

# City of Whitehorse



## Downtown Plan

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## Acknowledgements

The City acknowledges the participation of the following individuals in the creation of the Downtown Plan:

### **The Advisory Committee**

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<b>M.J. Warshawski</b>	President – Artspace North
<b>Dennis Zimmerman</b>	Economic Development – Yukon Government

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# 1.0 Introduction

UMA was retained by the City of Whitehorse in early 2005 to undertake a Downtown Plan for the City. The study area is bounded by Robert Service Way to the south, the Marwell industrial area to the north, the escarpment to the west and the Yukon River to the east. The study area is shown on Figure 1.

This report represents the Plan for Downtown Whitehorse. The Downtown Plan is not a replacement but rather is supplemental to the City's Official Community Plan (OCP). The Plan has grown out of a recognition in the OCP that Downtown is a special place and merits a Plan which is customized to its unique attributes.

The Downtown Plan has been written as a series of recommendations rather than policy statements. This provides flexibility, enabling the City to “work through” recommended initiatives or actions.

The Downtown Plan has evolved from a review and analysis of:

- relevant planning and policy documents
- current downtown conditions, including an assessment of assets and challenges
- comments received from a series of public workshops and open houses
- discussions with the Downtown Plan Advisory Committee

Community involvement in the planning process has included a series of meetings with the Downtown Plan Advisory Committee at critical project milestones. The Advisory Committee is made up of representatives of various organizations, including City and Yukon Government staff. Community involvement has also included a series of public open houses and workshops (three in total). The first meeting series (May, 2005) identified issues and existing conditions and examined the assets and challenges facing Downtown. The second series of meetings (June, 2005) reviewed the vision statements for Downtown and explored some preliminary plan ideas. The third, and final public open house (December, 2005) reviewed the draft Downtown Plan.

A complete documentation of the review and analysis, including details from the meetings/workshops with the public, is contained in the “Downtown Plan: Phase 1 Background Report” by UMA Engineering Ltd., dated August 15, 2005. The result of the background review and analysis was the preparation of the Downtown Plan which includes:

a vision statement for Downtown (Section 2.1); a conceptual planning framework (Section 2.2), policy recommendations (Section 3.0) and priorities and implementation (Section 4.0).

In addition to the Downtown Plan, the City of Whitehorse and/or Yukon Government have also embarked on a number of other planning initiatives which relate to the Downtown Plan. These include:

- The Detailed Riverfront Plan, City of Whitehorse. This Plan, focused on the area bounded by Main Street, Strickland Street, First Avenue and the Yukon River, will reconfirm priorities and result in a preliminary design concept for this special area of Downtown.
- Arts and Heritage Village Development Plan, Yukon Government (YG). This project involves the Yukon Government, Artspace North, and the Chamber of Commerce, in a concept to develop an arts and heritage village along the waterfront.
- Downtown Retail Strategy, City of Whitehorse. This initiative involves a detailed analysis of Downtown Whitehorse's retail market (both in terms of supply and demand), including a survey of Downtown retailers and service providers. The Strategy is intended to provide recommendations that will enhance the Downtown retail mix, Downtown marketing, and management of Downtown programs.

The Downtown Plan was adopted by Council as the vision for Downtown Whitehorse in May 2006. In January 2007, a series of Official Community Plan amendments were brought forward to implement the Downtown Plan (Bylaw 2007-01). A public hearing was held on March 26<sup>th</sup> and several changes to the Downtown Plan were made to reflect input received from the public.



## 2.0 The Vision for Downtown Whitehorse

A series of vision statements for Downtown Whitehorse evolved from recognition of existing conditions, an assessment of Downtown assets and challenges, and input from the Advisory Committee and stakeholders. These vision statements form the conceptual planning framework and the basis for Plan development.

### 2.1 Downtown Whitehorse Vision

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Downtown Whitehorse is the heart of the City: a dynamic, safe, and attractive centre that strives to:

- be the region's primary shopping, arts and culture, entertainment, service, and business resource base
- evolve as a more complete community, where Whitehorse residents of all income levels can choose to work, live, and socialize
- develop as a major year-round destination for business or pleasure, offering increasing volumes of tourists and visitors a range of high quality accommodations, meeting facilities, and services with attractions that honour and highlight the city's rich heritage
- appreciate its history while making use of its wealth of natural, cultural, and commercial resources to attract and retain people and activities that will ensure its long term vibrancy
- encompass a number of distinct, identifiable sub-areas which contribute in complementary ways to the quality of life and economic and social health of both downtown and the City of Whitehorse as a whole

### 2.2 Conceptual Planning Framework

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The Downtown Whitehorse Vision recognizes that Downtown is made up of several parts, all of which must function together to achieve a safe, dynamic and attractive Downtown. Each of the parts, represented by geographic sub-areas of Downtown, contributes to the long term sustainability of Downtown by providing places to live, work and play. However, while each sub-area supports the overall health of Downtown, each part offers a unique contribution. In the simplest of terms, the residents of Old Town support the downtown core

commercial area by shopping there, enjoying the services offered, and by participating in planned events and activities. In turn, a Downtown Commercial Core, full of pedestrian activity, including spending, encourages more businesses to locate or existing businesses to expand operations.

The recognition of the inter-dependency of the various parts of Downtown and roles they play forms the conceptual planning framework for Whitehorse's Downtown Plan. The roles and functions of the various Downtown areas are described as vision statements. The essence of these vision statements are illustrated on Figure 1. The comprehensive vision statements by sub-area are contained in the "Background Report".

### Downtown Commercial Core Vision

Main Street will continue to be the social and commercial focus of Downtown, offering tourists, visitors, and residents a dynamic range of high quality specialty shops, restaurants, and personalized services in an attractive, pedestrian-oriented setting. A more mature downtown commercial core will be apparent when:

- Main Street businesses continue to thrive, with increased sales volume, second floor retailing/service opportunities and low vacancies
- The vibrancy of Main Street will have encouraged further compatible development in other emerging core areas, including both east/west and north/south streets
- Additional core area streetscape improvements, such as lighting and landscaping off Main Street, provide improved pedestrian comfort and safety
- Façade and other building improvements and restoration materialize, contributing to a unique, safe, and comfortable streetscape experience
- Additional infill development and re-use of existing structures generate new businesses, including restaurants and specialty shops, in the downtown core
- Tourists, visitors, and residents alike are able to easily find what they are looking for, including parking and bicycle storage
- Pedestrian movement from the core to other parts of the downtown are facilitated with appropriately located signage, lighting, traffic calming mechanisms, and pedestrian crossings



### Old Town Neighbourhood Vision

Old Town, Whitehorse's oldest established residential area, will have properly evolved when:

- The neighbourhood has maintained its low density, single family character and quiet, peaceful and non commercial environment
- Considerable upgrades in infrastructure have been implemented, including roadway, sidewalk, and lighting improvements that offer local residents increased pride of community and a heightened level of safety and comfort
- Infrastructure improvements have encouraged significant improvements to existing single family homes
- Neighbourhood improvements have generated investment in redevelopment opportunities for newer forms of single family and semi-detached housing types
- Access to parks, downtown schools, and other downtown amenities has been dramatically improved, including upgrades to Fourth Avenue, such as road diet provisions and dedicated pedestrian crossings which serve to slow vehicular traffic and increase pedestrian safety



### North End Service Commercial Area Vision

In order to fulfill a healthy and sustainable role in the local setting and economy, the following conditions will need to be observed in Downtown's North End Service Commercial Area:

