foot, supporting street life, business prosperity, improved physical and mental health, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.






A Green Neighbourhood

Historic Downtown's green spaces and networks provide ecological function, create beauty, and support recreation, social interaction, connection to nature, and retreat from sounds and sights of busy urban areas.



Projections*

The projected population, housing units and student numbers are estimated below for when the neighbourhood is developed over the next 25 to 30 years.

	Current	Projected
	9,700 people	21,900 people
	Current	Projected
	4,600 units	9,100 units
Grade (Age) Preschool (0-4) Elementary (5-10) Middle (11-13) High (14-17)	Current	Projected
	580 students 655 students 275 students 435 students	800 students 1025 students 500 students 625 students
	TOTAL 1,945 students	TOTAL 2,950 students

Statistics Canada data - Abbotsford 2016

Table 3 – Residential and Student Population Projections

* The data presented in this section follows the same area as “Historic Downtown Today” described earlier in Part 1.

