

Downtown Strategy

RECOMMENDATIONS





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RECOMMENDATIONS



Project Background

Objectives

01

Develop a unique positioning

Develop a unique positioning that will resonate with residents, talent, visitors and businesses and develop a strategic marketing plan that executes upon the vision.

02

Identify future trends

Create consensus among stakeholders of the trends impacting downtown and the challenges and opportunities they represent.

03

Establish growth opportunities

Identify growth opportunities for downtown with respect to market realities as well as past or current downtown initiatives to ensure a cohesive approach.

04

Action recommendations

Articulate future actions to support short- and long-term needs in order to ensure the success of downtown and highlight opportunities for public realm improvements to catalyse investment and drive visitation.



Downtown Today

DOWNTOWN PERCEPTION

Overall, negative perceptions of downtown, increased by the COVID-19 pandemic, are a barrier to visitation locally and regionally, and the community's optimism towards positive change.

A PLACE TO EAT, SHOP, AND WORK

Today, Downtown is mainly perceived as a good place to eat out by the community. Walkability and proximity to restaurants, to shops, and to work are the main drivers for residents considering living downtown.

LOW LIVEABILITY

On the contrary, Downtown is perceived as a poor place to live, to operate a business, and to recreate or visit. Based on drivers, downtown is not considered as a good place to raise a family.

PERCEIVED AS UNSAFE AND UNCLEAN

The sense of community, safety, and level of cleanliness have significantly decreased in downtown in the last year according to the community.

KEY STRENGTHS

Events, farmers markets, unique businesses, cultural experiences, and continued investment.

A PLACE OF OPPORTUNITY AND SERVICES

Overall, the community is most satisfied with the employment opportunities and its proximity to work, and public transportation, as well as access to healthcare services.

AN AUTHENTIC DESTINATION

The unique stores and restaurants attract residents to Downtown.

A PLACE FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

While street vibrancy, access to entertainment, and recreational activities have all significantly decreased in downtown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Downtown is recognized by the community as a place of celebration.

A HOTSPOT FOR INVESTMENT

In the past decade over \$220 million worth of construction permits have been issued Downtown, including 40% of citywide commercial permits.

KEY CHALLENGES

Negative perception, safety, vulnerable population.

PERCEPTION, SAFETY, AND CLEANLINESS

Both safety and cleanliness are the biggest challenges facing Downtown. Nightlife is also missing from Downtown, but less important overall to residents. The community is least satisfied with the maintenance and cleanliness, and health and safety measures in downtown. Parking is also an issue downtown, especially off-street parking.

WHAT'S MISSING?

More shopping options, a grocery store, more restaurants, more green spaces and community events are key amenities to add or improve in downtown according to the community. Access to recreational opportunities Downtown is also limited. The lack of affordable market housing product limits opportunities for Prince George residents to consider Downtown Prince George as an option to live.



Vision

VISION

Downtown Prince George is the city's cultural and business heart, a destination and gathering place for local and visitors and a preferred location for businesses.