- The area of downtown north of Ray Street and east of Fourth Avenue has continued to evolve as a destination retail, service commercial, and light industrial area catering primarily to automotive traffic
- The area draws shoppers from a wide geographic region as well as providing increasing employment opportunities
- In addition to a wide range of fast food outlets and anchor box-format retailers the area includes a major home improvement centre, and a mix of complementary national chain retailers, restaurants, and service establishments
- Rather than competing with the downtown core, the north end commercial area complements these establishments by catering primarily to more price sensitive, convenience-oriented shoppers, many of whom drive great distances to visit their stores of choice
- A significant proportion of visiting north end service commercial area shoppers also visit other areas of downtown Whitehorse for more specialized goods, unique restaurants and attractions, and personalized service, thus generating direct economic benefit for local and independent operators throughout the downtown



### Riverfront Vision

The Downtown Riverfront offers a wide range of social, cultural, entertainment, shopping, and recreation opportunities that are enjoyed year-round. Heritage resources are maintained to a high standard and enhanced with appropriately scaled commercial uses which encourage active use and enjoyment by residents as well as tourists and visitors. This more evolved use of the downtown riverfront area will be evident when following is observed:

- During the summer months, the Whitehorse Trolley allows residents and visitors to travel along the riverfront from Rotary Peace Park at the south end to the northern-most end of downtown
- Major public access points are provided and highlighted, potentially at the foot of Ogilvie, Main, and Hanson Streets, which encourage pedestrian movement east and west between the riverfront and other downtown areas of interest
- Shipyards Park has become a well-used public open space throughout the year and periodically hosts live arts, music, and cultural events
- The former Motorways site has been redeveloped and includes a quality hotel and convention centre as well as a mix of residential and commercial land uses which serve to create an important new activity node which ties into the downtown via effective pedestrian linkages
- The Kwanlin Dun Cultural Centre is an important addition to the City's heritage/cultural precinct while the MacBride Museum has expanded to accommodate more collections and visitors
- The visitor/reception area provides information/orientation on Whitehorse area attractions and history as well as venues for active social gatherings
- Rotary Peace Park attracts a wide range of family activities throughout the seasons
- The riverfront has evolved into an active and cherished community resource which attracts locals and visitors on a daily basis for a wide variety of activities (including outdoor dining during the summer months) and serves as a functional link to the other sub-areas of Downtown Whitehorse



### Downtown South Vision

Downtown South is a mixed-use residential commercial area south of the Downtown Commercial Core with hotels, a convention / meeting complex, office and institutional uses, as well as some new residential infill development, and older, higher density housing. The area will have evolved into a richer, more colourful area as a southern downtown gateway when the following can be observed:

- Expanded, more diverse tourism infrastructure, including, for example, high quality bed and breakfast options
- Higher quality forms of multiple family residential, including apartments and townhouses
- A diverse range of architectural styles
- Maintained local-serving neighbourhood convenience retail
- Enhanced escarpment area as an important public park with adequate maintenance and a continuous trail system
- Continued integration of supportive housing and seniors'-oriented housing forms
- Southern "gateway" features/focal points highlighting public art and special landscaping treatments



### Downtown North Vision

Downtown North, a mixed-use residential / commercial area north of the downtown commercial core, will evolve into an effective central transition area, providing linkages between the Downtown Commercial Core and the North End Service Commercial Area, and between Old Town and the Riverfront. This evolution will be evidenced by such factors as:

- Redevelopment of underdeveloped or underperforming sites
- Significant increase in mixed-use development (residential over commercial)
- Extension of Third Ave. as a pedestrian corridor linking the Downtown Commercial Core with Black and Ogilvie Streets
- Adaptive re-use of older, currently underutilized buildings for a variety of commercial, institutional, or residential uses
- Relaxation of conventional development standards (i.e. parking, setbacks)
- Improved pedestrian mobility, particularly on east-west streets – providing safe and easy access to both Old Town and the Riverfront area







### 3.1 Living Downtown – Residential Land Uses

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For many communities across North America, the lack of residential options in the downtown core is often cited as a primary reason for downtown decay and the addition of residents is seen as a strategy for revitalization.

One of Downtown Whitehorse’s most significant assets is the presence of existing residential land uses with a population estimated at about 3300 people (Statistics Canada, 2001). While the majority of Downtown residents are found within the established, predominantly, single family, Old Town neighbourhood (about 2/3rds), there is also a residential population located immediately north and south of the Downtown Commercial Core area in single family as well as some multi-family housing.

The challenge for Whitehorse will be to maintain the established residential community and enhance Downtown as an attractive place to live throughout an individual’s life cycle, which includes raising a family. Therefore, the Plan recommends:

- a range of housing options,
- amenities and services that cater to the day to day needs of residents,
- a sense of safety and security, and
- accessibility throughout various downtown areas.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 To provide housing options and accommodate people with a variety of income levels, encourage the integration of social and affordable housing with market housing in locations throughout the Downtown. This may include provision for group homes and “room and board” options within single family dwellings.
- 2 Encourage a range of multiple family housing forms Downtown, including apartments and townhomes in the transition areas of Downtown South and Downtown North, as well as in the Riverfront. Multiple family housing developments are supported subject to the following guidelines:

- compatibility, in terms of character and scale, with adjoining land uses
  - ability to provide adequate on-site separation as a buffer from existing or planned single family housing
  - accessibility to the commercial services of the Downtown Commercial Core area (within a three block radius) or located in proximity to an existing or proposed transit route.
- 3 For the Old Town neighbourhood, maintain, as much as possible, the single-family character and style for the area generally bounded by Sixth Avenue west to the escarpment, and from Pioneer Cemetery to the lane between Cook and Ogilvie Streets by:
- allowing lower density infill of single-family dwellings, duplexes and multi-family residential buildings, as well as secondary suites within single family dwellings and accessory buildings, as long as the single family character of the home and neighbourhood is maintained
  - encouraging home-based businesses which maintain the single family residential character of Old Town, including bed and breakfast operations
  - promoting heritage restoration of residential buildings with incentives such as home owner grants, low interest loans, and/or tax-based incentives
  - establishing design guidelines, enforced through the development or building permit process, that support the single family heritage style prevalent in Old Town
  - upgrading road and sidewalk infrastructure to meet urban standards, including paved surfaces
  - considering a new engineering standard for road and right-of-way widths to reduce paved road widths
- 4 To promote a greater sense of community and foster neighbourhood identity, encourage Downtown residential neighbourhoods to participate in the City's Neighbourhood Identification Sign project. The project is a community-building exercise that involves the active participation of the community to develop identification signs for their neighbourhood.

## 3.2 Working Downtown – Commercial Land Uses

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Whitehorse boasts an attractive retail commercial core with its heart centered along Main Street. Its vibrancy is the result of an interesting mix of retail, food, restaurant and service uses in an attractive, pedestrian-friendly urban setting, which is easily accessed from other areas of Downtown and from the rest of the city.

The retail commercial core, centered on Main Street, is complemented by the auto-oriented service commercial area located in Downtown's North End, generally north of Ray Street.

This North End serves a more regional client base, drawing visitors to Downtown Whitehorse.

In addition, the commercial sector of the Whitehorse economy is bolstered by groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and Main Street Yukon Society, as well as the City's Economic Development Office.

The challenge for Whitehorse will be to build upon the existing commercial activity centres and promote Downtown as a place to do business. As a result, the Plan encourages:

- pedestrian-oriented land uses to concentrate in the Commercial Core and auto-oriented land uses to locate in the North End Service Commercial area
- infilling of underdeveloped gaps in the Commercial Core area and redevelopment of under utilized space in Downtown North and South
- a greater sense of place, identity, and activity for the entire Commercial Core area, beyond Main Street

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Encourage the following uses to locate within the Commercial Core, Downtown North and Downtown South:

- retail establishments and service uses
- offices
- educational facilities (actively promote a satellite facility of Yukon College)
- government buildings
- cultural facilities, entertainment
- hotels and tourist accommodation

2 Allow stand-alone office buildings, including government offices, to locate outside Downtown as a conditional use subject to the provisions of the City's Zoning Bylaw. Offices which are clearly incidental to the overall business activity or serves a local neighbourhood function are also permitted outside the Downtown.

3 To promote a greater sense of identity for the Commercial Core area and make it more attractive to do business, support a comprehensive coordination of streetscape improvements along streets connecting to Main Street, namely First, Second, Third and Fourth Avenues, as well as those parallel to Main, including Hanson, Lambert, Elliott, Steele, Wood and Jarvis Streets. Streetscaping includes landscaping, street furniture, public



View at 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, looking north

areas and pavement surfaces. (The Third Avenue streetscaping work is a good example of work to be continued.) Priority streets for streetscaping initiatives which build upon existing pedestrian oriented land uses, are:

- Third Avenue from Lambert Street, north past Black Street
- Black Street from Second Avenue to Sixth Avenue
- Wood Street from First to Second Avenue and from Fifth to Sixth Avenue

4 To help promote Downtown Whitehorse establish a:

- **Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA):** A BIA is a non-profit association of commercial property owners and business tenants which promotes the economic vitality of a business district. Activities of a BIA could include:

- marketing and promotion
- advocating for resolution of downtown issues
- event programming
- implementation of parking management strategies, design guidelines and streetscape improvements

The *Main Street Yukon Society* is an excellent example of a non-profit grassroots organization advocating for the

According to the International Downtown Association (IDA), well over 1,000 downtowns throughout North America have formed management organizations in response to fundamental shifts in the economy and role of downtown within a given region. Whitehorse is in the midst of such change, with new found interest in downtown living options, a lively and attractive Main Street, and renewed interest in more direct connection to activity along the riverfront. Growth and interest in Yukon heritage, local arts and culture, outdoor sports and recreation and other homegrown business potential, coupled with support for more regional-serving businesses and events such as the 2007 Canada Winter Games bode well for Whitehorse and balanced development of the Downtown.

Downtown. However, its effectiveness is inherently limited due to its minimal operating budget and reliance on volunteers. The City, in partnership with the Yukon Territorial Government (YTG), could follow the lead of Canadian provinces, and establish enabling legislation for a BIA. Since there are currently no provisions in the Municipal Act for the creation of BIA, this recommendation should be referred to the Municipal Act Review Committee. In addition to enabling legislation, the BIA also requires considerable support from local business and property owners. This may take some time, and would be best explored in partnership with the *Main Street Yukon Society*, Chamber of Commerce, City of Whitehorse, and YG.

- **Downtown Housing Committee:** Create a Downtown Housing Committee to promote Downtown as a place of residence, facilitate residential development/redevelopment, and capitalize on local knowledge and skills. The Downtown Housing Committee should include representatives of local developers, architects, planners, residents, business owners, and City staff and meet regularly

to discuss issues related to promoting quality Downtown residential development, such as:

- facilitation of site assembly
  - tax-based incentives to encourage development of vacant or underutilized sites
  - affordable housing
  - market vs. subsidized housing
  - preparation of a Downtown Housing Strategy to assess current and future demand for various housing types and amenities.
- **Downtown Whitehorse Website:** Support the establishment of a Downtown Whitehorse website, managed in partnership with the Main Street Yukon Society (or a future BIA), and other groups, to promote Downtown Whitehorse as a:
- Place of residence (for seniors, families, working singles and couples)
  - Employment centre (with information on growth and job opportunities)
  - Retail destination (with information on retailers and service providers)
  - Arts and cultural centre (with updates on activities, events, groups)
  - Tourist attraction (with links to major sites of interest and tourist maps)
  - Outdoor recreation “mecca” (with links to local and regional guides)
  - Connected community (e-commerce, “Wired Whitehorse”)

Each of these categories could be highlighted in an effective Downtown Whitehorse web site, supported by visual content and links to relevant organizations, information sources, and contacts.

As part of the Downtown Retail Strategy study, a review of the Downtown websites of 17 Canadian municipalities was conducted. The following websites ranked highest for the most effective content promoting and supporting Downtown development:

- [www.downtowncalgary.com](http://www.downtowncalgary.com)
- [www.downtownvancouver.net](http://www.downtownvancouver.net)
- [www.reginadowntown.ca](http://www.reginadowntown.ca)
- [www.downtownwinnipegbiz.com](http://www.downtownwinnipegbiz.com)
- [www.nanaimodowntown.com](http://www.nanaimodowntown.com)

When adjusted for population size, Vernon’s website ([www.downtownvernon.org](http://www.downtownvernon.org)) with a population similar to Whitehorse, ranked no. 2.

- 5 Encourage mixed-use residential over commercial development within the Downtown. The City will consider developing a comprehensive package of information available to prospective mixed-use developers which will outline the financial and development approval-related incentives for mixed-use developments. Some of these incentives may include: property tax breaks, a stream-lined approval process, fees waivers for infrastructure connections, density bonusing, and relaxation of parking standards.
- 6 Promote active, public uses to develop along the Riverfront with the creation of a public wharf, docks with boat tie-ups, cultural and art venues and limited tourist-commercial

uses. Maintain public access, and visibility along the waterfront to minimize safety issues and to encourage a welcoming public space environment.

- 7 **High Potential Redevelopment Sites:** There are a number of high profile sites in Downtown Whitehorse that, over time, have the potential with redevelopment to help Downtown evolve as a complete community and be the region's primary shopping, arts and culture, entertainment, service and business base. Figure 2 shows some examples of high potential redevelopment sites. These are generally vacant, or occupied with older buildings or underachieving land uses. It is not exhaustive; it is recognized that there may be other sites Downtown which also exhibit similar characteristics.

To help realize the vision for Downtown Whitehorse, redevelopment of these sites and others must consider:

- a mix of land uses, primarily residential and commercial, but also potentially a community amenity component such as public open space
- site design which minimizes expanses of paved parking areas; avoids parking which fronts pedestrian routes; provides for the transition to land uses immediately adjacent to the site (e.g. avoid blank walls that face adjacent uses), and reduces building footprint (e.g. preference for construction of 2 storey buildings)
- a re-evaluation of parking requirements to allow for shared calculation of parking capacity
- measures which promote Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. (Proper design of the physical environment can lead to a reduction in the incidence and fear of crime, thereby improving the quality of life. This includes consideration of lighting, access, and viewing corridors.)
- pedestrian connections to other parts of Downtown, particularly the Riverfront and Downtown Commercial Core through the extension of Third Avenue as a pedestrian corridor
- developer-sponsored public information meetings which emphasize specifically how the redevelopment will promote the realization of the Downtown Vision
- provision of required on-site parking such that no additional burden is placed on the supply of nearby street parking
- in addition, for the Motorways site:
  - the development of some residential uses in concert with the introduction of significant retail-commercial uses. (A more captive downtown market needs to be created prior to major expansion of the retail-commercial base beyond the Core Commercial area.)
  - site design elements which are sensitive to the Kwanlin Dun Cultural Centre site with consideration of natural forces such as wind exposure.



Large retail stores and parking, Ogilvie and Ray Streets



City of Whitehorse Downtown Plan  
**High Potential Redevelopment Sites**



### 3.3 Playing Downtown – Recreation, Arts & Environment

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Downtown Whitehorse is the location of significant cultural, park and recreational facilities and tourist attractions, including the SS Klondike, the Visitor Reception Centre, MacBride Museum, and signature park facilities such as Rotary Peace Park and Shipyards Park. It is also the location of popular major festivals, such as the Longest Days Street Fair and Yukon Sourdough Rendezvous.

A major initiative is underway to create an Arts and Heritage Village along the waterfront. According to the discussion paper “Arts and Heritage Village on the Whitehorse Waterfront” by Artspace North Society, the Village will serve as a foundation for a downtown arts and cultural district. The Village has the potential to anchor Main Street to future waterfront development and use the White Pass Train Station and Fire Hall along with other constructed buildings as publicly accessible space drawing people downtown on a daily, year-round basis.