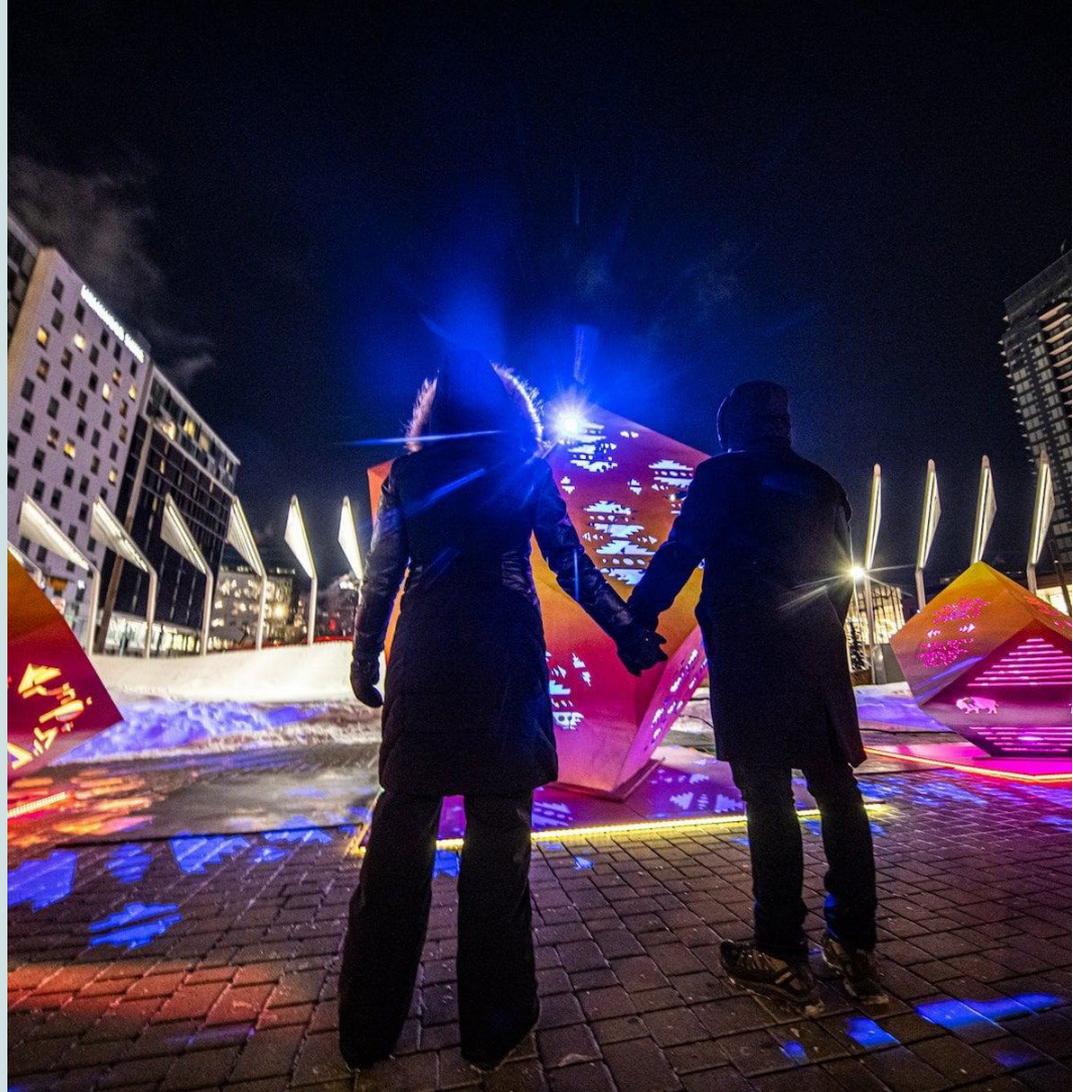
Proudly northern in spirit, downtown will develop into a place where urban adventure and excitement is the equal of the region's renowned wilderness encounters because it will innovate to offer art and cultural experiences beyond the walls of its many excellent institutions, create a base camp connection to recreation, and grow opportunities for continuing and higher education. We'll connect with tourism, city departments, and Lheidli T'enneh First Nation to align messages and share know-how.



VISION

Prince George will embrace placemaking and programming that will bring visitors to all parts of downtown, connecting streets by combining themes of central interior history, local markets and music, dining destinations and unique shopping venues. Downtown will be dependably surprising day and night, with a wide variety of events and activities to enjoy year round on the streets of the city centre and in the nearby parks on the Nechako and Fraser River and Connaught Hill.

In winter, Prince George will bring beloved winter sports and games to downtown, inviting residents to participate in informal winter games and activities that enrich well-being for all. And Prince George will catalyse the growth of residences and businesses by prioritising affordability, working with all local partners and easing entry to those who wish to make the centre city their personal or corporate headquarters.





Target Audiences

PRINCE GEORGE RESIDENTS

Local explorers—be they families, singles, couples or empty-nesters from surrounding and suburban neighbourhoods—are key to the short-term rejuvenation and long-term success of downtown. They know downtown, of course, but it's not a place they see themselves outside of work, the occasional special occasion event, the farmers' market or a visit to the parks. Their familiarity with the neighbourhood makes them a logical audience for itineraries that knit together a variety of events and places for visitors interested in arts, food, sports or entertainment, giving this audience reasons to come downtown and stay longer.