The challenge for Whitehorse will be to enhance existing community facilities and provide additional opportunities for a wide range of recreational, educational, cultural and entertainment pursuits which encourage residents and visitors to enjoy Downtown Whitehorse.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Locate future cultural, entertainment, and specialty retail-oriented land uses within Downtown Whitehorse. Allowing such uses to be developed elsewhere within the City (e.g. along Alaska Highway) will not serve to foster the desired Downtown evolution and may in fact create unnecessary obstacles to achieving the vision for Downtown.
- 2 Encourage a satellite presence Downtown for major cultural and educational facilities not currently located Downtown, such as Yukon College. For example, the College should be encouraged to provide extension programs, adult-education, and/or an entrepreneurship program in a Downtown location.
- 3 In an effort to increase public access and vitality along the riverfront, support the concept of the Arts and Heritage Village. The village will integrate more active uses, including space for arts programming and cultural commercial use.
- 4 Support the continuance of Whitehorse Elementary School as an educational institution, community resource and attraction to families living Downtown by promoting:
  - safe, walkable routes to school from adjacent residential areas, with sidewalk infrastructure along primary school routes and pedestrian-safe intersections
  - safe vehicular drop off and pick up points
  - enhanced appearance of Black Street between Third Avenue and Fourth Avenue.

- 5 Promote the Wood Street “heritage district” as an important Downtown asset which provides direct ties to the community’s history. Encourage the preservation of heritage structures, including the Wood Street Theatre. Support the installation of interpretive signage which highlights Downtown’s heritage resources.
- 6 Maintain and improve the area along the escarpment as a quality urban park with a continuous trail system and as a valued community resource through improved maintenance, additional seating, better lighting, and trail connections to east-west streets, the Old Town neighbourhood, and existing parks.

### **3.4 Getting Around Downtown – Traffic and Parking, Public Transit and Pedestrian/Cycling Routes**

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Two-way vehicular traffic and provision of significant angle parking capacity is recognized as a major asset for the purposes of stimulating business activity reinforcing Downtown Whitehorse’s role as a destination. Traffic speeds, especially on the major routes such as Second and Fourth Avenues are of concern, and Sixth Avenue has also been raised as a street that is experiencing increased traffic.

“The City-Wide Transportation Plan” (CWTP) prepared in 2004 by UMA is a comprehensive Transportation Plan that reviews road network, transportation safety, alternative transportation modes, and downtown parking for Whitehorse. The Transportation Plan suggests a number of recommendations that have implications for Downtown. With respect to Downtown parking the CWTP concluded that while there is sufficient supply to meet demand, there should be no further reduction in number of Downtown parking spaces. The issue of a downtown parkade is acknowledged in the CWTP; however, given sufficient existing parking supply and initiatives to reduce parking demand, the CWTP suggests that the concept of a downtown parkade not be considered before 2007/8. Many of the CWTP’s recommendations with respect to Downtown are re-enforced in the recommendations contained within this Downtown Plan.

The challenge for Whitehorse will be to implement the transportation-related activities in a timely fashion, balancing the competing interests of various land uses for visibility and accessibility with the need to maintain an attractive streetscape.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1 Encourage continued implementation of the City-Wide Transportation Plan (CWTP) directives which include the following elements with respect to Downtown Whitehorse:

- the Road Diet Concept for Fourth Avenue and a portion of Second Avenue, as well as for Quartz Road from Second Avenue to Industrial Road (this work has been initiated)
  - new traffic signals in the future at Industrial/Quartz, Black/Second, Black/Fourth intersections and upgraded pedestrian crossing standards for Lambert and Wood at Second Avenue, together with a program to upgrade the traffic controls, including signage and paint markings
  - a new road connection between Black Street and First Avenue (underway)
  - a Pedestrian Network Plan (which assigns priorities to routes to and through Downtown) including a pedestrian corridor extended northward along Third Avenue through Qwanlin Mall, sidewalk construction on both sides of designated arterial and major/minor collectors (Main, Black, Ogilvie and Lambert/First/Strickland)
  - a Bicycle Network Plan which includes improved bikeways on north-south routes: Fourth Avenue (Robert Service Way to Two Mile Hill), Sixth Avenue (Ogilvie Street to Hawkins Street), the Riverfront Trail (Robert Campbell Bridge to Quartz Road), First Avenue (Lambert Street to Black Street), as well as an east-west route along Black Street (from First to Puckett's Gulch)
- 2 To reduce the demand for downtown parking and efficiently utilize existing available parking, also support the CWTP's recommendations for:
- considering alternative strategies, such as a transit loop, bike lanes, pedestrian walkways and designated stalls for car pooling
  - continuing to allow developers to pay cash-in-lieu of providing parking spaces and permit the use of such monies for all parking related expenditures such as on-street bicycle parking and improved bus shelters
  - implementing a Parking Management Plan to ensure that all parking stalls in the downtown core are used efficiently by identifying employee-only parking and extending the controlled parking zone (i.e. metered parking) throughout the Downtown Commercial Core
- 3 To ensure that there is no further reduction of available Downtown parking spaces, new development or redevelopment of any site Downtown must endeavour to demonstrate no net loss of existing on-site parking spaces or indicate how the development will lead to a reduction in overall parking demand. Where a loss of parking spaces is unavoidable due to significant site constraints and the development is non-residential, consideration must be given to the provision of alternative parking. This may include consideration of angled parking on neighbouring streets.
- 4 Given retailers' need for visibility and access, support the existing/proposed circulation pattern which accommodates pedestrian, cyclist, and other movement/circulation in addition to vehicular traffic, including the trolley service as part of the public transit network. This supports the continuation of trails and cycle routes to create circular routes that connect the riverfront with the escarpment to the west, and enhancement of the east-west link, along Black Street in particular.

- 5 Support intersection improvements for enhanced pedestrian safety at all crossings of Second and Fourth Avenues and consider traffic calming measures along Sixth Avenue to ensure pedestrian safety and mobility and reduce traffic speeds.
- 6 Consider the implementation of late-night transit service which would focus on pick up from key activity nodes, including social institutions and employment bases, for drop off in residential neighbourhoods outside Downtown Whitehorse.
- 7 Consider the use of large, surface parking areas as opportunities for temporary uses, such as farmers' market activity or for compatible uses such as shuttle transit facilities for special events.
- 8 Consideration should be given to the adoption of alternative street design standards for residential neighbourhoods, in partnership with local area residents, such as reduced pavement widths for travel lanes, or alternatives to the standard curb and gutter.
- 9 The current "Local Improvement Charges Bylaw" process has made it difficult to generate consensus and support for comprehensive streetscape improvement programs. (The City's experience with the defeat of a proposed improvement program for Black Street is an example.) Problems range from the frontage-based calculation for determining property owner contributions to the difficulty of getting support from absentee property owners, particularly those of vacant or under-developed sites being held for speculative interest. To move forward with streetscape improvements, initiate discussion between the City and YTG on high priority areas of Downtown Whitehorse where streetscape improvements should not be delayed by the Local Improvement Charge process. (These discussions may include the possibility of securing federal infrastructure funding and/or other means of funding infrastructure improvements such as tax increment financing, where property owners help pay for infrastructure improvements through related capital gains on property.)

### **3.5 Social Issues, Public Safety and Security**

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Public safety, personal security, and property crime have been raised as issues Downtown. Given the nature of a Downtown Plan, there are somewhat limited measures to implement social change through land use policy. However, through the Downtown planning process, an awareness has developed of Whitehorse's homeless population. These, and other socially and economically marginalized individuals need a safe place to live and opportunities for life training, including employment.

The report "Room to Grow: A Made-in-Yukon Model of Service for Homeless Youth" documents a research project to develop the best options for implementing housing and service models for Whitehorse's homeless youth. The report suggests that comprehensive services are essential: from emergency shelter needs, to options for longer-term housing. The report specifically acknowledges that long term accommodations and semi-independent

housing are more likely to be effective if located in downtown. And further, that transportation and access to housing are an important issue to address.

The youth needs identified in the report, which have land use policy implications for Downtown, include the following:

- Transitional supported housing options (up to one year)
- Emergency shelter (several nights, up to one month)
- Permanent supported living options (until the client wants to leave)
- Affordable long term independent housing options
- Additional infrastructure in the form of evening transportation service to get youth to a safe place

The challenge for Whitehorse will be to build upon the awareness of the issue and move towards a community that embraces all its citizens. The following initiatives are intended to increase public safety by additional activity that creates more “eyes on the street”:

- Increase housing and resident population Downtown, including support for emergency, transitional, independent and affordable housing
- Increase commercial activity and pedestrian movement with opportunities for shelter from the weather
- Increase transit opportunities in the evening hours from places of employment, education, and other activity centres to places of residence

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Due to the lack of existing transit infrastructure, support a Downtown location for at least some emergency, transitional, semi-permanent and permanent housing for marginalized groups, including homeless youth. This targeted housing is to blend within the overall community in terms of form, character and design elements. Stand-alone, isolated institutional facilities are not supported.
- 2 Support smaller-scale, home based facilities, such as provision for room and board in private homes, which would allow for transitional and semi independent housing options.
- 3 Establish a Social Issues Committee made up of representatives of social services agencies, City and Territorial staff, Downtown business community and residential associations. This Committee could be charged with the following tasks:

- moving forward on recommendations in the “Room to Grow: A Made-in-Yukon Model of Service for Homeless Youth” to establish housing options for homeless youth
- working with the Transit Task Force to establish transit service to facilitate the safe transport of all users, including individuals from Youth Centres, and places of employment, education and training
- reviewing streetscape improvement concepts to ensure that the improvements (such as bus shelters) offer safe places of refuge

A meeting was held with representatives of various social agencies, City staff and members of the consultant team during the Downtown plan process (June, 2005). It was recognized as a potential starting point to build a relationship between the various groups and the City. Establishing a Social Issues Committee, supported by the City, and charged with the responsibility to coordinate efforts to improve the quality of life for individuals who are social and economically marginalized is considered a priority.

### 3.6 Downtown Form and Character

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Historical settlement patterns and structures are evident in many parts of Whitehorse, and are a valued part of the City. Many modern buildings, both public and private, now exist along with original heritage structures and historically influenced renovations. It is clear that no single style is solely appropriate for future buildings, nor is a single specified style desired by residents.

Logically, there is a place for contemporary buildings along with older structures and the Downtown Plan does not recommend any style guidelines. However, downtown is at a stage in its development where additional attention needs to be given to urban architecture for all uses.

Many existing buildings are simply utilitarian blocks, with little apparent consideration given to design or form beyond interior capacity. While the simplest and cheapest to build, they have a lasting impact on the character of the City, and reflect negatively on the Downtown. A key value identified in Phase One of this Plan was to have improved pedestrian level building quality, with landscaped areas, better transparency and visual access into buildings, more attention to materials and details, and a move away from blank buildings facing streets.

Quality of the streets for efficient vehicular movement and comfortable pedestrian space is highly valued; there are concerns over the lack of sidewalks in some residential areas, such as in parts of Old Town, at the same time as the Main Street pedestrian experience is praised and the Third Avenue streetscape improvements are an example of well considered and implemented streetscape work.

Landscaping is also an important contributor to the Downtown area urban quality. Street trees and low-level planting are well established along Main Street, and this ordered form should be expanded to adjacent streets. Commercial development must also contribute trees and planting to the downtown area; gravel should not be considered acceptable. Landscape maintenance must become part of the development permit process to give greater certainty that planting, once installed, will be preserved. Currently, the auto-oriented north end commercial areas are very poorly presented in terms of landscape, and this reflects negatively on the City, especially as this area is the northern entrance to the City from Two Mile Hill.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Height

- 1 Generally, maintain building heights in Downtown within the current four-storey height limit. Taller buildings could be considered in the next Official Community Plan re-write.

### Urban Design

- 2 Develop design guidelines for new construction/renovation that encourage quality development standard, street level activity, and diversity of architectural styles (but, no prescribed “Whitehorse-specific style”).

Guidelines should consider:

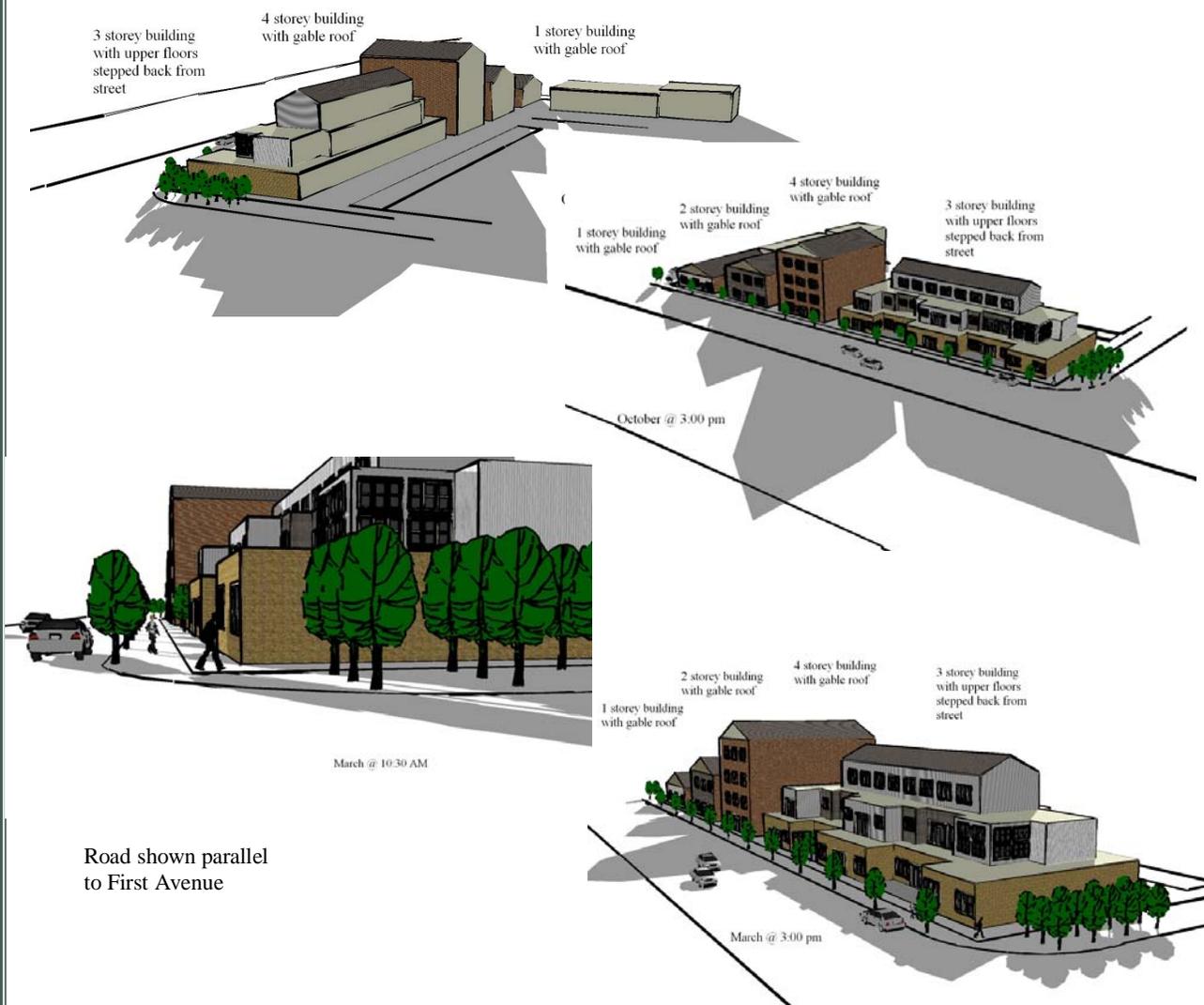
- environmental elements (sun access, wind, temperature)
- character
- public safety and vitality
- servicing, roads and parking
- landscaping and street furniture
- building (materials and finishes, massing, orientation)
- signage and lighting