DOWNTOWN RESIDENTS AND WORKERS

Downtown residents are our VIPs, the people with a vested interest in the success of the centre city. They're interested insiders who should be informed and invited first and treated as the ambassadors they are. Living downtown or in surrounding neighbourhoods, confident and familiar with the neighbourhood, they could be enticed downtown during the week and in the evenings, or even after work, when the area needs vibrancy the most.



LOCAL BUSINESSES

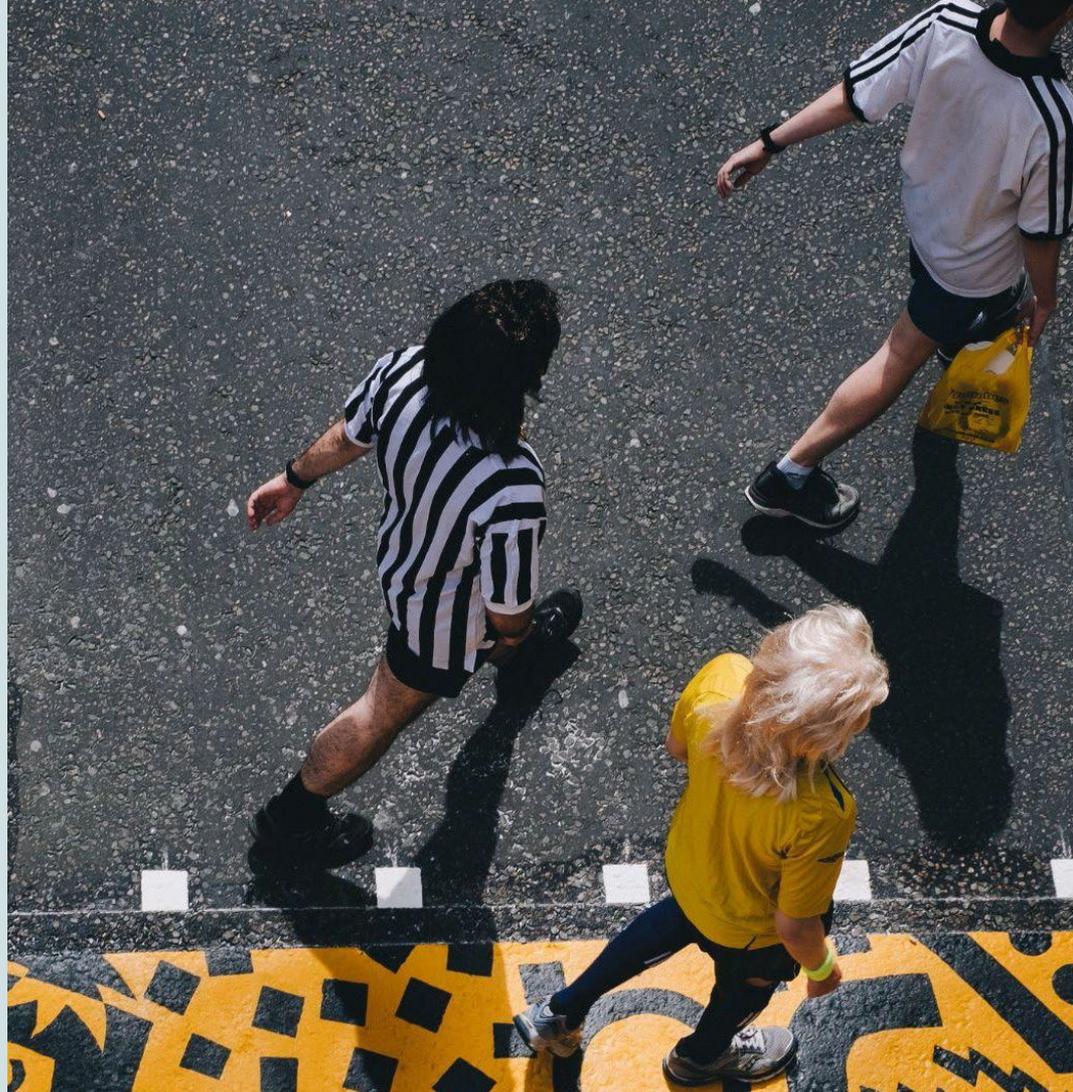
While government services are plentiful in downtown, we want to attract more entrepreneurs, from restaurants to retail to tech startups to the downtown. Natural risk-takers, entrepreneurs need a certain amount of incentive to make the leap but are ready to do the heavy lifting to succeed. We can help create the vibrancy that makes downtown exciting during and after the workday. We can also reach out to cultural communities to catalyse interest in short term opportunities and events.