Avoid the creation of a Whitehorse Klondike or Yukon-themed architectural style which would be applied throughout Downtown. Instead, encourage design that supports appropriate scale, improved detailing of architectural elements, and respect for neighbouring buildings. Design guidelines would vary from sub area to sub area, and should be created to enhance the existing neighbourhood character and/or promote an attractive physical environment. For example, Whitehorse heritage styles for Main Street may be logical, while the riverfront area would follow a more historic-industrial or hand-crafted form, as recommended in the Riverfront Design Guidelines (Charles McLaren, Architect Ltd. and UMA, Feb. 2000). Contemporary architecture can often be mixed with historically influenced elements.

- 3 Establish a Design Review Panel in an effort to improve the overall visual quality of Whitehorse. The Panel would be made up of City of Whitehorse staff involved in development applications, as well as representatives from the development community, design professionals and residents.

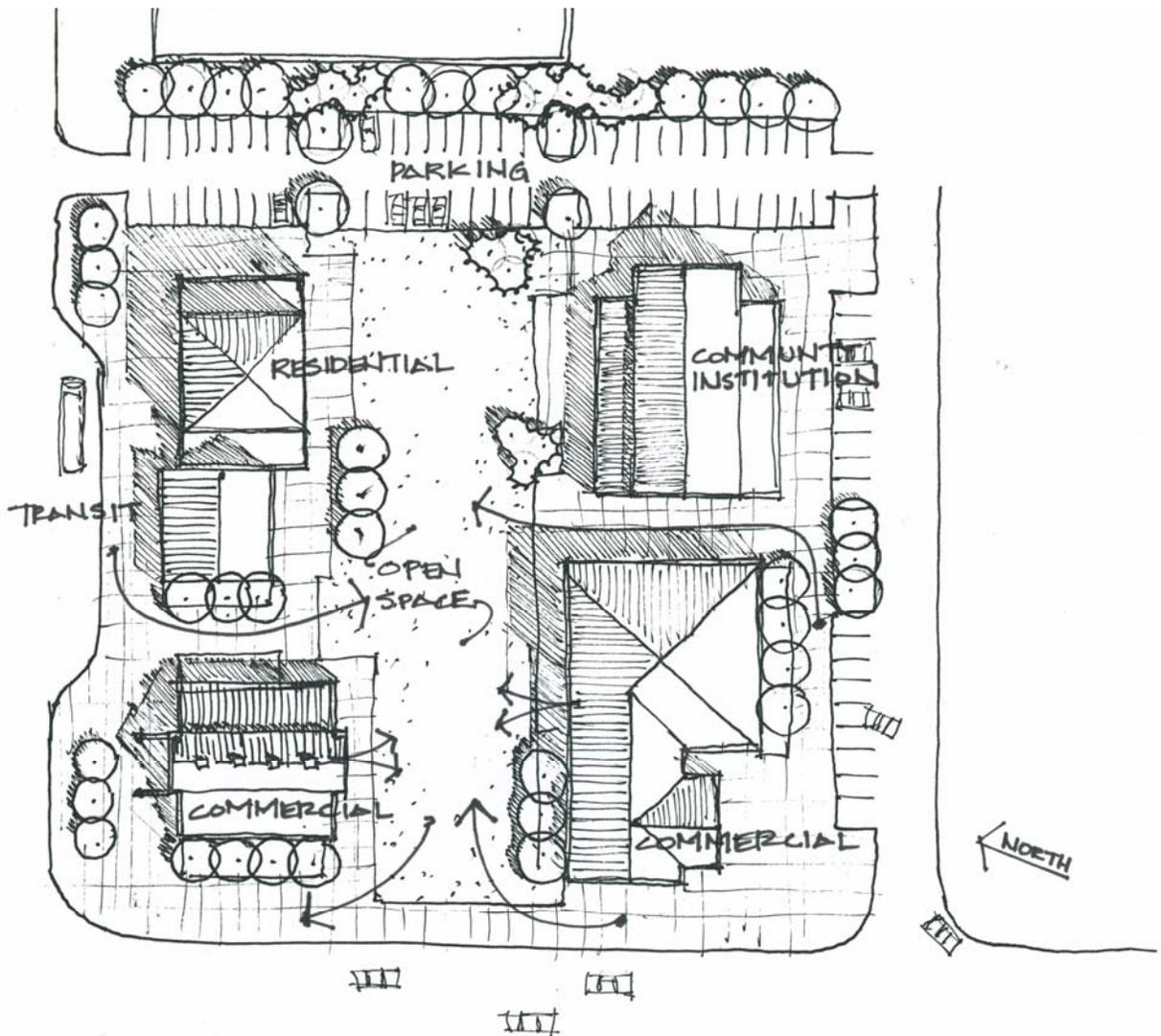
## Building Height and Shadow Impacts

Because of the latitude of the Yukon, structures tend to have increased shadow impact on adjacent areas and buildings relative to urban areas further south.



Preliminary shadow modelling, seen above, suggests that conventional, box-shaped buildings with a simple gable roof are best limited to a two-storey height, especially in areas where public open space might be affected. However, buildings of three storeys, with stepping back of upper floors may in fact have less shadow impact than the two-storey, gable roof structure.

While the months of November through February have very low sun angles and significant shadows are cast by all structures, consideration of building height, form and massing may allow for improved sun access during the shoulder seasons in spring and fall. Shadow studies may also allow for higher buildings while still preserving sun access to surrounding areas.

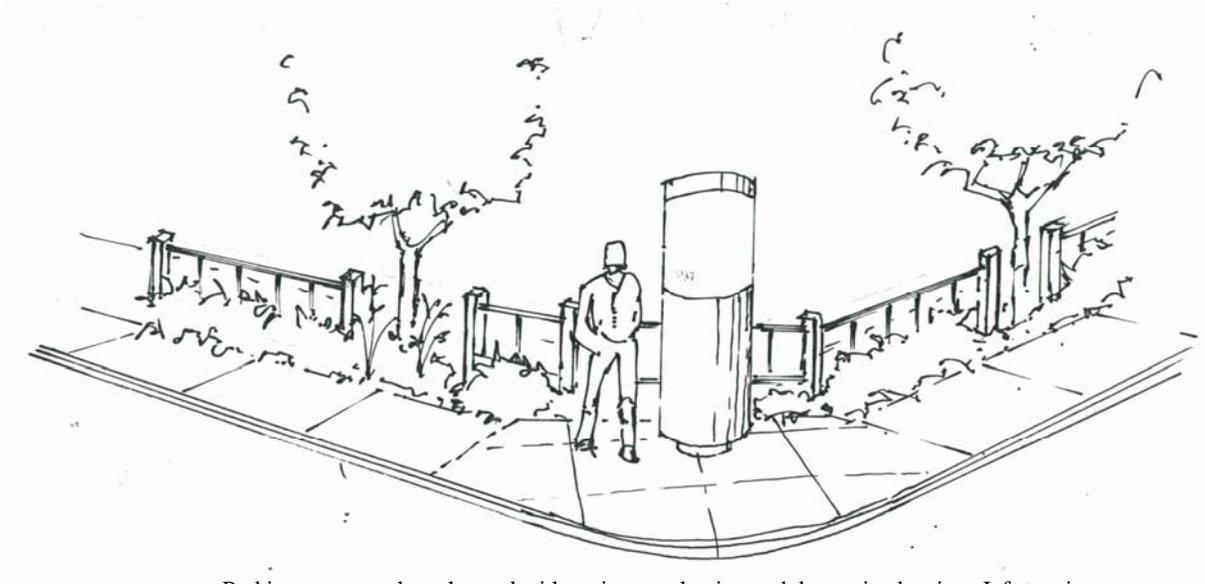


Interior areas of suitable parcels should be considered for urban open space, with surrounding buildings providing shelter from winds. Adequate openings between buildings as well as ornamental lighting to ease security oversight and to create welcoming links between street edges and interior spaces would need to be considered.

### Streetscapes

- 4 Support the retention of view corridors to the Yukon River and surrounding natural landscape, by maintaining open street ends along the Riverfront and/or by providing either physical access to the Riverfront or an activity which draws the public to the Riverfront. While the White Pass and Yukon Route Depot and the roundhouse are located at street ends, they also function as the limits of a more concentrated heritage and cultural area anticipated for the Riverfront.

- 5 Continue to support public art initiatives and, in particular, current programs to integrate art with street furniture, such as the bicycle storage initiative.
- 6 To promote redevelopment in the Downtown South and Downtown North, relax parking requirements, setbacks and/or density in exchange for improved street character, increased landscape or other building and site work.



Parking areas can be enhanced with perimeter planting and decorative barriers. Information kiosks can provide event announcements and wayfinding information



Old Town street character is generally characterized by smaller houses and lots with 'natural' landscape planting. Retention of individual trees and native tree clumps is an important part of maintaining the heritage character.

## Landscaping

- 7 Implement Landscape Maintenance Bylaws as part of development agreements to avoid neglect or removal of planting on commercial properties.

- 8 Develop a landscaping program for tree planting, street furniture, lighting, bike storage and garbage bins, which includes a maintenance strategy and landscaping standards for parking areas and frontages along important arterials. It is also suggested that perimeter landscaping be required for all parking areas, with inclusion of landscaped islands for larger parking areas.
- 9 Ensure that there is sufficient tree planting in large scale commercial areas, including the parking lots of existing and proposed big-box retailers.



Parking lot on Steele Street near Second Avenue

### Entry Features, Signage and Focal Points

- 10 Develop a “wayfinding” signage system to orient visitors to various Downtown sites of interest, specialty services, etc.
- 11 Highlight heritage/history with interpretive displays, and potentially integrate with the wayfinding (signage) system.
- 12 Create a “gateway” feature at the north and south entrances to Downtown to announce and celebrate entry to Downtown Whitehorse which incorporates public art, landscape treatment and signage. Suggested locations for the gateway feature are where Robert Service Way meets Fourth Avenue in Downtown South and where Second Avenue meets Fourth Avenue in the North End Service Commercial Area.



The Fourth Avenue roundabout provides an opportunity for a gateway feature



# 4.0 Priorities and Implementation

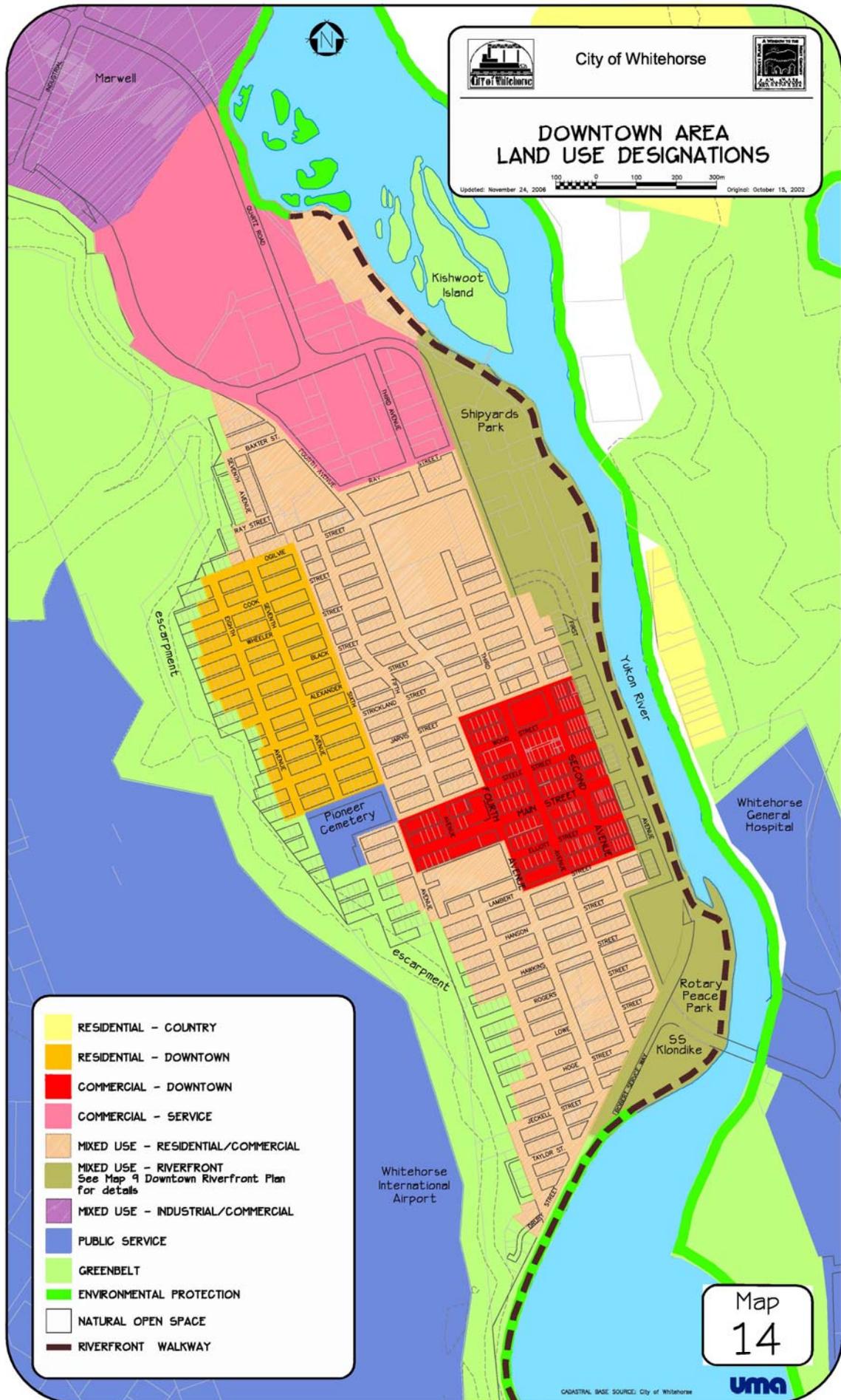
## 4.1 Official Community Plan Implications

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The City’s “2002 Official Community Plan” (OCP) provides land use policy direction for Downtown Whitehorse in Chapter 9, specifically, as well as sub-sections of Chapter 7 – Residential and Chapter 8 – Commercial. While the Downtown Plan generally re-enforces the policy direction contained within the 2002 OCP, the following exceptions should be noted:

- Policy 9.4.3.1 (page 89) which suggests retaining the commercial land use pattern along the west side of First Avenue (Riverfront) with consideration to either total commercial use or mixed commercial use with residential above retail. The Downtown Plan, in addition to commercial, mixed commercial/residential, supports stand-alone residential building, as a conditional use, to increase the residential population Downtown.
- Sub-section 7.8 provides policies for the Mixed Use – Residential/Commercial Designation. The Downtown Plan supports the policy statements, but expands the area designated Mixed Use northward from Wheeler Street to Ray Street, as well as the area west of Fourth Avenue, to provide additional opportunities for mixed use Downtown in proximity to primary Downtown assets, such as the Riverfront and to encompass many of the significant redevelopment opportunities.
- Policy 8.3.1 identifies that Commercial – Service areas may be used for a wide range of retail and office use, restaurants, tourist accommodations, service stations, automobile dealerships and entertainment facilities, as well as public and semi-public uses. The Downtown Plan supports the Commercial – Service policies subject to a contraction of the Commercial – Service designation from Wheeler to Ray (east of Fourth) in order to limit the auto-oriented area Downtown.