VISITORS AND NEWCOMERS

For visitors, Downtown Prince George is the big city—it offers a vibe they can't find elsewhere at home, and a walkability they might not enjoy.

Connecting with past visitors from nearby cities and keeping them abreast of upcoming events and opportunities could bring them back more often and potentially for longer stays.





Recommendations

Downtown Development Principles

1. VIBRANT, LIVABLE, MIXED-USE DOWNTOWN

Downtown is the most vibrant and inclusive neighbourhood in Prince George to live, work, and play.

2. CONNECTED DOWNTOWN

Downtown is pedestrian, accessible and well connected to surrounding neighbourhoods.

3. RESILIENT, ADAPTABLE, INNOVATIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL

Downtown is a living lab, sustainable, and dynamic.

4. THRIVING ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, AND CULTURAL HUB

Downtown is a regional centre for culture, entertainment, and celebration.

5. ACTIVE, ANIMATED, AND WELCOMING PUBLIC REALM

Downtown is welcoming and animated all year round, day and night.

6. URBAN GATEWAY TO THE MODERN NORTH

Downtown is a centre of opportunity for everyone in Northern BC.

1. VIBRANT, LIVABLE, MIXED-USE DOWNTOWN

Today Downtown functions predominantly as a commuter hub, with many streets deserted outside of working hours.

Transforming Downtown into a vibrant, livable, mixed-use Downtown requires a multi-tiered approach that in the short term improves quality of life Downtown, and in the mid-to-long term focuses on delivering diverse housing options necessary in achieving sustainable population growth.

2. CONNECTED DOWNTOWN

Today the majority of land use within the Downtown core is dedicated to auto-mobile access through roads, alleys, street parking, and surface lots, which results in convenient car access but less space for buildings, parks, and other urban elements.

By combining a streamlined and enhanced multi-modal transportation network with an upgraded pedestrian user experience, Downtown will become more animated, vibrant, and memorable. Fewer cars on the road means less demand for parking, freeing up underutilized land for more productive forms of land use.

3. RESILIENT, ADAPTABLE, INNOVATIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL CENTRE

As technology continues to permeate society and our everyday lives, Downtown must take steps to ensure that it stays ahead of the curve and capitalize on opportunities created by economic shifts generated by the pandemic.

Cultivating an adaptable, innovative, and experimental city that is proactive in decision making will be key in continued success and growth in the future.

4. THRIVING ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, AND CULTURAL HUB

In recent years, Downtown has attracted a growing arts and culture scene through various music and arts venues and events. While the COVID-19 pandemic restricted gatherings, Downtown is well positioned not only to become Prince George's cultural centre, but Northern BC's too.

By aligning aging arts, culture, and recreational facility needs with new/rehabbed infrastructure options, and building out a more comprehensive series of programs and events, downtown will become a choice location for celebration of the arts and Indigenous culture, and for businesses and community organisations to collaborate and diversify experiences.

5. ACTIVE, ANIMATED, AND WELCOMING PUBLIC REALM

Downtown is the heart of the city, a place of celebration and gathering for everyone. People come Downtown to discover new restaurants, shop at unique boutiques, enjoy art, and engage in civic celebrations – whatever the reason the public realm shapes the overall experience. Rethinking public plazas and streets for people through infrastructure improvements and creative streetscape activations is an opportunity to reinforce the sense of place downtown and improve its perception.

With a welcoming and amenitized central plaza, the Civic Core district and its adjacent connector streets will become a community destination for activations and events. While the Civic Heart is a catalyst to attract more people to the area, safe and active streets encourage people to explore the commercial corridors on George Street, Dominion Street, and 3rd and 4th Street. The public realm will be designed to support everyday programming as well as safe celebrations day and night throughout the downtown.