These modifications to the OCP are shown on Figure 3.



City of Whitehorse Downtown Plan Figure 3 - OCP Amendments

## 4.2 Zoning Bylaw Implications

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The City adopted a new Zoning Bylaw 2006-01 in April, 2006, following a lengthy review process. The Downtown has been divided into a number of different zones including nine covering primarily residential and commercial uses. Among these zones are: Downtown Residential 1 and 2 (RD), Core Commercial (CC), Mixed Use Commercial 1 and 2 (CM), Mixed Use Waterfront/Motorways (CMW), Service Commercial (CS), Commercial Waterfront (CW), and Commercial/Community Centre (CCC). There are also various zones to accommodate public and institutional uses, including Parks and Recreation (PR), Public Services (PS) and Public Waterfront (PW). Many of the modifications to the Zoning Bylaw have been done to support policy direction in the 2002 OCP. The new Zoning Bylaw proposes a number of changes to the zoning boundaries, permitted uses within zones, and other provisions for zones allocated in Downtown Whitehorse. In particular, in Section 7.3.7 the parking provisions are modified to require less parking for non-residential uses in the CC, CM1, CM2, RD1, RD2 and CW zones.

The following additional modifications are suggested to support the Downtown Plan:

- The CW zone (Section 10.7.6 a) permits “multiple housing” but limits residential use to above the first storey. The CW zone is applied to the west side of First Avenue.
- The CM1 zone should be extended to the block bounded by Wood and Jarvis Streets, and Fifth and Fourth Avenues to be consistent with the Downtown Plan which supports single family character in the Wood Street heritage area. The proposed CM2 zoning for this area does not permit single family, while the CM1 zone does.
- The CM2 zone should be extended to Ray Street and west of Fourth Avenue to be consistent with the Downtown Plan which supports mixed use commercial/residential in this area, rather than the primarily commercial land uses of the Service Commercial zone.

In addition, it is recommended that:

- the “Geohazard Risk Study Whitehorse Escarpment” by EBA Engineering Consultants Ltd. be used as a basis to update the Environmental Protection Zoning along the escarpment
- consideration be given to adding a maximum parking provision, specifically within commercial zones
- boundaries of the RD1 zone in Downtown Whitehorse, particularly with respect to the Old Town neighbourhood, be reviewed

## 4.3 Implementation Measures

**Table 1 – Implementation Measures**

Recommendation	Implementation
Provide housing options to accommodate people with a range of incomes, integrate social and market housing and encourage multiple family housing.	Establish a Downtown Housing Committee made up of City staff, local developers, architects, residents and business owners.
Maintain the single family character, density and style of Old Town.	Revise Zoning Bylaw to ensure that only low density infill housing can be developed in Old Town. Encourage representation from Old Town on the Downtown Housing Committee.
Promote community pride, foster a greater sense of neighbourhood and increase historical and local awareness.	Continue the City’s Neighbourhood Identification Sign project. Implement a gateway signage program for Gateways to Downtown as well as an Interpretive Heritage Program for key downtown features.
Encourage higher density residential and mixed use development Downtown as well as offices, educational facilities, cultural/entertainment uses, and tourist accommodations, including hotels to locate Downtown.	Prohibit stand-alone offices from locating outside of Downtown by supporting the OCP. Initiate discussions with Yukon College to operate a satellite campus Downtown.
Market and promote Downtown as a place to live, work and play.	Establish a Downtown Business Improvement Area (which requires YG enabling legislation), Downtown Housing Committee and a Downtown Whitehorse website.
Encourage auto-oriented uses to locate in the North End Service Commercial area and pedestrian-oriented uses to locate elsewhere in the Downtown.	Establish a minimum building footprint area of 450 square metres in the City’s zoning bylaw for individual business units within the Commercial Service zone.

Recommendation	Implementation
Encourage the realization of the vision for Downtown through the redevelopment of high potential sites.	Review development applications from High Potential Redevelopment sites for consideration of land use mix, site design, parking requirements, measures to promote Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, and pedestrian connections to other parts of Downtown.
Promote active and public uses to develop along the Riverfront.	Implement the initiatives of the Arts and Heritage Village Development Plan.
Continue supporting Whitehorse Elementary School as an educational institution, community resource and attraction to families.	Establish safe and walkable routes to school, including sidewalks and pedestrian-safe intersections, vehicular drop off/pick up points, and an enhanced appearance of Black Street.
Maintain and improve the area along the escarpment as a quality urban park with continuous trail system.	Initiate a program for maintenance and improved facilities for seating, lighting and trail connections.
Implement late-night transit service focusing on pick up from key activity nodes with drop off in residential areas.	Refer the recommendation for late night transit service to the Transit Task Force for consideration/implementation.
Create a community that embraces all its citizens, including those that are socially and economically marginalized.	Establish a Social Issues Committee made up of representatives of social service agencies, City and YG staff, Downtown business community and residential associations.
Promote a higher standard of appearance for Downtown with more attractive buildings and streetscapes.	<p>Develop Urban Design Guidelines that support appropriate scale, improved detailing of architectural elements and respect for neighbouring buildings, but no prescribed “Whitehorse style”.</p> <p>Establish a Design Review Panel.</p> <p>Develop a Landscape Program for tree planting, street furniture, lighting, bike storage and garbage bins.</p>

Recommendation	Implementation
<p>To reduce the demand for downtown parking and efficiently utilize existing available parking, support the CWTP recommendations with respect to parking management.</p>	<p>Undertake a Downtown Parking Management Plan which would review such issues as: identification of employee-only parking, a maximum parking standard for some land uses, criteria for allowing shared parking, criteria for reducing parking requirements, and requirements for landscaping of parking areas.</p>
<p>Encourage mixed use residential over commercial development within the Downtown.</p>	<p>Develop a comprehensive package of information available to prospective mixed-use developers which will outline the financial and development approval-related incentives for mixed-use developments. Some of these incentives may include: property tax breaks, stream-lined approval process, fees waivers for infrastructure connections, density bonuses and relaxation of parking standards.</p>

## References

“Arts and Heritage Village on the Whitehorse Waterfront” Phase One of the Cultural Spaces Plan, prepared by Artspace North Society, June 21, 2005

City of Whitehorse, “2002 Official Community Plan”, adopted October, 2002

City of Whitehorse, Draft 2 Zoning Bylaw 2005-01

City of Whitehorse, “City-Wide Transportation Plan”, prepared by UMA Engineering Ltd., March, 2004

City of Whitehorse, “Geohazard Risk Study Whitehorse Escarpment”, prepared by EBA Engineering Consultants Ltd., October, 2002

“Riverfront Design Guidelines”, prepared by Charles A. McLaren Architect Ltd. and UMA, February, 2000

“Room to Grow: A Made-in-Yukon Model of Service for Homeless Youth”, developed by Heather Finton and Mike Kramer (32862 Yukon Inc) for National Homelessness Initiative Canada in partnership with the Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness, Draft October 25 2005