6. URBAN GATEWAY TO THE MODERN NORTH

The health of the downtown core and its surrounding neighbourhoods are critical to a healthy region. As the catalyst of the modern Canadian North, Prince George is an important destination for both locals and visitors. Such a position defines new objectives for Downtown in terms of innovation, economic development, and leadership.

Downtown Recommendations

1. VIBRANT, LIVABLE, MIXED-USE DOWNTOWN

1. REDUCE BARRIERS TO DEVELOPMENT DOWNTOWN
2. SUPPORT CONVENIENCE RETAIL
3. ADVOCATE FOR MORE DIVERSE HOUSING OPTIONS
4. CULTIVATE A VIBRANT DINING & ENTERTAINMENT LANDSCAPE
5. CONTINUE EFFORTS TOWARDS A SAFE, CLEAN, AND INCLUSIVE DOWNTOWN

2. CONNECTED DOWNTOWN

1. OPTIMISE AUTOMOBILE ACCESS DOWNTOWN
2. INVEST AND ENHANCE MULTIMODAL TRANSPORT
3. IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE DOWNTOWN
4. ESTABLISH A FOUR-SEASON GREENWAY
5. ADDRESS FIRST/LAST MILE GAPS IN MOBILITY

Downtown Recommendations

3. RESILIENT, ADAPTABLE, INNOVATIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL CENTRE

1. EXPERIMENT WITH TACTICAL URBANISM
2. EXPAND AND INVEST IN GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE
3. PROMOTE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMALL BUSINESS
4. REDUCE GROUND FLOOR COMMERCIAL VACANCY
5. DEVELOP A DOWNTOWN REAL ESTATE STRATEGY
6. INVEST IN THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF DOWNTOWN TRANSITION

4. THRIVING ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, AND CULTURAL HUB

1. POSITION DOWNTOWN AS PRINCE GEORGE'S CULTURAL CENTRE
2. CONSOLIDATE AGEING ARTS, CULTURE, AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES INTO A NEW MULTI-PURPOSE FACILITY
3. SUPPORT AN ACTIVATED DOWNTOWN
4. DEVELOP A PUBLIC ART PROGRAM
5. CREATE AN ARTIST HUB DOWNTOWN

Downtown Recommendations

5. ACTIVE, ANIMATED, AND WELCOMING PUBLIC REALM

1. INVEST IN PROGRAMMABLE URBAN PLAZAS AND SPACES
2. IMPROVE CONNECTION BETWEEN URBAN PLAZAS AND PROGRAMMABLE SPACES
3. WORK TOWARDS A UNIFORMED PLACEMAKING EXPERIENCE UNIQUE TO PRINCE GEORGE
4. STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRIVATE SPACE AND PUBLIC REALM

6. URBAN GATEWAY TO THE MODERN NORTH

1. FOSTER AN ALL-SEASON URBAN EXPERIENCE
2. CELEBRATE INDIGENOUS CULTURES AND IDENTITY
3. FOCUS ON LEADING INNOVATION IN THE NORTH
4. TRANSFORM PERCEPTIONS OF DOWNTOWN AS A DESTINATION



Governance



Improve cooperation

CHALLENGE

While the Downtown Strategy was launched collaboratively between the City of Prince George and Downtown Prince George, there are definitely downtown management and promotion opportunities where better cooperation between both organisations could result in enhancing the urban experience and optimising resources.

SOLUTION

The Downtown Strategy must also act as an opportunity to communicate and address the issues and opportunities that stakeholders and partners are dealing with and work hand in hand to address. Shared resources between the City of Prince George and Downtown Prince George will only facilitate planning and implementation, while the integration of the Economic Development Strategy and the Downtown Strategy as part of City Council reports is an opportunity to align objectives and tactics.



Create a Downtown Strategy team

CHALLENGE

While the City of Prince George Economic Development Division will act as the liaison to enhance relationships between the City, Downtown Prince George, and partners, the extraordinary outlook for growth in Downtown suggests that the Downtown Strategy and the organisation responsible for its implementation be afforded the necessary stature and resources within the City of Prince George's organisational structure to deliver the vision, roadmap and commitment to build a thriving, future-focused downtown.

SOLUTION

The introduction of a Downtown Strategy team to coordinate and lead the strategy will accelerate the implementation in partnership with focus area leads, and enabling roles.